



History

Introduction

Archaeological findings prove that the territory of today's Principality of Liechtenstein has been populated since the 5th millennium BC. For a long time, only the higher areas could be settled, as the Rhine represented a permanent threat, flooding the valleys.

Numerous places of worship and settlements were found in Gutenberg and Eschnerberg.

Among the archaeological findings worth mentioning are the bronze worship figures, which were found on the Gutenberg Mountain.

The original inhabitants were considered to be Raetians (Vennons), but also Celtic influences (Vindelics) coming from the west can be detected.

Raetia as a Roman province

Raetia was conquered by the Romans and declared a Roman province in the year 15 BC. Already in the 1st century, a military road was built from Italy along the Splügen Pass, Chur and the Luziensteig on the right side of the Rhine valley towards Bregenz.

Many Roman estates emerged along this military road in what is now Liechtenstein. Over the years, the local dialects merged with the imported Latin and formed the Raetian language. This evolution was also supported by Christianization beginning in the 4th century.

The ruins of a castle built in Schaan in the 4th century to repel the Alemanni coming from the north are an important testimony of the late times of the Roman rule.

Emergence of counties in the Early Middle Ages

In the 5th century, the Roman Empire began to decay. The centuries that followed were characterized by Alemannic immigration. The Roman and Alemannic cultures developed for a long time side by side.

In the 8th century, Raetia was incorporated into the Frankish Empire.

Under Charlemagne, the Frankish county constitution was introduced in 806. A Raetian land register dating from around 846 recorded all the royal domains. In this land register, places and people from what is now Liechtenstein, like Balzers, Schaan and Eschen, were mentioned for the first time. Beginning in the 10th century, Raetia belonged to the counts of Bregenz, who died out in 1152. The former Raetia was split up more and more by divisions of inheritances.

Imperial immediacy and territorial lordship

At first, Lower Raetia was given to the counts of Montfort, who split up into the lines of Montfort and Werdenberg. The counts of Werdenberg themselves branched into more lines. After a first division of such an inheritance, the County of Vaduz emerged in 1342. In 1379, King Wenzel bestowed jurisdiction on Count Heinrich upon Werdenberg. In 1396, King Wenzel validated the Imperial immediacy of the counts of Vaduz. This represented the cornerstone for establishing territorial lordship. In the centuries that followed, the Imperial immediacy of the Vaduz sovereigns was time and again confirmed by the Emperor.



Repeated change of rulers

The Vaduz line of Werdenberg counts died out in 1416 and the barons of Brandis, who originated from the Bernese Oberland, became the rulers of the land. They were able to gain the northern part of the Lordship of Schellenberg, which had previously belonged to the Werdenberg-Heiligenberg line. The borders have remained unchanged since 1434. The former dominions of Schellenberg and Vaduz within these borders form the territory of today's Principality of Liechtenstein.

The 15th century brought three wars to Liechtenstein: During the Appenzell War (1405), the Old Zurich War (1444-1446) and the Swabian War (1499-1500) plundering, pillaging and destruction took place. Particularly the Swabian War was of major significance: the Rhine was established as the permanent border between the Old German Empire and the Swiss Confederation. Liechtenstein subsequently occupied a marginal position for many centuries.

In 1510, the last baron of Brandis sold the dominions of Vaduz and Schellenberg to the counts of Sulz, who had their seat in Klettgau (Baden). They reigned over both dominions from afar. They were Catholics and made sure that the land remained Catholic during the Reformation period. Overall, this period was favorable for the development of rights in these two territories. Each of the two dominions constituted its own court district, in which the subjects could appoint a chief judge and twelve judges. This court convened twice a year as the so-called "Zeitgericht" (temporal court). The Sulz period is considered a time of freedom and happiness.

Thirty Years War and witch persecutions

It took only 100 years until the next change of rulers. The counts of Sulz had to sell Vaduz and Schellenberg in the year 1613. The counts of Hohenems were the purchasers. They were at the zenith of their power and wished to found a buffer state between Austria and Switzerland.

The 17th century remains one of the saddest chapters in the history of Liechtenstein: The plague erupted repeatedly.

The Thirty Years War had victims in Liechtenstein, although Vaduz and Schellenberg were not actually a theater of war. The witch persecutions were far worse: More than 100 innocent persons were persecuted and executed. The counts of Hohenems ran deeper and deeper into debt and were finally forced to sell off part of their property.

Elevation to Imperial Principality

The rulers of Liechtenstein were elevated to the rank of princes in 1608, but this did not entail admittance to the Council of Princes. The Princes of Liechtenstein had wealthy land holdings in Lower Austria, Moravia and Bohemia, but none of these domains enjoyed Imperial immediacy. In order to obtain the admittance to the Council of Princes, and thus to the most significant status they could attain, they needed properties that enjoyed Imperial immediacy.

In search of such a territory, the attention of Prince Johann Adam Andreas of Liechtenstein was drawn to the Hohenems domains of Schellenberg and Vaduz. He was able to purchase the Lordship of Schellenberg in 1699 and the County of Vaduz in 1712. Both dominions were elevated to the Imperial Principality of Liechtenstein in 1719. The fact that Liechtenstein received the name of the ruling family is a peculiarity.



The rulers continued to reside in Vienna and were not acquainted with the principality that bore their name. Governors administered the principality on their behalf. Soon, the land was governed in the absolutist spirit of the era. The districts were abolished and the authorities came into conflict with the subjects. A compromise was found in 1733, limiting the rights of the districts, but the districts and courts retained their form.

From the Napoleonic Wars to sovereignty

The French Revolution constituted the beginning of far-reaching changes in Europe. Liechtenstein had not been a theater of war since 1799. The French army marched through the country and occupied Feldkirch. The remains of the Russian troops marched through Liechtenstein the same year, under the command of General Suvorov. Napoleon abolished the Old German Empire in 1806 and established the Rhine Confederation. Almost all the small German States vanished from the map, but Liechtenstein was accepted as a sovereign state into the Rhine Confederation - a political gesture of Napoleon to Prince Johann I, the ruler at the time. After Napoleon's ultimate defeat at Waterloo, a new political order for Europe was negotiated at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The old small German States were not reestablished, and the existing ones were no longer called into question. The independent small State of Liechtenstein was accepted into the German Confederation. In the long run, Liechtenstein became the only small German State able to maintain its independence.

Absolutism and the revolutionary year 1848

Liechtenstein's situation was difficult. Because of economic isolation, trades could not evolve. Liechtenstein turned more and more into an underdeveloped rural State, unable to undertake the necessary reforms. Rural agriculture was burdened by feudal taxes and was unproductive. In 1805, general mandatory school attendance was introduced, but the educational level remained low. Necessary legislative reforms (for example the introduction of the land register or of the general civil code) were viewed with mistrust by the population, due to the absolutist approach of the reforms. The ideas of the revolution of 1848 thus found a breeding ground in Liechtenstein as well. By means of an urgent petition, the subjects called upon the Reigning Prince to grant them a new constitution, free elections of their representatives, and abolition of the feudal taxes. The historian Peter Kaiser ensured that there were no riots. Prince Alois II was not disinclined in principle to agree to the demands, but he wanted to wait for further developments in Germany and Austria. The absolutist system thus ended up being preserved.

Economic liberation and constitutionalism

The Customs Treaty with Austria-Hungary was concluded in 1852. It entailed economic liberation and made the development of the textile industry possible. With the reign of Prince Johann II, a period of reforms began, which were also debated in Parliament and thus were supported by the population. The first bank was opened in Liechtenstein in 1861; a reformist constitution was enacted and the first national newspaper was published in 1862. Under constitutionalism, the Reigning Prince retained State power, but Parliament could no longer be bypassed. The country experienced an upswing overall. After its defeat in the war against Prussia, Austria - and in consequence Liechtenstein - withdrew from the German Confederation. The



Liechtenstein army, which had been a great financial burden, could now be dissolved.

The economic situation remained difficult. The construction of the Rhine dam over the following decades constituted an immense burden for the country. Simple trades developed only gradually, and tourism only gained a degree of importance toward the end of the 19th century. The textile industry offered employment mainly to women. Except in agriculture, men could hardly find employment. Hundreds of men and a good number of women therefore sought jobs as seasonal workers in the neighboring countries. Far more saw no future in their small homeland at all and emigrated - some to the neighboring countries, but the majority to America.

First World War and fundamental reorientation

Liechtenstein remained neutral during the First World War, but it was seriously affected by the economic measures adopted against Austria. The population suffered from hunger. The textile industry came to a complete standstill. Most savings vanished due to post-war inflation.

Liechtenstein experienced many changes when the First World War came to an end. In 1918, the first political parties came into being: the Christian-Social People's Party and the Progressive Citizens' Party. Demands for a more democratic constitution became louder. The slogan was "Liechtenstein to the Liechtenstein people". A new constitution was negotiated between the Reigning Prince and Parliament in the following years and entered into force in 1921. The Constitution provided not only significant direct democratic mechanisms (popular initiative and referendum), but also prevented foreign dominance: Beginning in 1921, the Prime Minister had to be a native Liechtenstein citizen, and all courts had to be located in the country.

Partnership with Switzerland

Liechtenstein turned toward Switzerland after the collapse of the monarchy in Austria. In the year 1919, the Customs Treaty with Austria was terminated. An ever increasing network of treaties was concluded with Switzerland and the Swiss cantons over the following years and decades. The most important of these treaties is the Customs Treaty of 1923, which to this day forms the basis for a close partnership.

Years of crisis

The years between the world wars brought bitter experiences and suffering. The collapse of the Rhine dam flooded more than half of the valley plains in 1927. The so-called Sparkassa scandal shook the country only a year later, bankrupting the savings bank and almost the whole country. The severe economic crisis of the 1930's also broke out in Liechtenstein; the Government tried to alleviate the situation somewhat through emergency work projects.

This resulted in the project of a century: the Inland Channel, which flows through the entire country and drains the valley plains. Adding to all the economic problems, the political feud between the two parties imposed a difficult burden on the young democracy. Only in light of the German occupation of Austria in March 1938 did a resolution of the party-political disputes emerge. Under pressure from home and abroad, the two parties joined forces to form a coalition Government. One year later, they introduced proportional representation, which subsequently became an important pillar for the political stability of the country. It also contributed to the



relocation of Prince Franz Josef II to Liechtenstein in 1938, who became the first Reigning Prince to establish his residence in Vaduz Castle. He then became an important integration figure.

Liechtenstein remained neutral during the Second World War and was spared the direct effects of war. Thanks to its close partnership with Switzerland, the country also survived the social and economic problems relatively well. The National Socialist "German National Movement in Liechtenstein" was active for a short while, but - at least after an attempted coup in March 1939 - never became a serious threat to the country. Any attraction to National Socialist Germany quickly disappeared when the war erupted.

Boom after the Second World War

The first new industrial establishments emerged already during the Second World War. The years following the war were marked by an ongoing boom. Within only a few decades, Liechtenstein developed from a poor agricultural state into a modern society with a surprisingly diversified economy. The most important reasons for this upswing were the Customs Union with Switzerland, the introduction of the Swiss franc as the new currency, the stable political and social conditions, and a liberal organization of the economy in conjunction with moderate taxation.

The highly specialized industrial firms are competitive throughout the world, and trades occupy an important position in the region. International recognition was increasingly achieved through financial services, banks and fiduciaries. Overall, the local population was no longer able to satisfy the demand for human resources, so that the Liechtenstein economy had to rely on a growing number of cross-border commuters. The social services were continually improved thanks to the good economic development, so that Liechtenstein is now a well-developed welfare state.

Increased international cooperation

The right of small States to exist is often called into question. Liechtenstein has therefore aimed for decades to strengthen international contacts and cultivate friendly neighborly relations. Liechtenstein has joined a number of international organizations since the 1950's, only the most important of which can be listed here:

International Court of Justice in The Hague (1950), CSCE/OSCE (1975), Council of Europe (1978), UN (1990), EFTA (1991), EEA (1995) and WTO (1995). In addition, the good relations with the neighboring countries of Switzerland and Austria are a particular priority. Liechtenstein will continue to rely on good international cooperation in the future.