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Introducing Myself



Dear United States of America,

There is a particular kind of audacity in writing a love letter to a nation, and yet, as I sit down to compose this first of twenty-five, I find that audacity comes rather naturally to me. After all, I have spent the better part of my professional life in conversation with you: your language, your law, your extraordinary legal tradition, and the remarkable men and women who have shaped it.

Allow me to introduce myself. I am Franz J. Heidinger, a Viennese lawyer, a senior lecturer, a reader of fine print and, when the occasion demands it, a writer of letters such as this one. As a senior partner of *Alix Frank Attorneys at Law* in Vienna, my days are spent navigating the beautiful complexity of law, domestic and international, civil and common, written in the careful grammar of Central Europe and the bold vernacular of the Anglo-American legal tradition.

But my relationship with you, dear US of A, runs deeper than professional acquaintance. It was forged in Charlottesville, Virginia, at your great University of Virginia School of Law. An institution that bears, in its very architecture and founding spirit, the unmistakable imprint of Thomas Jefferson, one of the men who put his name on your birth certificate 250 years ago. As a Fulbright grantee and alumnus of that venerable faculty, I carry a small piece of your legal soul with me wherever I go.

For over thirty years, I have lectured on the Anglo-American legal system and legal language at the University of Vienna, the Vienna University of Economics and Business, and the University of Graz. I am also a court-appointed interpreter for English — a role that places me, day after day, at the precise intersection of language and law, where the exact choice of a word determines the course of a case. Legal language, in all its fascinating peculiarity, is my scholarly home.

And then there is the matter closest to my heart in recent years. As Vice President of the *Women in Law Initiative* and Secretary General of the *Justitia Awards*, I have had the privilege of helping build bridges between aspiring and distinguished female lawyers across Austria, Europe, and the world, and most especially with the remarkable women of the American legal profession, whose trailblazing careers have long served as an inspiration and role model.

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So, as the world pauses to mark a quarter of a millennium since those representatives in Philadelphia set down their extraordinary propositions — propositions that altered, as one might say, the trajectory of political thought across the globe — I find myself with much to say, much to celebrate, and, yes, a great deal of affection to express.

This, dear America, is the first of twenty-five letters. Consider it a beginning — a handshake across the Atlantic, warm, and sincerely meant.

Yours, with great admiration and transatlantic devotion,

Franz J. Heidinger

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