

Why is Liechtenstein a Country?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-9aZS9LoTI>

Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/liechtenstein2.pdf>

Over 38,000 people live in a nation smaller than a city - around 62 square miles or 160 square kilometers, to be exact.

It ranks as one of the top 10 smallest countries to carve itself out on our maps yet has one of the world's top 3 GDPs per capita.

Doubly landlocked between Austria and Switzerland, the nation of Liechtenstein has no airport nor army, and its entire plot of land lies within the Alpine Region.

So, how did this compact and peaceful principality even become a country of its own?...

In antiquity, the land now belonging to Liechtenstein and its royal family was, in fact, a part of the Roman Empire.

Specifically, modern-day Liechtenstein sat within the Roman province of Rhaetia.

When the Frankish Carolingian Empire took over the region, the lands of Liechtenstein were transformed into a handful of counties as opposed to one unified entity.

During this time, the Liechtenstein family were of wealthy and noble stock, serving often as advisors to the emperor, but they lacked any land possessions directly subordinate to the crown.

That would remain the case until, in 1699, the prince of the Liechtenstein family, Johann Adam Andreas, purchased the lands of Schellenberg.

When he obtained the country of Vaduz just over a decade later, Prince Liechtenstein moved to unite his new holdings into one, and he, now Prince Anton Florian, managed to do so with the support of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles VI, on January 23, 1719.

Schellenberg and Vaduz were merged into a new principality with the fresh name of Liechtenstein in honor of its founding royal family, who in turn had received their name from the possession of Liechtenstein Castle.

For the time being, the young principality would remain under the watchful eye of the Holy Roman Empire.

As the hegemony of the imperial power met its match with the rise of Napoleon, authorities shifted and Napoleon's Confederation of the Rhine welcomed Liechtenstein into its ranks.

This put the Germanic state into more French hands...until Napoleon's War of the Sixth Coalition culminated in an embarrassing defeat at the 1813 Battle of Leipzig.

Napoleon's crumbling power led to the collapse of the Confederation he'd overseen, and the Principality of Liechtenstein saw itself standing on its own once more.

The summer of 1815 then saw the birth of the German Confederation - the alleged successor to the deceased Holy Roman Empire.

Given that this was a confederation of over 3 dozen Germanic states, it is thus predictable that one of the founding members was little Liechtenstein.

Safely nestled now within the newborn Confederation, the Prince of Liechtenstein looked to provide more structure for his principality.

Still residing outside of the official lands of his dominion, Prince Johann II signed into law the 1862 variation of the Constitution of Liechtenstein from Moravia.

This was just in time as, after sending out its army of 80 soldiers to play its part on defense in the Austro-Prussian War, Liechtenstein saw the German Confederation collapse by the end of 1866.

The end of the war brought about the Confederation's rapid deterioration into nothingness, and this left Liechtenstein again to fend for itself.

Now a fully independent nation, the principality took on a new strategy - it would remain on its own.

Dissolving its already minuscule army, the Principality of Liechtenstein declared ultimate neutrality.

Even with the rise of the new German Empire or the ongoing lure of the neighboring Austrian Empire, Liechtenstein kept to its new stance - it remained totally neutral, and alone.

With the outbreak of World War One, this bold posture would be tested...

Going into the great conflict, Liechtenstein was still its own entity but was nevertheless on markedly friendly terms with the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

While this wouldn't be enough to push the principality to regather an armed force and join the war on the side of the Central Powers, it was enough to create distrust between Liechtenstein and the Triple Entente.

But alas, still, Liechtenstein wished to join no one, and no one cared enough to change that.

1919 did see Liechtenstein form a new bond with neighboring Switzerland as the Austro-Hungarian Empire was hastily crumbling to the floor, but this would only be a diplomatic alliance, not a true union of any sort.

After the resolution of the war and the collapse of Liechtenstein's neighbor, whispers of a German-supporting Nazi-sympathizing movement could be heard throughout the principality's limited borders.

With a Jewish Princess and Germany's annexation of the next-door Austrians, it looked as though Liechtenstein's freedom might now come to an end as the interwar period steamrolled into the Second World War...

Somehow, even with the Third Reich on its doorstep and sympathizers within its ranks, Liechtenstein managed to hold strong and maintain its neutrality as war raged on all around it yet again.

An attempted coup within the principality couldn't overpower the results of a diplomatic meeting between Liechtenstein's leaders and Hitler himself, and the status quo remained intact.

Liechtenstein, alongside its neighbor Switzerland, held strong to their perseverance of peace and friendly ties with all - and it worked.

When the war came to a close, the scant principality remained free.

The royal family of Liechtenstein, however, did not escape the war so unscathed.

Lands held by the family in Moravia, Silesia, and Bohemia were seized by Poland and Czechoslovakia as part of their efforts to claim territories formerly owned by the Third Reich.

This soured diplomatic ties particularly between Liechtenstein and Czechoslovakia, a state of affairs that would carry into the 21st century.

Liechtenstein's economy had also suffered during the world war period, and being that it has always been closely tied to the wealth of its royal family, the decision to sell artwork held by the dynasty was a crucial step in steadying the ship.

Low corporate taxes furthermore inspired much-needed economic prosperity as Liechtenstein served as a paradise for many companies.

The principality's later decisions to join the Council of Europe, United Nations, European Free Trade Association, European Economic Area, and World Trade Organization further portrayed it as a truly independent and well-functioning modern state.

A 2003 referendum would grant additional powers to the monarch, at this point in time Hans-Adam II, winning with an impressive 64.3%, and only a few years later, for the first time in history, Liechtenstein would send its first consuls to the United States of America.

This marked an era of increasing global presence and cooperation from the principality who, to this day, remains free and non-violent, and good friends with its Swiss neighbors.

Liechtenstein is a country as much as any other - but how is that possible?

How did the minuscule principality manage to break free from multiple overlords and maintain its independence with such powerful neighbors, multiple world wars, and not even an army of its own?

Partly, because Liechtenstein wasn't the reason that its Roman, Holy Roman, French, or German dominators lost power - they all collapsed, and it had nothing to do with Liechtenstein.

Such was the way of the times and all great powers shared the same fate.

All Liechtenstein had to do was hold fast and grab onto the next most powerful neighbor who could protect the principality and its interests.

But, by the time the German Confederation would meet its foreseen disintegration, Liechtenstein had been a state of some sort for over a century, and there was a better likelihood of the principality surviving on its own.

Thus, it took its shot at ultimate independence, shunning its past and keeping its neighbors at arm's length.

By now, war and annexation were on Liechtenstein's doorstep, but it had no army, no larger protector, and no desire to participate in the conflicts.

This served as a perfect opportunity for any larger nation to march across the border and claim Liechtenstein as its own without fear of armed resistance - but it also meant that the principality wasn't an outward threat to anyone.

Liechtenstein couldn't defend itself from invasion, so how could it invade another state? It couldn't, so why attack it?

The nation's leaders were furthermore skilled at maintaining positive relations with the surrounding, larger European states, and it was able to ride this combination between having good friends and being a harmless bystander all the way through the Cold War period.

Aside from a feud with Czechoslovakia, Liechtenstein had never really found itself on anyone's bad side, and thus hadn't inspired anyone to see it as a threat or wanted possession.

By the 21st century, the age of annexation in the West was all but a long-forgotten memory, and with its welcoming into global organizations such as the European Council, there could no longer be debate or question as to Liechtenstein's legitimacy as an independent nation.

Standing still as a constitutional monarchy deep in the heart of Europe, the Principality of Liechtenstein is a country today due to a triumphant combination of luck, innocence, and good diplomacy.

And, as for how it got its birth, one can only thank Prince Johann Adam Andreas of Liechtenstein for his great imagination and decision to purchase the lands of Vaduz and Schellenberg, and morph them together into one tiny yet sound autonomous nation as it is today...