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SPEECH

**DELIVERED BY ALBERT FRICK
PRESIDENT OF PARLIAMENT**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
NATIONAL DAY 2023**

Your Serene Highness Prince Hans-Adam
Your Serene Highness Hereditary Prince Alois
Your Royal Highness Hereditary Princess Sophie
Your Serene Highnesses
Esteemed Members of the Parliament and Government
Excellencies
Dear People of Liechtenstein
Dear Guests

When looking at the development of our country over the past decades, what comes to mind is an often-heard statement that captures it very well: «From farmer to banker.» In other words, we might say: «From abject poverty to great prosperity.» Since the 1950s, we have been lucky enough to experience an almost permanent economic upswing. There are fewer and fewer people in Liechtenstein who have witnessed both eras in their own lives. This could imperceptibly lead to the fatal assumption that the prosperity of the country can be taken for granted – but we should always remember the values and measures that have made the path to success possible.

The Customs Treaty of 1923 with Switzerland forms a very important basis for our astonishing economic development. Switzerland's willingness to allow Liechtenstein to join the Swiss economic area was not the result of national interests, but a sign of magnanimity on the part of Switzerland. Accordingly, at the meeting of the National Council of Switzerland on 21 December 1923, Councillor Henri Calame said: «Switzerland has no selfish intention. It has heard the call of a country smaller than itself; it is helping a country on the border that can only regain its equilibrium thanks to our help.» The Customs Treaty was more important for Liechtenstein than for Switzerland. It is therefore more than natural that the centenary of the Customs Treaty was duly and extensively celebrated in Liechtenstein. However, it is particularly pleasing that Switzerland also held an anniversary celebration in the Parliament Building in Bern. It can be seen as a sign of great appreciation for our country that the Members of the Liechtenstein Parliament were invited, headed by their President, who gave a speech at the event. Among other things, this shows that Switzerland, too, considers this intergovernmental partnership as beneficial. If Liechtenstein was a supplicant 100 years ago, today we can speak of a mutually beneficial union.

Esteemed Festive Community

Over the past decades, Liechtenstein has grown as a country. Visionary foreign policy has led to our sovereignty being further strengthened by membership of the UN and EEA, so that Liechtenstein is now a respected member of the international community. International relations are cultivated on many levels. To name just one example, Liechtenstein is now an established presence at gatherings of heads of state, governments and parliaments of German-speaking countries. These exchanges of experience with friendly countries are very helpful in dealing with current political challenges.

The major challenges of our time include the rapid development of digitalisation and of artificial intelligence. Fake news and disinformation are more widespread today than ever before. One example in particular has made us realise that this development poses an unprecedented danger to democracy. Never before has manipulation been so easy and never before could false news be spread so extensively in a matter of seconds. This can lead to the radicalisation of entire population groups. There will be no way around creating regulations to protect society. The Internet must not be a lawless space. Promoting media literacy among all population groups has become the order of the day. Being able to distinguish between reliable and unreliable news has become essential.

We must ensure that we live together in respectful solidarity. This also means occasionally leaving behind conflicts. For instance, I am thinking of different perspectives on the potential dangers posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and on the measures taken. In hindsight, it is easier for everyone to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of specific initiatives. But if we concede to each other that everyone acted to the best of their knowledge and conscience during that challenging time, we can look forward together, as we should.

We must give our full attention to many new tasks, including some that have arisen as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the coming months, the politicians, economists and citizens of Liechtenstein will have to deal with many issues. Without giving priority to any particular one, I would like to address some of the tasks ahead.

Securing energy supply is of paramount importance and we must begin by taking measures in our own country. Our self-sufficiency must be increased. In democracy, politics is the art of the possible. Effective and sustainable concepts must be implemented in consultation with the population.

Health care issues must also be clarified in consultation with the country's population. Looming additional costs for the planned national hospital have reignited the fundamental discussion on whether we need our own hospital at all. Thus, we can anticipate that the vote on an additional loan will turn into a plebiscite on whether the population wants a national hospital or not.

A current issue that seriously challenges our economy is the shortage of skilled workers and employees. One of the causes is demographic change. Many baby boomers in the labour market are reaching retirement age. The competition for labour force will give an edge to those companies that offer the most attractive working conditions and reliable social security benefits. If we want an efficient state administration, we must also allow the state to remain a competitive employer.

It would be misguided to turn a blind eye to climate change and its effects. Numerous incidents have shown that nature is out of joint, including extreme temperature fluctuations, as we have experienced recently, winters with little snow, or devastating storm and fire damage worldwide. We will not bring climate change under control by pointing fingers at others. Coordinated action by the international community, including us, is needed to prevent much worse effects.

The education system is also challenged to an extraordinary degree. The digital revolution with its ingenious innovations and artificial intelligence are changing the world of work and life at all levels, and all this is happening at ever faster speed. We can only enable people to keep up with this pace and the constant changes by permanently adapting teaching content as well as further education programmes.

We will also have to deal with domestic political issues. Should the government be elected by the people in future? The determining factor for or against a change of system will be how the population assesses potential risks to the stability of our country.

The list of tasks facing the politicians, leading economists and citizens of Liechtenstein could be continued. There are many complex issues ahead. However, we have good reason to be optimistic. The resilience of humanity in general and Liechtenstein society in particular to challenges of all kinds is impressive. On our national day, it is important to realise that although we represent a vanishingly small part of humanity, we are just as obliged to show solidarity as large nations. We must particularly encourage the youth of our country to actively and imaginatively participate in shaping the world we are going to live in. Together, let us ensure that future generations can also live in a pleasant and prosperous Principality of Liechtenstein.

Dear People of Liechtenstein

We must continue to remember our strengths with confidence and keep them alive together. Let us ensure that Liechtenstein remains a homeland of people that strive for education, work hard and stand up for one another. On our national day, I call upon you to cultivate our community. Let us focus on what unites us and makes us happy.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the success of today's festivities. I sincerely wish the entire population of Liechtenstein as well as our guests a joyful celebration and God's blessings.