

Learning about foreign policy in Austria from Ambassador Jan Kickert



Being able to hear from the Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations, Ambassador Jan Kickert presentation at Utah Valley University on Tuesday, February 19, 2019 about Austria and their foreign policy was a very interesting experience. I was not very familiar with the country of Austria before this presentation, so I was very interested to learn more. I felt like Mr. Kickert did an excellent job giving a brief history of Austria and sharing his knowledge and experiences representing Austria at the United Nations.

I thought it was very interesting that many people were getting the countries Austria and Australia mixed up at the United Nations. Mr. Kickert said that he and another representative initiated a change in the voting practices at the United Nations so that the votes would stop getting mixed up. Instead of handwriting the country, they used pre-printed ballots. It is funny to think that this simple mistake happens at such a large level like the United Nations.

Mr. Kickert then went on to say that Austria's foreign policy is greatly influenced its history and geography. He explained how Austria is a small land locked country that was left small and almost unwanted at the end of the First World War. By 1934, the conservative government took the legislative powers of the parliament, making Austria a fascist country. I found this small history lesson to be very interesting and really helped me understand how Austria's government and history plays a role in their foreign policy.

He then went on to discuss what happened after World War II in Austria. Much of the country was re-built, and by 1955, Austria declared its neutrality and re-gained full sovereignty. Austria remained militarily neutral and did not join NATO. By remaining neutral on military issues and not agreeing to any military pacts, Austria was a very neutral country. This neutrality attracted the United Nations and many other countries as a neutral meeting ground. For a number of years the UN headquarters was in Vienna.

Overall, I was very impressed with Mr. Kickert's knowledge and presentation of Austria and their foreign policy. I learned a lot of information about a small country that I did not know before. It was super fascinating to hear directly from an ambassador and permanent representative in the United Nations. I especially liked when he told everyone to find their "niche" and see where you can add value to foreign policy just like Austria has with their neutrality.

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