

Learning about Austria from Ambassador Jan Kickert

On Tuesday, February 19th, 2019 students and faculty of Utah Valley University hosted His Excellency, Jan Kickert, who is the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations. Mr. Kickert shared the rich culture, history, and current events of his country.



Ambassador Kickert presented several interesting opinions about the unique position of Austria in the context of a larger European Union and global stage, both historically and in contemporary terms. Perhaps the most-important principle that he emphasized was that Austria's – and other smaller countries – continued success relies on finding its own distinct niche within the larger international structure.

He illustrated this point through a brief overview of the history of Austria. Within half a century, Austria transformed from one of Europe's largest empires to a small, neutral state. After World War Two, Austria's land was divided between the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and France. It wasn't until 1955 that Austria regained its statehood and national sovereignty.

Even though Austria's domestic and international powers were weakened, their neutrality proved to play a crucial role in the country's long-term survival and success; this was its niche in global politics. Austria's refusal to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, while still maintaining

close economic and political ties with the United States, positioned them to be an international meeting space between the two world superpowers during The Cold War Era.

Ambassador Kickert also discussed the importance of Austria's leadership as it relates to combatting climate change and effectively-monitoring the growth of artificial intelligence. Leading the discussion and creating substantive change regarding these contemporary issues fits within the country's own abilities and fits within the larger scope of the European Union.

Through the cultural interchange provided by His Excellency's visit to Utah Valley University, students and faculty are able to examine our contemporary global politics in nuanced ways. We are able to examine the hidden complexities within our own country and its relation to others. We gain an invaluable appreciation of history and its ability to teach us.

Parker Dolton, UVU student