
A Big Prince in His Tiny Realm. Effectiveness of political system of Principality of Liechtenstein – Interview with His Serene Highness Prince Alois, Hereditary Prince of Liechtenstein¹

Marcin Łukaszewski: First of all, thank you for this opportunity and congratulations because of the 10th anniversary of taking power of the head of state.

His Serene Highness Prince Alois: Thank you.

My first question is linked with recent events. Few days ago² H.S.H. Prince Albert Grimaldi of Monaco announced the birth of his children. While his son, Prince Jacques, is younger than his sister Princess Gabriella, he is the successor to the throne. Your Princely House is the last monarchy in Europe which excludes women from succession to the throne. What is the reason? What does His Serene Highness think about the male-preference primogeniture system which works in Monaco. Would it be suitable for Liechtenstein as well?

The reason is very simple. The succession model in Liechtenstein was introduced long time ago, many centuries back, and the Princely House had good experience with this model in the past. Changes to the Family law should be made rather rare. They require a 2/3 majority.

I don't know about Monaco's model enough to say if it would be suitable for us but it's unlikely that we change our succession model unless members of the Family members see a specific need for it.

So we could say that Your Highness is linked very closely to the tradition. Am I right?

I would rather say that our experience has been very good so we see no need to change this law.

Lately, few European monarchs decided to abdicate and to give their power to the new generation. In Liechtenstein the Family Law (Hausgesetz) provides an abdication, but it seems no to be useful because of the constitutional mechanism from art. 13bis. How does from Your Highness' perspective the mechanism of co-regency work? Does Your Highness think other monarchial countries should use this mechanism in their constitutions?

I believe that is good to have a possibility of abdication in the Family Law. The role of the Reigning Prince is not only the role of the head of state, but also the role of the head of the Family and the chairman of the Princely foundations that hold the Princely assets. Although he can delegate his role as the head of state according to art. 13bis to the Hereditary Prince, he may still wish in certain circumstances to completely retire from all his roles and therefore it makes sense to have this mechanism.

¹ The title refers to the article entitled *A Big Prince in a Tiny Realm: Smallness, Monarchy, and Political Legitimacy in the Principality of Liechtenstein* written by Wouter P. Veenendaal from Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies published in "Swiss Political Science Review" (vol. 21, Issue 2, p. 333–349, June 2015).

² Interview done at 19th December 2014.

I think that this constitutional provision (art. 13bis) could also be interesting for other monarchies. Actually, to my knowledge, Luxembourg has similar article, but they tend to use it only for short terms, in the transition period before a new Grand Duke completely takes over the power after an abdication.

Now, please, let's focus more on issues linked with the Liechtenstein political system. Till the 20s of 20th century Liechtenstein had no instruments of direct democracy and when they were established they became so popular that on average almost every year (excluding even general or local elections) the Liechtensteiners go to the polls. Where this phenomenon did come from? Were ties with Switzerland so close at that time?

If you look at other countries that have direct democracy, like Switzerland and the states in the US, it is a usual phenomenon to have these popular votes very frequent, almost every year or even more often.

During last 93 years the actual Constitution was amended or changed almost 50 times. What is Your Highness' general opinion about the functioning of the current constitution? Does it need any changes or maybe even a total revision and enacting a new constitution?

I think that the Constitution of Liechtenstein works very well. Of course there is a need from time to time for some modification, but currently I don't see any need for a major change of the Constitution.

Last years the Constitution was amended in direction of the justice, human rights and international cooperation. If there was a constitutional revision, would it be in any specific direction?

There might be a need in the near future to make a change in the context of being able to cooperate better on legal aid matters where it would be from investigation process problematic to inform the person that is affected by legal aid about the fact that legal aid is given on him to another country.

On those matters our Constitution is rather strict and due to international regulations on this matter we may have to consider some changes.

In 2003 You Highness' Father gained a support of 64% in favour of his constitutional request. You, Your Highness, gained 76% in 2012. Since 2003 the Constitution has very unique institutions as motion of no confidence against the head of state or a legal way of establishing the republic. Does Your Highness think that using either of them is even possible when we consider the very high trust in the Princely House which I have mentioned?

As long as there is the high trust in the Reigning Prince by the people of Liechtenstein such motions are unlikely. However, the mere fact that such motions are possible forces the Reigning Prince and the Princely House to act in the interest of the people of Liechtenstein.

This does not mean that there could not be a disagreement between the Reigning Prince and people of Liechtenstein on a specific issue, but the Reigning Prince and the Princely House could not act on a longer run against the will of the people of Liechtenstein. Therefore, one could also say that with this constitutional amendment the legitimization of the Reigning Prince moved from divine legitimization to a democratic legitimization.

Most monarchs, either due to their own will or political and cultural changes, evolutionally resign from the political participation, while in Liechtenstein since 2003 the monarch has gained the real political power. Does Your Highness think, from more than 10 years' practice, was it a good idea to do so?

It is a common misunderstanding that with the reform of 2003 the Reigning Prince got more political power. Actually, this reform reduced the political power of the Reigning Prince and if you

look back into history, the power of the Reigning Prince has been diminishing over the longer time, similar to other European monarchies. If you look at the articles of the Constitution prior to reform and after 2003, you will actually see that the rights the people were increased and the political power of the Reigning Prince was reduced.

Now on your question about experience of the last 10 years: In my opinion the Constitution works very well and I think it has worked towards to benefit of the people that the Reigning Prince has a political active role as it was in the past when he had more political power.

Now I would like to ask Your Highness about the Landtag. If we focus on this political triangle: the Reigning Prince, the Government and the Landtag, how from perspective of Your Highness does the Landtag work?

I would say that the Landtag works very well particularly if you compare it with parliaments in other countries. Parliamentarians in Liechtenstein still form their own opinions on the government proposals (law proposals). There is much less of the tendency to just rubber stamp proposals given by the Government, even if the ministers and parliamentarians are from the same political party.

There is a challenge for the parliamentarians to work on complicated laws and due to the flood of EU laws coming from the EEA membership, to have enough resources to look into detail on all the laws. They don't have the same resources, especially the same access to civil servants resources, as the Government has. However, this is generally a problem for most parliaments in the world with some exceptions like the US Congress which has a real, big machinery to look on everything in detail and therefore has more or less the same possibility as the Government.

So how from the perspective of Your Highness does the system based on parliamentarians working as part-time MPs contrary to the American congressmen work in Liechtenstein? Is it a good solution for Your Highness' country?

For a country of our size it would be very difficult to have full-time members of parliament. Firstly, it would add considerable additional cost and, secondly, it is not so easy to find enough people prepared to move to such a full time position in Liechtenstein. There are pros and cons for full-time positions. I think, you should have an easy way to move in and out of a full-time parliamentarian position. You don't want to end up with life-time politicians which tends to be a problem of some of parliaments particularly in Europe. There, politicians take on a political career quite often straight after university and don't know anything else than being a politician. Firstly, there is a danger that they then come up with concepts which are rather far from reality because they have never been working in a normal environment. And secondly, they can be taken hostage of their situation. The force of the party that they follow the line and the danger that they may be not reelected is taking them much more into hostage than a part-time parliamentarian.

So overall, in Liechtenstein, I think it is better to have the actual system.

Now I would like to ask Your Highness about government in Liechtenstein but not as an institution but as the most important part of a process of conducting country's issues. Which particular policy of the Liechtenstein government is nowadays the most important from the point of view of Your Highness?

One of the most important is to ensure the balance of the state budget and a fully funded social security system for reasonable cost i.e. law taxes and other state charges. A second important topic is to ensure an attractive work environment and an attractive living environment in Liechtenstein. A third important topic, particularly on our long term horizon, is that we ensure an education system that prepares the citizens of Liechtenstein in the best possible way for challenges of the future.

Is it true for Liechtenstein that as a country it should have its own institutions founded to maintain every issue which normally is given by the state? Does Liechtenstein have its own institutions in every matter in the context of modern integrated Europe?

In my opinion very small states like Liechtenstein can't do everything by their own, especially if you want to provide high living standards. So in Liechtenstein we always cooperated very closely with our neighbors. Especially in education if we would want to offer full range of possible university education in Liechtenstein that would be hugely expensive. It is much better for us to have treaties with our neighbors and we pay them for our students and they can take on their studies mainly in other countries.

Similarly for healthcare. Healthcare is nowadays so sophisticated that you can't offer hospital services only for 37,000 people. So the concept of sovereignty doesn't necessary require that you offer all of that yourself. So let me look at your country. You give up a lot of sovereignty to the EU level, but what is important is that whatever you outsource to your neighbors, what you give up, what you decide to regulate on international level, that you keep the power to change that. If you are not happy with the service you get from one of your neighbors, you're not happy with international setup, in our case the EEA, you can reverse it and go for new arrangements. This has been always our philosophy and in this sense we are sovereign.

Nowadays, if you look at the European countries sovereignty is not so much what you provide on your own, but whether you are taking seriously as a member of the international community, act responsibly, if you are an active member of the international community.

Let me get a summary what Your Highness has just said. Small states like Liechtenstein should guarantee their citizens only basic, fundamental services as basic medical service but more sophisticated issues should be given by the neighbors. Am I right?

I would say it differently. The state has to provide certain services to its citizens. However, for smaller states in particular, but it is true also for other states nowadays, not all services must be provided by the state directly. These may be provided indirectly by either private part or by other states. To give you another example: we, for many years, have been using Swiss diplomatic services, in particular consular services. If you look now, many countries due to cutting the costs, decided to share their cost for consular services. EU countries now share cost for consular services, for instance Austria share costs with Switzerland in African states and some Asian states, where the costs for providing these services are big, but where there are not many Swiss or Austrian citizens. So it has become very usual to do that. We only do it on much larger scale than larger countries do.

So what about this current discussion in the Principality – if I understand it properly – about closing diplomatic embassies in some countries. So if the Liechtensteiners should cut the cost due to the budget balance, how does Your Highness see these two issues: the importance of maintaining international relations on a very high level with the UN, EEA, etc. and the need to fix the budget problems?

Luckily, we have very good relations with many countries. However, for very small countries it is a big challenge to keep very close relationships with many countries because we simply don't have enough resources for that. So we always have to prioritize very good relations with our neighbours and with our trading partners. You can argue how many missions, embassies we need. In my opinion, we are generally on a good level if you look on amount of costs and if you cut down one or two diplomatic missions, you don't really save great deal of costs in the overall context of the state budget. However, there is something you can observe in other countries – to explain to the people the need for foreign politics is always difficult – and therefore this argument comes from time to time because the citizens don't see the benefits of foreign politics directly.

Now I would like to move to the special role of the Catholic Church. In modern Europe the Catholic Church has relatively weaker position and role than few years ago. While in European small states (Malta, Monaco, Andorra, Liechtenstein, San Marino) the Catholic Church is a strong institution which could raise its doubts about controversial issues (as same-sex marriages, euthanasia and abortion). This may lead to a conflict between the people, government and the Church. If we focus on the case of both: partnership bill (Lebenspartnerschaft) and abortion bill in Liechtenstein, we may notice that some demands of the Church are implemented and some are not. What does Your Highness think about either this special role in the constitutional system of the Catholic Church in Liechtenstein or this role as a political actor?

Well, I am in favour for clear division between church and state and their roles. In my opinion, the role of the state is to ensure that its citizen can live a happy life in freedom. The role of the church, in my opinion, is to ensure that as many people as possible lead a life in a way that it is very likely to take them to heaven. If you look in the past, it has been problematic if either the church or the state tried to mix in with the role of the other one or to even take on the role of the other one.

Usually it was bad for both sides if that happened. I think that it is important that Catholic Church and other religions do raise their voice on state matters, particularly on ethical questions of human rights. If you look into past for instance, Judaism and Christianity played a very valuable role in helping in creating the concept of human rights. But on the other hand, it is also important that the state keeps our certain overview over the religions, so that they can interfere if our religion or sect becomes a threat to the citizens.

How does this system work in Liechtenstein, from perspective of Your Highness, especially in issues may seen as controversial (partnership bill or others)?

If you look at our Constitution you have an article that gives the Catholic Church a special role, the Catholic Church has the special protection of the state. As that article was never specified into law, it was never a matter of further meanings. So what we have, if you look at the Constitution, is a very close link between the Catholic Church and the state of Liechtenstein. If you look into the past it also has been very close link. There was a strong influence of the Church on politics up to 60s and 70s. Since then there has been much more division, but not in all matters, especially on a community level, there are still lots of linkages which are, in my opinion, neither good for the state nor for the Church in Liechtenstein. For instance, you have the system that priests are community employees of the local community and if there is a problem between a parish priest and his chaplain its rather local mayor that intervenes then the bishop.

On the other hand there is sometimes a tendency that the major gets pressure from political party members or from community members, that he should intervene on church matters or if the priest in his sermon says something that they don't like because he is an employee. I think that is not healthy for both sides. We should move towards a clear division in the future.

There is also something I have mentioned before. If you have a clear institutional division between Church and the state I think the Church should be still able to raise its voice in ethical questions and that the state should be able to interfere if a religion becomes a threat to its citizens. Even if you have a clear division there should also be an interaction between them.

Now I would like to skip to Liechtenstein foreign policy. In 2008 there was a tax affair which resulted in not very good relations with Germany. In 2009 the Principality recognized both: Czech Republic and Slovakia. Does Your Highness think that today Liechtenstein has any relationships with any particular country which should be improved? What are the main goals of Liechtenstein's foreign policy?

I would say that we have very good relationships with most countries and if you look at the relationships with those countries that you have just mentioned before we could very much improved

the relationships in the past years, even though there might be still some issues that need some work to do but we can work on that in a good climate.

What I mentioned very before, we have to work on having good relations with our neighbours, because it is very important for us. We have much closer relationships than countries usually have as we do many things together. And otherwise we have to concentrate on countries that are particularly important for us because they are very important trade partners for us.

Coming to conclusions, I'd like to ask Your Highness more general questions. What does Your Highness think about effectiveness of Liechtenstein political system? Does it work good? What are advantages and disadvantages of institutions which are in the political system of the Principality? Which improvements should be made?

The political system in Liechtenstein works very well and I do not see any major changes that are necessary.

Since the end of the II World War in Europe we have a tendency to abolish monarchies instead of re-establishing them. Nowadays we have 12 monarchies in Europe. What are their future in the United Europe in opinion of Your Highness as a monarch?

I think a monarchy – at least as in Liechtenstein – is very a interesting model also for other countries. In Liechtenstein we have a unique system of parliamentary democracy with strong monarchy's elements and a strong direct democracy. This brings very high political and economical stability, a long term orientation of politics, high continuity and identity all thanks to the monarchy's elements. And the politicians act very closely to the people, this very much thanks to direct democracy element.

If you look around you can hear or read quite often about crisis of democracy, especially the parliamentary democracy, particularly of the short termism of parliamentary democracy and there I think that Liechtenstein model can offer some attractive elements against this problem.

Now I'd like to ask Your Highness about functioning of the art. 13bis in practice. Does H.S.H. Prince Johann Hans-Adam II participate in any particular way of governing after transferring his power to Your Highness? Does he give Your Highness any advices about decision which are to be taken?

If you look at the art. 13bis the Reigning Prince can entrust the Hereditary Prince with his rights and obligations as a head of state. In that sense he remains formally the Reigning Prince, even though the role of the acting head of state is taken over by the Hereditary Prince, but theoretically it is a kind of a deputy role the Hereditary Prince takes on and that could be reversed theoretically. In other words, it is obviously normal that the deputy keeps the reigning Prince informed about the most important issues. This comes with the role he performs for the one he is representing.

In practice, when I took over from the Reigning Prince as a head of state, it was still very useful for me to talk with him in greater depths about all kinds of political issues because he had much more knowledge on many issues than I did. That was very helpful. It is generally very helpful for a head of state to be able to talk through certain political questions with other people, and particularly with people who don't have a vested interest and that's a problem if you talk to other politicians and representatives of the interest groups and so on. So to be able to talk anything through with someone who has all this experience, who has a neutral position, was helpful. Now, after a longer period of time in those talks it is much more your knowledge, your own experience but it is still helpful and it still is a part of tradition. So if you look back between my father and my grandfather, so when my grandfather didn't hand over to my father yet he still would talk through certain political issues with my father already. The idea of this is that is good to have someone you can talk things through, but it is also our way you can prepare next one for his role and then when my father took on as a representative of my grandfather it was useful for him to get experi-

ence of my grandfather. And we continue to do that in the same way as it happened. So this is how it happened.

Nowadays, none of the European microstates (Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, Vatican) are in the European Union. Only Liechtenstein is a member state of EEA. What are Your Highness' general thoughts about the future of these states? Should they join the EEA or EU looking from perspective of Liechtenstein experience?

The EEA is very good solution for Liechtenstein and I could imagine that it could be also an attractive solution for other very small states. It allows us to have a deep integration into Europe and to fully participate in the European market without having to be a full EU member which in the current structure of the EU would be very difficult for such a small country which has only 37,000 inhabitants and also without having to negotiate everything on a bilateral level like the Swiss do because again – that would be difficult for such small state. So we have an attractive framework of integration into Europe, and the dynamic framework of integration, and yes, we are very happy with that. And I could imagine it would be also an interesting for others to have similar way of integration.

Thank You, Your Highness. It was a pleasure.

You're welcome.

19th December 2014 at the Princely Castle

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