



LE GOUVERNEMENT  
DU GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG  
Ministère des Affaires étrangères  
et européennes

## **Foreign Policy Address**

presented by

Mr. Jean Asselborn  
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs

before the Luxembourg Parliament  
on 13 March 2018

*Check against delivery*

## FOREIGN POLICY ADDRESS

Mr. President,  
Honorable Parliamentarians,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. In my first foreign policy address to this Chamber, in November 2005, I underlined that “effective multilateralism” is more than just a slogan for us Luxembourgers. It is a necessity, in order to guarantee durable peace and security in Luxembourg and in the world.
2. In the November 2014 address, based also on the experience of our first mandate in the UN Security Council, I described multilateralism as an edifice in which the states are the building blocks, as it were. When these blocks become fragile, or rather, when the cement, which binds these blocks together – i.e. the trust in the other stakeholders and in the system itself – starts to crumble, the entire edifice is at stake and risks tumbling down.
3. This is a clear and present danger today. The Paris climate agreement, trade negotiations, the nuclear deal with Iran, the Middle East Peace Process, negotiations at the UN on a Global Compact for Migration, international humanitarian law: multilateral agreements and normative frameworks are increasingly under fire. The international consensus of yesteryear – for instance the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine – is called into question today, more and more often also under the influence of the current US Administration.
4. There is a definite trend towards unilateralism, just like there is a clear tendency to undermine human rights and the rule of law.
5. After World War II, the establishment of the United Nations laid the foundations for an international order, whose purpose it was to prevent war and protect human dignity. This year, we celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, in many countries, human rights are trampled underfoot every day. There are unfortunately also countries in Europe, in which the rule of law is threatened; countries, in which an authoritarian populism is taking hold, which does not shy away from branding journalists or liberal politicians as “enemies of the people”, designating minorities and other vulnerable groups as “alien” or “undesirable”; countries, in which migrants and refugees are described as an existential threat.
6. Together with our partners in the European Union and beyond, we Luxembourgers must continue to resist this racist, authoritarian, and populist worldview, and fight for human rights and the rule of law. We have faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, as it is

written in the Charter of the United Nations. We believe that all human beings have the same rights, regardless of their origin, the colour of their skin, their ethnicity, their religion, their sexual orientation or gender identity, social circumstances or their political convictions. We also know where we end up when human dignity is no longer held as the central principle.

7. People occasionally ask me whether it is not depressing and frustrating to be a Minister of Foreign Affairs at a time in which the world seems to be increasingly in turmoil. I do not want to burden you with an insight into my state of mind. But I remain of the firm conviction that, precisely in times as difficult as these, the diplomatic engagement and commitment of Luxembourg also is more necessary than ever before: a commitment to multilateralism, to our fundamental freedoms and our values, to human rights and the rule of law, in the framework of a strong European Union, since this is also in our own best interest. And to make yourself understood, it is not always sufficient to cuddle up to the truth with diplomatic politeness; it is occasionally very appropriate to trust your gut.
8. I do not mean to paint a bleak picture or conjure up doom, as the populists are wont to do. The global trend of human evolution remains positive. Steven Pinker, a renowned Harvard psychology professor, underlines this with concrete statistics, like the regression of poverty, progress in education or medicine, or the rising number of democracies worldwide: there were 52 democracies in the early 1990s, now there are 103. Even if everyday reality – especially that of a Foreign Minister – appears to be dictated by crises and emergencies, we must not lose sight of the bigger picture and the longer term. This bigger picture gives us reason to hope that our collective engagement is not in vain.

## **ENGAGEMENT FOR MULTILATERALISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

9. First of all, I would like to show with a number of examples how Luxembourg's diplomacy concretely promotes our values and multilateralism.
10. One such example is the **Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar**.
11. Much has been written about what has been going on since 25 August of last year in Rakhine State in Myanmar. Up until now, more than 700,000 Rohingya have had to flee to Bangladesh. The Burmese army is talking about "clearance operations" or the "fight against terrorism". The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned as far back as September that ethnic cleansing is taking place in Myanmar, and only last week, he used the term "genocide" again. We know, based on credible reports by the UN, international observers, the press, and civil society that systematic and widespread attacks have been carried out against the civilian population. Under article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, this amounts to crimes against humanity. In my understanding of this situation, which is certainly

complex, there is no doubt about this. With the support of Luxembourg, the European Union has taken targeted restrictive measures against military leaders in Myanmar. We also requested the government of Myanmar to accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for those crimes. If this does not happen, the international community must take its responsibility: either the UN Security Council needs to refer the situation in Rakhine State to the ICC, or a special mechanism needs to be set up, as it was done for Syria in 2016.

12. Last November, I met with Aung San Suu Kyi in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar, in the margins of an Asia-Europe Foreign Ministers' meeting. I was able to tell her personally that we are deeply worried about the situation of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Rakhine state, in the Western part of her country, on the border with Bangladesh.
13. My call was clear: the violence against the Rohingya must cease immediately; access for humanitarian aid must be guaranteed, including for the UN and NGOs; the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of the refugees must be enabled through a bilateral agreement with Bangladesh.
14. In the meantime, such a bilateral agreement has been signed. It now needs to be implemented. We must however be aware that the return of the Rohingya refugees, whenever it will start, could take 10 years.
15. Perhaps our expectations vis-à-vis the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and the democratic transition in Myanmar were too high. Aung San Suu Kyi has only so much room for manoeuvre in a system in which the army retains a great deal of control. But it is precisely because of her status of Nobel Peace Prize laureate that she bears a decisive political responsibility.
16. Closer to home, we have continued to promote our **values in the context of developments in Turkey**, an important neighbouring state of the EU; a country which has had the status of EU accession candidate since 1999 and with which negotiations started in 2005.
17. In Turkey, the pressure on all stakeholders of democracy, the rule of law, and civil society continues to grow. The attempted coup d'état of July 2016, which could thankfully be averted, has unfortunately been invoked to justify ever more drastic measures. Hundreds of thousands of people, judges, magistrates, journalists, civil servants, teachers, and officers have been placed under general suspicion, suspended from their jobs, and tried. The Turkish courts can no longer accomplish their mission independently. Civil society is under increasing pressure. The media are under fire from all sides.
18. What remains is a climate of fear and hopelessness. The many people in Turkey who had seen their future in a law-abiding democracy and inside the European Union are now worried that this same European Union is leaving them behind. This must not happen: we must act much

more systematically for the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in this great and important country. It is not too late to change course. Hence my renewed call today for the unconditional release of Taner Kilic, President of Amnesty International Turkey, as well as of all other human rights defenders, journalists, magistrates, or civil servants, who have been locked up in Turkey because of their convictions.

19. With regard to Turkey, I would also like to underscore the importance of the Council of Europe. As a multilateral institution of 47 member states with 820 million citizens, the **Council of Europe** plays a crucial role in helping to uphold the rights of these citizens. Luxembourg supports the Council of Europe all the more now, one year before its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, because it is in a deep crisis, which may come to question its very existence. This crisis has been triggered by a number of “firsts” in the history of the Council of Europe, as through the activation of article 7 inside the European Union, to which I will return later.
20. It is the first time that article 46.4 of the European Convention on Human Rights has been applied, because a member, Azerbaijan, has not respected a decision of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. It is also the first time that the President of the Parliamentary Assembly has had to step down on suspicion of corruption. Furthermore, it is the first time that a member, Russia, refuses to pay its contribution to the budget of the Council of Europe, because its right to vote in the Assembly was rightfully taken away. And finally, it is the first time, that a member which has become one of the Council’s main financial contributors, Turkey, has stepped away from this responsibility after one year, because it does not agree with a decision by the Assembly. For the first time in its history, the Council of Europe is confronted with the potential withdrawal of different members.
21. The legitimacy of the Council of Europe and its institutions is systematically questioned, and not only by non-EU member states. The means allowing the Council to fulfil its missions are withheld in a manner that borders on extortion.
22. This cannot continue. The human rights which have been enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights after the Second World War, are not negotiable. This will also be the central focus of the address I will give to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 25 April.

### **Middle East**

23. Another example of our engagement in defence of multilateralism and human rights, one that is particularly close to my heart, is our commitment for the right of Palestinians and Israelis to live in peace, security and dignity as neighbours in the Middle East.

24. More than 100 years after the Balfour declaration and more than 50 years after the beginning of the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has lost nothing of its political, strategic and emotional centrality. Other conflicts in the region must not be used as a pretext in order to question the political rights of the Palestinians.
25. A peace agreement between Israel and Palestine would greatly contribute to reducing tensions in the Arab world as well as between the Islamic world and the West. As long as the conflict remains unresolved, it will be a breeding ground for frustration, hatred and radicalisation.
26. I continue to be convinced that respect of international law has to remain the basis for peace in the Middle East. There can be no doubt as to Israel's right to exist, nor as to the right of the Palestinians to their own state. We have to continue to stress that the principle of "land for peace" remains valid, as well as the EU-parameters for a two-state solution, based on the borders of 1967.
27. The state of Israel will celebrate its 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on 14 May. The Trump administration has announced that the US embassy in Jerusalem will be inaugurated on that same day, in line with the President's announcement made on 6 December to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This choice of date constitutes a totally unnecessary provocation for the Palestinians and the Arab world, as they associate 14 May with the "Nakba", that is the catastrophe of the mass expulsion of Palestinians in 1948.
28. The unilateral decision on Jerusalem breaks with the international consensus and goes against several UN resolutions, such as UN Security Council resolution 478 of 1980. These resolutions stipulate that the status of Jerusalem will have to be determined through negotiation, and that the agreement will have to respect the rights and aspirations of both parties.
29. The status of Jerusalem is not only a politically and legally sensitive issue, but also a religious and symbolic issue for Israelis, Palestinians, over 400 million Arabs and billions of Muslims and Christians worldwide. The US decision complicates the implementation of a two-state solution, which continues to be the pillar of the European and international pursuit of a solution to the conflict. Without Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, there can be no two-state solution. The two-state solution is the only fair and sustainable solution. The Palestinians have a right to their own state, and the creation of said state is also of vital interest to Israel, in order to guarantee its democratic and demographic future.
30. The Jerusalem decision not only strengthens the positions of radicals, but it also discredits the US as a neutral mediator in the peace process. We therefore belong to those calling for the

establishment of a new multilateral format for negotiations, in which the EU, the Arab League, European as well as Arab countries are more involved.

31. The US can no longer be the only mediator. But obviously, a solution cannot be found without the US. I look forward to the day when the US will once again give its full support to the two-state solution.
32. In the meantime, European unity has to be re-established, and we have to avoid episodes such as the vote during the UN General Assembly on 21 December 2017. On that day, six EU-countries abstained from the vote on Jerusalem, only a couple of days after the European Council had confirmed the EU's support for the two-state solution, clearly specifying that the EU position concerning Jerusalem remains unchanged.
33. In any case, Luxembourg will continue to work for a common and coherent EU position.
34. This also applies to the recognition of Palestine. Obviously, Luxembourg wants to see a viable and independent Palestinian State, as soon as possible. The Palestinians have a right to self-determination and to their own state. 136 countries have already recognised this state bilaterally. We believe that a critical mass of EU member states is necessary to jointly recognise Palestine. In order for this recognition to have the desired effect and serve the peace process, it cannot be decided independently of the international context. A close coordination with like-minded countries, countries that have a position similar to our own, is thus necessary in order to choose the right time and to maximise the impact of our common recognition.
35. The position of France on this matter is very important. Luxembourg stood with France in the Security Council in 2014, as we did at the international conference in Paris in January last year, which underlined the international consensus for the two-state solution. France also has a special responsibility as an EU member state with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.
36. The situation on the ground is worsening continuously, be it because of the construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, including in East Jerusalem, or because of the demolition of Palestinian houses, schools and infrastructure. In response to the demolition of humanitarian projects in support of vulnerable Palestinian communities, Luxembourg participated in joint demarches in October 2017, and also at the beginning of this month, together with Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Sweden, Spain and the European Commission. These demarches demanded either the return of the confiscated equipment or the reimbursement of their costs, in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention.

37. UN Security Council resolution 2334, which was adopted on 23 December 2016, clearly demands a total and immediate cessation of settlement activities in the occupied territories. And yet, in 2017, nearly 7,000 new housing units were authorised in the settlements. It is evident, unfortunately, that Israel behaves as if the resolution in question and international law were non-existent. Because of this behaviour, the establishment of a Palestinian state becomes more difficult with each passing day.
38. Since Oslo, that is over the last 25 years, the number of settlers has doubled and has reached 600,000. 200,000 of them are living in East Jerusalem. Israel has to take a decision and opt either for the two-state solution, or for its settlements, which continue to lead to a one-state reality, and which carry the risk of Israel becoming an apartheid state.
39. As if the situation were not challenging enough, the United States also decided drastically to reduce their contribution to the UN agency UNRWA, which supports Palestinian refugees. Yet, UNRWA's activities, in particular in the sectors of education and health, are critical for stability in Gaza and the whole region. That is why Luxembourg supports the Agency. It would not be in anyone's interest if all of a sudden over 260,000 children in Gaza could not go to school anymore. 80% of Gaza's two million inhabitants depend on humanitarian aid. There is a possibility that their situation could still get worse. A political instrumentalization of the aid for the Palestinians is simply unacceptable. The day after tomorrow, I will travel to Rome where I will participate in an extraordinary ministerial conference organised by my colleagues, the ministers of foreign affairs of Jordan, Sweden and Egypt, in order to find solutions for UNRWA's precarious financial situation as well as to guarantee the continued functioning of its services. Once again, a multilateral effort is necessary, which will also require an increased participation of the Gulf countries.
40. Let me turn to the blockade of Gaza, which has been in force for more than a decade: it has to be finally lifted in order to allow a fundamental improvement in living conditions. This can be facilitated through an inter-Palestinian reconciliation and the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. Yes, there is violence in Gaza itself and there is also violence coming out of Gaza. Hamas often operates with criminal methods, and in no way should one defend what Hamas is doing. One has, however, to visit Gaza in order to understand that one cannot pack two million people into a very confined space, a seventh of the size of the territory of Luxembourg, and demand that these people act like normal people. Gaza is unworthy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the civilised world!

## **Iran**

41. The next example that I want to invoke is our engagement with Iran. The nuclear deal with Iran, which came into force in 2016, has demonstrated that multilateral diplomacy works, even if one has to have a lot of endurance in order to reach such results. Last year, I referred

to the deal as a “ray of hope”, and I still stand by that statement. The deal ensures that the Iranian nuclear programme can be used only for civilian purposes, and it must continue to be implemented fully, by all parties and in all of its components.

42. Iran has been implementing the deal to the letter. The IAEA has confirmed this ten times already. Unfortunately, this important deal is continuously put under pressure by the US administration. President Trump threatens to leave the deal unilaterally if it is not fundamentally changed and tightened by the month of May.
43. On this matter, I want to underline that the nuclear deal with Iran is enshrined in a UN Security Council resolution. Hence, it cannot be denounced unilaterally. Luxembourg will continue to promote this deal, together with its EU partners.
44. In line with the implementation of the nuclear deal, we have bilaterally normalised our relations with Iran. This does not mean that we do not share the concerns of our American partners when it comes to other aspects of Iran’s policies, be it the human rights situation in the country, Iran’s regional policy and also its ballistic missile programme. We communicate these concerns to the Iranian authorities. Iran has a clear responsibility when it comes to peace and stability in the region.
45. We continue to believe in engagement and dialogue with Iran. The policies of President Rouhani, who was re-elected last year, are the best chance for reform. An end of the nuclear deal would above all strengthen the hardliners in the country.

### **Syria and Yemen**

46. Our engagement for multilateralism, international law and human rights is most critically needed in situations of war. This is particularly the case in Syria and in Yemen.
47. The **war in Syria** has led to the greatest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. It has cost the lives of over 340,000 people. Half of the population is either internally displaced or has fled abroad. Tens of thousands have been tortured to death in prisons. Why? Because a dictator, Assad, wants to stay in power by all means. His regime does not hesitate to use the most violent forms of force, even poison gas, against its own people. The images coming out of Eastern Ghouta are unbearable. The area is under siege, starved and bombarded, just like in the Dark Ages. It is “hell on earth”, as was said by Antonio Guterres.
48. The situation on the ground is extremely complex and dangerous: there are wars within the war, opposing non-state, national, regional and international actors. A year ago, it was difficult to imagine that the situation could become worse. Because of the common fight against Daesh opportunistic alliances were formed, but now we see the risk of a widening

conflict with direct confrontations between regional and international powers. In February, for instance, we witnessed the most serious escalation between Israel and Syria in decades. This has increased the risk of direct confrontations between Israel, Iran and Hezbollah.

49. On 20 January, Turkey launched its military operation “Olive Branch” in Syria. Its main target is the Kurdish militia YPG, which has been supported by the US and plays an important role in the fight against Daesh. The militia, together with the “Syrian Democratic Forces”, liberated the city of Raqqa from Daesh. A few weeks ago, pro-Assad militias entered the canton of Afrin, which increases the risk of direct confrontations between Syria and Turkey. There is also the danger of indirect confrontation between two NATO-partners, Turkey and the United States. The Turkish offensive risks indirectly strengthening Daesh, which currently only controls three areas in Syria. Over 98% of the areas that were once under the control of Daesh have been liberated.
50. It is unacceptable that Turkey, with the help of more or less extremist militias, endangers the civilian population, particularly in the city of Afrin, under the pretext of exercising the right of self-defence. I am hence calling to immediately cease the military operation and in no way to expand it, in order to avoid a humanitarian disaster.
51. The bombardments and the fighting in Idlib and particularly in Eastern Ghouta have also drastically increased over the last month, and the suffering of the civilian population is unbearable. In Eastern Ghouta, over 1,000 civilians have been killed over the last weeks because of the regime’s ongoing offensive. These events remind us of the scenario of the capitulation of Eastern Aleppo in December 2016.
52. Eastern Ghouta lies on the outskirts of Damascus and is symbolic of the war in Syria. It was one of the first regions to join the opposition. It was in that area that the most devastating poison gas attack was carried out by the regime in August 2013, and poison gas has once again been used there recently.
53. It is incomprehensible that countries in the UN Security Council use their veto in order to block independent enquiries that could contribute at last to holding to account the perpetrators of the poison gas attacks, such as the ones in Eastern Ghouta or in Khan Shaykhun in April 2017.
54. The Security Council has been paralysed since 2011 when trying to deal with Syria, mostly because of the use of the veto. This is why I explicitly welcomed the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 on 24 February, upon an initiative by Sweden and Kuwait. It is a small ray of hope. The resolution demands that the fighting cease immediately and that a humanitarian pause of at least 30 days is upheld throughout Syria, in order for humanitarian aid to be distributed and the critically ill and wounded to be evacuated.

55. This resolution, however, has also been largely ignored.
56. Turkey, Russia and Iran, the guarantors of the Astana process which decided to establish so-called de-escalation zones such as in Eastern Ghouta and around Idlib, have to shoulder their responsibility and impose a complete stop to military operations on the Syrian regime and on themselves. There is a risk that attacks from the regime and its allies as well as from Turkey in the canton of Afrin will continue, under the pretext of fighting terrorism.
57. The bombardments in Eastern Ghouta, Idlib and in the region of Afrin have to cease immediately, and resolution 2401 has to be respected and implemented. This has been clearly called for by the European Union, and I was personally involved in formulating this call during the last Foreign Affairs Council.
58. The EU is the largest humanitarian aid donor in Syria and in the neighbouring countries, which have felt most of the consequences of this conflict: Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt have taken in over five and a half million Syrians, and it is important that we continue to support these countries.
59. Luxembourg is doing its part. Our help amounts to 7.5 million euros per year and benefits in particular Syrian children so that they can continue to go to school, even when they are refugees. But our position as regards to Syria is clear: “No help for reconstruction without a political process”.
60. There is no military solution for the war in Syria. Only a political solution can lead to sustainable peace and stability. There is no alternative for us and we continue to support the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura. On the basis of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 as well as UN Security Council resolution 2254 of 18 December 2015, a political transition has to be launched, in which the Syrian population is represented in all of its religious and ethnic diversity.
61. And even if a political process would start: the atrocities of these last few years cannot simply be ignored. The bombardments of hospitals, of which there have been around 500 cases since 2011, as well as of civilian targets, and poison gas attacks are war crimes according to international law. There can be no impunity for such crimes. We were pushing for this when we were in the Security Council, and Luxembourg supports the independent mechanism, which is collecting evidence in order to help bring the perpetrators to justice in the future.
62. As to the war in **Yemen**, a military solution and impunity are no options here either. The UN mediation between the different conflict parties has stalled, and the war has become more vicious over the last months. 80% of the population is in need of humanitarian aid. The

blockade is impervious. 17.8 million out of 27 million Yemenis are a step away from the worst famine in decades. As in Syria, hunger is being used as a weapon of war in Yemen. There is also a massive cholera epidemic.

63. In Geneva, Luxembourg has supported a Dutch initiative aiming at investigating war crimes in Yemen, in the hope that this might have a deterrent effect. We are also giving humanitarian aid to Yemen.
64. In order to put an end to the chaos in Yemen, which only benefits the terrorists, political negotiations have to resume as soon as possible, and access for humanitarian aid has to be ensured.
65. The wars in Syria and in Yemen have led me to the defining challenge of our time: migration and the refugee crisis.

#### **A DEFINING CHALLENGE: MIGRATION AND REFUGEES**

66. Currently, there are 5.6 million refugees from Syria registered in the neighbouring countries by the UN refugee agency, the UNHCR. In Yemen, two million people are internally displaced, and over 190,000 people have fled to the neighbouring countries. In the past, Yemen itself has taken in many refugees; and it is the only country of the Arab peninsula and the whole Middle East that has signed the Geneva Refugee Convention. However, because of the conflict, the country can, no longer guarantee adequate protection for the refugees. The situation of the 280,000 refugees in Yemen, mostly Somalis, is getting increasingly dramatic.
67. Migration and the refugee crisis are not abstract concepts. I was able to get a clear picture of the reality in the countries of transit and of origin myself. During our EU presidency in 2015, I was in Italy and in Greece, in Lampedusa and in Lesbos. In December 2017, I visited two refugee camps in Athens. And, in February this year, I saw the very difficult situation in Libya and in Niger, two stops on the way many people have been taking over the last years in order to reach the Mediterranean and Europe.

#### **Libya and Niger**

68. The situation in **Libya** remains of crucial importance for Europe.
69. IOM, the International Organisation for Migration estimates that there are between 700,000 and a million migrants currently in Libya. In part, they have been in Libya for years, hoping for a better life, either there or in Europe.

70. Last year, 119,000 migrants reached Italy from Libya. Tragically, 2,833 people lost their lives in the Mediterranean while trying to cross it, on their way to Italy.
71. Our country supports efforts to combat human trafficking. Luxembourg has contributed two of the four surveillance planes deployed in the EU operation Sophia in the Mediterranean. And we are contributing financially to the training of the Libyan coastguard.
72. A sustainable solution can, however, not be found as long as there is chaos in Libya and as long as the country is not lead by a unitary and stable government. The country needs legitimate and functioning institutions.
73. We have to work to promote political stability. In that regard, Luxembourg supports the efforts of Ghassan Salamé, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, to bring together all actors in Libya and to make progress along three paths: national reconciliation, a new constitution, and credible elections, if possible this year.
74. In Tripoli, I visited the Tarek Al Matar detention centre, which is managed by the government; UNHCR and IOM have access to the centre. The conditions under which the migrants have to live there are horrible. Hundreds of young men, most of them from Africa, were standing there pressed together. But we also saw mothers with their children. In Libya, there are also several prisons that are managed by private militias and where the UN does not have access. The living conditions there are even more inhumane.
75. Fortunately, the Libyan authorities are currently in the process of closing all the centres where violations have been reported. It is imperative to find alternatives to detention. I pleaded with the Libyan government representatives that structures should be created for UNHCR and IOM, where people who want to be repatriated on a voluntary basis can be received in decent conditions. Libya should follow the example of Niger and should not criminalise and incarcerate migrants, but host them in humane conditions.
76. Persons in need of special protection should get the possibility, within a legal migration framework such as resettlement, to start a new life in a European country. The EU is ready to take in 50,000 migrants legally over the next two years. These people will reach the EU via Niger. In that context, Luxembourg is planning to receive 200 people by the end of 2019.
77. In Tripoli, I pointed out that an agreement between Libya and UNHCR would be key to improve the treatment of migrants. Last year, Luxembourg mobilised one million euros for UNHCR so that the agency can better protect the people rescued at sea and brought back to Libya. It is indispensable that the international community gives UNHCR the necessary means to carry out its work.

78. During my visit, I also went to an evacuation centre next to the airport of Tripoli. That day, people were being flown back to Senegal and Cameroon. This year, with the help of the IOM, it is foreseen that 30,000 migrants will voluntarily return to their home countries. UNHCR for its part plans to resettle 8,000 refugees, either directly or via Niger, in 2018.
79. Violations of the human rights of migrants and refugees have to be condemned in the strongest terms. The EU's first objective has to be to help protect the rights of the migrants, and to avoid further deaths in the Mediterranean. This is why we are explicitly welcoming the efforts of the African countries that are repatriating their citizens.
80. Here I would like to stress the positive role played by **Niger**. During my visit to this partner country of Luxembourg from 6 to 8 February, and particularly during my visit to the IOM's transit centre in Agadez, I noticed that the migrants are being treated in a much better way than in Libya. Under the leadership of the minister of the interior, the smuggling of migrants is being suppressed. Those who want to move towards Libya are being advised against it, in order to avoid that they will find themselves under impossible conditions, like many of their predecessors.
81. I cannot recount all the personal impressions that I brought back home from those visits. But it has been a very important experience which comes to show once more that behind numbers and statistics, we find the fates of people and families, often marked by a lot of suffering and disillusionment. Those fates should motivate us to look for solutions, also at the EU level, which respect the dignity of those people, the dignity of refugees and migrants; solutions which combine rigour and solidarity, the law and humanity.
82. What do the **statistics** tell us? In 2017, the UNHCR counted around 66 million people worldwide that were fleeing, either out of their homeland or within the borders of their country. In Europe, the migratory pressure has drastically fallen in 2017. Around 707,000 people have applied for asylum in the EU. This is 43% less than in 2016, but it is still more than before the crisis of 2015. 70% of those applications have been lodged in Germany, Italy, France, Greece and the United Kingdom, and most of the applicants came from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.
83. Even as the numbers are clearly falling, 2017 still demanded a lot of efforts throughout Europe when it came to asylum. 980,000 decisions have been taken in the whole of the EU, out of which 40% were positive, meaning that the applicants got international protection. Around 100,000 Syrians applied for asylum in the whole of the EU in 2017, and 94% of them were granted protection. The backlog of 2015 is slowly but surely being reduced: today, 460,000 people are still waiting for a decision.

84. Overall, 171,000 migrants reached Europe through the Mediterranean route, most of them, around 162,000, came via the Eastern and Central Mediterranean route. In 2016, the number was 362,000. Unfortunately, too many people are still drowning in the Mediterranean: according to estimates, in 2017 3,100 people died on their way to Europe.
85. The only route where the numbers have actually increased is in the Western Mediterranean. In Spain, the number of migrants has doubled, from 14,000 to over 28,000, and the trend is still on the rise. The Spaniards are, however, confident that they can manage the situation, in particular with the help of Morocco and Senegal.
86. Within those 707,000 migrants that have applied for asylum in the EU in 2017, one also has to take into account the people who reached Europe from a visa-exempted country, such as the Western Balkans and Georgia. Furthermore, we also need to take into account those who have been resettled and those who have lodged applications in several countries, so-called “Dubliners”.
87. Is Europe ready for the next crisis?
88. My answer is: No! The legislative agenda is still very busy. Unfortunately, the mood is not conducive to significant progress. After the crisis of 2015, it became clear that we could no longer continue with a business as usual approach.
89. The whole system, be it asylum, borders, cooperation with third countries, finances and solidarity measures, needed to be subjected to a fundamental review. These legislative projects are by no means completed. We still have strong tensions between individual member states when it comes to the reception, the asylum procedures and the distribution of asylum seekers. Three successive presidencies tried, without success, to crack the nut that is reforming the Dublin regulation. What is more, elections are coming up in Hungary and we have to wait and see how the incoming Austrian presidency will tackle the issue.
90. The elections in Italy on 4 March have demonstrated that a lack of European solidarity in the management of migration discredits the EU as well as the pro-European political parties. In my view, this has clearly contributed to the surge of the far right and the populists in Italy. As a result, it will be much harder to find European solutions on migration policy.
91. The Bulgarian EU presidency is making a lot of effort in order to finalise a balanced package by June. The aim is to have member states strictly apply the rules at the external borders and asylum seekers strictly apply the rules as well, in order to suppress so-called “secondary movements”. For countries such as Italy and Greece to be able to shoulder this burden – after all, their efforts are guaranteeing the correct functioning of the Schengen area – they have to be supported. It is very unfortunate that we have to talk about compulsory solidarity in the

first place. Solidarity is a fundamental pillar of the European Union. Unfortunately, many countries are simply viewing it as a one-way street. Responsibility and solidarity have to be promoted through financial support coming from the EU budget, through experts from EU agencies such as Frontex and EASO, through resettlements, and through automatic relocations within the member states.

92. The EU still comprises a majority of member states that want to guarantee the protection of the refugees. It is inadmissible that countries who do not want to help people because of the colour of their skin or of their religion are imposing their views on other member states. The EU is functioning according to democratic principles and the rule of law. Judgments from the Court of Justice have to be implemented, whether one likes them or not.
93. There is no way around it: we need a common European migration and refugee policy, as it is foreseen in the treaties! We can only manage migration if the definition of a refugee, the duration of the procedures, the reception conditions, and above all the welfare benefits and the acceptance rate are the same throughout Europe. In order to achieve this, we need a network of European courts, just like the one for the European patent, to guarantee that the acceptance rates for different nationalities are converging. As long as this is not the case, people will want to reach the countries where the chances of getting a positive answer for their asylum request are the highest or where they will be treated the best.
94. The solution is not a race to the bottom in Europe in order to be the least attractive country. Europe is and has to remain a sanctuary for people who need protection from persecution. I have said it before, and I will repeat it once more: the refugee burden has to be shared more fairly. A community like the EU has to be built on solidarity and fairness. This is why we are working so intensively on reforming the Dublin regulation and establishing clear criteria to determine which countries are competent for processing asylum applications.
95. There is no alternative to more solidarity. If the entry countries cannot cope with the crisis, there will be a lot of secondary movements. Other member states will react by introducing border controls, ultimately endangering Schengen. This is why I have constantly been pleading these last few years for a fair distribution of the asylum seekers within Europe.
96. We also have to see this from a wider perspective. We can gain a lot by working with certain partner countries who are not member states. I am thinking, for instance, of the associated states, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein, who have shown solidarity in the migration crisis, even though they were not legally obliged to do so. In these last few years, they have helped the EU by reinstalling or resettling over 7,000 persons. They have acted resolutely and out of solidarity. Some member states would do well to follow their example.

97. Beyond the EU, the international framework is also very important. The UN plans to adopt, by the end of 2018, a global compact for refugees as well as a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. Even though the United States have pulled out, and even though it will be difficult for the EU to act united, I hope that the discussions at the UN will give a positive momentum for the global management of migration, also in a European context.
98. Migration will continue to require a lot of attention from us over the next years, at the European level and at the international level. Problems will not be fewer, but we will see if we come out of this crisis stronger as an EU, and better prepared for the future. There is still a lot to do and a lot of convincing will certainly need to be done, if we want to act as one and create a common European asylum policy.
99. Only with a strong European Union will we be able to tackle these challenges.

#### **EUROPEAN UNION – FUTURE OF EUROPE**

100. The manner in which we treat the question of migration is very revealing of the health of Europe, very revealing as well as of our motivation to tackle difficult challenges together and solve them in a spirit of solidarity.

#### **Economic recovery, but much too high youth unemployment**

101. Let us take a look at the economic situation of the European Union: we are in a better position now than we were in a year ago. The trust of citizens in the European economy is higher than it has been for a long time. Growth figures have evolved positively, including in the Eurozone.
102. This positive trend can also be observed when it comes to the evolution of unemployment figures. Eurostat reports that over the course of one year, from 2016 to 2017, the number of those looking for a job has gone down by more than 1.5 million. This is welcome news, but let us not be complacent. There are still large differences from one member state to another, and the very high rate of youth unemployment is a ticking time bomb, not least because nationalist and populist movements – from the right and from the left – can gain political capital out of that situation.

#### **Food for thought**

103. After the declaration on the State of the Union by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and the seminal address on European policy by French President Emmanuel Macron at the Sorbonne, the debate on the future of the European Union is once again in full swing.

## **Dialogue on Europe with citizens**

104. Until the European elections due in 2019, the Council and the European Parliament will discuss the future of the European Union in all its manifold facets. Citizens will also be heard. As you know, the French President proposed to hold consultations with citizens all across the European Union. Almost all member states will take part. This initiative intends to give people the opportunity to share their expectations, wishes, proposals, and worries in the debate on the future of Europe. In Luxembourg, we will hold a number of discussions between May and June. The conclusions will be presented on 2 July, in the presence of Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans.

## **Franco-German engine**

105. Before I discuss some of the challenges facing the European Union, please allow me to say a few words about the Franco-German engine, which I hope will start again soon. Emmanuel Macron's call for a renewal of the European Union has been picked up by the new German government and included in its coalition programme. France and Germany, like Luxembourg, want to give a new impetus to the European Union, and to cooperate more closely on the major European issues. Closer cooperation at European level will also be enshrined in the new Elysée-Treaty between Germany and France. For the European Union, this means renewed energy towards a more independent and capable Europe.

## **Institutional issues – important but not urgent**

106. The Union is only capable of acting when its institutions are working well. For this reason, it is no wonder that we are once again debating a number of institutional reform proposals. I am not really convinced that we need many short-term changes, given the numerous urgent and substantial challenges we are facing.

107. In February, the European Parliament has pronounced itself clearly in favour of keeping the concept of the "Spitzenkandidaten" for the European elections of 2019. I welcome this decision, since it contributes to bringing the EU closer to its citizens. This was also one of the priorities of our Presidency in the year 2015. A definitive solution ought to be found in a dialogue between the European Council and the European Parliament. This must not lead to a frontal collision between the competencies of the European Parliament and the European Council, with the consequence that no decision is taken. As a decisive criterion, the Commission President should be supported by a broad majority in the European Parliament.

108. With regards to the introduction of so-called transnational lists, this would be an interesting idea and would be a good fit for our country, since we have always stood and continue to stand for a maximum of European integration. This idea is no longer considered for 2019.

109. Another institutional issue currently under debate is the restructuring of the European Parliament after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom in April 2019. The proposal on the table foresees among other things to reduce the number of MEPs from 751 to 705 and to redistribute 27 of the 73 British seats to 14 member states. We will support this proposal in the Council in June, because we believe that the so-called degressive proportionality remains guaranteed in this manner, and Luxembourg's seats do not lose any importance.
110. Other reform ideas, like for instance the proposal to reduce the number of EU Commissioners, or the proposal to merge the position of the President of the European Commission with that of the President of the European Council, risk changing the current institutional setup too much. We need to be careful not to upset the current inter-institutional balance. What is more, there is little political will among member states to go in the direction of treaty changes. At the same time, we need an open and honest discussion of these proposals concerning the long-term perspective of the EU. That is why Luxembourg will participate in this debate in a constructive manner.

### **Economic and Monetary Union**

111. In terms of economic and financial issues, we have come out of the crisis, and the current fair "weather conditions" allow us to look ahead and consider reforms for the Eurozone, which will get our common currency ready for the future.
112. The discussion about the deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union is not new. We have had this discussion since the EMU's inception, sometimes more often, sometimes less. Recently, the dynamic launched in 2015 with the publication of the report of the five Presidents, has intensified. After their food for thought paper of last May, the Commission tabled its new proposals on 6 December 2017 – on Saint Nicholas' Day. Some ideas are for immediate consumption, others will come in later. In parallel, there are intensive talks to complete the banking union, which will enable risk reduction in the European banking sector and allow for more solidarity. This is in the interest of the citizens, because it means that after the failure of a bank, the taxpayers will not be the ones who pick up the tab. On top of this, there are reflections to strengthen the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), which is based in Luxembourg, and upgrade it to a European Currency Fund. We believe that it is critical not to throw a functional system overboard in the short term until we can replace it with another one that has the support of everyone. This means inter alia that if we continue working on this in an intergovernmental manner, we should remain aware that this is in fact contrary to the Lisbon Treaty, according to which the community approach should be the rule and the intergovernmental approach the exception.
113. As concerns budgetary matters, we believe that it is not necessary to create a new budget exclusively for the Eurozone. The best solution to our mind would be the one flagged by the

Commission President, when he suggested to include a specific budget line in the EU budget, through which we can further strengthen investments in the European Union in the future.

114. For the moment, we can conclude that all important issues regarding reform ideas in the EU are discussed in a very superficial and abstract manner. This could change in short order, as of tomorrow, when the new German government gets to work. The Luxembourg government wishes to ensure that the well-being of Europe prevails in this debate both tactically and strategically.

### **European fiscal policy**

115. In European tax policy, a number of ideas have surfaced over the last months. I would like to name inter alia the proposal to introduce a common regulation of the corporate taxation of businesses at the European level.
116. It has to be clearly said that Luxembourg is not in favour of fiscal dumping, nor in favour of a race to the bottom through exaggerated low tax levels. In the same spirit, this government has supported steps, which will allow countering aggressive tax planning. I would like to refer you to the so-called ATAD, the “Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive”, which Luxembourg will transpose into national law in the coming months. Given the substantial efforts of our government over the last years, it should be possible to have a constructive dialogue with the Commission on this matter.
117. On the other hand, a coordination or even harmonisation of corporate tax rates would be a far-reaching development, which would have a substantial impact on the sovereignty of member states, because tax rules are specific to each EU state. Some for instance have high direct taxes and lower indirect taxes, like our country. For others the opposite is true.
118. In this debate, we should not forget either that the issue of the harmonisation of tax levels cannot be viewed in isolation. It is an issue, which exists within the more global debate of fiscal harmonisation within Europe. It bears repeating that the European Commission tabled ambitious plans as far back as 2016, to implement a harmonisation of the assessment base for corporate taxation across the EU. These discussions are ongoing, Luxembourg participates constructively, and the government expects to be able to continue the dialogue with the Chamber on this topic.
119. The proposals of the Commission on the harmonisation of corporate taxation have been made on the premise that the competency of member states to determine their own tax rates would not be affected by it. Against this backdrop, the idea of a coordination and harmonisation of tax rates is an entirely new development. The government is, however, cautious in this respect, in particular in the context of a potential harmonisation of the assessment basis.

120. Luxembourg is in favour of a fair and coherent taxation of international corporations, and has demonstrated this over the last few years, for example during discussions on BEPS. As concerns more specifically the taxation of digital activities, Luxembourg agrees that the current rules have still not been adapted to the reality of the internet. In this context, Luxembourg stands for a coherent approach, and for fair and equal conditions. Therefore, we ambition a solution at the level of the OECD. Such a solution would allow us not only to include the EU member states, but also the other major industrial nations, like Japan and the US. This is commensurate with the efforts that were undertaken at the international level over the last few years. And it is, most of all, in the interest of the European economy.

### **Social Europe**

121. One construction site, which has seen a lot of progress at the European level over the last months, is that of a social Europe. The Commission has rightly claimed the expansion of the social dimension of the internal market as its success and it has delivered on its promises, together with the Council and the European Parliament. Luxembourg is firmly committed to the expansion of this social dimension.

122. Freedom of movement of persons, goods, services, and capital are among the basic principles of the European Union, and I do not need to remind you that Luxembourg's economy would suffer most of all if these four freedoms were to fall prey to protectionist reflexes, and would subsist only on paper. For the internal market to lead to growth and greater choice of goods for the consumer, without social dumping, we need social minimum standards, which can be controlled by national authorities.

123. One example for the intensive legislative work is the fact that there is an agreement for the changes to be made on the Posting of Workers Directive. Luxembourg invested a lot of energy into an ambitious and achievable solution. This agreement primarily foresees that a posted employee receives the same salary, with bonuses and advantages from applicable collective agreements, as an employee doing the same job, but living in the country in which the work is executed. For the transport sector, which is by definition mobile, work is ongoing on a specific solution. Here again, Luxembourg is working on a socially ambitious agreement, and emphasises control measures to avoid cheating, trickery, and abuses.

124. At the end of last year, the Council, the Parliament, and the Commission, adopted a so-called "Pillar of social rights", which lays down a number of rights and principles, applicable in the entire EU, from labour conditions to social security and pensions, all the way to training and equal opportunities. Now, we need to implement these principles in practice. Here we expect the necessary legislative and non-legislative proposals from the current Commission and from the next one.

125. A word, then, on the revision of the regulation on the coordination of social security systems. The Commission's proposal aims for a paradigm shift with regards to allowances and unemployment benefits for cross-border workers. The idea that a cross-border worker should in the future depend on the ADEM when they lose their job, is particularly problematic in the sense that the ADEM is unable to verify whether these non-residents fulfil the conditions to receive the Luxembourgish benefits throughout the period of their unemployment. What the Commission is proposing here is not going to be easy to implement and this government has been working hard and will continue to work hard to find a solution that can be implemented in practice.

### **New financial framework**

126. Among the challenges that the European Union is facing are the negotiations about the financial framework for the period following 2020. Because of Brexit, we will lose the contribution of the United Kingdom, which in 2016 represented more than 12 billion euros. And this at a stage where the European Union is facing great challenges: digitalisation, migration, defence, security, to name only those areas. Without the necessary means, the European Union cannot achieve its goals. For this reason, we must labour for a future-proof and efficient financial framework. Each member state needs to take its responsibilities and contribute. This means that the Luxembourg government is also ready to pay more if we are convinced that this increase in the European budget is serving the European interest.

127. At the moment, there are intense discussions about conditioning access to European funds. Among these ideas is to make access to the Cohesion Funds contingent on the respect of the principles of the rule of law. Another idea would be to go towards a more positive conditionality and to help those member states that, for instance, take in more refugees than others. We must avoid a situation where the actual purpose of the European cohesion policy would be undermined. The aim of the cohesion policy is to bring EU member states together – in the EU jargon, this is called “convergence” – and to reduce economic disparities. This instrument must remain in place. By linking the benefit of structural and cohesion funds to the rule of law, we would be taking the wrong path and we would punish the wrong people. But to remain silent while member states are trampling upon the most elementary principles of solidarity is not an option either.

128. We need a solution that respects the principle of solidarity, without which our Union cannot function. I have hinted at it a few times: solidarity must once again become the main ambition of the Union. When member states refrain from European solidarity for short-term national political gains, we are moving into the wrong direction. With a mechanism of positive solidarity in favour of the countries that invest in refugee policy, and with more drastic

penalties – as outlined by the European Court of Justice – for those who could not care less, we would be going into the right direction.

### **Rule of law**

129. No less important than solidarity are our shared core values and the principles of the rule of law, as defined in Article 2 of the EU treaty. Without the respect of these core values, we cannot comprehend the European Union as a union of values. Every citizen benefits from the unimpeded rule of law. In certain member states, the principles of the rule of law have regrettably been put into doubt for a while now. I am talking about member states who no longer respect the Copenhagen criteria – the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which we are celebrating this year.
130. As a reaction to the problems related to the situation of the rule of law in Poland, the European Commission initiated the Article 7 procedure last December. The Commission has so far published four recommendations in total, which prove in detail that there is a clear danger of a severe violation of the rule of law in Poland. In addition, the Commission of Venice of the Council of Europe, which, as you know, is composed of eminent legal experts, has reached the same conclusions. Together with the other countries that belong to the Group of Friends of the Rule of Law, we support the Commission in its actions and continue to rely on dialogue with Poland, in the hope that the Polish government will change course and re-establish the independence of the judiciary. If this were not the case – and the Polish Parliament waved through the contested reform of the judiciary just last week – then we must apply the mechanism of Article 7. I welcome that there is a dialogue between Poland and the Commission now, which was not the case for many months. However I do not see any progress on substance. The White Paper on justice reform published last week by the Polish government does not alter this assessment.
131. In Hungary, unspeakable things are happening: organisations that are helping refugees are criminalised! Alas, Hungary is also moving fast towards Article 7.
132. In the EU, every citizen deserves the guarantee that they live in a democracy in which everyone can express their opinion, where everyone has a right to free media, to independent judges, where the separation of powers is respected, and where everything related to fundamental human rights is in 100% conformity with the EU Treaties and with international law. This is the cement that keeps the EU together as a peace project: it must not crumble.

### **Brexit**

133. Almost a year ago, the British government took the decision to leave the European Union. It is clear that there will be no winners from Brexit. We are in a “lose-lose” situation. We will

have to shape the future of the European Union without the Brits, but hopefully that does not apply to the future of Europe. It would be desirable for the United Kingdom to remain an important partner after its exit.

134. Since the week before last, the withdrawal agreement has been tabled, containing the results of the first phase of exit negotiations about citizens' rights, Ireland, and the Union's finances. This text is due to be signed in autumn, before its ratification by the British and European Parliaments. It also contains the regulation of the transition period, which is due to last from 30 March 2019 to 31 December 2020. During this time, the United Kingdom would remain in the internal market, retain the same obligations as an EU member state, but no longer be represented in the EU institutions; in Brussels jargon, this is called "everything but institutions".
135. The withdrawal agreement regulates the rights of citizens who make use of their right to free movement before the end of the transition period. Many questions have been answered, but some important elements are still in need of clarification. The current version of the text would mean that British citizens who move to Luxembourg until the end of the transition phase would, after the transition phase, lose their right to work in another EU country or offer services from Luxembourg. Their freedom of movement would be limited to Luxembourg alone. In the Luxembourg context in particular, this wouldn't make much sense.
136. Concerning the issue of the Irish border, the EU27 have agreed with the Brits that a hard border on the Irish island must be avoided and that the Good Friday Agreement must be protected. A protocol attached to the first version of the withdrawal agreement presents a solution to the issue of Northern Ireland. This solution stipulates that Northern Ireland has to apply European rules on goods. This solution only applies when the Irish question cannot be resolved within our future relationship with the United Kingdom or through another specific solution. The EU27 stand ready to listen to British proposals for specific solutions. All of these proposals must however be compatible with the integrity of the internal market and the customs union.
137. As concerns the future partnership with the United Kingdom, much work remains to be done. The broad lines and the content of the new agreement are supposed to be written down in a declaration that is to be attached to the withdrawal agreement. The Conclusions of the Heads of State and Government of the EU27 this month will provide the basis for this.
138. Last week, in Luxembourg, President Tusk presented his proposal for the future relationship with the United Kingdom. He proposes continued cooperation in the fight against international terrorism and transnational organised crime, an agreement to ensure that air traffic does not collapse, as well as access to EU Programmes in the fields of research,

innovation, education, and culture. As concerns future economic relations, the President of the European Council recommends negotiating a free trade agreement and a customs union.

139. The prospective shape of our future economic relations is based on announcements made by the British government about what it wants and what it does not want, as well as on the desire of the EU27 to ensure that a country which has left the internal market and the customs union will not be better off than a member state.
140. The Brits want to conduct an autonomous trade and regulatory policy; they want to regain control over their borders, as well as over the influx of persons. More than anything, they want to keep their distance from the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union.
141. Luxembourg's position is as follows: yes, we want to maintain a close relationship with the United Kingdom, but also of importance is the preservation of the integrity of the internal market, as well as of our European and Luxembourgish competitiveness – especially that of our financial centre. Therefore, we oppose all forms of “cherry picking”: access to the internal market is only possible if a third state makes clear commitments in the field of regulation and thus also accepts the authority of the EU Court of Justice.
142. There can however be no cherry picking on the side of the EU either: every member state has a particular domain to which it attaches more importance than to others. The principle of solidarity among the 27 is indispensable: in the future agreement with the UK, the specific desiderata of all member states must be taken care of. In the case of Luxembourg, this includes financial services.
143. Yes, Brexit is a challenge. We are running a little bit out of time. Businesses, citizens, and administrations need to prepare for all sorts of scenarios. A “no deal” scenario is not off the table yet. Notwithstanding this, I am confident that we can find a common solution.

### **Enlargement**

144. Some want out, others want in... Accession negotiations are underway with three of the five candidate countries, with Serbia, Montenegro, and, at least on paper since 2005, with Turkey.
145. In April, the Commission will indicate, in the context of the enlargement package, whether the other two candidate countries, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Albania, fulfil the conditions for the start of negotiations.
146. Every Balkan country must be given a credible prospect of accession, including Bosnia and Kosovo. It is also abundantly clear that the accession process is an individualised process and

that the respect of the accession conditions is paramount. I have visited almost every country in the Western Balkans last year to gain an understanding of the state of play of ongoing reforms.

147. In February, the European Commission presented its new strategy for the region. After the publication of the enlargement package in April, the implementation of the new strategy will be launched at the Sofia Summit in May.
148. With regard to Turkey, there is nothing to report concerning accession. At the moment, nothing is being negotiated, no comma and no period. I have explained why. On 26 March, there will be an EU-Turkey summit in Varna. If this conversation can break the ice, all the better. But the President of Turkey needs to turn his promises into concrete progress in the field of human rights. To say it plainly: open the gates of the prisons, close the gates of the state of injustice. Otherwise we will not be able to move an inch forward.
149. Like 95% of the member states and the Commission, Luxembourg is not in favour of a formal suspension of the accession process, as it is important for us not to slam the door in the face of civil society in this country.

### **Trade policy**

150. After 2016, the year of the signature of CETA, 2017 was a quiet year when it came to trade policy. You know that the Government of Belgium asked the Court of Justice of the EU whether the Investment Court System (ICS) is compatible with the Treaty of Lisbon. We will need to wait for the judgment of the Court, before we can move on to the ratification of CETA.
151. The issue of investment protection had more judicial consequences for European trade policy in 2017. In May 2017, the Court of Justice of the EU in Luxembourg decided that the trade agreement with Singapore is a joint competence of the Union and its member states, precisely because of the clauses on investment protection and certain types of indirect investments included in the agreement. As a consequence, the Commission has proposed to split up future trade agreements: into, on the one hand, a trade agreement that will only need to be ratified by the European Parliament; and, on the other hand, an investment treaty to be ratified by the European, the regional, and the national Parliaments.
152. This new Commission approach has not yet been formally accepted by all member states. Most member states acknowledge that the European Union is responsible for European trade policy, and that the proposals of the Commission in this sense respect the spirit of the EU treaties and the democratic legitimacy of the European Parliament. This is not to say that the national parliaments should no longer be involved. The Commission has committed to keep national and regional parliaments “perfectly” – the word used by Jean-Claude Juncker –

informed about the negotiations of bilateral agreements. If we do opt for split agreements, we also need to ensure that cooperation with member states' parliaments is fully implemented.

153. On top of this, the Commission has decided to publish all draft terms of reference, and also has called on the Council to publish the terms of reference that it has adopted.
154. The publication of the terms of reference, including those that have been adopted by the Council, is something I have been calling for, for a long time. We desperately need more transparency in our trade policy, and I welcome the Commission's decision in this matter. At this stage, I would like to commend the work and commitment of Commissioner Malmström, who has invested herself personally for the necessary transparency and contact with regional and national parliaments.
155. In principle, I would be glad to talk about the successes of a multilateral trade policy which works for everyone, and first and foremost for the poorest countries. However, unfortunately, the results are extremely disappointing in this field. In December, the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation took place in Buenos Aires. Alas, we can only say that this was a missed opportunity to reboot world trade and make it more inclusive. Apart from a few small decisions, member states were unable to find an agreement about the future of the World Trade Organisation in Buenos Aires.
156. However, we need a World Trade Organisation more than ever. Global trade has to be regulated within a multilateral framework. The alternative is chaos, and the law of the strong imposing their trade policy on the weak. The US is currently blocking the nomination of new judges. If this continues, the World Trade Organisation's Dispute Settlement Body will no longer be able to function.
157. The tendency of the US Administration to attempt to regulate matters unilaterally, without dialogue or consideration for friends and allies, has gotten dramatically worse over the last few days. Nobody has failed to notice that President Trump not only announced drastic measures in the sectors of steel and aluminium, but also implemented them last Thursday. The EU has declared its readiness to react in a determined and measured way, in full respect of the rules of the World Trade Organisation. We must not allow ourselves to be provoked needlessly and to be pushed towards a trade war; on the other hand, we must defend our interests.
158. In this context, the Commission has identified three options. First, it is paramount that we issue a complaint to the World Trade Organisation, with the objective to get the US measures declared incompatible with trade law. This will take a while. Therefore, the second option will aim to offset the billions in damages to our industry in the coming months by the adoption of

measures against American imports, in full compliance with the laws and procedures of the WTO. These measures will concern steel, but also certain emblematic industrial and agricultural productions. Thirdly, we need to ensure that the European market is not inundated with products that can no longer be sold in America. This will be done through the implementation of provisional “safeguard measures” on steel and aluminium.

159. Luxembourg’s steel industry is concerned for about 10% of our steel exports. For this reason, we still hope that the US government will come to realise that as a long-term partner, objectively speaking, Europe not only does not pose any danger, but can also help, in particular by looking for solutions to resolve the problem of steel overcapacity. However, a first exchange of views in Brussels last Saturday did not bear fruit, and the US President appears to want to force a change in the EU import rights.
160. This is unacceptable. If the American administration continues to exclude an exception for Europe, we will stand united behind the Commission to guarantee the interests of Luxembourg and Europe.
161. We must not forget how protectionism and trade wars have caused global harm and how they have often triggered conflicts.

### **Foreign Policy in the EU’s Neighbourhood**

162. Since we are talking about conflicts, unfortunately we have to look to the EU’s Eastern neighbourhood, toward **Ukraine and Russia**. More than 10,000 people have lost their lives since 2014 in battles in Eastern Ukraine, and more than 23,000 have been injured. I am extremely worried about the scale of the violence, which has become a permanent feature of life in this region. A year ago, I was able to see the situation in the Donbass for myself. As always, it is the civilian population which has to suffer the most on both sides of the contact line. The repeated destruction of vital civilian infrastructures, the bombing of dwellings, all of this is unacceptable. In Eastern Ukraine, an entire generation is growing up for whom violence is becoming a normal part of life.
163. Luxembourg supports **Ukraine’s** territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, its sovereignty, and its unity. We support all efforts, in particular those in the Normandy format and the trilateral contact group of the OSCE to steer the situation in the right direction. Of course, we need to see additional progress in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.
164. Since the beginning of the conflict, the Luxembourg government has contributed more than 1.7 million euros in terms of aid for humanitarian projects in Ukraine, mostly for sanitary

infrastructure and projects that benefit children. We will continue to support the OSCE mission.

165. 2017 was an important year for the deepening of the relations between Ukraine and the European Union: the association agreement and the free trade agreement have officially entered into force, and the visa requirement for Ukrainians was abolished. By doing this, the EU has acknowledged the reform progress in Ukraine. But our Ukrainian neighbours still have a very long way to go: in terms of combatting corruption, and on justice reform, there is a lot more to do. It seems as though the enthusiasm resolutely to push reforms forward has dwindled somewhat. This can partly be explained by the fact that there will be elections in Ukraine next year. And yet, the Ukrainian government will need to take its responsibilities. I would also kindly recommend to the Ukrainian government to implement the recommendations of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe on the new education law.
166. Concerning our relationship with **Russia**, I would like to begin with our bilateral relations, which will soon be 127 years old. Our cooperation with Russia concerns a number of areas, from cultural and academic cooperation to industry and new technology. We have also cooperated on a darker chapter of our shared history. This summer, our national archives will receive the digitised files of the Luxembourg forced recruits of the Second World War from Tambov; last year, Russia presented us with archives on the anniversary of the Treaty of London.
167. On the European level, nothing has changed. The sanctions, which the EU has decreed against 150 individuals and 38 entities in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, were renewed yesterday. The economic sanctions will prospectively run out at the end of July. In June, the European Council will discuss their renewal. I cannot prejudge the decision that will be taken. I can just note that there is no positive element to report.
168. Russia is a very important partner of the European Union, an important European country, a member of the Council of Europe and of the OSCE, but Russia also has to play by the rules and respect international law. I am worried when the United States and Russia, two key countries for global peace, not only disregard rules, but keep drifting further apart from each other. This is not good, neither for the world, nor for Europe.
169. After the East, let me turn now to our **Southern Neighbourhood**.
170. Seven years after Ben Ali fled Tunisia and the so-called “Arab Spring” was declared, the situation in the region is more worrying than ever. In early February, I visited **Tunisia**, where the democratic transition has been successfully achieved. But democracy stands on shaky

foundations as long as the situation of the economy is not improving. We wish therefore to deepen our cooperation with Tunisia.

171. Many countries in the Near and Middle East – Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Qatar, to name only those – are directly affected by the decades-old **rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran**. Unfortunately, this rivalry is escalating in a dangerous manner. What is at stake is predominance in the region. It is a political conflict, not a religious one between Sunni and Shia, even though religion can always be abused for political reasons. I hope that mediation, especially by Kuwait and Oman, can manage to de-escalate the situation.
172. Peace and security of the EU depend very strongly on the developments in this region. We must cooperate with our partners to tackle the common threats we face. This is the case notably for the **fight against terrorism**, which we must pursue together, with resolute determination, but without jeopardising our values and the rule of law.
173. Three months ago, the Prime Minister of **Iraq** announced that his country was completely liberated from Daesh, after a three-year long campaign.
174. In those three years, more than 18,000 Iraqis have lost their lives. Large parts of Iraq have been laid to waste. Even though Iraq had the support of the Global Coalition, of which Luxembourg is also a member, it is the Iraqis who sacrificed the most, for their country, but also for all of us.
175. In order to underscore our solidarity with Iraq and in the fight against terrorism, I participated in **two conferences in Kuwait** in February: the meeting of the Global Coalition, where we discussed progress in the campaign against Daesh, and the conference for the reconstruction of Iraq. Luxembourg contributes through humanitarian assistance and demining, in cooperation with our UN partners, in order to build a sound foundation for the reconstruction in Iraq.
176. Reconstruction also has a political and socio-economic dimension. The Iraqi Prime Minister has announced that the next great challenge will be the fight against corruption.
177. If terrorism is to be denied its fertile soil in Iraq, there needs to be progress in terms of national reconciliation and political reforms. After the significant political damage caused by the Kurdish referendum on independence, Baghdad and Erbil need to find a settlement. Both parties can build on the good cooperation between the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Iraqi troops, which was instrumental in the defeat of Daesh in Mosul.

## AFRICA

178. Our neighbourhood also includes **Africa**. In its dynamism and its diversity, the African continent is an extremely important partner for Europe and for Luxembourg. Our security and our well-being are closely intertwined. There are currently 1.2 billion people living in Africa; there will be 2.5 billion in the year 2050. Half the African population is under 18 years of age. In 2030, this figure will climb to two thirds. This trend harbours a lot of potential and challenges.
179. The fifth Summit between the European Union and the African Union, in November of last year in Abidjan, rightly put youth centre stage. A number of priority areas were identified, where we would like to collaborate more closely over the coming years, in order to open better perspectives to African youth: alongside peacebuilding, governance and mobility, these include investment in education, science, and technological progress. Luxembourg has something to offer in these areas.
180. Sustainable peace and prosperity are only possible when the rule of law and human rights are respected. In these two areas, young people in many African countries demand ever more from the political class, and rightly so.
181. There are many crises in Africa, and every effort must be made to resolve them and to prevent new ones from emerging. Prevention is key. In this context, we are worried about the discussions in South Africa about expropriation of farmers without financial compensation.
182. On the other hand, it gives us hope to see that the continental and regional institutions, from the African Union to regional organisations, play an active role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts.
183. The **G5 Sahel** is a good example of such an active role. The five countries of the Sahel Region – Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad – have joined up to tackle their common challenges together. On 6 February, I had the opportunity to take part in the G5 Sahel Summit in Niamey, Niger: I was impressed by the determination of my African colleagues to get to grips with the security situation in the region.
184. In less than a year, they have managed to put together a cross-border joint force and to conduct their first operations on the border between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. When it reaches full operational readiness, this force is supposed to better control the borders between the five countries and thus to contribute to the fight against terrorism, organised crime, and smuggling. The terrorist attack, which struck the centre of Ouagadougou on 2 March underscored once again, alas, the gravity of the terrorist threat.

185. Together with the UN, the EU, and other international partners, Luxembourg is supporting the G5 Sahel. Here we are applying our tried-and-trusted “3D” approach: the resources of diplomacy, development, and defence are brought to bear in a complementary manner. Last year alone, this represented an effort of roughly 100 million euros. On top of our long-standing commitment to the Sahel in terms of development cooperation, we are also active in the context of the European Security and Defence Policy, and we have decided to bolster the G5 Sahel Joint Force with medical equipment and training worth 1.1 million euros. And since we are convinced that Mali is playing a central role in the region, we also specifically support the peace process in this country.

## **ASIA**

186. The relations with the **Asian continent** are also very important for the European Union and for us. We are now represented by five embassies in Asia; they cover a total of 15 Asian countries, as well as the Secretariat of ASEAN, the Association of South-East Asian Nations, based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

187. Last November, there was a State visit to **Japan** in the context of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our diplomatic relations. This was a great honour for Luxembourg, because it was one of the last State visits received by Emperor Akihito, before he will leave the throne to his successor in April 2019.

188. Our relations with **China**, the largest economic partner of Luxembourg in Asia, have continued to develop well, also in the context of the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our diplomatic relations, which we celebrated last year.

189. Our contacts with China are extremely diverse and cover many different areas. This was underlined by a number of high-level visits last year, and already at the beginning of this year as well. I myself was able to meet with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in November in Myanmar, to take stock of our bilateral relations.

190. One aspect of our diverse relations is also that, as a member of the EU, and in the fora of the United Nations, we are talking with China about human rights.

191. Dialogue is important and Luxembourg’s diplomacy will continue to work to strengthen the political, economic, and cultural relations with China.

192. In the Asian region, we must not forget our important political and economic relations with **India**. Without a doubt, we will also strengthen our cooperation with countries like **Indonesia**, **Malaysia**, **Singapore**, and **Thailand**.

193. **North Korea** continues to represent a major danger for the region and beyond, for international peace and stability, under the regime of Kim Jong-un. We need to maintain pressure on North Korea with sanctions, but also leave the door open for dialogue in order to bring about a peaceful solution.
194. During the Olympic Winter Games in Pyeongchang, we observed a rapprochement between South and North Korea. Now, a summit between the South Korean president and the North Korean leader has been planned for the end of April. With all due caution, it would be most welcome if this third inter-Korean summit since the end of the Korean War could take place. This also applies for the summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, which has been announced for May. We must hope that it can lead to a multilateral dialogue, which would lead to the complete nuclear disarmament of North Korea. The engagement of China and America will be a crucial factor here.

### **AMERICA / LATIN AMERICA**

195. I have just mentioned **America**.
196. Unfortunately, what many of us had feared has come to pass over the last months. The United States are progressively withdrawing from multilateral fora. Thus, the American administration has announced its intention to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement. The Americans will also no longer participate in the negotiations, at the level of the UN, on a Global Compact for safe, orderly, and regular Migration. This Administration has little interest in the definition and defence of the multilateral rules that we have established together since the end of World War II; those rules are intended, notably in the context of free trade agreements, to create shared wealth for each party, in full respect of common values. On the contrary, President Trump and his Administration increasingly follow the “America First” agenda.
197. This presents new challenges for the transatlantic partnership, to which we remain 100% committed. Despite those difficulties, we must now more than ever proactively engage in dialogue with the American administration.
198. On the American continent, I would, however, also like to underline our partnership with countries from Latin America, in particular with **Mexico, Chile**, and with **Mercosur**. The European Union wishes to deepen these strategic partnerships through new political and economic agreements, which anchor our democratic and social values at the international level.
199. The Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and **Cuba** has been applied since last year. This Chamber has ratified it in January 2018. The agreement opens up

a new chapter in the relations between the EU and Cuba, by enabling collaboration through political dialogue and cooperation on important matters like human rights or economic reforms. This is all the more important at a time where cohesion on the basis of shared values has also suffered in Latin America, because of the situation in **Venezuela**.

200. Venezuela continues its descent into an autocratic regime under Nicolas Maduro, who, since last August, has monopolised all three constitutional powers. The humanitarian situation is becoming ever more precarious. The EU has been supporting initiatives to establish dialogue between the government and the opposition, and is using sanctions for leverage at the same time. It is vital that we, as the EU, stand together in support of a democratic future for Venezuela.
201. There are also more positive developments in Latin America. Among those is without a doubt the peace process in **Colombia**, which is progressing, despite a number of obstacles. We need to keep an eye on the presidential elections in the coming months. They will be a critical moment. Luxembourg has renewed its support to the peace process this year with a contribution to a project promoting transitional justice in Colombia. We continue to contribute to the EU Trust Fund for Colombia.
202. With the opening of our embassy in Brasilia, our first embassy on the South American continent, Luxembourg wishes to deepen its political and economic ties with Brazil and the region. Brazil is vast as a continent. It is a region which is of growing importance to Luxembourg businesses operating abroad, and with which we share historic ties, also through the history of Luxembourg's steel industry. There are many Brazilians of Luxembourgish origin nowadays, who are proud of their roots and who actively participate in giving fresh impetus to the relations with Luxembourg. At the inauguration of our embassy on 1 March 2018, I myself could experience these dynamic relationships and gain an understanding of the rich connexions we have with Brazil.

## **SECURITY**

203. For the transatlantic Partnership and our security, **NATO** is playing a central role. The Summits of Wales in 2014 and Warsaw in 2016 have paved the way. Luxembourg is playing its part in collective defence. We have actively participated in reassurance activities, notably by stationing a Luxembourg contingent in Lithuania. We will continue to do so.
204. In the **EU**, an important step forward was made at the end of last year. Luxembourg helped launch the permanent structured cooperation (**PESCO**). We are thus among the countries working towards more cooperation in European defence. This step was necessary to develop our investments, our research, and our capacities as Europeans in a more coordinated and

effective manner. For Luxembourg, there is no doubt that a stronger EU defence also strengthens NATO.

205. I want to point out once again that we should not focus on the issue of the 2%. Security is more than just a matter of defence. When Luxembourg invests 1% of its GNI in official development assistance and humanitarian aid, it is also making a contribution to security. If many countries did likewise, we would have far fewer conflicts in the world.
206. In the spirit of the “3D” approach, we also continue to participate in civilian and military mission. Be it a demining expert in Afghanistan, a police officer in Niger, a patrol aircraft over the Mediterranean, a non-commissioned officer in the EU Training Mission in Mali or capacities for satellite communication: Luxembourg does contribute in concrete terms and is considered to be a responsible and supportive stakeholder by its partners.
207. Being responsible also means striving for a **safer world with fewer weapons**. This is what Luxembourg does.
208. In the coming months, a new law will enter into force, which will modernise our national framework for export controls for sensitive goods. Henceforth, a joint decision by the Minister of the Economy and the Foreign Minister will be necessary to ensure that military equipment or other sensitive goods are not transported via Luxembourg to locations where there is a risk that they could be used for violations of international law.
209. This is in line with our obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty.

## **BENELUX AND INSTITUTIONS IN LUXEMBOURG**

210. Trade, export, transit: in spite of globalization, the bilateral relations with our neighbouring countries remain very important. You know that the **Benelux Union** is celebrating 60 years this year. In the Union we are making sure that our three countries focus their cooperation on sectors which bring a concrete added value for our citizens. Together with the Ministry of the Economy, we are working to abolish territorial restrictions, which disadvantage our retailers in Luxembourg abroad.
211. Joint Benelux visits and declarations clearly show that we have more influence together and can effect change. Benelux should continue to play its role as a European laboratory. We must however be mindful that divergences can exist between the Benelux countries, inter alia when it comes to issues of EU reform. Case in point: the Dutch position on the EU post-2020 financial framework. Luxembourg does not share that position.

212. In the 60<sup>th</sup> year of the Benelux Union, Luxembourg has been able to host a joint institution for the first time: the **Benelux Court of Justice**. This is coherent with the development of an international competence centre in the field of justice in Luxembourg and mirrors the increasing importance of this court.
213. Through its *politique du siège*, Luxembourg continues to work on consolidating and developing the presence of those European and international institutions, which have their seat in Luxembourg.
214. With the European Commission, we are working on the implementation of the agreement I had concluded at the end of 2015 with Commissioner Georgieva. In said agreement, we had concluded inter alia that the Commission would expand its presence in three areas: in financial, judicial, and digital affairs. This agreement is important for Luxembourg. We see a lot of complementarity with the development of our economy and Luxembourg as a dynamic location. The adoption of the regulation for the creation of the European prosecutor's office last year – in which Luxembourg was confirmed as the host country – is another good piece of news for the Grand Duchy. Alongside the European Court of Justice and the General Court, the judicial centre in Luxembourg is thereby strengthened.
215. 2018 is also an important year for NSPA, the NATO Agency, which has its headquarters in Capellen. It will celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, as well as the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its presence in Luxembourg. We are proud to host the NSPA. It is an Agency with a lot of potential going forward, and our cooperation is excellent.

## **ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY**

216. Luxembourg's diplomacy is at the service of the country, its citizens, and its companies. It thus makes a contribution to the development of our economy.
217. It is also in the spirit of a dynamic "Economic diplomacy" that we manage our network of embassies, consulates, trade and investment offices, the LTIOs, which report to the Ministry of the Economy. We now have bilateral embassies in 32 countries. On top of this, there are our Permanent Representations to the multilateral organisations, the co-accreditations of our embassies, our non-resident Ambassadors, our General Consulates, our Honorary Consuls and external economy advisers. I want to underline here that our collaborators in the entire network are working with a lot of commitment.
218. Our economic diplomacy is pursuing very concrete aims. In the context of my visit to Lima, at the end of 2017, the Peruvian authorities agreed to strike Luxembourg off their black list, a decision that then took effect in January this year. There have been similarly positive results with Armenia. Such demarches are important for the international image of Luxembourg and

have an impact on the conditions under which our companies can operate abroad. The Foreign Ministry will continue to work on these goals in the future.

## CONCLUSION

219. Contrary to popular opinion, diplomacy is not the art of beating around the bush. A good diplomat is not someone, who thinks twice before saying nothing, as a former British Prime Minister once put it. Diplomacy needs honesty and a solid amount of straight talking. Dialogue – which is at the heart of diplomacy and foreign policy – can only work when you are prepared to say things clearly, in straightforward language, when you are also ready sometimes to convey uncomfortable truths.
220. At the same time, you need to be able to stomach criticism yourself. This also applies to Luxembourg. Two months ago, I was in Geneva, where I presented our national report for our Universal Periodic Review. Many country representatives intervened to salute the progress made by our government and its different administrations. A good few constructive recommendations were also made on how we can improve our policies for the promotion and protection of human rights in Luxembourg. We will take this advice into account in order to make progress in this very important domain.
221. Luxembourg depends on a multilateral system, which functions according to the rule of law. And we want to continue assuming our responsibilities within this system, to promote our values and human rights.
222. This month, Luxembourg will join the “Equal Rights Coalition”, upon the invitation of Chile and Canada: the coalition is a group of countries working for the defence of the rights of LGBTI persons. Our membership is an international recognition of our engagement in this field.
223. We also plan to adopt a national action plan for the implementation of the UN guiding principles on business and human rights this year.
224. From March 2019 to March 2020, Luxembourg will hold the Presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Our Presidency will be marked by the commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. At a time, in which the last survivors of the Second World War are leaving us, we want to help and make sure that the memories and lessons from the Shoah do live on.
225. As you know, Luxembourg presented its candidacy to become for the first time in its history a full member of the UN Human Rights Council in 2022-2024. We aim to be a reliable, committed, and courageous member of this highest UN body for human rights.

226. Our very positive experience on the UN Security Council in 2013-2014 will be helpful in this regard. This experience has also prompted Luxembourg to present its candidature for a new mandate on the Security Council, for the years 2031-2032.
227. As you can see, Luxembourg's diplomacy focuses not only on the crises of today, but also on the long term. The strength of our foreign policy, to my mind, lies in its continuity on substance, its continuity in terms of commitment. Parliament also contributes to this, in the form of parliamentary diplomacy. I would like therefore to thank you all for your efforts.
228. This summer, Nelson Mandela would have celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. "Madiba" inspired through his courage, and the dignity with which he fought and defeated the Apartheid regime in South Africa. The following motto is often associated with Nelson Mandela and fits well with his life's work: "It always seems impossible until it's done."
229. So much remains to be done for the world to spin the way it should. But with the right attitude, so much is possible.

Thank you for your attention.