



Statement on Foreign and European policy to the Chamber of Deputies

19 November 2024

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Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today I have the honour of making my first speech as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade to the Chamber of Deputies. It is with great privilege to address you on this occasion.

[Structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs]

As you are aware, this government has reviewed the organisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From the outset of the coalition negotiations, I stressed the importance of consolidating all major areas of foreign policy within a single ministry. Foreign trade is now an integral part of our portfolio, along with the Greater Region. In this Government, I have the honour of taking responsibility for these areas, as well as for development cooperation, a topic I will address in this Assembly in a few months' time. Defence, for its part, remains within the remit of this Ministry, and Minister Backes and I work closely together on issues where there are synergies between defence and foreign policy. Indeed, defence is a key pillar of our integrated '3D' approach to foreign policy: Defence, Diplomacy and Development, three dimensions that are complementary. I will elaborate further on this approach later.

[Introduction]

Let us now turn our attention to the foreign policy we have pursued over the past year.

This past year has been turbulent, to say the least, both in Europe and on the international stage. Before proceeding further, I would like to say a few words about the recent presidential election in the United States, following the confirmation of Donald Trump's re-election for a second term. For now, it remains uncertain how he will approach his second term or who will be appointed to key positions in his administration. However, the tone and general direction of his policies were clearly signalled during the election campaign.

During my time as Prime Minister, I had the opportunity to work with Donald Trump, and I remain committed to continuing our collaboration with him and his new teams, as we did between 2016 and 2020. Our goal is to further strengthen the bilateral relations between Luxembourg and the

United States. We will pursue this objective by steadfastly defending our interests while remaining true to our values. 'America First' should not, and must not, mean 'America Alone.' Fundamental principles such as democracy, the rule of law, the separation of powers, human rights and respect for international law are not only universal but are also enshrined in the US Constitution and cannot be subject to renegotiation. For a country of our size, these principles are essential—indeed, vital. But even a great power like the United States requires an international legal framework that must remain inviolable. Under President Donald Trump, the United States will also need global partners. I am counting on the new American administration to commit itself to addressing the major challenges that the international community is striving to resolve collectively. Multilateralism, with the UN at its centre, remains our best lever.

Over the past year, I have frequently observed how challenging it can be for the European Union to reach common positions on key issues. However, Donald Trump's re-election could serve as an opportunity for the European Union to fully recognise that our unity is our greatest strength. It is imperative that we demonstrate determination and commitment to adopting a more united and coherent stance on the international stage. The war in Ukraine exemplifies the complexity of these challenges, as does the situation in the Middle East. I will address these issues further in my speech.

[Structure of the speech]

These are, in order, the topics I'm going to address today:

- The political situation at international level and its impact on the security architecture in Europe and Luxembourg.
- The political situation at European level, as we get ready to work with a new Commission and a newly elected European Parliament.
- Our policy on supporting the establishment of European institutions to strengthen and enhance Luxembourg's position.
- The international trade policy of the European Union in a difficult international context and its impact at national level.
- Our policy to promote foreign trade and investment in Luxembourg, recently integrated into our foreign policy, which is grounded in the 'Team Lëtzebuerg' concept. This approach seeks to strengthen synergies among all stakeholders, fostering a collaborative and productive dynamic.
- The consular work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support our citizens abroad, including the issuance of passports and visas - an area in which I will share some remarkable figures.
- I will conclude by presenting an outlook for the coming year, which promises to be as eventful as the last, with many opportunities to strengthen Luxembourg's commitment on the international stage.
- Looking ahead to 2025, our focus is on:
 - o the six-month presidency of the Council of Europe, which has just begun;
 - o the one-year presidency of the Benelux countries;
 - o the World Expo in Osaka, with a Luxembourg pavilion;
 - o the 40th anniversary of the Schengen Agreement, which we must defend more than ever;
 - o our two-year term on the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which began in September;
 - o preparations for our term on the Executive Board of UNESCO, where we have not been represented for 20 years;
 - o major economic missions to our main trading partners;
 - o our strategies for expanding and strengthening our diplomatic network to defend our interests and values more effectively on the international stage.

[Diplomacy based on dialogue]

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Minister for Foreign Affairs, I am constantly and resolutely working to promote cooperation and dialogue at all levels. For me, foreign policy is based first and foremost on dialogue and contact with all stakeholders, with the aim of defending our interests, helping to resolve conflicts, strengthening multilateralism, improving our country's image, and defending our values, which are essentially universal. All this, however, without moralising or preaching. I believe that open and honest dialogue is far more constructive than delivering lectures. Foreign policy requires deep empathy. And my travels as Minister for Foreign Affairs and for Development Cooperation never fail to move me. I meet people living in the midst of conflict or populations struggling to survive. Each visit is a profound learning experience that leaves an indelible impression on me.

Over the past 12 months, I have participated, to be precise, in 354 meetings, whether during my travels and economic missions abroad, during official visits to Luxembourg, or as part of my multilateral commitments.

Advocating for dialogue does not mean shying away from confrontation: I do not hesitate to speak the truth to my interlocutors, even when it is difficult to hear. This is why, together with other members of the Luxembourg government, I travelled to Budapest to participate in the informal EU ministerial meetings under the Hungarian presidency, while many EU ministers and commissioners chose to boycott these discussions. I would like to highlight that a meeting took place in Budapest just a few days ago, which was attended by all.

Dialogue also means denouncing serious violations of human rights and international law, which is a moral responsibility towards those who suffer and rely on others to make their voices heard. This is exactly what Luxembourg has done over the past three years at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva – defending the rights of the voiceless, whether they be the people of Afghanistan, Syria, Russia, Sudan, or many other regions of the world.

Unfortunately, crises and conflicts are still omnipresent in the world. Luxembourg seeks to play an active role, within its means, in promoting constructive solutions, both bilaterally and multilaterally. Over the past 12 months, two regions have particularly captured our attention and driven our efforts: Ukraine and the Middle East.

[War in Ukraine]

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has fundamentally reshaped the European security architecture established by the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. We are confronted with an unprecedented situation: a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council has brutally invaded a

neighbouring country, flagrantly disregarding the core principles of the United Nations Charter, particularly those of freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence.

Thousand days and almost three years after the massive invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops, this war has claimed thousands of lives, caused unimaginable destruction, forced millions to flee their homes, and resulted in severe violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

At a time when Ukraine is facing significant challenges on the frontline, along with repeated attacks on its energy infrastructure, and when there are concerns that President Trump may consider ending the conflict without regard for Ukraine's territorial integrity, the unity of European and Western countries in the face of Russia and their unwavering support for Ukraine must remain resolute. It is crucial that we, as the European Union, immediately coordinate with the new American administration.

Unfortunately, an end to the war remains out of reach as President Putin continues to show no signs of stopping his aggression. I would like to reiterate that Ukraine is acting in self-defence, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, and that Russia is capable of ending this conflict at any time.

As the EU, NATO, and through bilateral efforts, we are supporting Ukraine to make progress on the ground and to facilitate negotiations that will lead to a lasting peace in which Russia acknowledges the sovereignty of its neighbour. Ultimately, every conflict must be resolved through dialogue, but Ukraine must never be compelled to accept an arbitrary or hasty peace agreement.

Luxembourg is actively supporting Ukraine, fully aware that the security and future of all of Europe are at stake in this conflict. For almost three years, Luxembourg, in cooperation with its partners, has made significant efforts to assist Ukraine, whether through military, humanitarian, or financial support. In July, on the sidelines of the NATO summit, our Prime Minister signed a bilateral security agreement with Ukraine's President, reaffirming Luxembourg's commitment to continue its assistance across all areas in the years ahead. Furthermore, Luxembourg is undertaking bilateral initiatives in Ukraine, particularly in the field of mine clearance, to help establish the necessary conditions for post-conflict reconstruction. At the European Union level, Luxembourg is working actively to ensure that the EU continues to provide robust and effective support to Ukraine.

At the multilateral level, we participate in all initiatives aimed at establishing responsibility for crimes committed in Ukraine.

[Coordination with Defence/Minister Yuriko Backes]

In this context, I would like to highlight our excellent cooperation with Yuriko Backes and her teams. Ukraine is undoubtedly the prime example of the synergies between foreign and defence policy. At the NATO Summit in Washington, which we prepared in collaboration with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence, we reaffirmed with our allies that Ukraine's future lies within NATO. As members of both NATO and the EU, we will continue to send military equipment to Ukraine and actively engage in multinational equipment supply initiatives.

As you know, as a NATO ally, Luxembourg will actively contribute to collective defence. This means that we must strengthen our own defence capabilities. As a government, we are committed to investing 2% of GNI in defence by 2030. We will also continue to play an active role in NATO and EU missions alongside our partners. Before I became Prime Minister and then Foreign Minister, I would never have imagined having to defend such measures. But I must admit that the current security situation in Europe leaves us no choice.

It is also clear that Luxembourg cannot defend itself alone, nor can we always bear the burden of major defence projects on our own. That is why partnerships with our friends and allies, particularly with Belgium but also with other countries, are crucial to our defence policy. This is yet another area where foreign policy and defence policy intersect.

[The impact of Russian aggression on international norms]

As I have already mentioned, the war in Ukraine has profoundly changed the security architecture of Europe. In this context, Russia's nuclear rhetoric has intensified. Moscow has recently adjusted its nuclear doctrine accordingly. President Putin's nuclear threats against the West undermine our global non-proliferation efforts. Russia is violating the obligations of the signatories to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Other countries, such as Iran and North Korea, which are pursuing nuclear policies in contravention of the NPT, are taking advantage of this tense and uncertain situation, affecting an area of international law that is crucial to preventing the future (re)use of nuclear weapons.

It is also very worrying that since the start of its aggression against Ukraine, Russia has withdrawn from the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. This treaty, negotiated at the end of the Cold War, is considered one of the pillars of European security. In response to Russia's withdrawal, Luxembourg, like its allies, has suspended the treaty indefinitely. This suspension sends a clear message to Russia: for NATO, reciprocity is a central principle of disarmament. Despite this suspension, of course, we remain committed to conventional arms control.

[Impact of the war on the rest of the world – double standards must be avoided at all costs]

As far as the security situation in Europe is concerned, it should be remembered that the consequences of the war in Ukraine extend far beyond Ukraine and Europe. Inflation and the rise in food and energy prices caused by the conflict are having repercussions on a global scale.

Many countries around the world, for various reasons, are reluctant to take sides. Many of them tell us that they have historically maintained good relations with both Russia and Ukraine and would prefer not to be forced to choose. We are working to engage with these countries, helping them understand that there is no room for neutrality when international law is being so flagrantly violated. No one should accept that the law of the strongest prevails – such a precedent would lead to grave injustices elsewhere in the world. Those countries that fail to grasp this should ask themselves how they would react if they found themselves in the same situation tomorrow.

Our approach to the many conflicts around the world is to remain consistent and to prevent the application of double standards. So, our message is clear: whether in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Venezuela, Myanmar, or Congo... international law and human rights must be respected everywhere, without exception.

[The Eastern Neighbourhood: Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan]

Before turning to the Middle East, let me briefly mention the EU's eastern neighbourhood, where the effects of the war in Ukraine are being felt most acutely. It is important not to forget that Russia is also destabilising other neighbouring countries such as Georgia, Moldova and Armenia. We must not remain indifferent to this situation: the EU cannot claim to be a "geopolitical actor" if it is unable to protect its neighbours from Russia's destabilisation attempts. We have recently seen how far this destabilisation can go in Georgia. The widely disputed election results sadly confirm that Georgia is moving further and further away from the EU. We must do all we can to support the Georgian people who have chosen the European path. In Moldova, the referendum on EU membership produced a positive result, but it appears that Russian disinformation may have cost up to 10% of the vote.

The South Caucasus is a particularly sensitive region where conflicting interests collide. Since 1991, the three countries of the Caucasus – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan – have been seeking ways of regional integration that would allow them to escape the ambitions of their powerful neighbours. The EU should assist them in this process. Luxembourg is committed to supporting the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. I had the opportunity to visit Armenia in early September, where I witnessed the fragility of Armenian democracy and the pressing need for a peace agreement with Azerbaijan, as well as normalisation with Turkey. These steps are crucial to offering the Armenian people a hopeful future and ensuring peace and security in the region. COP29 is currently taking place in Baku, and we had called for a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan to be reached before the summit, in the interests of the entire region. I

admit that I am disappointed that this opportunity was not seized, and I continue to urge our Azerbaijani colleagues to make a gesture towards Armenia. I have reached out to institutions and spoken with other colleagues, including foreign ministers who have visited the country. I believe it was a missed opportunity not to leverage COP29 for peace. It would have been in Azerbaijan's interest to show that we can rely on them. While the results of COP29 are important, this missed opportunity for peace is alarming.

[Luxembourg's participation in the EU's civilian missions]

During my visit to Armenia, I had the opportunity to visit the EU Monitoring Mission Armenia, which is responsible for monitoring the line of contact between Azerbaijan and Armenia in order to prevent any military incident or confrontation. I also had the privilege of meeting our Luxembourg police officers on the ground. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight Luxembourg's participation in EU civilian peace missions. Luxembourg is currently actively involved in missions in Armenia and Georgia. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the police officers involved on the ground and to thank Minister Gloden and his teams for their cooperation on these issues. Our participation in civilian missions is an essential pillar of our commitment to European security policy.

[Middle East]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Among the regions I visited last year, the Middle East ranked first, just after Brussels. I made three trips to Israel and Palestine and one to Jordan. This is no coincidence. In addition to the war in Ukraine, the dire situation in Gaza, and more recently in Lebanon, are major concerns for us. It is crucial that we continue our efforts to find solutions as soon as possible, in cooperation with the current American administration under President Biden until the end of January, and thereafter with the new administration under President Trump. It is clear that there can be no lasting peaceful resolution in the Middle East without the United States.

Last week, during the topical debate on Palestine, I reported on my recent trip to Jerusalem and Ramallah on 30 October. It was a complex visit, and I did not receive a clear answer regarding the war aims Israel seeks to achieve now that the leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah are deceased. This trip took place shortly after the Knesset voted on two laws aimed at prohibiting UNRWA from continuing its mandate in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza. The very existence of UNRWA is now at risk, in a context where its role is vital when you know the situation on the ground. During my visits, I had the opportunity to meet with UNRWA teams and gain insight into their work on the ground, whether in the West Bank, in their schools, or in their hospitals. In Gaza, UNRWA remains the only organisation able to reach the population and distribute vital aid.

In the absence of an alternative solution, UNRWA's mandate remains vital. In the most concrete sense of the word, the lives and even the survival of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians depend on UNRWA. In Gaza, the question of survival has been urgent for more than a year. The horrific images we see every day showing innocent civilians – many of them children – losing their lives as Israel continues its fight against the terrorism of Hamas leave no doubt: UNRWA must not be dissolved by the Knesset.

While it is not perfect, UNRWA is currently undergoing a major reform process, which we are actively supporting. These reforms include addressing critical issues, such as the review of schoolbooks used by Palestinian authorities, which need to be carefully examined. I can assure you that Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini, whom I had the opportunity to meet two weeks ago in New York, is overseeing this process with the utmost rigor, even as the Agency continues its humanitarian efforts under extremely difficult circumstances. To further support UNRWA, which also serves Palestinians in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, I have signed an agreement for the period 2025-2027, guaranteeing an annual contribution of €10 million.

The war waged by the Israeli army against Hamas, and more recently against Hezbollah in Lebanon, must be stopped at all costs. It is causing indescribable suffering on the ground, destroying countless lives, and only fuelling a cycle of hatred. It exacerbates violence and drives young people with no other prospects to turn to violence. The spiral of violence must be broken.

Two weeks ago, in Jerusalem I met a woman, Rita Livshitz, from one of the kibbutzes attacked by Hamas on 7 October. Her father-in-law is still being held hostage in Gaza. On that day, Hamas attacked pacifists, those who had been working for peace for decades. Despite the deep trauma she has suffered since 7 October, Ms Livshitz gave me a simple message to pass on: "Palestine needs a state, Israel needs security; therefore Israel and Palestine need a peace settlement". She remains convinced that only peace as part of a two-state solution can guarantee lasting stability in the region, and she did not hesitate to say so in front of a live camera. But this view is not shared by everyone in Israel. The collective trauma of 7 October remains deeply rooted. Many politicians, especially on the right and far right, are adamant that they do not want a Palestinian state. The new foreign minister, Gideon Sa'ar, has already expressed this position. The active policy of colonisation, with the increasing building of Israeli villages and towns on land which, according to the Oslo Accords, was intended for a Palestinian state, is increasingly undermining the two-state solution. I asked my Israeli interlocutors whether they want a Palestine without Palestinians. They vehemently deny it, but the situation on the ground suggests otherwise.

That is why it is crucial to demonstrate our support for the two-state solution at every opportunity. This is also why I would like Luxembourg, in coordination with other countries, to

recognise the Palestinian state as soon as a ceasefire is reached, the Israeli hostages have finally been released and the process towards a two-state solution can begin. In the current situation, which is even more complex because of the second open front between Israel and Hezbollah, such recognition would have no tangible impact on the ground. I am in contact with about ten of my colleagues from countries that have not yet recognised Palestine, but who, like us, support Palestine's full membership of the UN. UN membership would, of course, solve the recognition issue, as Luxembourg recognises all UN members.

As you may have read in the newspapers, I am considering the idea of linking the recognition of Palestine to a significant gesture in favour of the Israeli people. Recognising Palestine in no way means calling into question the recognition of Israel, on the contrary. Our relations with the Israeli people are solid and lasting, they have developed throughout history, and I see great potential in our bilateral relations when peace finally allows us to deepen them. That is why I am considering becoming the last EU Member State to also open an embassy in Tel Aviv. But I am well aware that this could be seen as a reward for Benjamin Netanyahu's policies and his war. Under no circumstances do I want to give the impression that I am rewarding Prime Minister Netanyahu and especially the members of his extreme right-wing government. Such an embassy would also allow us to open an office in Ramallah to better support our bilateral efforts on the ground. For the time being, however, this 'Luxembourg solution' will unfortunately have to wait until the situation allows it to be implemented calmly.

Within the EU, we often struggle to define common positions on the Middle East, and we are frequently accused of 'double standards,' applying different criteria to different conflicts. However, over the past year, the EU has managed to establish unified positions, the most important of which is the call for an immediate ceasefire to halt the ongoing human suffering. The EU's stance is also firm and clear regarding Lebanon, where the UN mission, UNIFIL, is deployed with troops from 16 EU Member states. A ceasefire in Lebanon is as urgent as in Gaza, where the humanitarian situation is rapidly deteriorating, with hundreds of thousands of people being forced to flee. The EU has also managed to agree on a series of sanctions, not only against Hamas but also against radical Israeli settlers involved in violence against the Palestinian population. In the West Bank, the effects of decades of occupation are ever-present: a constant military presence, security checks, and incessant military operations that have claimed the lives of hundreds of Palestinians this year. During my visit, I met farmers whose olive crops are being threatened by settlers, and who risk losing their entire income if they cannot work safely in their orchards.

The situation in the West Bank is critical, partly because the Palestinian Authority, which is responsible for security and administration in the region, receives only a fraction of its legitimate

budget. Israel withholds a substantial portion of the tax revenues that rightfully belong to the Palestinian Authority. The European Union is financially supporting the Palestinian Authority, and it is imperative that European funds be released without delay. It is unacceptable for the EU to be held responsible if the Palestinian Authority collapses due to a lack of funding.

Another Middle East issue on which we have a broadly shared position as the European Union is Iran. At first, when the new president was elected, we hoped that he would adopt a more constructive policy. Unfortunately, it is clear that Iran continues to support Russia's war effort in Ukraine. As for its support for Hezbollah, this no longer seems to have any significant impact on the ground. We also need to analyse the extent of Iranian influence in the region. But we remain open to dialogue if Iran shows a genuine desire to engage.

The current regime in Iran remains as radical as its predecessor when it comes to human rights, particularly women's rights. Two years after the massive 'Women – Life– Freedom' demonstrations, Iranians are still living under the oppression of a brutal and authoritarian regime. Iranian women and girls continue to face systematic harassment for refusing to wear the veil. We cannot turn our backs on these people, even if their struggle is no longer in the spotlight. Executions are increasing at an alarming rate, with the recent execution of a German Iranian linked to an exiled opposition group. Amnesty International reports that in 2023 the number of executions in Iran reached its highest level for eight years. Many of those executed had been arrested in connection with the 2022 protests.

[Africa]

As I have said, we defend the fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, as well as respect for international law and humanitarian law throughout the world. This commitment is also reflected in our engagement within the European Union, where we play an active role in defining the common foreign and security policy. When it comes to the Middle East, our positions sometimes diverge, but on many other crises around the world, the European Union has clear positions and plays a concrete role on the ground, making an essential contribution to finding solutions. In this context, I am particularly looking forward to working with Kaja Kallas, the EU's new High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy. I am convinced that she will be able to strengthen the coherence and dynamism of European foreign policy, provided that all Member States are fully committed to this collective effort.

The European Union has adopted a common policy on Africa in response to the major crises affecting the continent, in particular the dramatic war in Sudan, which is today causing the largest crisis of forced displacement in the world. Similarly, the situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains extremely worrying. In June this year, I had the honour of visiting

Kigali, where Luxembourg opened an embassy last September. This diplomatic representation is crucial, not only to strengthen our cooperation in this strategic region, but also to reaffirm our commitment to peace and the resolution of the conflict in eastern Congo. Thousands of civilians in the region continue to suffer from violence linked to clashes between different armed groups. These groups are fighting for control of land, resources, and influence, often with the support of the DRC and Rwandan governments.

The European Union also provides substantial support to the efforts and initiatives of the African Union and African regional organisations. This support is particularly important in the areas of peace and security, mediation, and economic integration. These organisations have a key role and responsibility in addressing the specific challenges of the African continent.

Our country has always been particularly active in West Africa, especially in the Sahel region. Today, the situation there has become extremely complex due to the series of coups d'état in recent years. I'll come back to this in more detail in my statement on development cooperation in February. In particular, I'll talk about our engagement in the central Sahel and our new involvement in the periphery. We are also actively working to identify opportunities for new partnerships in other regions of Africa.

The African continent, our neighbour to the south: the involvement of the European Union and its Member States in this region, in all its dimensions, is a complex and interesting subject. Unfortunately, I do not have enough time today to go into all the details. To conclude, however, I would like to reiterate the many opportunities that Africa offers, particularly for the development of our external trade.

[Asia]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The war in Ukraine has shown the importance of having reliable and solid partnerships around the world, based on shared values. Since the beginning of the Russian aggression, we have intensified our efforts to raise awareness of the situation in Ukraine, to underline the fundamental distinction between the aggressor and the aggrieved, and to recall that independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are inviolable principles. However, many partners, particularly in Africa and South-East Asia, who are geographically distant from Ukraine, have sometimes had some difficulty in taking a clear position on what they perceive as a 'European' conflict. This situation underlines the need for close dialogue with them to better understand their views and concerns. Beyond these efforts at mutual understanding, we need to seize the

enormous potential of enhanced bilateral and multilateral cooperation in key areas such as tackling climate change and improving the resilience of global supply chains.

To strengthen relations with ASEAN, the association of 10 South-East Asian countries, I was invited to the ASEAN Summit in Vientiane in October, where I signed, on behalf of the Grand Duchy, the instrument of accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South-East Asia. Luxembourg was the only European country invited to this Summit and the sixth EU Member State to sign this Treaty. It was therefore a particular honour to be present in Vientiane. This instrument of accession will now be submitted to Parliament for ratification. It will provide a solid basis for deepening our cooperation with this region, with which we have long-standing friendly relations, in particular with countries such as Vietnam, as well as Laos and Thailand, which I have also visited bilaterally. These countries, which are experiencing rapid economic growth, are also of considerable interest to our international trade. Furthermore, at a time of heightened geopolitical tensions, strengthening political dialogue with these nations is essential to building lasting partnerships and collectively addressing global challenges.

We also maintain a close dialogue with regional powers such as India, a key partner for stability and prosperity in South Asia. Last April, we held a new Joint Commission in the framework of the Belgo-Luxembourg Economic Union (BLEU), in cooperation with our Belgian partners, to discuss in depth all aspects of our relations with India. We have had an embassy in Delhi for more than 20 years. In addition to this diplomatic representation, Luxembourg is home to a large Indian community which plays an important role in our society. In March, I will participate in the Raisina Dialogue, a major forum held every year in Delhi, which brings together thousands of decision-makers to discuss major geopolitical and geo-economic issues. This will be an excellent opportunity to meet bilaterally with my Indian counterparts and to discuss the future prospects for our relationship.

Other strategic partners in Asia are Japan and South Korea, two nations considered 'like-minded' in a part of the world that is becoming increasingly important on the international stage. Japan is in many ways our oldest friend in Asia. We enjoy a strong bond of friendship covering almost a century. In 2027, we will have the honour of officially celebrating the centenary of our bilateral relations, and we are already busy preparing major events to mark this historic anniversary. Over the next 12 months, I am planning several trips to Japan, in particular for the World Expo which opens in Osaka next April. I had the privilege of attending the laying of the foundation stone for our pavilion last January. This event will be an exceptional opportunity to promote our country, its cultural wealth, its economic potential as well as its openness and multiculturalism, not only to the Japanese public but also to visitors from all over the region.

In the coming days, I will visit the hotel school in Diekirch to explore the menu of Luxembourgish specialties that will be served in Osaka. After that, I will head to Esch, where a bowling alley is being set up for Osaka, adding a touch of fun to the experience. This will give us the opportunity to share a lesson or two in an activity where we are world champions.

In July, I had the honour of inaugurating our first resident embassy in Seoul. It was about time that Luxembourg had a permanent representation in South Korea. Our two countries share a common history dating back to the recruitment of 85 young Luxembourgers during the Korean War, two of whom never returned. I am also delighted that Korea has decided to reciprocate by opening a resident embassy in Luxembourg. Mr. Ambassador, who I believe is in the gallery listening to us today, I can assure you that you will not regret coming to Luxembourg. I see immense potential for further strengthening our exchanges, particularly in the economic sector.

Should you have the opportunity to travel to Korea, you will still feel a connection to Luxembourg because of those soldiers. Most of these young men had no idea where they were going, yet they fought for freedom and for values that unite us.

[NATO]

Japan and South Korea are also among NATO's strategic partners, along with Australia and New Zealand. This year, the leaders of these four countries were once again invited to the NATO summit in Washington, where we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Alliance. I would like to emphasise the fundamental role of NATO, which remains an essential pillar of our collective security. Through nuclear deterrence, the Alliance continually safeguards the territory of its members against potential aggression from states such as Russia. This summit was notable for the participation of 32 Allies for the first time, with Sweden joining Finland as new members of the Alliance. The integration of these two historic partners represents a significant step forward in strengthening a unified Euro-Atlantic security architecture, fortifying our position against autocratic and aggressive regimes. Finally, I welcome the appointment of Mark Rutte as NATO Secretary General. Under his leadership, the Alliance is in capable hands and well-positioned to address the challenges of tomorrow.

[China]

Let's stay in Asia, as I haven't yet mentioned China. At the end of November, together with Minister Delles, I will embark on an economic mission and working visit to Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. Our bilateral relations, as well as those of the European Union with the People's Republic of China, a nation of 1.4 billion people, are set against a complex geopolitical backdrop.

This context is marked by tensions between Washington and Beijing, as well as the influence of the conflict in Ukraine, provoked by Russia. I remain convinced – as I emphasised at the NATO summit in Washington that it would be a strategic mistake to treat China and Russia as a monolithic bloc in the context of the war in Ukraine. The relationship between the two countries is nuanced: while some sectors in China support Russia’s war effort, China is also one of the few actors capable of playing a key role in securing a lasting and equitable peace in Ukraine. Instead of pushing China closer to Russia, we should focus on fostering serious and constructive dialogue on all global issues. China remains a critical partner in many areas. The visit of Vice Premier Ding to Luxembourg last June clearly demonstrated the importance of this relationship. As the world’s second-largest economy, China plays a central role in all major international economic discussions. Even Donald Trump cannot ignore this reality, and I am convinced that there is no merit in doing so.

"There are areas where our positions diverge from China’s, and it is important that we address these differences. One such issue is human rights, a topic we regularly raise with our Chinese counterparts. In this context, we make every effort to highlight specific cases, whether during our bilateral exchanges or on the multilateral stage. A recent example of this is the speech we delivered as the Benelux countries at the Human Rights Council in Geneva in September. This principle applies not only to China but to all countries. I am sceptical of the effectiveness of diplomacy based on general statements, often amplified by a 'megaphone' approach. While it may create the appearance of action, it does not necessarily lead to concrete outcomes for those who are affected. In fact, it can sometimes undermine the very causes it seeks to promote. For this reason, I favour serious dialogue and direct engagement, which I believe are the most effective means of achieving tangible and lasting progress.

As I mentioned earlier, it is important to prevent China from aligning too closely with Russia. Similarly, one must be cautious with statements: claiming in one sentence that Iran, North Korea, Syria, and China are the same is both incorrect and counterproductive.

[UN and multilateralism]

Direct contacts and personal interaction play a central role in my approach, whether I'm welcoming foreign leaders to Luxembourg, conducting bilateral visits or taking part in multilateral meetings. The United Nations General Assembly, held annually at the end of September, is a unique occasion that brings the entire world together in one place. This year I spent a full week in New York with a packed programme, alternating between the official sessions of the General Assembly, where I delivered the Luxembourg speech, thematic side events and some twenty bilateral meetings with my counterparts from third countries. There were also more informal

exchanges and discreet initiatives to bring together different interlocutors – without this confidentiality, some would have been reluctant to participate. These meetings allowed me to raise sensitive issues such as Cyprus-Turkey relations, the conflict between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and the tensions between Serbia and Kosovo. These discussions, though often challenging, provided an opportunity for me to contribute to finding solutions to these sensitive issues.

The United Nations General Assembly also provided an opportunity for the European Union to meet at the ministerial level with representatives of CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. Although I have not yet had the chance to visit this region as Foreign Minister, this event allowed me to engage in brief discussions with several Latin American colleagues. I look forward to building on these contacts in the near future. Brazil, for example, holds a special place in our relations, as Luxembourg is home to a large community of around 28,000 'new' Luxembourgers who have obtained Luxembourg nationality under our legislation. Next year will present numerous opportunities to strengthen our ties with Latin America, particularly through the EU-CELAC ministerial meeting in Brussels this spring, followed by a summit.

The week in New York began with the 'Summit for the Future,' convened by Secretary-General António Guterres, where a Compact for the Future and a Global Digital Agenda were adopted. The Hereditary Grand Duke and the Prime Minister also attended this significant summit. Against a geopolitical backdrop shaped by the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, which have sparked heated debates in international bodies and paralyzed many global structures, the fact that the adoption of the Pact for the Future by consensus at the General Assembly is nothing short of miraculous. The Pact addresses a wide array of crucial issues: peace and security, sustainable development, the fight against climate change, digital cooperation, human rights, gender equality, and the concerns of young people and future generations. Although there is still room for progress, its adoption is already a major accomplishment. The challenge now lies in its effective implementation. Luxembourg is fully committed to actively participating in efforts in New York to transform this Pact into concrete initiatives.

At the end of 2024, Luxembourg will complete its first-ever three-year term as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Through hard work, our team has demonstrated that even a small country can play a valuable and constructive role on the international stage. We have positioned ourselves as a trustworthy and consistent partner, allowing us to engage in dialogue even with countries that may not initially share our perspective on the universality of human rights. Among our major achievements, our delegation has successfully tabled a resolution on the human rights situation in the Russian Federation for three consecutive years. This was the first ever country-specific resolution in the Human Rights Council concerning a permanent member of

the Security Council. However, the Council's mandate is not limited to national situations: it also covers many cross-cutting issues. Luxembourg led the drafting of a resolution on the link between Agenda 2030 (sustainable development) and human rights, as well as a resolution adopted last June highlighting the importance of guaranteeing free education, including early and secondary education. We have also focused our efforts on promoting the rule of law and supporting civil society, while defending economic, social, and cultural rights, in particular the right to development and the right to a healthy and sustainable environment. Finally, we have paid particular attention to the rights of children, women and LGBTIQ+ people.

Our commitment to multilateralism is unwavering, and I will return to it several times in this speech. An important example of this commitment this year is the presidency of the International IDEA Council held from Stockholm. This organisation plays a key role in promoting democracy around the world, with a particular focus on democratic electoral processes. This Parliament is currently in the process of ratifying the International IDEA Statute, a document that may be adopted during its term. We initiated this process as soon as we took over the presidency, as a sign of the importance we attach to this organisation. I would like to thank you, dear members of the Parliament, for the attention and work you have devoted to this important issue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our most important multilateral commitments naturally lie within the European Union:

[Commission von der Leyen II]

From 6 to 9 June this year, European citizens were called to the polls for the European elections. These elections are a fundamental pillar of our thriving European democracy. Their significance extends well beyond the European Parliament, influencing both the European Commission and the work within the Council.

This means that the European elections are not just about renewing the composition of the European Parliament. They also mark the beginning of a new legislative cycle for the European Union, with a new Parliament, a new European Commission, and a new President of the European Council, all working together to drive forward a strong and united European Union. I want to underline this point because we often hear people say that all decisions are made in Brussels. But let's be clear: 'Brussels' is us. The Commissioner is nominated by our government. Luxembourg's voters elect the members of the European Parliament. The members of the Council come from governments that hold majorities in their national parliaments. We must stop seeing 'Brussels' as populated by 'Martians', disconnected from our countries.

In this context, top jobs had to be reassigned. The reappointment of Ms Metsola as President of the European Parliament illustrates the determination of the members of the European Parliament to preserve our common interest in maintaining continuity within the Union. I also look forward to working with António Costa, a friend of Luxembourg, as he begins his term as President of the European Council. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Charles Michel for the outstanding work he has carried out during his term in office; he has been well known since his time as former Prime Minister of Belgium. I also look forward to working with Kaja Kallas, the former Prime Minister of Estonia, who succeeds Josep Borrell, whom I would like to express my gratitude, as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The European Commission, led by its new President, was also renewed following the European elections. In this context, the European Council demonstrated its willingness to work for institutional stability. Following her nomination by the Heads of State and Government, Ms von der Leyen was subsequently confirmed by the European Parliament.

A key element of this new Commission is also the College of Commissioners, appointed by the various Member States, whose hearings in the European Parliament concluded just a week ago and on which Parliament is to vote next week.

Cooperation among the Commissioners, as well as with the Council and the European Parliament, will be essential for the development of the European Union and the functioning of our single market. The success of the framework in which we all operate hinges on the harmonious and constructive collaboration among all stakeholders in the legislative process.

The strategic orientation of the new Commission, as the institution with the right of legislative initiative, plays a central role. In this regard, I welcome the clear commitment to strengthening the European single market and enhancing the competitiveness of the European Union. Key priorities include the simplification of procedures, the full and rigorous implementation of the 'Acquis communautaire', and efforts to ensure that the green and digital transitions become true European success stories.

On a national level, I would also like to congratulate Mr Hansen, who, as the new Luxembourg Commissioner-designate, will take on the important portfolio Agriculture and Food.

[40th anniversary of the Schengen agreement in 2025]

Next year, we will celebrate an anniversary of great significance, not only for Luxembourg but for Europe as a whole: in 2025, the Schengen Agreement will mark its 40th anniversary. As I said here last week: At the time, few believed in its success. Five secretaries of state attended, but not a single minister made the trip. Yet, I can confirm that this agreement has been a resounding success. It will be 40 years since the Benelux countries, Germany, and France formally decided, at Schengen, to gradually eliminate border controls between their national territories. It was also 40 years ago that the foundations of the Schengen Area were laid. Today, Schengen stands as one of the European Union's most significant achievements, transforming daily life for countless citizens, particularly those living in border regions.

Unfortunately, we must acknowledge that controls are being carried out at our borders with Germany and France, which directly and negatively impact the daily lives of our citizens and our many cross-border workers. Above all, the anniversary should motivate us to remind everyone of the vital importance of keeping our borders open. As Luxembourg, we bear a unique responsibility to repeat, over and over, that the Schengen Agreement is one of Europe's most precious symbols, a reality that is experienced daily, far beyond our own borders. For many European citizens, Schengen represents unity and freedom. However, the other side of Schengen is the need for security and effective control of our borders.

[EU Enlargement]

The enlargement of the European Union was once again one of the main issues in 2024, coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the accession of 10 new Member States in 2004. These countries, from Central, Eastern and Mediterranean Europe, joined the EU at this historic milestone. Their integration is now recognised as a real success: their economies have seized the opportunities offered by the single market, leading to increased prosperity, and contributing to greater political stability. The younger generations in Estonia, Romania, and Cyprus, for example, were born within the European Union.

This anniversary comes at a key moment, as the European Union is in talks with nine candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Talks with Turkey, however, remain frozen. Kosovo has formally applied for membership but has not yet been granted candidate status. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, the number of candidate countries has risen from six to nine.

Since the war in Ukraine, the enlargement of the European Union has become more than ever a geostrategic priority for the EU. Faced with today's challenges, Europe must respond with unity and solidarity. Enlargement is also crucial for promoting and consolidating the EU's fundamental

values on the international stage. The accession of candidate countries to the Union is the most effective way to ensure democracy and stability in Europe's neighbouring regions.

The enlargement of the European Union is not automatic. It is a process built on strict criteria, with each candidate being evaluated based on its individual merits. These conditions, known as the Copenhagen criteria, require candidate countries to demonstrate their commitment to the fundamental values of the EU, such as democracy, the rule of law, freedom of the press, respect for minorities, protection of human rights and the establishment of a stable market economy. This is a sine qua non for ensuring the integration of countries that genuinely want to work with us and share in the Union's common future.

At the same time, the European Union will need to undertake internal reforms to ensure that it continues to function efficiently and in an orderly fashion, even with a growing number of members. It is therefore essential to maintain a balance between the EU enlargement process and institutional reforms. As a founding member of the EU, Luxembourg is committed to preserving the DNA of the European Union, ensuring that our common principles and values remain at the heart of its functioning.

A closer look at the various candidate countries shows that this year has been marked by some progress, as well as some setbacks :

This year, Albania began accession negotiations on the 'fundamental' chapters of the EU enlargement process, an important step for any candidate country. This Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) was held in Luxembourg on 15 October in the presence of the Albanian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister.

The European Commission issued a positive opinion on the opening of accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina in March 2024, after the country had been granted candidate status. However, little significant or concrete progress has been made so far.

Montenegro has so far made the most significant progress in the field of justice and the protection of fundamental rights and remains, for now, the 'frontrunner' in the EU enlargement process.

In the case of Northern Macedonia, accession negotiations are currently at a standstill, and substantial reforms in line with EU requirements have yet to be implemented.

Serbia still has a lot of work to do.

Turkey has been a candidate for EU membership since December 1999, making it the longest-standing candidate. Accession negotiations were suspended in 2018 due to concerns about the rule of law and democratic backsliding. According to the European Commission's latest report on Turkey, there were no further setbacks last year. Almost all EU Member states, including Luxembourg, have expressed their willingness to re-engage step-by-step with Turkey.

Georgia was granted EU candidate status in December 2023. However, the adoption of controversial laws indicates that the country may be heading in a different direction. It appears that they are moving closer to Putin's regime rather than aligning with the values we fight for. I hope they can steer clear of this path.

In June of this year, Moldova and Ukraine began their EU accession negotiations during an intergovernmental conference (IGC) in Luxembourg, marking a historic moment for both countries and for us. On October 20, Moldova held crucial elections for its European future. The population supported the government's ambition to join the EU with 50.4% of the vote, a narrow result, but as I mentioned earlier, there are rumours that some of the percentages may have been bought. Our goal now is not to blame, but to strengthen the bond and acceptance of this country towards the EU. Last week, Deputy Prime Minister Cristina Gherasimov was in Luxembourg for technical meetings with the European Commission. She informed me about the Moldovan government's efforts to move closer to the EU.

Regarding Ukraine, if you ever visit the country, you will witness its remarkable resilience and unwavering commitment to EU membership, despite the ongoing Russian aggression. The EU is deeply grateful that Ukraine continues to fight for the freedom and security of our shared continent. As part of its integration process, the EU established a support facility for Ukraine in March, with the first disbursement having taken place this summer. A similar facility for Moldova is currently being prepared.

Allow me to return briefly to the Western Balkans. To bring these countries closer to the European Union, particularly in economic terms, the EU has launched the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, which runs from 2024 to 2027. Provided they meet the necessary conditions, the plan offers these countries support in the form of additional loans and subsidies to help them integrate economically into the EU's single market. Better economic integration will above all enable the citizens of these countries to benefit from new employment opportunities, improved living standards and, as a result, better prospects for the future.

[Rule of law]

As a founding member of the EU, Luxembourg places the defence of the rule of law at the heart of its priorities. Member States have a responsibility to guarantee these principles in order to maintain the confidence of European citizens in the EU and its institutions. The rule of law cannot be taken for granted in times of peace, but it becomes a necessity in times of crisis and instability. It is our collective responsibility to defend and strengthen a strong rule of law. This is essential for the resilience of our democracy and the stability of our internal market, which is the central pillar of European competitiveness.

Luxembourg actively participates in the annual Rule of Law report in the European Union and regularly intervenes, either individually or on behalf of the Benelux countries, in the annual dialogue on this subject in the Council. On 21 May 2024, Luxembourg took part in this procedure for the second time. Although the overall results are very positive, we must remain committed to protecting the rights and freedoms of our citizens and further strengthening our institutions. We also welcome the European Commission's initiative to put the rule of law more at the heart of the EU accession process and to extend the Rule of Law report to four candidate countries in the process of joining the EU: Albania, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, and Serbia.

Luxembourg supports the various instruments of the Commission aimed at ensuring respect for the rule of law. This includes the so-called Article 7 procedure, which may result in a country being deprived of its voting rights in the Council. In this context, we welcome the positive developments in Poland, which have led to the country no longer being subject to this procedure, and we encourage Poland to continue adhering to its action plan to fully restore the rule of law and judicial independence. On the other hand, significant concerns persist regarding the state of the rule of law in Hungary. We encourage Hungary to intensify its efforts and to work constructively with the European Commission.

[Competitiveness]

A few words on competitiveness: the Single Market is the backbone of our competitiveness – and it must remain so in the future. The Single Market stands as one of the Union's greatest achievements and a fundamental part of our daily lives: it facilitates trade, drives economic growth, fosters innovation, and considerably improves our citizens' lives. However, Europe is increasingly falling behind in competitiveness compared to the United States and China. Language barriers, a lack of sufficient harmonisation in regulations across the 27 'mini markets', and labour markets that are less dynamic than those in countries like the United States are all structural challenges that we must address collectively within the EU.

Current geopolitical tensions also present a significant challenge to our trade: the war in Ukraine, conflicts in the Middle East, and attacks by the Houthis on trade routes in the Red Sea are all major obstacles. These tensions, combined with the lessons learned during the pandemic, have underscored Europe's heavy reliance on international supply chains.

Last year marked the 30th anniversary of the Single Market – a historic milestone that reminded us of its vital importance to our prosperity within the Union. The Single Market is a key pillar of European integration and a cornerstone of our freedom of movement, not only in goods and services but also in capital and, of course, of people.

In this context, the new composition of the Commission and the European Parliament presents an important opportunity to renew our commitment to enhancing competitiveness. The new Commission's emphasis on strengthening the Single Market marks a significant step forward.

We welcome the two reports on the Single Market and on future European competitiveness, authored respectively by Mr Letta and Mr Draghi. They provide us with valuable proposals on how we can further advance our work.

I would also like to emphasise that in our efforts to strengthen European strategic autonomy, we must ensure that we continue to support an 'open' economy. Our country has no interest in trade to be hindered. Therefore, we must strike the right balance between efficiency and resilience. This is what we are committed to – in Brussels within the EU, and in Geneva within the WTO.

[Luxembourg Presidency 2029]

I would also like to take this opportunity to look further ahead, specifically to the first half of 2029, when Luxembourg – as a founding member of the European Community – will assume the Presidency of the Council for the 13th time overall.

Each presidency is an opportunity to prove to our European partners that we are both willing and capable of exceeding expectations and dedicating ourselves fully to the service of the European Union. However, for a country like ours, which does not have unlimited resources, such a presidency also presents a significant challenge. That is why I would like to take this opportunity to call on all of you to approach this task as a united nation, with determination and thorough preparation well in advance.

If we give ourselves the necessary means to put our pro-European commitment into action and drive the European Union forward, we will be able to reflect on our Presidency with pride, and the Union will likewise take pride in its European capital, Luxembourg.

[Bilateral relations with the rest of Europe]

Our bilateral relations with other European countries remain crucial, even beyond the EU framework. As a founding member of the European Union, Luxembourg enjoys particularly close ties with many other member states. However, as an EU Member, these relationships are clearly shaped by shared priorities such as economic stability, the competitiveness of the European market, and the defence of European values. At the diplomatic level, Luxembourg engages with fellow EU countries on critical topics such as migration, energy policy, and the transition to a green economy. We advocate for a more inclusive model of cooperation, challenging, where necessary, the more nationalist positions adopted by certain EU countries. Furthermore, collaboration in the fields of culture, research, and higher education remains a priority. We continue to support initiatives that foster the exchange of artists and researchers for example, strengthening the cultural and intellectual ties across Europe.

But strong European relations are not just about our ties with other EU Member states. It is also important to us to briefly mention our partnerships with countries on the European continent that are not part of the EU.

I would like to begin with the United Kingdom. A new government was elected in July, one that has so far demonstrated a willingness to pursue constructive discussions both with the EU and with individual EU Member states. We welcome this openness. In this context, the participation of *Foreign Secretary* David Lammy to the FAC on October 14 in Luxembourg sent a clear signal of re-engagement between the EU and the United Kingdom. On a bilateral level, the UK remains one of our most important European trading partners, particularly in the financial sector. This is something we must not overlook.

Looking eastward, I would also like to address our bilateral ties with the Balkan countries. These ties are certainly not as close as those we share with EU Member states, particularly our neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, they remain essential partners with whom we maintain strong diplomatic and economic relations, which we are determined to further deepen.

We have relatively large communities from the region here in the country, who have both integrated well and continue to maintain close contact with their regions of origin.

We continue to support the EU ambitions of the Balkan countries. In this context, Luxembourg has offered these countries technical assistance – in the form of training and expertise – as well

as scholarships to study EU law. Through these efforts, we aim to help them adopt and implement the *Acquis communautaire* as effectively and swiftly as possible.

At the beginning of this month, I undertook a working visit to Kosovo. As you know, Luxembourg enjoys very close relations with Kosovo. This visit was an excellent opportunity, on the one hand, to engage in exchanges with my counterparts and, on the other, to review our projects in Kosovo, particularly in the fields of healthcare, vocational training, the energy sector, and inclusive and sustainable growth. Next year, together with Belgium, we will also deploy a contingent of soldiers. This mission, under Luxembourgish command, will support the KFOR mission in Kosovo, specifically in the areas of communication and drone surveillance. Let me take this opportunity to emphasise: a visit to Pristina is not a visit against Belgrade, and a visit to Belgrade is not a visit against Pristina.

[Greater Region]

The energy crisis, supply shortages, and the need to adapt to climate change are pressing challenges. However, when considering the future challenges in foreign policy, we do not need to focus solely on the EU's outer borders. Many of these challenges are much closer to home. Even within our Greater Region, the issues are becoming increasingly complex. Climate, environment, energy, mobility, education, culture, health, and security all require stronger cross-border cooperation. The government fully recognises that Luxembourg depends on robust relations with its neighbouring regions. The vision of a united Europe is most visibly realised at Europe's internal borders, especially in border regions. Luxembourg and the Greater Region exemplify this, showcasing the everyday lived experience of European integration. There is no cross-border region in Europe as interconnected as ours, making it a true model for European cooperation. This is precisely why the Letta Report explicitly praises the Greater Region for the high quality of its institutional collaboration. As the largest cross-border labour market in the EU, the Greater Region is a cornerstone of both Luxembourg's and Europe's economic models. To maintain competitiveness and remain attractive on the global stage, it is essential to further strengthen the functioning of the EU Single Market.

Regular coordination with our neighbouring regions is essential to us.

The COVID-19 crisis amplified that Luxembourg is not an island; we must face future challenges in close cooperation with our neighbouring regions. During that time, collaboration was particularly vital with East Belgium under Oliver Paasch, with France under Emmanuel Macron, and with Malu Dreyer. Together with our former Minister for the Greater Region, Madame Cahen, this joint effort enabled us to avert the worst. I am therefore delighted that disaster management and prevention are central priorities of the current Rhineland-Palatinate Presidency of the

Greater Region Summit. In critical situations, this emphasis fosters better cross-border coordination among experts on the ground and stronger mutual support during emergencies.

Collaboration within the Greater Region and bilateral cooperation with our three neighbouring countries are now housed within the same ministry. The Greater Region has become part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The advantages are clear: greater efficiency, enhanced coherence, and improved coordination between the bilateral and multilateral levels.

Concrete examples include the trade mission to Saarland in March 2024 and the state visit to Belgium in April. Key topics during these events included hydrogen, renewable energies, and digitalisation.

Together with our neighbouring regions, we must focus on developing the key economic sectors of the future: Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence, environmental technologies, and the circular economy.

A skilled workforce is essential to address these economic transformations. This is why we actively promote cooperative partnerships within the Greater Region between schools, universities, and research institutes, aiming to develop the talents of tomorrow and foster new synergies.

We enhance our attractiveness and competitiveness not only through strengthened cooperation in the fields of education and training.

Moreover, the labour market must adapt to evolving economic realities. The introduction of 34 days of teleworking for cross-border workers from Belgium, Germany, and France has further increased the appeal of the Luxembourg labour market.

The mobility offering is also a key factor in the attractiveness and competitiveness of the Luxembourg labour market. This involves enhancing mobility for both our residents and cross-border workers in close coordination with our neighbouring regions. This is not about opposing bicycles to cars or train connections to buses. Our clear ambition is to collaborate with our partners in the Greater Region to further develop an attractive multimodal mobility offering. Mobility remains one of the main priorities of the current Presidency of the Greater Region, alongside energy supply. There is a strong commitment to deepening cross-border cooperation in renewable energies, particularly in the field of hydrogen.

When discussing the labour market, we must not lose sight of the needs of both our businesses and our people. This includes, notably, the more than 230,000 cross-border workers who account for approximately 47% of the workforce in this country, with over 124,000 coming from France alone. It is therefore essential to collaborate to anticipate the challenges we face as a region. Through dialogue with our partners in the Greater Region, we must strive to find joint solutions to shared issues or those that may emerge in the years ahead.

We must anticipate the challenges regarding mobility, the labour market, and education.

These and many other topics are addressed at a technical level between Luxembourgish experts and their counterparts from the neighbouring regions – Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Ostbelgien, and Wallonia – both multilaterally and bilaterally. On our side, these discussions are coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in an interministerial approach.

A coherent collaboration with our neighbours is essential, as coherence and a global perspective are crucial for positioning ourselves. Such collaboration should be a constructive dialogue, driven by the needs of both the citizens and cross-border workers.

This is why we established the Franco-Luxembourg Intergovernmental Commission for Strengthening Cross-Border Cooperation – or simply, the CIG – with France. The CIG remains the reference of our collaboration with France. It was created nearly 15 years ago as a regular meeting point to deepen our partnership and provide a platform for dialogue, enabling discussions across all areas of cooperation. Both sides are committed to continuing this constructive collaboration in the future.

[Free movement]

Collaboration with our neighbours forms the cornerstone of harmonious coexistence in our region. It serves the interests of all our citizens, regardless of which side of the border they live on. As a matter of fact, these borders no longer exist for our citizens. This reality – no borders in our region and no borders in our minds – is one of the most significant achievements in Europe.

Like my fellow members of the government, I consistently advocate for an open and free Europe. The gradual reintroduction of border controls across Europe is a matter that must be addressed with our neighbours.

I consistently remind my colleagues, whether from Germany, France, or other member states, how important a Europe without internal borders is for our European citizens in general, and particularly for Luxembourg and the Greater Region. Such controls must be strictly temporary and implemented in a manner that minimises their impact, especially on cross-border workers.

Our attention must be directed towards strengthening of the external borders. Solidarity within Europe must remain unwavering. Questioning it would be a betrayal of the European spirit and values. Introducing long-term internal border controls and allowing borders to re-surface in our lives and minds would equate to sacrificing Europe on the altar of populism and far-right extremism.

[Benelux]

The Benelux Union, a regional cooperation that has proven itself over decades as a quasi-avant-garde model, celebrates its anniversary for about twice as long as the Schengen agreement. For 80 years, the Benelux has served – and continues to serve – as a laboratory for ideas and initiatives that advance European integration.

In the context of the 40th anniversary of the Schengen Agreement, Luxembourg will take on the Presidency of the Benelux Union, a partnership founded on the shared values of solidarity, openness, and cross-border cooperation. The Benelux has been a pioneer in the development of the European Union, particularly in areas such as mobility, economic integration, and justice. During our 2025 Presidency, we are committed to building on this legacy and further advancing these priorities.

One of the most significant moments of our Presidency year will undoubtedly be the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Schengen Agreement. Signed in 1985 in a small Luxembourgish village, this agreement profoundly transformed the face of Europe: internal borders disappeared, allowing people to move freely. The agreement was itself based on a Benelux accord and was negotiated at the time within the Maison du Benelux.

With the Benelux, we are not merely reflecting on the past 40 or 80 years. Our focus is resolutely on the future. We must address shared challenges, whether they pertain to climate change, the energy transition, or the digitalisation of our economies.

[Conclusions: Europe]

I am confident that, hand in hand with our neighbours, we will overcome the challenges ahead, and that this very principle of cooperation – within the Benelux, with our neighbouring countries, and across Europe – will directly and positively impact our citizens.

[A look back at Luxembourg's active seat policy over the past year]

As one of the founding members of the European Union and the historic seat of EU institutions, our commitment to the European project is also reflected in an active seat policy.

The Coalition Agreement 2023-2028 outlines the provision of the necessary means and resources to reinforce and further develop Luxembourg as one of the three administrative European capitals. This represents a challenge in an increasingly competitive environment. I intentionally refer to administrative European capitals, as there are 27 capitals within the EU.

This also involves enhancing Luxembourg's attractiveness for the staff employed by the European institutions and international organisations located here. At present, more than 16,000 staff members work across the various European institutions, bodies, agencies, and international

organisations in Luxembourg. Together with their families, they contribute significantly to the country's cultural diversity, economy, and reputation.

For some time now, it has become clear that Luxembourg is losing its attractiveness as the seat of European institutions, with an increasing number of institutions facing difficulties in recruiting and retaining talent.

To address this issue, which is primarily due to the high cost of living in Luxembourg and the reduced purchasing power of European staff compared to other locations such as Brussels, we are working alongside the institutions in Luxembourg on concrete and targeted measures. One example of this is our efforts to finalise an agreement between the EU institutions and the Fédération des hôpitaux luxembourgeois (FHL). This morning, Madame Deprez, together with Commissioner Hahn, signed the agreement. At noon, the Prime Minister, along with Madame Deprez and myself, also held discussions with Mr. Hahn to explore ways to further enhance the attractiveness of Luxembourg as a location for EU institutions.

Luxembourg also supports the Unified Patent Court (Juridiction unifiée du brevet), which has its Court of Appeal and Registry based in Luxembourg, both with facilities and personnel, to ensure the best possible environment. Just under one year after its establishment, the Unified Patent Court has become an integral part of patent law in Europe. Its importance for a forward-looking and competitive Europe cannot be underestimated, and the presence of this court further strengthens Luxembourg's status as an international hub for legal expertise.

Furthermore, we remain committed to attracting entities of international organisations to Luxembourg and ensuring they benefit from the existing local synergies.

[International Trade Policy – International Context]

Global trade is also facing significant challenges. The multilateral framework, once founded on cooperation and openness, is increasingly under threat from protectionist approaches.

We are increasingly witnessing the politicisation of international trade. This trend began with Trump's steel tariffs in 2018, and next January will reveal how he plans to address these measures in his second term. Moreover, Europe also had to contend with the 'Inflation Reduction Act' introduced by the Biden administration in 2022. Added to this, is the energy crisis triggered by Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

Our prosperity in Europe has been built on open borders, a free economy, and a global trade system based on internationally recognised rules. In light of geopolitical crises and economic difficulties, these three pillars are coming under increasing pressure.

In addition to increasing internal European border controls, international trade barriers are also increasing. Our companies are increasingly confronted with economic dynamics that aren't with a 'level playing field'.

Ultimately, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find solutions within the WTO to the well-known problems. In particular, the dispute resolution mechanism has been blocked since 2019, with little prospect of this changing in the next four years.

Luxembourg, as a small country open to the world, is committed to ensuring that size does not dictate the law, but that both the international community and the private sector can rely on clear rules and standards.

[Economic security]

The current geopolitical tensions have made economic security an increasingly central concern within the European Union. In June 2023, the Commission presented its global strategy for economic security.

In this context, Luxembourg established a national framework in July last year for the screening of foreign direct investments, which aims to ensure that such investments do not endanger security or public order.

At the European level, we are actively collaborating with the Commission and the Member States to develop a coherent and unified legal framework. We place great emphasis on maintaining an open and dynamic investment environment while ensuring that administrative burdens for businesses and administrations are kept to a minimum.

In the Commission's considerations on reviewing European investments in third countries, we support a cautious approach and a thorough impact assessment before introducing new instruments.

[Conclusions: Trade Policy]

While we need a confident and realistic approach to our trade policy, it is crucial not to overlook the opportunities that globalisation presents. If we aim for 'derisking' without 'decoupling', we must continue to diversify our trade relations. This entails forging new agreements with new partners. Luxembourg will continue to promote free trade and an open economy. At the same time, we must ensure that a fair 'level playing field' exists.

The negotiations with Mercosur, and the discussions I have had with Mme Hansen, Mr. Roth, Mr. Frieden, and Mr. Delles, are a good example of this. At the moment, we cannot give our approval: we are waiting for the Commission to present the final negotiated text to the Member States, along with additional commitments.

However, we must also reflect on how to remain attractive to our trading partners. It is essential to acknowledge that the so-called 'Brussels effect' – the influence of the standards set by the EU – tends to diminish in a multipolar world.

In the future, trade, industrial, and security policies will become increasingly interconnected. However, investors from third countries should not automatically be regarded as a security risk, but rather as an opportunity to attract foreign know-how to Europe.

Naturally, we must not be naive. When required, we must protect our economy, including through the strategic use of our own tariffs. However, it is equally important to avoid the trap of blind protectionism. Our measures must be fact-based, compliant with international rules, and designed to facilitate constructive dialogue.

Ultimately, neither Luxembourg nor the EU stands to benefit from a trade war. Only through cooperation, not conflict, can we tackle the challenges we face as an international community.

[The principles of promoting external trade and investment]

As I mentioned earlier, I am now also in charge of promoting external trade and investment, as these areas have been transferred from the Ministry of the Economy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the new government.

In my 10 years as Prime Minister, I have always championed Luxembourgish businesses, and I must say, it is with the same determination and passion that I am pursuing this objective today—this time, in the framework of official missions abroad.

However, promoting our country is a team effort! I am therefore very pleased to work closely with the Grand-Ducal Palace, the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Economy, the Minister of Finance, the Minister for Digitalisation, and other government colleagues in promoting our country abroad as 'Team Lëtzebuerg'!

The success of Luxembourg is indeed rooted in the fact that we are an open and export-oriented country. For this reason, we must enhance our visibility abroad, in the interest of our businesses and the many foreign companies that employ our people here.

The statistics from STATEC speak for themselves: in 2023, Luxembourg had a trade volume of 301 billion euros.

More than 90% of our trade relations are concentrated on our top 20 trading partners. 61% of our trade volume is with the EU, and 39% with the rest of the world. Moreover, 83% of our total trade volume is in services, which also highlights the need for us to make efforts to attract investment into the country.

Our trade policy is clearly built on the two pillars of external trade and investment in Luxembourg.

As outlined in the government programme, we aim to allocate the necessary resources to enhance our economic promotion, particularly in light of the increasingly challenging economic situation in Europe and Luxembourg.

It is therefore crucial that we strengthen our trade relations in the interest of Luxembourg and attract investments that bring high added value to the country.

As 'Team Lëtzebuerg', we stand firmly behind Luxembourg as a location at the heart of Europe, deeply rooted in the European Union – our greatest advantage!

[First assessment]

In recent months, I have led numerous economic missions abroad, including as part of the state visit to Belgium, as well as to the USA, Japan, and Korea.

There is always significant interest from Luxembourgish companies, which, together with the Chamber of Commerce, have participated to explore new markets or strengthen existing relationships.

I have held numerous meetings with Luxembourgish and international companies, whether at the Luxembourg American Business Award in New York, in Berlin, in Paris, or here in Luxembourg during the Nexus 2050 Conference.

These exchanges are not only about maintaining our contacts but also about gauging the pulse of the international ecosystem. Through these interactions, I have observed something significant:

In these times of war in Ukraine and the Middle East, soaring energy prices, and a strained global economic situation, the need for a robust trade policy is more critical than ever before.

Despite the strong headwinds we are likely to encounter in international markets, I remain confident in our ability to adapt to the evolving geopolitical and economic landscape.

[A good framework for our businesses]

Our foreign trade policy is grounded in our core values, adherence to the rule of law, and a commitment to respecting the multilateral framework.

A strong multilateral framework, underpinned by the EU and the World Trade Organisation, is therefore essential. Equally significant is the bilateral framework, through which we support businesses in international trade via our air agreements and our double taxation treaties designed to prevent double taxation.

We are also committed to providing financial support to businesses within the country to better prepare them for international expansion. This includes export assistance through the Committee for the Promotion of Exports (COPEL) and export insurance via the Office du Dueroire, both of which offer direct support to our businesses. Additionally, we have further increased COPEL's budget to enhance its capacity to assist exporters.

Through our trade missions, organised in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, we actively support Luxembourgish businesses in gaining access to international markets. I would also like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Hereditary Grand Duke again for his unwavering commitment and participation in these numerous trade missions. Just last week, although it was not a trade mission, he once again helped open new doors for Luxembourg at the Web Summit in Lisbon.

[Conclusion on Foreign Trade]

Luxembourgish businesses remain at the heart of our focus, alongside our goal of attracting more investments to Luxembourg. These efforts aim to foster a sustainable economy and generate new employment opportunities.

Our ambition is to position Luxembourg as a leading trading platform within the EU, with a particular focus on the cutting-edge technologies of the 21st century, including artificial intelligence, e-health, renewable energy, and the development of e-batteries.

I view this as a continuation of the economic promotion efforts that have been successfully undertaken in our country in recent years.

As 'Team Lëtzebuerg', I sincerely hope for a broad consensus in Parliament on the importance of actively promoting foreign trade and investments to advance our country's interests!

[Consular Affairs]

The increasingly complex international context poses challenges not only in traditional international relations but also in the provision of citizen services, a responsibility the Ministry of Foreign Affairs takes very seriously. This includes consular assistance, which provides advice and support to citizens abroad. Such assistance may involve helping citizens return home during major security crises in other countries or regions, should they wish to do so – situations that are occurring with increasing frequency. The same applies in the context of natural disasters, accidents, theft, or other challenging circumstances of any kind.

In this context, I would like to emphasise the importance of citizens registering their contact details on the online platform "Lëtzebuerger am Ausland" (LaMA) before travelling. This enables us to provide them with more proactive and effective assistance when needed.

On the other hand, I would like to highlight other tangible services where we continue to set remarkable records. This development has not undergone a fundamentally new shift since I

assumed the role of Minister of Foreign Affairs, but it remains no less remarkable. By the end of this year, my department will have issued approximately 64,000 Luxembourgish passports, representing a 202% increase compared to 2014, just a decade ago. Additionally, for visas requested by citizens of third countries wishing to travel to Luxembourg, we will have processed around 28,000 applications by year-end, marking an extraordinary 273% increase compared to the figures from ten years ago.

I would also like to draw attention to the steady increase in the number of Luxembourgish citizens residing abroad, which poses new challenges for our ministry, embassies, and consulates worldwide. Our diplomats and other staff stationed abroad play a vital role in providing services to these citizens. Let me remind you that currently, around 144,000 Luxembourgers live outside the country, accounting for approximately 28% of the total Luxembourgish population.

This figure, which many residents of Luxembourg might not immediately realise, is partly attributable to our nationality law. Naturally, this presents its own set of challenges. It is perhaps more important than ever to recognise that Luxembourg is not only a country with significant immigration but also one with substantial expatriate communities. Admittedly, the connection that many 'new' Luxembourgers have with our country is not always particularly strong. Their ancestors, who came from Luxembourg, are often the only link they have to the country. However, as outlined in the coalition agreement, we should view this diaspora as an opportunity and further explore its potential. This also includes our obligation as an administration to be there for these citizens when they need us, insofar as it falls within the scope of our consular activities.

[Outlook for the End of 2024 and the Coming Year/Conclusion]

Mr

President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me, in concluding this speech, to offer an outlook for the next 12 months. I will remain steadfast in my commitment to promoting and defending our values and interests on the global stage, and I am confident that there will be no shortage of opportunities to do so.

Achieving immediate ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon is of paramount importance; there is no reason to delay until the new U.S. administration assumes office in January. Following this, it is essential to work decisively towards a two-state solution, laying the groundwork for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Likewise, efforts must focus on securing a fair and enduring peace in Ukraine in the coming months, addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and fostering long-term stability in the region.

On the multilateral level, we face several pressing challenges, which we are fully committed to addressing. Some of these we have already begun tackling, and we will continue to pursue them with determination:

- Luxembourg will assume the presidency of the Benelux Union on 1 January.

- Last Wednesday, Luxembourg officially began its six-month presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Over the next six months, we will actively implement our priorities and lead the Committee of Ministers with determination. If you visit Strasbourg, you will notice the logo of our presidency, a creation by Lucien Wercollier. The connection between his work and the current European context, as well as the role of the Council of Europe are deeply meaningful: Wercollier, an artist who courageously said 'No' to the occupier and paid a heavy price for his resistance, stands as a powerful symbol of culture, and embodies the essence of Luxembourg's culture and identity. The three central pillars of the Council of Europe – human rights, democracy, and the rule of law – are at the heart of our presidency. Specifically, Luxembourg is prioritising initiatives to uphold the rule of law, including the protection of key actors such as journalists, lawyers, and ombudspersons. We are also advancing efforts to strengthen social cohesion in our societies, focusing on equality of opportunity and combating violence against women and girls. Additionally, we are highlighting the role of culture, sports, and heritage as powerful tools for promoting human rights. During this same meeting, I proposed an idea: we already have the Interrail pass, which allows young people to explore Europe by train. Why not extend this concept through the Council of Europe to include culture? This initiative would provide access not only to train travel across Europe but also to all museums on the continent. We are currently investigating the feasibility of this proposal. Luxembourg's presidency will culminate in May 2025 with a ministerial meeting in Kirchberg, bringing together key stakeholders to mark the achievements of our term.

- Luxembourg has made history by becoming a member of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna for the first time. This significant role allows Luxembourg to actively support the Agency and its Director in ensuring the comprehensive, impartial, and objective enforcement of nuclear safety measures, while challenging obstructionist nations when necessary. As a member of the Board, Luxembourg champions a multilateral approach grounded in universal values and principles. Our focus includes addressing critical issues such as the nuclear programmes of North Korea and Iran, as well as the precarious situation of nuclear reactors in Ukraine. These challenges, which pose risks to global safety, are approached with consistency and constructive engagement.

- We are gearing up for an important election in the autumn of 2025, with the goal of securing re-election to the UNESCO Executive Board after a 20-year absence. I look forward to sharing more details about this endeavour around this time next year.

[Our Perspectives for Foreign Trade]

In the realm of foreign trade, our primary focus remains within the EU, where 61% of our trade is conducted. We are committed to working closely with our neighbouring countries and key partners in Brussels to further strengthen the internal market. Additionally, I plan to enhance our active presence in the Greater Region in the near future.

However, we must also intensify our global promotion efforts, particularly in the North American market, where we seek to further expand and strengthen our presence.

North America is a key market for Luxembourg, particularly as we strive to attract investments in the high-tech sector. To this end, we are about to open an embassy in Ottawa, Canada, which will play a significant role in advancing this objective. More broadly, establishing a presence in Ottawa was long overdue: Luxembourg was the last EU Member State without representation in the Canadian capital, despite our excellent bilateral relations and a shared history.

When discussing economic growth, it is clear that Luxembourg must also bolster its presence in Asia. I am personally convinced that this region will emerge as one of the most significant markets of the 21st century.

China, for instance, is one of Luxembourg's largest trading partners outside the EU. As I mentioned earlier, I am pleased to be leading a large economic delegation to the country in the coming days. China represents a vital market for us, and numerous Luxembourgish companies are already well-established there.

Next year, our participation in Expo Osaka with a national pavilion will highlight our clear aim to forge new partnerships in Japan, building on our long-standing friendship with the country. The Expo offers an excellent opportunity to showcase Luxembourg and further strengthen our ties with Japan.

A few months ago, as I mentioned, we opened our embassy in Korea, underscoring our commitment to engaging with the Korean market, particularly in high-tech sectors.

I am also focusing on India and the ASEAN countries for foreign trade, where more active engagement is essential to ensure we capitalise on these emerging markets. Singapore, for instance, stands out as our largest trading partner in Asia, primarily due to its strong service sector.

I would like to reiterate our intention to strengthen ties with the South American market, where we established an embassy in Brazil a few years ago.

In Africa, I also seek to deepen our economic relations while maintaining a clear separation from development cooperation. I firmly oppose to a 'tied aid', where assistance is made conditional on economic counterparts.

The African continent has a strong economic growth ahead and it is important to collaborate with these countries especially in Tech, Start-ups, and renewable Energy.

Before concluding, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to our teams at the ministry. This includes, first and foremost, the Secretary-General and the Directors, but also our dedicated young interns and diplomats, both at home and abroad, who tirelessly carry out their work every day. Without their efforts, none of our diplomatic achievements – whether in foreign trade or, though not discussed today, in development cooperation through the on-site presence of our actors – would be possible. To everyone who represents Luxembourg's image in their daily work: a sincere and profound thank you.

So, with that, we've completed a tour of the world, spanning over all continents. I hope I haven't bored anyone here. The approximately 350 meetings and bilateral discussions I've conducted emphasise the critical importance of dialogue. Some dialogues are easier than others, and some interlocutors are more agreeable than others – but we must engage with all of them. Dialogue is, and always will be, at the heart of Luxembourg's foreign policy DNA.

Thank you.