

## **Ambassador Jan Kickert about foreign policy of Austria**

On Tuesday February 19, 2019 we had the privilege of listening to Ambassador Jan Kickert speak at Utah Valley University about what foreign policy means to a small country. Ambassador Kickert was assigned as the Permanent Representative to the United Nations in August 2015. Ambassador Jan Kickert spoke about many things that I may never have considered before this lecture because I am a U.S. citizen and as such, I take for granted the weight of U.S. foreign policy globally.



*Ambassador Jan Kickert during presentation at UVU*

Ambassador Kickert began by giving us an overview of recent Austrian history. He spoke that after WWII, Austria was split very similarly as Germany. Austria no longer had its sovereignty but leading into the Cold War it took a neutrality stance with the western states and the Soviet Union in order to help regain its sovereignty. Ambassador Kickert explained that by not joining NATO and by taking a neutral stance in the conflict Austria had found a niche in the international system. Now Austria had gone from being a small land locked inconsequential state to the one having an important role in international politics. In his lecture, Ambassador Kickert explained

that for a small country, finding a niche is really its only means of becoming politically significant as far as foreign policy matters go. He told us that because of Austria's neutral stance, Vienna, its capital was able to become one of only four places on earth to host a United Nations Head Quarters.

For small countries, international organizations, such as the U.N., are extremely important and being a part of them is paramount. Because small countries like Austria lack the resources and influence that the larger world powers hold, it is very important for them to be members of the U.N. It provides them with the opportunity to have a vote that counts as much as any other country. It also provides them with security because they know that they are protected by international laws and treaties.

Again, Ambassador Kickert explained to us how Austria has found its niche in the modern political system. Austria's niche in the modern political system has been in the disarmament and banning of specific weapons. Austria was a driving force behind the banning of land mines and cluster weapons in modern warfare. These weapons are capable of causing catastrophic damage without any discrimination. This means, that there is the possibility of causing massive casualties to the civilian population. He spoke about how more recently Austria has been assisting in the disarmament of nuclear weapons across the world. Ambassador Kickert hopes that one-day nuclear weapons will be no longer a threat to the world.

Ambassador Kickert also spoke about how geography can play a strong role in foreign policy. He explained that international relations and foreign policy begins with your neighbors. He explained that because Austria is a small land locked state it is very important that it keep good relations with its neighbors. Austria relies heavily on its ability to trade openly. Without strong treaties and good relations with its neighbors, Austria would have a difficult time importing or exporting its products.

I thought this was a very enlightening experience for me. Because I am a U.S. citizen, my perspectives of the world and foreign policy are narrowed to the perspective of someone who knows that their country cannot be ignored. The majority of the world does not live in a super power country and has a much different outlook on the world. I found it interesting that while Austria may not be the most important actor in the international system, it has managed to make itself relevant. I also found the idea that neutrality could be a useful in making a country important. I have always seen things again through the lens of an American. As a super power, the U.S. is usually polarized to one side of a conflict. Therefore, the possibility that by being a neutral party

Austria was able to work its way into a niche during the cold was surprising to me. Overall, I am very grateful that Ambassador Kickert was willing to speak to us.

*Miles Gevas, UVU student*