



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

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*«Many small people, in many small places doing many small things, can change the world.»*

Dear President of the Parliamentary Assembly,  
Dear Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly,  
Dear Secretary General of the Council of Europe,  
Dear Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,  
Excellencies,

The African proverb I started with, means a lot to me. Aren't we all "small" or "little" in a sense? All of us are merely individuals, living and acting in small places. Strasbourg, like most places in the world, is a small place too if you look at it individually. And only if in many small places, many people do many things, a greater movement can happen.

Just recently, I attended a church service and the priest talked about scientific findings, outlining that this planet – mother earth – has been inhabited by 107 billion human beings up to the present day. Currently there are around 8 billion people on this planet, 640 Million of them living in the countries we represent – in Europe.

107 billion is a truly impressive number – however, it is a historic number, indicative of the past – the generations before ours.

But – shouldn't we focus on the generations to come? The hopefully infinite number of people living on this planet after us. I believe, and I am convinced, that our desire to shape the world – or at least Europe – with our decisions for future generations is the reason why all of you – all of us – decided to pursue a career in politics.

When talking about the past and about the future, I would like to add an additional aspect to the African proverb I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks. The phrase "do many small things" includes a particularly significant element: the verb "do".

Significant, because we can only "DO" things right now. We might be able to plan or aim to do things in the future, but we are only actually able to take action in the present. Equally, we are not able to change what we "did" or "did not do" in the past, even if we may regret our decisions and now need to bear the consequences.

So, all we have is NOW. I myself decided to deliver a speech that matters to me here in this room today. And that is what I am doing right now. All of you are free to decide on what you want to do in this very moment as well: You could interrupt me by yelling "Yes you're right" or even "Please stop, I think you're wrong" or you can – what I personally would appreciate most – listen and connect with what I say. The decision is all yours.

Having said this, let me continue with the “small place” I call home. Some of you have already had the opportunity to visit Liechtenstein when the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly met in our capital Vaduz last November. I hope that the rest of you will get the chance as well – it definitely is a place where many people do many things. A place where we feel as proud Europeans too. And a place, where we know that only if we interact, work together and engage, we can be successful. This also brings me to our current Presidency of the Committee of Ministers and the term “Multilateralism”.

Over the last few years, headlines repeatedly proclaimed that “Multilateralism is dead”. Some journalists and scholars put a question mark at the end of the sentence – which is a little more encouraging, I find. But the sombre spirit remains the same.

Liechtenstein relies on the effective functioning of the international rules-based order. Multilateralism is one of our life lines. Statements like these therefore worry me – particularly in my role as Prime Minister of Liechtenstein.

With a surface area of 160 square kilometres and a population of 40'000 citizens – 0.04% of whom are present in this room today, I may add – Liechtenstein can be considered to be a small place – but a great one at the same time. Let me emphasise that geographical size is not indicative of the impact a state can have, particularly in multilateral fora. Liechtenstein has proven this time and again – be it in the Council of Europe, the UN or the EEA.

The multilateral system faces multiple threats. The core values of the Council of Europe – human rights, democracy and the rule of law – are increasingly challenged. The present seems to be characterised by aggressive power politics, anti-democratic tendencies, growing nationalism and disregard for the rule of law and the rules based international order. Tragically, we have seen what can happen when these threats escalate.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine, serves as a painful example for the culmination of these elements. Particularly in times like these, the Council of Europe and its core principles prove not only important, but urgently necessary. Let me reiterate Liechtenstein's continued solidarity with Ukraine and its people. After almost two years of war, it is unimaginable what the people of Ukraine have had to endure in their places. We honour their unbreakable spirit.

In these current times, we are reminded that multilateral organisations such as the Council of Europe play a critical role in promoting peace and stability. Aggressive power politics must not prevail. Those challenging our common commitments must be held accountable.

With the establishment of the Register of Damage, the Council of Europe has taken a critical first step towards ensuring accountability for the Russian aggression against Ukraine. On the way forward, it remains of critical importance that the crime of aggression is investigated and prosecuted, and that all those responsible are held to account. There will be no peace without justice.

Initiatives like these underline the importance of multilateral cooperation once again. As member states of the Council of Europe, we are connected through our common commitment to multilateralism and the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. And as member states, it is our obligation to do our utmost to safeguard these principles. And we do this not only for our own benefit, but for the people in our countries – the people we represent.

This is, of course, also the case with Liechtenstein's membership in other multilateral organisations. In the United Nations, Liechtenstein has repeatedly proven that even the geographically small can make a difference.

In 2022, Liechtenstein championed the so called "veto initiative". The use of the veto in the United Nations Security Council has increased significantly over the past years with far-reaching consequences on the work and effectiveness of the United Nations. The broader UN membership in the General Assembly has a legitimate interest and a political responsibility to address situations in which the use of the veto leads to paralysis in the decision-making of the Security Council that carries out its functions on their behalf. With the Veto Initiative, Liechtenstein sought to strengthen inclusive multilateralism and to provide a mechanism to ensure accountability between the organs of the United Nations. With this initiative, the General Assembly mandates a formal meeting every time a veto is cast in the Security Council, allowing for the broader UN membership to express its views.

We are proud, that the resolution establishing the veto initiative was ultimately adopted by consensus, sending an important message in support of multilateralism. By enhancing the role of the General Assembly, the Veto Initiative took an important step towards strengthening inclusive multilateralism and the international rule of law.

In Liechtenstein, we tend to take such a pragmatic approach in other areas as well. We are doers, not talkers. And as such, we prefer to implement standards before we adorn ourselves with labels that entail the ratification of conventions, for example.

In Liechtenstein, we are pragmatists not only because this is the mindset that has proven successful in the past, but also because we have to. Being a small place – a very active one I may emphasise – translates to limited resources and a lean state administration. We maintain efficient processes and put tailored and pragmatic solutions at the centre of our policy making. I therefore often speak of an entrepreneurial way of running our state.

Liechtenstein has always considered itself quintessentially multilateral. The world does not stop at our borders. Only together we can effectively address the challenges ahead.

The Council of Europe and the UN are not the only organisations or collaborations we are part of or engage in on a daily basis. The Customs Treaty we share with Switzerland is an excellent example of this. For more than 100 years, Liechtenstein has been part of the Swiss customs area. The Customs Treaty has created a strong

foundation for relations between Liechtenstein and Switzerland, which today affects many areas of life.

Through its membership in the European Economic Area, Liechtenstein is also integrated in the European Single Market – the world's largest internal market encompassing 30 states and around half a billion people. This has proven immensely important, not only for Liechtenstein's economy but also for the overall prosperity and security of our country.

For 30 years now, the EEA ensures a level playing field through the application of homogeneous rules and of accompanying policies in the areas of competition, environment, climate action and social policy. It also facilitates Liechtenstein's cooperation with our EEA partners Iceland, Norway and the European Union in the fields of research, technological development, environment, culture, education, health and civil protection.

Well before joining the European Economic Area, however, Liechtenstein became a member of the Council of Europe. Last year, we celebrated the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our membership – what a fitting time for us to take over the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

We took over the Presidency last November. Tomorrow, Liechtenstein's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Education and Sport – and my dear colleague – Dominique Hasler will address you in her role as President of the Committee of Ministers. She will further elaborate how Liechtenstein, also in this role, continues to take a principled position in support of multilateral cooperation and the core principles of the Council of Europe.

Liechtenstein's membership in the Council of Europe has helped to further secure our sovereignty and to extend our international recognition as an independent state. With our membership, we received a seat at the table in this European community of values. It offered us the opportunity to actively contribute, both, to the development of new European standards, and to the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in all of Europe – a responsibility we take very seriously. It also allowed us to grow and progress with our common standards.

Since the Ministry of Finance is part of my responsibilities as Prime Minister, let me highlight one area in particular: fighting money laundering and terrorism financing.

For a number of years now, Liechtenstein has put particular significance to the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing, and in doing so follows the international standard of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Since 1999, Liechtenstein has been a member of MONEYVAL, a monitoring body of the Council of Europe modelled on these standards.

The Government, the authorities and the financial market participants are aware of their respective central roles in the effective fight against money laundering and terrorist financing – not least due to our membership in the Council of Europe and MONEYVAL. The determined adoption and implementation of international standards is an important part of this.

Liechtenstein's approach is based not only on the implementation of international requirements, but primarily on the certainty that the effective fight against abuse is a competitive advantage for the financial centre, in addition to the quality of services and the general conditions.

MONEYVAL's latest assessment confirmed Liechtenstein's targeted measures and high overall compliance. As a consequence, Liechtenstein is considered to be eligible for the regular follow-up process, becoming one of only five member-jurisdictions with this outcome so far.

MONEYVAL recognises the progress made by Liechtenstein to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. The report makes it clear that the decision taken in the past were the right ones – this we are very proud of. We will, of course, continue to consistently pursue this path. Ongoing strengthening and strategic expansion of measures to combat money laundering and terrorist financing remains a top priority for Liechtenstein.

Multilateralism and implementing the standards we set together therefore not only serves the so called "greater good", but ultimately also benefits us.

With our planned membership in the International Monetary Fund later this year, Liechtenstein – again – strives for more multilateralism, not less – both for the benefit of others and ourselves.

Of course, multilateralism is not always easy, and certainly not always pleasant. Ultimately, however, it benefits us all – and we need to emphasise this aspect today more than ever. Implementing standards that we set together as a European or an international community through multilateral fora leads to progress and stability. History has proven this time and time again.

I had the opportunity to attend the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of States and Government of the Council of Europe in Reykjavik in May last year. We stood together against Russia's aggressive power politics, and we sent an important and powerful signal in support of multilateralism. We recommitted to the Council of Europe and its core principles. Now, it is upon us to work together to ensure that these become not just empty words.

The European Court of Human Rights is a critical ally in this endeavour. As such, it acts as the principle safeguard to protect our values, and to guarantee that Europe remains a continent of democratic societies, guided by the rule of law. As member states, we have the obligation to ensure the full, effective and prompt execution of all judgements of the Court and to respect its case law. Contrary actions undermine the authority and functioning of the convention system, and they pose a dangerous threat to our rules-based order. Let us not go down this path.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again come back to the proverb I mentioned at the beginning of my speech: "Many small people, in many small places, doing many small things can change the world."

I tried to give you an insight in how we, in our small place, do many things for our people, but also to make Europe and the world a better place. But we cannot do this alone. This is the reason, we are here today, at the UN tomorrow and in

Brussels just next week. Multilateralism is not dead – not even with a question mark. It does, however, certainly face multiple threats and challenges in the current times. The good news is, that it is in our hands to reverse them and to take a different path. Collectively, we must do our utmost to preserve multilateralism. It is upon us. So, let us make the most of the now.

Thank you