

Learning about Austria from Ambassador Jan Kickert



On Tuesday, February 19th, 2019 Utah Valley University hosted His Excellency, Jan Kickert, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations. UN dignitary gave a presentation on the history of Austria and current political issues in Austria today.

Austria is a landlocked state in the middle of Europe. Once a vast empire, Austria was reduced to a small population of 6 million after the first world war. After world war 2, Austria became a neutral state, and a go-between for the Soviet Union and the west. An example of their neutral status and friendship with conflictual states is their refusal to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization at the request of Moscow. Following the fall of Communism and the iron Curtain, Austria was able to work with their neighbors and

experienced economic growth. “In foreign policies, neighbors are everything.” Austria now has a proud identity as a peacekeeping nation, with over one hundred thousand soldiers abroad on peacekeeping missions. Austria has recently signed a treaty banning nuclear weapons, not buying into nuclear armed countries promises of future disarmament. Austria has led the debate on artificial intelligence and climate change, worrying the former may lead to autonomous robots

capable of killing humans, and speeding up the process of climate change prevention to reduce carbon emissions.

Austria has remained ahead of the A.I. debate, with many western capitalist countries not worrying about the future of automation. A worry smaller countries like Austria may have is that capitalist behemoths like America and to an extent China will put profit before caution and allow A.I. experimentation without government intervention or guidelines, with a common understanding that being months ahead of the competition is the same as being an eternity ahead. Austria and other countries are attempting to create an agreement restricting the use of A.I. as it inevitably advances, similar to restrictions placed on Nuclear Weapons after World War 2.

While Austria might not carry the infamy of its northern neighbor, it was regardless a very active part of World War 2 and the attempted ethnic cleansing of the Jewish people. The Ambassador pointed out that Austrians made up some of the most vicious and aggressive Nazi soldiers and SS officers. Austria did however attempt to resist Hitler and the Nazi party at the beginning of the war. This resistance culminated to the assassination of a powerful Austrian political actor, and Austria's eventual surrender to and acceptance of the Third Reich.

Austria has recently faced widespread immigration issues. With an immense amount of Southern European, Middle Eastern, and African immigrants traveling north in hopes of reaching Germany and Scandinavia, many must enter Austria either legally or illegally, and many end up staying. Austria is a small country, with a population of 8.7 Million and a large portion of that concentrated in the capital city, Vienna. High amounts of unregulated immigration could have unforeseen effects on such a small economy.

Austria is a predominantly Christian country, also contributing to cultural differences and conflict among unassimilated immigrants and Austrian Citizens.

Austria is a beautiful country that I was lucky enough to spend 6 months in as a Mormon Missionary. While there is a large amount of immigrants in Vienna, in my experience the animus towards immigrants came from older Austrians who disliked change and were not open to understanding the new comers in their country that were in need of help. Vienna remains one of the safest cities in the world, and ranks high yearly on best places in the world to live.

Jared Faux, UVU student