



GOVERNMENT
PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN

MINISTRY OF
GENERAL GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS AND FINANCE

Speech by Prime Minister Dr. Daniel Risch

Minister of General Government Affairs and Finance

«30 years of the Liechtenstein Representation in Brussels»
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Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy to be here with you in Brussels tonight - in the "heart of Europe."
Even though back home in Liechtenstein we also consider ourselves to live in the center of Europe nestled in the Alps between Switzerland and Austria. And when I think back to my time in School my Maths Teacher, originating from Danzig in Poland – explained us with a compass over the European Map, that "the real heart of Europe" is in Poland or more accurately in Danzig.

I'm convinced, there's no point in arguing about the "real" heart of Europe. But we should take it as a good sign for a strong Europe, that many places and many people like to be in the very center of Europe. From a political viewpoint there's no doubt – Brussels definitely is a very European place. This is also the reason, why for 30 years Liechtenstein has its own Embassy and Mission in this place.

It is great to welcome so many friends and colleagues from European and non-European nations in this beautiful room tonight. I am also delighted to see so many Liechtenstein citizens and representatives of Liechtenstein companies present in Belgium – a testimony to the fact that our countries are intertwined in many ways beyond the political. As I already mentioned: We are here tonight to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of our Embassy and Mission in Brussels. 30 years of official diplomatic representation in the Kingdom of Belgium - but our joint history with Belgium clearly goes back much further. In fact, Liechtenstein had its first building in Brussels a quarter century earlier – the Liechtenstein Pavilion at the World Exposition of 1958. The event that gave Brussels one of its most famous sights: the Atomium.

The 30 years of our diplomatic representation in Brussels also stand for 30 years of dedicated and committed European integration of our country. This celebration also coincides with 30 years of the European Economic Area, of which we are a member state, yet another big celebration for us later this spring. For Liechtenstein, a country with a relatively limited diplomatic presence in the world, opening this representation was a very conscious decision. When my predecessors proposed to parliament the establishment of this physical presence, they were very clear: the opening of a diplomatic representation in Brussels is the logical consequence and physical demonstration of Liechtenstein's determination to take the path of European integration.

This clear objective resulted from a popular vote in 1992 – probably one of the most decisive votes in our country's history – in which the people voted in favor of joining the European Economic Area. This laid the foundations for the path that has led us here today – and I can assure you that the goal of a European, sovereign future for Liechtenstein as a member of the European Economic Area, the Schengen area and as one of the closest partners of the EU and its Member States are carried on by my government and the people of our country. Our representation here was hence opened in 1994, at the time with only the Ambassador and one secretary position. Since then, the embassy and mission has grown considerably in tasks and in size – and I am looking forward to listen to the memories of the first and all following Ambassadors of Liechtenstein in Belgium later tonight.

One thing that has not changed since then, however, is the location of our representation: it is still in the original location on number 1 Place du Congrès, looking out towards the *Congress Column*. As most of you surely know, the *Colonne du Congrès* is named after the constitutional congress that founded the democratic state of Belgium in 1830 and installed important fundamental rights for the protection of its citizens. In Liechtenstein, in 2021 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of our current constitution. Similar to the Belgian one, our constitution foresees an interplay of the monarchy and strong (direct) democratic rights.

Both of our constitutions form the bedrock of the rule of law in our countries, a principle and value to which both our countries are firmly committed indeed, this commitment to the rule of law and democracy should bring states together as it creates the foundations of a world that is safe and peaceful for all of us. We know all too well that these are not only hollow words. The brutal return of war to the European continent and a seemingly ever-growing belligerence in all regions of the world is a sharp reminder that we need to stand together and defend the values we share.

In such a world, evenings like tonight are ever more important. I hence want to thank our Belgian, European and international guests for thirty years of friendship and good relations – and I am looking ahead to many more to come.