

Ambassador Jan Kickert lecture at Utah Valley University



Permanent Representative (PR) of Austria to the United Nations, Ambassador Jan Kickert, focused his lecture on Tuesday, 19 February in Utah Valley University on the foreign policy of small countries and Austria specifically. Ambassador Kickert first addressed some historical context for Austria. He did this because he stated that foreign policy is dependent on both the geography and history of a country. He also discussed the primary ways that small countries can develop a strong foreign policy: finding a niche, being involved in facilitating communication, and focusing on international law rather than military efforts.

It was interesting to learn about how a smaller country has to manage its foreign policy differently from a massive country, in both geographic size and population, such as the United States. One foreign policy that small countries should invest in is in finding a niche. For Austria, as Ambassador Kickert described, this meant become a “bridge” between the eastern and western forces of the Cold War. Thanks to remaining neutral, Austria was able to work as a go-between for both allies of the United States and the Soviet Union. Their neutrality was largely modeled after the Switzerland’s one and allowed Austria to engage both sides of the war. They were also

active in encouraging disarmament, as they are today. Being able to form a niche in the circumstances around the Cold War, made Austria into a more powerful state than their small size would normally indicate.

Additionally, for small countries it is important to be a part of networks of communication. Ambassador Kickert described this as “finding a meeting point” through helping to facilitate communication between different countries. In line with this policy, Austria joined the United Nations early on, in 1955, once they regained their independence, which they had lost after losing with Germany during World War II. They also became a part of the European Union. Joining the EU, in addition to being a good place for communication, also helped boost Austria’s economy. This is because open, diverse trade is what their economy depends on, and the EU provides a platform for this.

Another one of the primary focuses a small country needs (in terms of foreign policy) must be on international law. This is due to the fact that if a country is not a useful state to others, or at least protected by international law, other larger states can take over your country. Investing in things like communication, remaining neutral when possible, and international law all help countries like Austria to maintain their sovereignty. As Ambassador Kickert described it, an international, law-based system works as a kind of “insurance policy” for small countries so they do not become overtaken by large ones. When Austria joined the United Nations, it was a sign of this foreign policy in action. Since joining, and benefiting from the UN, Austria has put forth great effort to give back to the international community. They have done this through their continued focus on disarmament of nuclear weapons, international peacekeeping efforts, and combatting climate change.

Although these three foreign policies (finding a niche, encouraging communication, and focusing on international law protections) are clearly beneficial for small countries like Austria, I think they can and should be applied to large countries as well. International cooperation is central to maintaining peace in all countries, including the United States. Maintaining an active role in these venues for peace and communication is vital for all countries. Even though these policies are necessities for the continued existence of small countries, large countries would greatly benefit from utilizing some of these policies as well.

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