



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

to the Luxembourg Parliament
on 13 March 2019

Check against delivery

FOREIGN POLICY ADDRESS

Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen Members of Parliament,

1. Today is the thirteenth time that I have the honour to deliver to the Chamber of Deputies the Declaration on the Foreign Policy of the Luxembourg government, in which I shall outline the principles, objectives, and challenges of our foreign policy and which, as always, I am looking forward to debating with you.
2. If you re-read my previous declarations, you will notice that there is a clear continuity in terms of the principles and objectives of our diplomacy, as there should be. However, the world is ceaselessly changing, and we must continually question our ability to meet these new challenges. In December last year, we adopted the new coalition agreement as the foundation of this government.
3. Now, we must tackle the issues awaiting us with renewed vigour. Energy and enthusiasm are needed, today more so than ever. I, for one, am looking forward to continuing to put my experience and the many insights I have gained as Foreign Minister in the last almost 15 years at the service of the interests of our citizens, our country, and, consequently also, Europe.
4. We have no time to lean back and revert to “business as usual”. Metaphorically speaking, I would say that we are in the midst of a very difficult mountain stage. There is a strong headwind, the rain is pouring down and the road is getting slippery. Ideal conditions, that is, for those who, as cyclists or politicians, will not be intimidated, who refuse to give up and who summon all their strength and motivation to conquer the mountain and reach the finishing line.
5. What is the aim of Luxembourg’s foreign policy? What are our principles and values?

6. The aim of our foreign policy was and remains to defend the interests of our country and its citizens; that is, to guarantee our sovereignty, independence, freedom, and peace, to further the prosperity of our country and improve the wellbeing of our society. Admittedly, this may sound somewhat selfish. But we know that a country like Luxembourg cannot achieve its aims on its own, and that it is only in the framework of a strong Europe and a world order based on the rule of law that we can “remain what we are” and simultaneously develop as a peaceful, economically dynamic and socially just country. Therefore, universal values such as freedom, human rights, human dignity, democracy, and the rule of law are inextricably linked with our interests. Which is why we will always be committed to championing these values, at home, in Europe, and beyond.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. This year, even more so than in previous years, I want to put the focus of my declaration on Europe. Elections to the European Parliament are due on 26 May. These elections will be critical. The future of the European Union is at stake – no less.
8. I will of course look beyond Europe as well. Just as we support a stronger and more solidary European Union, so too are we committed to a stronger multilateralism and more efficient international institutions – not because we are naive idealists, but because we know from our own history that blind nationalism, the weakening of international organisations and the lack of respect for rules grounded in international law sooner or later lead to war, suffering and misery.
9. “Nationalism is war”, François Mitterrand famously declared in January 1995 before the European Parliament in Strasbourg. His assessment is more relevant than ever in 2019!

Europe, European Union

10. At present, the European Union is not in the best of shape. We are faced with a whole series of internal and external challenges and threats that must prompt us to reconsider our approach.
11. From within, we are confronted with political tendencies that suggest easy solutions to complex problems, spread lies about what the EU is and what it is not, play on people's fears, challenge our common values and promise a better future outside the EU, but which to this day have not proposed a credible plan on how they intend to deliver on their promises.
12. From outside, we are confronted with a questioning of the international multilateral system, with actors disregarding international law and indifferent to our democratic values, and who advocate an aggressive trade policy, and with information campaigns aimed at weakening our democratic systems from within.
13. We should not allow the future of our common European project to be jeopardised. Too many things have been achieved to let this happen. These tendencies must be opposed in a consistent manner.
14. On the other hand, it would be irresponsible to pretend that everything is going fine. Citizens have legitimate expectations of their national governments and the EU, and they are entitled to be taken seriously.
15. 2019 is probably the year in which, for the first time, a Member State will leave the EU. Brexit will undoubtedly mark an important disruption in the EU's history, because it shows that European integration is not an automatic process and that the European engine also has a reverse gear.
16. In that sense, the European elections are an important moment for democracy on our continent, as citizens get to decide where the common journey should lead us, and one can only hope for a high turnout.

17. Following last year's citizen consultations, the Luxembourg government has decided to further intensify the debate on Europe, including through citizens' consultations on specific topics that are of concern to the people.
18. French President Emmanuel Macron is right to say that we cannot afford to be sleepwalkers on a continent in the grip of lethargy. While I share many of his views, I cannot agree with his proposal to "rethink Schengen". Together with the Euro, Schengen is the most important achievement for Europe's citizens; an achievement that is the envy of the world and that we cannot simply abandon.
19. Currently, we are faced with a situation in which several Member States are clearly questioning the common values stipulated in Article 2 of the Treaty. This relates to the role of the judiciary in Poland, fundamental freedoms and the state of civil society in Hungary, and to anti-corruption measures in countries such as Hungary and Romania. What role can Europe possibly play in the world if we do not respect our own values at home and yet try to be a role model?
20. We have now reached a point where we have to say: "Stop! So far and no further!" This is what, together with numerous other Member States, we have tried to make clear in our discussions with the countries in question, and we are beginning to witness a change of mind, for instance in Poland. Let me be very clear on this issue: Luxembourg will continue to advocate the respect of the rule of law within the EU. This is the shared foundation that we must protect at all cost. We will therefore continue to support the European Commission in its role regarding the Article 7 procedure to protect the rule of law.
21. Brexit, populism, nationalism, challenges to our values, lack of solidarity: how did we get to this point?
22. To begin with, there are the delayed effects of the economic and financial crisis that began in 2008, as well as a series of negative consequences of globalisation. When looking at Europe as a whole, it appears that in the past, its citizens' legitimate expectations regarding the preservation of their quality of life and social protection have not always been taken as seriously as they probably should have been.

23. We must develop the social dimension of Europe and work towards a fairer distribution of wealth in Europe. To this end, Luxembourg will argue at European level for a minimum wage, a European unemployment benefit scheme, and a common social safety net. Luxembourg will also introduce a guarantee for children in poverty and elderly unemployed people, based on the model of the European Youth Employment Guarantee.
24. The principle of equal pay for equal work aims to prevent the exploitation of posted workers. Through the establishment of a European Labour Authority, which we fully support, the Member States will furthermore enable cross-border controls and improve information exchange.
25. If we do not succeed in creating a Europe that also provides better social protection for its citizens, then those who want to harm Europe – and there are a number of them, unfortunately – will have an easy job of it, especially if they employ disinformation and so-called “fake news”. These no longer just emanate from the depths of the Internet, but also from elected governments within the EU, as a recent smear campaign by the Hungarian government has shown. We have clearly reached a new low point here.
26. I will admit that we have underestimated the power that nationalism and xenophobia still wield in many European countries, or sadly do so again. It is an old disease that brought our continent to the brink of destruction in the twentieth century, and yet the notion that “we must come first, then the others” and the “marginalisation of all those who think differently, live differently, pray differently, or look differently” are still prevalent. In this respect, we have the moral obligation to remember – for today’s and tomorrow’s generations. In this context, I want to point out that starting this month Luxembourg is taking over the presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) for a year, to which we will devote all our energy.
27. Democracies are slow, democracies are complex. Multilateral cooperation takes time. One-sided, simplistic messages hit home faster. On a national level, it is

therefore extremely tempting to lead people to believe in simplistic solutions regardless of their long-term interests.

28. How can we oppose the negative tendencies in Europe? What does Luxembourg do to represent its citizens' interest in an open, fair and efficient Europe?
29. One way to breathe new life into a big political machine like the EU is to revise its financial framework for the next few years, in line with the idea that "governing means anticipating".
30. In Brussels we are taking an active part in the discussions around the financial framework for the period 2021–2027. This framework defines the priorities of the EU budget for the years to come, that is, for the 27 Member States post-Brexit. In Luxembourg, we believe that we need a modern and ambitious budget, a budget that gives the EU the means to meet its shared political ambitions and to concentrate spending on the areas that we have defined as priorities.
31. In this sense, we must for instance ensure that the EU gives itself the means to fulfil its ambitions in areas such as innovation, digitalisation and environmental protection. With new priorities emerging and a large Member State leaving the EU, all Member States will each have to support their share of the budget.
32. But we should put that budget in perspective. It has been calculated that the EU "costs" every Luxembourger €1.56 per day. This is the so-called "coffee index", as the EU does not cost any European citizen more than a cup of coffee per day. If you look at what you get for that amount - a huge Single Market, a common currency, open borders, ERASMUS, safe products, etc. - I would argue that this is not such a bad thing. Incidentally, Luxembourg is the country that pays the most per capita, but even without doing the maths it seems obvious that, all things considered, the balance for us is positive, to say the least.
33. Luxembourg is also strongly committed to a so-called mechanism on the Rule of Law. A free and independent judiciary system is key to a trustworthy distribution process of EU funds – in other words, European taxpayers' money. In case a

Member State fails to uphold the rule of law, we must be able to protect the financial interests of the EU.

34. Beyond the financial framework, Luxembourg is interested in a strong Single Market based on the free circulation of people, goods, services and capital. In recent years, however, things have not progressed as much as we had hoped. Today we need a Single Market that is more closely connected to other policy areas and aims for sustainability in economical, environmental and social matters. We need a transition towards a Single Market that is competitive in the digital economy and focuses on innovation, to enable start-ups and small to medium-sized businesses in particular to be successful at home and abroad. In the realm of artificial intelligence, Europe must look to benefit from productivity gains, while simultaneously putting the human factor at the core of its approach and including ethical aspects in its regulation.
35. In the context of the implementation of the digital single market, taxes are a recurring subject of debate. I would like to emphasise once again that Luxembourg is in favour of fair taxation of digital activities. We stand for a coherent approach and for fair and equal conditions. This is why we are looking for a solution at OECD level, a solution that also includes other large industrial countries. This view is shared by an increasing number of EU Member States.
36. Generally speaking, we have to ensure that citizens in the EU will be able to continue to earn a living from their work and that our companies benefit from the best possible conditions in an efficient and open Single Market. This is the homework we will be giving the new Commission in 2019. It is with this goal in mind that we will actively participate in delivering the new Strategic Agenda of the EU for 2019–2024.
37. I would also briefly like to address the debate on qualified majority voting. Currently, there are suggestions that the principle of unanimity should be abandoned in areas such as foreign policy or fiscal policy. The main argument for this change is that it would resolve existing blockages among Member States.

38. In matters of foreign policy, the government supports this initiative. The aim is to avoid obstructions by single Member States, which make it impossible to reach a common EU position in international fora and thus paralyse the EU externally. However, we should not delude ourselves, as unanimity is needed to shift towards qualified majority voting. In fiscal matters, we are dealing with matters affecting internal policies of the Member States. The evolution throughout history of approaches and priorities in fiscal matters – as evidenced by a country like ours, which has always favoured direct taxes over indirect taxes, notably for social reasons – cannot be discarded at the stroke of a pen.

Trade Policy

Ladies and Gentlemen,

39. The European economy must serve its citizens. While within the EU we need a strong single market that can provide secure and competitive products and create jobs, we also have to ensure that beyond the EU we have a strong trade policy that enables us to sell our products to the rest of the world, and ensures that we can import the goods and services we need and want.
40. Maintaining a rules-based multilateral trading system is therefore an absolute necessity. Hardly anybody benefits more from the openness to the single market and to international markets than our economy, our industry, our small and medium enterprises, our services sector. For a country such as Luxembourg, with an economy that has one of the highest foreign trade quotas in the world – that is, the sum of exports and imports measured against the gross domestic product – it is therefore vital to operate within a functioning global trade system.
41. We will therefore continue our efforts to ensure that the European economy remains open and investor-friendly, and creates prosperity and jobs in a socially just and environmentally friendly framework. On the one hand, we must therefore ensure that our companies and their investments abroad are protected against discrimination. We must also strengthen the role of European trade policy as an instrument for promoting our values. This is what we will promote in Europe and in international organisations.

42. Provided these standards are met, I say unequivocally that trade creates prosperity, and trade creates peace. I already said as much in my speech here last year. Unfortunately, since then the situation has not improved fundamentally. The World Trade Organization (WTO) needs urgent modernisation if it is to avoid paralysis. This is why, via the EU, Luxembourg has made concrete proposals to improve transparency within the WTO, particularly as regards the subsidy notifications.
43. It is particularly worrying that we still have not found a solution to the appointment of new judges to act as neutral arbitrators in trade conflicts. If this situation persists, come December, the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body will no longer have enough judges to do its work. This must be prevented. The functioning of the WTO and its impartiality must be guaranteed.
44. Sadly, we are also finding that protectionism is *en vogue* again. Last year, we were surprised to see the United States take measures against imports of European steel and aluminium, arguing that our products represented a threat to American security. Back then, I announced that the Luxembourg government would support the Commission's countermeasures. This is what we did, and we will advocate further countermeasures should the US seek to impose further tariffs on European car imports in the coming weeks. We still hope it will not come to this and that the compromise reached at the highest level in July of last year will remain in place. That close partners like Europe and America should engage in a trade dispute makes absolutely no sense.
45. Among other things, Europeans and Americans agreed in July to negotiate a limited trade agreement with the aim of eliminating tariffs on industrial and fishery products. The industries on both sides of the Atlantic would benefit from this measure. However, I want to underline that the Luxembourg Government is not ready to revert to the TTIP, the comprehensive free trade agreement with America. Any such negotiation is no longer conceivable without the United States' support of the Paris Climate Agreement.

46. Climate change poses tremendous economic, ecological and political challenges. We must all be aware that we are at the eleventh hour. Luxembourg is poised to increase its efforts to support climate protection at a European level. The fight against climate change epitomises our responsibility towards future generations. Young people are expecting change. They are saying so loud and clear, and not just since the movement launched by the young and courageous Greta Thunberg. Her movement stands for a profound socio-political change that transcends all generations and social classes and demands a greater commitment to bring about change.

Brexit

47. Since last night, one can reasonably say - although what can be reasonable in Brexit, - that the Withdrawal Agreement agreed between the EU and the United Kingdom in November 2018 will not make it through the British Parliament. It is currently hard to imagine that it will only take a few tweaks to change this.

48. A clear majority, 391 against 242, rejected the Agreement and the additional guarantees offered by the EU, and Prime Minister May has now in effect placed the lead in these negotiations into the hands of Parliament. Today, the House of Commons will be voting on the *no deal*. Apart from a few dogmatic Brexiteers, it is expected that a large majority will decide against an unorderly withdrawal. On Thursday, Parliament will vote on the possible extension of the Article 50 period, beyond 29 March 2019. Here again, a majority is expected to vote in favour.

49. Up until now, and again last night, the EU has made clear that it would consider a possible British request of an extension, but that it expects this to be supplemented by a workable initiative, meant to bring the situation forward. In other words, an extension cannot aim to reopen and push aside the backstop.

50. In Brussels and in all its capitals, the EU must now be ready to face a *no deal*. In particular, the rights of citizens must be protected – 3.5 million EU citizens in the United Kingdom, of which approximately 2000 Luxembourg nationals, and over

1 million British nationals in the EU, of which 6000 living in Luxembourg. This is an absolute priority.

51. The ball is now in London's court and perhaps the two major parties in Parliament should make a step towards each other and seek a softer Brexit, in which the United Kingdom would remain in the Customs Union. For now, we need to wait and see what happens in the next couple of days.
52. For months, the Government has been preparing the scenario of an orderly withdrawal, as well as an unordered withdrawal, the so-called no deal.
53. In case of a no deal, the Government has decided that British citizens who live in Luxembourg on 29 March 2019 can stay after Brexit even if they do not yet have their residence documents as third-country nationals. This will apply for a transitional period of one year, in other words until 30 March 2020, during which they will be given time to apply for new documents. When issuing these new documents, we will be as flexible as possible. Our aim is to not burden British nationals who already live here with unnecessarily complicated bureaucratic procedures.
54. Furthermore, at national level, legislative proposals designed to mitigate the direct consequences of Brexit have been put forward. Among other things, they address the situation of British nationals working for the state or local councils, the automatic recognition of certain professional qualifications, and ensuring that our financial sector can withstand the effects of Brexit. These texts are meant to enter into force on time, that is, by 30 March.
55. But our preparations are not restricted to the legislative domain : numerous administrations have already taken measures internally to prepare for Brexit. The Directorate of Immigration has hired additional staff to handle the requests made by British citizens. Similarly, the Customs Administration has prepared its staff for Brexit and made its computer system Brexit-compatible.
56. To raise awareness among citizens and businesses about the consequences of Brexit and explain which administrative steps they will have to take, we have

launched an extensive information campaign. We are also working with the Chamber of Commerce to support businesses and where possible guide them in their preparations.

57. The message is clear: Luxembourg will try to keep the potential negative consequences of Brexit for citizens and businesses as small as possible.
58. At European level, preparations for a no deal scenario have also been increased. Indeed, over the past weeks, the Commission has presented 19 legislative measures it plans to take in the event of a no deal. These are unilateral measures, which are limited in time and designed to mitigate the adverse effects of a no deal.
59. But let me round up by making one point clear : even if the European Union will henceforth be functioning at 27, the United Kingdom will remain a close partner for Luxembourg. This expectation is shared on both sides of the Channel.
60. Our aim is to guarantee a maximum of continuity in the current bilateral relations between Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. The relationship developed over the past decades between the City of London and our financial centre will have an important role also in the future. More generally, however, Brexit cannot become a pretext for a race to the bottom in social, environmental, or fiscal matters.

Relations with our neighbouring countries

61. From this rather gloomy subject I would like to move on to those among our partners who are geographically and economically closest to us. The principles that Luxembourg defends at EU level are also high on the agenda in our relationships with our neighbours. Luxembourg is at the centre of the Greater Region, an increasingly connected and mobile region. We must concentrate our efforts on this role as an economic powerhouse, which can no longer be confined to the national level, and intensify cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries and regions.

62. We also aim to develop the synergies between the Greater Region on the one hand, and the Benelux Union on the other. Naturally, our relationships with our three neighbouring countries are so close that they hardly fall under the scope of foreign policy, but rather European regional policy!
63. On the German side, we have a close partnership with both the Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate, but also with North Rhine-Westphalia, which has declared 2019 a “Benelux Year”.
64. Our cooperation with our Belgian neighbours traditionally takes place in the framework of the Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union (BLEU), where, among other things, we discuss investment agreements with third countries. At the same time, direct relations with Regions and Communities, first and foremost with Wallonia and the German-speaking Community, have also been intensified.
65. On the French side, we can say that the state visit of March 2018 brought our two countries even closer together and enabled Luxembourg to present itself in a different light. This was by no means a vain undertaking, considering how many people in France have a somewhat curious image of Luxembourg, as we witnessed recently during a debate in the French National Assembly.
66. Aware as we are of the challenges posed by the large number of cross-border workers living in French municipalities in Lorraine, Luxembourg has committed to co-financing concrete infrastructure projects that facilitate everyday life for citizens on both sides of the border.
67. We are also witnessing a new momentum in the relationship between two of our neighbouring countries, namely, France and Germany. On 22 January 2019, they signed a new treaty in Aachen that complements the Élysée Treaty of 1963. I hope that the new Aachen Treaty will result in a push towards a more independent and effective Europe. However, it is important that France and Germany do not monopolise the debate in Europe, but that they play instead the role of an inclusive catalyst that inspires the other EU countries to show more commitment and work together more closely for a strong Europe. The Aachen Treaty also promotes cross-border cooperation, including among others

in the area of mobility. We are monitoring these developments with great interest, as such regulations or projects can also serve as examples for other border regions.

68. To this effect, Luxembourg has created, in the Coalition Agreement of 2018, a new specific instrument, namely, the Interministerial Coordination Committee for Cross-Border Cooperation (CICT). Starting in December of the same year, we created a network of representatives from the various ministries. Our aim is to develop, through exchange and coordination, a more coherent approach that we can pursue even more systematically in our relationships with our neighbouring countries.
69. Following Luxembourg's two-year Presidency of the Summit of the Greater Region, Saarland took over on 30 January. I would like to use this opportunity to thank my fellow Minister Madam Cahen for her commitment and the good cooperation between our teams.

Benelux

70. Of course, I shall not forget to mention one of our longest-standing fora for cooperation, namely the Benelux. On 1 January, Luxembourg took over this year's Presidency of the Benelux Council of Ministers. The Benelux Interparliamentary Assembly will also be presided by Luxembourg for the next two years and I am looking forward to a good dialogue with its President Gusty Graas.
71. In the context of the Presidency of the Benelux Council of Ministers, Luxembourg has set itself three main objectives, which I presented at the launch of our Presidency on 5 February:
 - 1) Developing the Benelux single market: why, for instance, are there still territorial supply constraints in the Benelux retail sector?
 - 2) Achieving the energy transition and fighting climate change: how can we work together to fulfil our commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement?

3) Promoting digitalisation: how can our three countries improve our cross-border digital infrastructure in the best interests of the citizens?

72. Cooperation with the Benelux countries remains an important element of our foreign policy, be it cross-border projects or at a European and international level. The role of the Presidency also consists in defining areas of shared interests, in order to make the voice of our three countries heard through jointly defined positions.

New Alliances

73. But beyond our traditionally close relations with our neighbouring countries, we also want to deepen our partnerships with countries that might be less close to us geographically speaking, yet share our vision of an open, competitive and social Europe. The momentum within the Council will most likely change after Brexit, with the voices of the big Member States bound to carry more weight. This lead to new dynamics, which means that the small and medium-sized Member States will have to find new ways to make their suggestions and positions heard.

74. In this context, Luxembourg will continue its efforts to expand its cooperation with the Nordic and Baltic states. These are countries with which we are often in line, particularly on European social policy, the development of the digital single market and trade policy. We will also continue to seek a dialogue with other Member States, whether from the south of Europe or from the Visegrád Group.

Headquarters

75. By pursuing a forward-looking and dynamic headquarters policy, the Luxembourg government will continue its efforts to consolidate and expand the presence of European and international institutions headquartered in Luxembourg.

76. One of the best ways to achieve this is to further improve the attractiveness of Luxembourg as a place to live and work. We can be proud of the fact that nearly 13,000 EU officials and agents work in European institutions and agencies in Luxembourg, and we value the important social, cultural and economic contribution these officials and agents, and their families as well, make to Luxembourgish society.
77. Together with the European Commission, we will continue our efforts to implement the Asselborn-Georgieva Agreement of December 2015. The implementation of this agreement is one of our priorities, as it stipulates that the European Commission will expand its presence in Luxembourg in the digital, financial and legal services sector.
78. We will also continue to work closely with institutions and agencies on the realisation of infrastructure projects. One project that has been making good progress is the third tower of the European Court of Justice, which we will be able to inaugurate as early as 2019. Another large project that has been gaining momentum is Jean Monnet 2, the new building of the European Commission. Following the ground-breaking ceremony in June 2018, construction work has been progressing according to schedule. The building is scheduled to be completed by the end of February 2024.
79. Furthermore, in 2019, the Luxembourg government will continue to work actively on offering new institutions and agencies the best possible conditions to settle in the Grand Duchy. Our aim is for these new institutions and agencies to be operational as quickly as possible and to enable them to fulfil their respective missions in the best possible way.
80. The European Prosecutor's Office is one of the new agencies that will be headquartered in Luxembourg. Preparations are progressing as planned, and we will do everything to remain on schedule. Together with a new court of law, the Unified Patent Court, whose Court of Appeal will be seated in Luxembourg and will hopefully start operating this year, the European Prosecutor's Office will contribute to the development of Luxembourg as an international centre of excellence in jurisdictional matters.

81. As concerns the digital sector, it was decided in 2018 that the joint undertaking EuroHPC should have its headquarters in Luxembourg. This ambitious project, which will start work this year, has tremendous potential, as it will bundle the digital capacities of 26 European countries to create a kind of supercomputer. By hosting its headquarters, Luxembourg is contributing to this project, which will support research and innovation in Europe.

EU Enlargement

82. The European Union is currently negotiating with Serbia and Montenegro. By the time the Council meets in Luxembourg in June this year, we hope that enough progress will have been made to enable us to also start negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia.

83. This decision depends, among other things, on the individual country evaluations, which will be published by the Commission in the spring. It is important to emphasise that each country evaluation is made based on the efforts and merits of the respective accession candidate. Our highest priority in this regard is and remains for candidates to respect the conditions of accession, specifically the so-called Copenhagen criteria relating to our common values.

84. North Macedonia is proof that there are positive developments in the Balkans, a highly complex region. I visited the country in September last year and witnessed the positive atmosphere surrounding the referendum on the country's name change. In the end, Macedonians voted in favour of the new name "North Macedonia", and thereby brought their country one step closer to EU and NATO membership. Together with Greece, North Macedonia has demonstrated that it is possible to resolve conflicts peacefully and diplomatically. This is an extremely important signal for a region that, unfortunately, is still plagued by internal conflict and tensions. We therefore want to ensure that, after NATO, the EU also honours this important step.

85. I would hope this development will send a strong signal to Serbia and Kosovo. The fact that Kosovo has for some time been imposing customs tariffs on

products from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina does not contribute to a constructive solution, as we have stressed to the Kosovo authorities. Political leaders, both in Serbia and in Kosovo, must be encouraged to sit around the negotiating table and seek a compromise that would allow them to normalise their relations and find a long-term solution to the remaining problems.

86. Reforms and good relations with their neighbours are indispensable if the Balkan states want to improve the living conditions of their people and provide prospects for young people in the region. This is why, over the last few years, Luxembourg has also contributed around €2.6 million to fund various technical support programmes for training in EU integration for national administrations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo, which also benefits from our development aid. We will continue to allocate funding to this region in order to stabilise those countries and bring them closer to the EU. This is in our own interest. If we do not support these countries, others will, and this would hardly be to our advantage.
87. However, I would also like to seize this opportunity to emphasise once again that the pace at which the countries of the Balkans are converging with the EU depends on how effectively their respective governments implement the necessary reforms. This progress is entirely up to them. It essentially entails reforms in the area of the rule of law, the fight against corruption and the protection of the freedom of the press, and of democratic fundamental rights. It is not only the EU that demands these reforms, but also the citizens of this region, as evidenced by the recent protests in several of these countries. The reasons for these protests may differ from one country to the next, but they have in common a general dissatisfaction with still largely opaque power structures. This shows yet again how important it is that we support these countries in their efforts to join the European Union and help them to implement democratic standards.
88. As for Turkey, negotiations on the country's accession to the EU, as you know, came to a halt a while ago. Since the failed coup of July 2016, Turkey has taken several measures that are hardly compatible with the Copenhagen criteria. Earlier this year, I paid an official visit to Ankara and shared with all my

interlocutors, including the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, my thoughts and concerns regarding the human rights situation and the state of the rule of law in Turkey. Although Turkey has suffered a great deal from the attempted coup as well as from terrorist attacks in recent years, these events do not justify the arbitrary detention of journalists, academics, opposition politicians, and judges, without a fair process.

89. Turkey remains an important strategic partner for Luxembourg and the EU, and we want to do everything in our power to keep the communication channel with Ankara open, because it is only through mutual dialogue that we can find common solutions. In all our talks with the Turkish authorities, we must emphasise that human rights and the rule of law are non-negotiable. This is particularly true in the context of the accession talks, which can only be resumed once Turkey again fully meets all the conditions.
90. On 31 March, Turkey will hold municipal elections. This is an opportunity for the Turkish authorities to show that free, democratic elections and the acceptance of the results are part and parcel of democratic rule.

EU Neighbourhood

91. This year, the EU's neighbourhood policy is celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership – even if, given the situation in some of the countries of the region, there is currently not much to celebrate.
92. The conflict in eastern Ukraine has been dragging on; worse, on 25 November 2018, it spread to the Black Sea, as Russia attacked Ukrainian ships near the Kerch Strait and captured 24 members of the Ukrainian Navy.
93. Despite the efforts of my German and French colleagues within the Normandy format, which I fully support, it was not possible to advance with the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. Because of the Ukrainian presidential election at the end of this month and the parliamentary elections in October, further progress in this matter is unlikely.

94. As far as the other countries of the EU's Eastern Partnership are concerned, we have seen positive developments in Armenia, where the "Velvet Revolution" has opened a new chapter in the country's history.
95. Russia remains a difficult partner. But Russia is the EU's largest neighbour in the East and cannot be ignored, whether in terms of security, economy or energy supply. As a European, I advocate that, without being naïve, we must seek ways – beyond the sanctions taken in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and the destabilisation of Ukraine – to establish a genuine and open dialogue with Russia. It is best to address our differences and shared opinions openly. Failure to do so would amount to gross negligence in the present international context.
96. Looking further east, the situation in Central Asia, where I was visiting last week, is improving. The countries in the region are cooperating much more closely, and, through its new strategy, for Central Asia the EU will contribute to ensuring the "New Silk Road" will be more democratic and inclusive.

Migration

Ladies and Gentlemen,

97. On the subject of migration, Europe unfortunately remains divided. The issue remains a constant challenge to European cohesion. After the fiasco of the EU's lack of position on the Global Compact for Migration at the UN, we should not expect any miracles before the European elections. The worst thing about this issue is that the EU is neither fit enough to cope with a new migratory crisis nor to manage the current crisis in a satisfactory manner.
98. It is true that the number of asylum seekers in Europe fell by 90%. The main reason is quite obvious: Europe has become more of a fortress in the past two years.
99. There is no doubt that the Schengen borders must be monitored and that Europe – like all countries in the world – must be able to establish who enters or is allowed to enter. On the other hand, the EU, mainly in its partnership with

Africa, has not lived up to its commitment to give legal migration a chance, based on fixed quotas for all EU countries. We are not talking about millions or even hundreds of thousands of people per year, but maybe 50,000, who would be given the opportunity to integrate in a community of 500 million inhabitants. In other words, they would make up 0.01% of the total population.

100. Without this or similar approaches, and clear respect for the rights under the Geneva Refugee Convention, the EU will fail to establish proper partnerships and to reach an agreement for the return of individuals who cannot obtain refugee status.
101. In 2018, Frontex registered 150,114 movements at the EU's external borders – compared to 204,750 in 2017. This year we are observing increased migratory pressure in the western Mediterranean. Since the beginning of this year, 4000 people have already arrived in Spain, which amounts to a 174% increase over the same period last year. And, tragically, people continue to die in the Mediterranean: more than 200 deaths at sea have already been recorded this year, regardless of whether the NGOs' rescue boats had been immobilised or not.
102. In this context, it was quite discouraging to hear the EU Presidency of the Council for the second semester of 2018 insisting that maritime migration had ceased.
103. The pressure on our asylum systems remains high, even if it has been easing slightly. According to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the EU registered 634,700 requests for asylum in 2018 – 10% less than in 2017. In 2017, that figure was down by 44% compared to 2016. The recognition rate is also down, dropping from 40% to 34% last year. There are also new trends, with more demands from Iranians, Turks and people from visa waiver countries. Demands by Syrians have decreased by 25%. Luxembourg ranks 4th when asylum demands are compared with the number of inhabitants, right behind Cyprus, Greece and Malta.
104. The declaration between the EU and Turkey and the €6 billion in EU aid have helped many refugees on the ground improve their living conditions. Since 4

April 2016, 19,609 Syrians have been resettled from Turkey. At the same time, there were a mere 1825 returns from Greece to Turkey under this declaration. There are still some 15,000 people in the hotspots on the Greek islands, where living conditions are dramatic in some cases.

105. The situation in Libya is also far from satisfactory. Training the Libyan coastguards and equipping them with ships simply is not enough. We also need to monitor their actions to make sure they respect basic human rights. This is precisely the task of EU operation Sophia. However, the UN Refugee Agency, the International Organization for Migration and the EU must also create on-site structures to guarantee the health and human dignity of those who have been rescued.
106. What is the way forward? If we want a functioning Schengen space, we need renewed mutual trust in Europe. Wherever migrants enter Europe, the Schengen rules must be upheld. To avoid the pressure on entrance countries becoming unbearable, we need legal ways to enter the EU, a mutually supportive distribution mechanism in times of crisis and a humane return policy. All this was provided for in the plans for reform of the European Commission. Unfortunately, reforms such as the Return Directive or the EU Blue Card will no longer be passed in this legislative term. The only area in which I still see a window of opportunity is in improving border control.
107. The asylum reforms, including the crucial Dublin Reform, are also stalling. Currently, most affected Member States feel discriminated against, and the group of countries denying others their solidarity has become stronger under the Austrian Presidency. Several Member States displaying solidarity – and I really hope they will eventually be more than 10 – are trying to set up a distribution mechanism for rescued migrants. It is unacceptable that each time a few dozen people arrive on a ship in Europe, the public is led to believe that Europe is facing another migratory crisis.
108. After the European elections, the new EU Commission, the European Parliament and the Council must come up with ways to break the deadlock.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

109. I would now like to look beyond the European continent and expand on Luxembourg's commitment, both through a multidimensional or "3D" approach – which stands for Diplomacy, Development and Defence – and a multilateral approach, to help build peace, security and prosperity in areas where daily life has been characterised by conflict and poverty.
110. Earlier, I laid out our approach to Europe's neighbouring countries. Our biggest and enormously important neighbour in the long term is located on the other side of the Mediterranean, namely, Africa – "Immortal Africa", "the new world that will be tomorrow", as Léopold Sédar Senghor wrote.

Africa

111. Africa is a dynamic continent, with numerous opportunities, but also big challenges that have a direct impact on Europe. The question of migration is but one example among many that show that the fates of Europe and Africa are closely intertwined. Peace, economic growth, future prospects for young people, human rights, democracy and the fight against corruption in Europe and Africa are in the best interest of both our continents and must remain at the heart of our partnership with Africa.
112. Luxembourg remains committed alongside the EU to collaborating with the African Union to find solutions for the problems on both continents. During their joint Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting in January this year, Africa and Europe agreed to work together to create better prospects for young people in the areas of peace and security, economic cooperation, migration and multilateralism.
113. Examples such as the recent elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo show that much remains to be done in terms of the quality of democracy and governance, even though this was the first peaceful transition in Kinshasa since

the country's independence. Africa does not need strong leaders, but strong and democratic institutions – much like Europe, that is.

114. Recent political developments, such as the peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia after more than 20 years of cold war, give reason to hope that new windows of opportunity are opening up in Africa. In this context, I travelled to Ethiopia and Eritrea in mid-February to get a clearer picture of the situation on the ground. Today, the borders between the two countries are open again, and there are daily flights between Addis Ababa and Asmara. The fact that the countries of the Horn of Africa – Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia and Eritrea – are coordinating their policies and working together is a source of great hope.
115. My talks with the President and the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia confirmed the ambitious and open vision of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who has received worldwide recognition for his reconciliation process with Eritrea. Certainly, the Ethiopian prime minister's vision of regional integration should be applauded.
116. I also travelled to the north of Ethiopia, to the refugee camps near the border with Eritrea. While there, I was able to establish two things. Firstly, the influx of people from Eritrea seeking asylum is massive, as they are now crossing the border without fearing being shot at. Secondly, on the Ethiopian side, the local authorities are working closely with the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, to offer immediate support to the many children travelling alone from Eritrea. I was very impressed to see so much solidarity despite this country's very limited means.
117. However, it would be much too optimistic to think that with reconciliation the reasons for so many people to flee Eritrea have vanished. Compulsory national service, which is both military and civilian in nature, forces young people to make themselves available to the state for at least 18 months, if not for unlimited periods of time. In combination with drastic prison sentences for so-called "traitors", who are often locked up without proper judgment and legal counsel, these are blatant human rights violations. Just like Libya, Eritrea rejects the UNHCR, which it accuses of spurring migration.

118. Nevertheless, it would be wrong not to seek and intensify contact with Eritrea. In my discussions with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea, I made it clear that for the country to receive financial assistance and investments from the EU aimed at creating jobs, it must achieve fundamental change in matters of the rule of law. The two go in hand in hand. My visit, the first bilateral visit of a Foreign Minister of an EU member country after the reconciliation of both countries, must be followed by others – also in the hope that the political opening in Ethiopia will affect Eritrea in such a way that, besides peace, human rights become a priority, too.
119. Luxembourg remains committed and has in recent years continuously strengthened and diversified its traditionally good relations with many countries on the African continent. As you know, our development cooperation programme has established close contacts with a number of African countries over the years. Particularly in the Sahel, we have upgraded our representation thanks to the presence of a resident ambassador in Senegal, who is co-accredited to Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Along with our embassies in Cabo Verde and Ethiopia, which also houses the headquarters of the African Union, this will enable us to develop our partnerships in the long term.
120. Our longstanding commitment in West Africa, especially in the Sahel, shows that Luxembourg is a reliable partner, even in times when the security situation complicates the work of our personnel on the ground. The current destabilisation of the Sahel, which is spreading from Mali to Burkina Faso and Niger, and the fact that terrorist groups are growing ever stronger, is a crisis that we must not underestimate. It concerns us because it is a menace for our partner countries, with which we have built long-term relationships based on solidarity.
121. Together with the UN, the EU and other international partners, Luxembourg supports the G5 Sahel Joint Force. In this context, we are applying our trusted “3D” approach, which combines diplomacy, development and defence as complementary means to an end. Last year alone, this effort amounted to €100 million for the Sahel region, mainly in the field of cooperation, where nearly 200 people work under Luxembourgish mandate. We are also active within the

framework of the European Security and Defence Policy. We participate actively in the EU Training Mission in Mali and regularly in the civilian EUCAP missions in Mali and Niger. We also participate in MINUSMA, the UN mission in Mali.

Afghanistan, Pakistan, India

122. Our “3D” approach also applies to Afghanistan, which I visited last week. The situation in this country remains very tense after 18 years of armed conflict. There are still huge challenges to be overcome in the coming years. We support the talks between the US and the Taliban. However, as the authorities in Kabul have emphasised, talks have to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned in order to secure durable peace.
123. President Ashraf Ghani also clearly stressed that the rule of law must be upheld, as must human rights, in particular the rights of women and children.
124. By 2020, Luxembourg will have contributed approximately €100 million in Afghanistan for development cooperation and humanitarian aid, but also for the stabilisation of the country. Thus far, 325 Luxembourg soldiers have participated in NATO missions in Afghanistan. The Luxembourg Army is currently participating in NATO’s “Resolute Support” mission, which trains and advises Afghan forces so that in the long run they can ensure the security of the country. During my visit to Afghanistan last week, I met our two service men who are currently stationed in Mazar-i-Sharif, in the north of the country. On behalf of the government and all Luxembourgers, I thanked them as representatives of the Luxembourg Army for their courage, commitment and efforts to bring stability and security to Afghanistan.
125. My visit to Pakistan was the first of its kind by a Foreign Minister of Luxembourg. In Islamabad I spoke to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the new Prime Minister Imran Khan about regional stability, Afghanistan and the recent tensions in Kashmir. On behalf of the European Union, I encouraged Pakistan to seek dialogue with India and welcomed the steps taken by Prime Minister Khan towards a de-escalation of tensions, notably through the return of the Indian pilot whose plane had been shot down.

126. The Prime Minister of Pakistan also clearly emphasised that Pakistan wants to live in peace with India. However, as long as there is no lasting solution for Kashmir, tensions will persist. This situation is all the more volatile as both countries have nuclear weapons. No one wants a war between India and Pakistan.

Iran

127. Since my last address, the US threat to withdraw unilaterally from the nuclear agreement with Iran has unfortunately become a reality. We regret this decision, as the agreement is an important cornerstone for non-proliferation in the region.

128. The agreement is in Europe's interest, also from a security perspective. We are geographically much closer to Iran than the United States and would therefore be more directly affected by a potential threat. This is yet another reason why we continue to support the agreement.

129. Until now, Iran has been implementing the agreement to the letter. This has been confirmed fourteen times by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). But the fact that Iran abides by the nuclear agreement should not obscure the reality that other Iranian policies are highly problematic. I am thinking of Iran's ballistic missile programme, its regional behaviour, mainly in Syria and Yemen, and the planning of terrorist attacks on European soil.

130. Luxembourg therefore advocates a comprehensive European policy vis-à-vis Iran that also addresses the human rights issue. This policy combines dialogue with determination whenever needed. In January, the EU therefore decided to impose sanctions on the Iranian security apparatus, specifically against individuals who had plotted terrorist attacks in Europe.

131. We share the concerns of the United States when it comes to the problematic aspects of Iran's policies. However, these aspects are not part of the nuclear

agreement and must therefore not be used as a pretext to dismantle the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This is in no one's interest.

Yemen

132. Yemen does not always get the attention it deserves, but the situation in the country is catastrophic. More than 24 million people, in other words three-quarters of the population, are dependent on humanitarian aid. Women and children are particularly affected by the humanitarian crisis.
133. Last December, there was a ray of hope for diplomacy when the various parties to the conflict reached an agreement in Stockholm. However, the agreement is extremely fragile, and the international community must continue to enforce its implementation. Most importantly, access to the port of Hodeida, the gateway for more than 85% of the humanitarian aid, must be guaranteed.
134. Luxembourg is active in three ways:
135. Firstly, by providing humanitarian aid. On 26 February, I announced in Geneva that Luxembourg would continue to show its solidarity and contribute at least €1.75 million this year to ease the suffering of the civilian population.
136. Secondly, we are supporting the Dutch initiative to uncover war crimes in Yemen in the hope that it might also act as a deterrent. Last September, the Human Rights Council voted to extend the mandate of the so-called Group of Eminent Experts for a year. Luxembourg supported the outcome of this vote. We also call for the rights of minorities such as the Bahá'í to be guaranteed. As in Iran, the Bahá'í in Yemen are also victims of violence and oppression. We cannot tolerate that in the twenty-first century people are locked up, tortured, or even killed because of their religion.
137. In addition, Luxembourg supports the mediation of the UN and the efforts of Martin Griffiths to guide the parties to the conflict in Yemen towards a political solution. This is also the only way to achieve a lasting solution to the humanitarian crisis.

Syria

138. There is still no end to the atrocities in Syria. Of the four so-called “de-escalation zones” that existed last year, there is only one left in the north of the country, around Idlib. Three million people are living in this confined space. While it is true that terrorists operate in that area, the overwhelming majority of people there are civilians, many of whom have fled other zones. An offensive on Idlib must be avoided at all costs.
139. The fact that the regime has crushed the opposition – which has led to a certain calm in Syria, if you will – has prompted some voices to demand a normalisation of relations with Syria. In this matter, Luxembourg’s position is clear, as is that of the EU: without fundamental political reform and without a political transition, we will not normalise our relations with Syria.
140. Indeed, Syria is still ruled by the same dictatorship that has been brutally fighting its own population since 2011. This is why we also believe that the conditions for refugees to return to the country have not been met.
141. Only a political transition on the basis of Security Council Resolution 2254 can bring lasting peace and stability to Syria. We therefore fully support the efforts of the UN Secretary-General’s new Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen. This is also the only way to eradicate the threat posed by Daesh.
142. The Kurdish forces, supported by the Americans, have recently launched an offensive on the village of Baghouz, the last stronghold of Daesh. Although Daesh has lost control over its territories in Syria and Iraq – mostly thanks to the Kurdish fighters – the roots of the problems that have led to the radicalisation of parts of the population are still present. There are still Daesh cells, now increasingly likely to turn to terrorist attacks, both in Syria and in Iraq, in a bid to destabilise these countries.
143. The EU is the largest donor of humanitarian aid to Syria and the surrounding region: Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt have taken in about five and a

half million Syrians, and it is important that we also support these countries. As I speak, Brussels is hosting the third EU-organised international donors' conference aimed at mobilising political and humanitarian aid to Syria. Although the EU is essentially a "payer" rather than a "player" in the Syrian conflict, we must continue to use the means at our disposal with a sense of purpose and strategy.

144. Luxembourg is contributing its fair share. Our aid to the Syrian population amounts to €7.5 million per year since 2016. This is by far Luxembourg's largest humanitarian commitment, and it will be maintained at that level until next year at least. But again, our position vis-à-vis Syria is clear: no normalisation and no help for reconstruction can take place without a political process.

Iraq

145. In Iraq, the long and difficult path to national reconciliation has started. The parliamentary elections were held on 12 May in an organised fashion, and on 2 October, the new Parliament elected the Kurdish politician Barham Salih as the new president of Iraq. The government has not been fully formed as of now. But there is hope that the reconstruction in cooperation with the international community will make progress and that Iraq will thus be sustainably stabilised.

Israel and Palestine

146. The international community is also called upon in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – a conflict that in 2018 was yet again marked by unilateralism and disregard for multilateral rules. Israel is relentlessly pursuing its settlement policy, despite Security Council Resolution 2334 calling for it to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory.

147. Following the United States' recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the new American embassy was opened in Jerusalem on 14 May 2018. This unilateral decision breaks with the international consensus and violates many UN resolutions. It complicates the implementation of the two-state solution, without Jerusalem as the capital of both Israel and Palestine.

148. The opening of the US embassy coincided with protests in Gaza, which had begun at the end of March. On that day, 61 demonstrators died in the Gaza Strip, because Israeli soldiers shot at them with live ammunition. To protest against this unacceptable and disproportionate use of violence, I summoned the Israeli Ambassador to my office on 16 May.
149. The Gaza blockade has been going on for more than 10 years. It must be lifted to enable a fundamental improvement of living conditions in Gaza. An inter-Palestinian reconciliation and a return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza would be instrumental in achieving this.
150. Yes, there is violence in Gaza. Last summer, Hamas and Israel were repeatedly on the brink of a new war. But you have to see Gaza to understand what it means to lock up 2 million people in a confined space, a seventh the size of the Luxembourgish territory. Let me repeat that: in the twenty-first century, Gaza is a disgrace.
151. The UN agency UNRWA, which supports Palestinian refugees, is proof that international collaboration can achieve results in the Middle East. In 2017, the US contribution to UNRWA amounted to a third of the agency's total budget. But last year, the US surprisingly cancelled their contribution. Because of this drastic decision, UNRWA suddenly faced a deficit of \$446 million, which jeopardised its very existence.
152. The international community then made a tremendous effort and collected an additional \$425 million last year. These efforts must be renewed this year if UNRWA's activities, mainly in education and health, are to continue. They are important in the stability of Gaza and the entire region. It is in no one's interest if suddenly over 260'000 children in Gaza were no longer able to attend school.
153. Luxembourg has been supporting UNRWA for many years. This year, our Development Cooperation will sign a new multiannual agreement with the organisation, in which we pledge to maintain a contribution of €4 million per year from 2019 to 2021. This also contributes to the agency's long-term financial

security. Together with the other projects that Luxembourg supports, we are looking at an increase in our contributions of more than 10%.

154. Since the Jerusalem decision, the US can no longer be regarded as neutral mediators in the peace process. The US plans to table a new peace plan after the elections in Israel on 9 April. As of yet, there is no official information about the contents of this plan.
155. It is clear that no solution can be found without the United States. Luxembourg, together with its European partners, will press for a plan that will back the two-state solution, in accordance with the internationally recognised parameters.
156. Luxembourg will continue to push for a common and coherent EU position. Unfortunately, we Europeans seem to be increasingly divided on this matter, which effectively makes the EU a “lame duck”.

Venezuela

157. Venezuela has been in the grip of a deep political, economic and humanitarian crisis for several years. The government of Nicolás Maduro, who suffered significant losses in the legislative elections in late 2015, and whose party is in the minority in the National Assembly, has since been trying to consolidate his power, whether by controlling the judiciary or by creating the so-called Constituent Assembly, which has largely appropriated the powers of the legitimate Parliament and the National Assembly.
158. The early presidential elections that took place on 20 May last year were neither free nor fair. They were marred by the exclusion and fragmentation of the opposition in advance of the polling, vote buying and much more. The EU Foreign Ministers agreed on 28 May last year that they would not accept the results of the election and have asked for new elections to be held.
159. In light of these developments, it became clear that we Europeans should support the President of the legitimate Venezuelan Parliament, Juan Guaidó, in

his attempt to initiate a process leading to free, fair and democratic elections in line with the Venezuelan Constitution.

160. Let me emphasise that the solution in Venezuela can only be a peaceful and political one. In this context, Luxembourg supports the work of the International Contact Group set up by the EU in early February with the aim of creating the necessary guarantees to support the process of new elections and to ensure that humanitarian aid is distributed according to humanitarian principles.

161. For we must not lose sight of the tremendous humanitarian challenges that Venezuela is facing, which also have a severe impact on the stability of the countries in the region. By the end of November last year, the UN had registered more than 3 million Venezuelan refugees. For some time now, Luxembourg has been supporting the UNHCR's work to help Venezuelan refugees, while also taking part in a project led by UN Women in the Brazilian border region. We will continue our efforts in this field in the future.

Nicaragua

162. The situation in Nicaragua, where our Development Cooperation has been operating since the beginning of the 1990s, remains very tense. Almost a year after the outbreak of protests and the repression in April 2018, which caused at least 325 deaths, the situation has calmed down, but human rights violations continue, notably in the form of arbitrary detentions and repressive measures against civil society and media.

163. Our partnership with Nicaragua has always concentrated on helping the Nicaraguan population, based on respect for human rights and democratic values. This is why last year we agreed with the Minister of Cooperation to take appropriate measures and redirect our funding entirely to civil society and the activities of international and regional human rights organisations in Nicaragua. Luxembourg, together with the EU, has clearly expressed its position on the situation in the country and continues to support the national dialogue that was resumed in late February as the only way out the current crisis.

America

164. More than two years after the start of his mandate, the current US President's "America First" doctrine has left lingering marks on climate protection, international security, peace in the Middle East, North Korea and world trade.
165. As a result, the transatlantic relationship is facing new challenges. But the US remains an essential partner in dialogue. We Europeans must insist on the virtues of historic alliances and partnerships, and stay true to our common values. At the same time, we should also look at better ways to defend our common strategic interests. Here too, EU unity is essential.

INF Treaty

166. As you know, on 2 February the US officially notified Russia that it was withdrawing from the agreement on intermediate-range nuclear missiles, the so-called INF Treaty. For many years, including under President Obama, the US has been trying unsuccessfully to get Russia to clarify the situation concerning the mobile 9M729 missile system.
167. We Europeans are directly affected by the termination of the INF Treaty, because it puts our collective security at risk. This is why, in the roughly five months remaining before the agreement is fully abrogated, we must do all we can to persuade Russia and the US to resume talks. What was possible during the Cold War must be possible today! Responsibility clearly lies with Russia, as Moscow has to prove that it is respecting the terms of the treaty.
168. Ideally, disarmament treaties such as this one should not be revoked but rather strengthened through the inclusion of other countries, notably China.
169. The termination of the INF Treaty is a symptom of a general crisis of the global system of disarmament and arms control. Many of the treaties from the post-Cold War era are no longer effective in the present context. In addition, the New START Treaty on strategic weapon systems between the US and Russia will expire in 2021. Here, I would like to point out once again that the New START is

responsible for the destruction of more than 1,200 nuclear devices by the Russians and Americans. If this treaty cannot be extended, the world will again find itself in an alarming situation in which the two major nuclear powers are no longer restrained by bilateral treaties.

170. On the initiative of our German neighbours, Luxembourg too is therefore advocating a new push for arms control in Europe. We need a new approach that includes modern technologies and is supported by all international actors. Any agreement in the realm of arms control is accompanied by rigorous verification measures. They ensure transparency. The fact that countries can control each other is a first step towards restoring confidence. And confidence is what we urgently need in international relations.

171. During the Cold War, arms control contributed substantially to a relaxation in international relations. Unfortunately, these achievements have been partly reversed over the past few years. We must learn from the past and start building again on these achievements. This is the only way to guarantee peace and security in Europe in the decades to come.

Security

172. NATO plays a key role for our security. Luxembourg contributes its fair share to our collective defence. We have actively participated in reassurance, notably by deploying a Luxembourgish contingent in Lithuania, and will continue to do so.

173. Within the EU, we are pursuing closer cooperation in defence matters. This is necessary to further our investments, research and capacities as Europeans in a more coordinated and effective way.

174. In line also with our “3D” approach, we take part in civilian and military missions conducted by NATO, the EU and the UN, including by contributing satellite communication capability. Luxembourg is actively involved and is perceived as a reliable and responsible actor by its partners. A recent example is a trilateral cooperation with Portugal and Cabo Verde, through which we have extended our collaboration to defence matters.

175. In July last year, the new Law on Export Control came into force, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs working very closely with the Ministry of the Economy. Together, we make sure that no so-called “dual use” goods or military goods from Luxembourg fall into the wrong hands and that we meet the international obligations we have committed to as part of the Arms Trade Treaty, among others. We take our responsibility seriously, both in the context of international security and vis-à-vis our Luxembourgish businesses.

Economic Diplomacy

Ladies and Gentlemen,

176. Our European policy, our policy towards neighbouring countries and regions, and our foreign policy in general are at the service of our citizens and businesses. And there is no doubt that our foreign policy is also an instrument for promoting our economy throughout the world. Eighty-three percent of our gross domestic product derives from international activities. I do not need to stress the openness and dynamic nature of our economy. Until now, we have often succeeded in positioning ourselves as “first mover” in a number of areas and in preparing for the future, whether this concerns the steel industry, satellites, investment funds or the digital revolution.

177. Our economic assets are obvious, and it is up to us to make them known to the world. Through its economic diplomacy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is actively contributing to the dynamism and diversification of Luxembourg, in coordination with the Trade and Investment Board (TIB) and the Trade and Investment Steering Committee (TISC). We are working hard to attract further investments and talent. In this context, I would also like to point to the strategy for economic promotion adopted by the Government in February 2017.

178. Our diplomatic network – that is, 29 embassies, 5 permanent representations, 3 consulates general, 9 trade and investment offices under the Ministry of the

Economy and some 170 honorary consuls around the world – supports our businesses and their endeavours, and helps them access new markets.

179. This modern and dynamic form of diplomacy is also at work in the field of international air traffic. Four bilateral air services agreements were signed in 2018, with Burkina Faso, Uruguay, Sri Lanka and Brazil respectively. Last week, I signed a protocol for air services in Uzbekistan. These agreements give concrete shape to Luxembourg's air transport strategy, which aims to secure the sector's long-term prospects and develop Luxembourg Airport (Findel) as an international platform for passenger and freight traffic. Incidentally, the signing of the agreement with Brazil is a particularly strong indication of the development of our bilateral relations with that country, particularly in light of the opening in Brasilia of the first Luxembourg embassy in South America, which we inaugurated in early 2018.

180. Connectivity between Europe and Asia is becoming increasingly important. Through our diplomatic network in Asia, we are working to establish closer contacts in line with the principles of our economic diplomacy. In the area of research and innovation, we have continued to promote Luxembourg as a centre of excellence. This is important for our businesses, which are increasingly looking towards Asia. Countries such as Japan and China in particular, but also India, South Korea and Southeast Asia are important partners in this respect.

181. In the context of our economic diplomacy, I would like to make it clear that we do not turn a blind eye to potential human rights violations caused by economic activities – neither at home nor abroad! Sustainable development hinges on the respect of human rights. In Luxembourg, the government is taking its international obligations in this matter very seriously, just as businesses must be aware of their responsibility. The first National Action Plan on "Business and human rights", adopted by the government in June of last year, outlines the framework in which we will work together on these issues with the private sector, civil society and researchers. This is one example which demonstrates how a smart foreign policy can combine economic interests with principles and values.

Human Rights

182. In recent years, we have often discussed human rights and fundamental values; the non-negotiable cornerstones of our social and international order; freedom, equality and dignity for all human beings; human rights as a legal and moral guarantee for the former; the rule of law as the fundamental principle of equality of all before the law and the protection of individuals from tyranny and arbitrary rule; and, finally, democracy, this magnificent experiment that aims to give humans agency in deciding on matters of governance and the distribution of resources.
183. Two weeks ago, I addressed the Human Rights Council in Geneva, outlining several of our thematic and geographical priorities. Not all of them, because there are currently too many places in the world where human rights are being challenged and attacked; where women and men who fight to defend the rights of others are intimidated, persecuted, imprisoned, tortured or killed. A striking example is the condemnation to a very heavy prison sentence of Ms Nasrin Sotoudeh, an Iranian lawyer who received the 2012 Sakharov Prize from the European Parliament. Less than three weeks ago, Amnesty International published a report on efforts to silence civil society using legal means, through laws restricting the financing, establishment or organisation of NGOs, or through other forms of “legal” constraints. This has nothing to do with the rule of law – this is a perversion of the law for the purpose of drowning out critical voices!
184. Today, in 2019, we are witnessing a near-global crisis of human rights and democracy, worsened by a deep crisis of confidence in politics. Authoritarian trends are on the rise on all continents and in many countries. And yet we must uphold the dialogue, because the very premise, if not purpose, of diplomacy is to talk to those with whom one disagrees.
185. In many current conflicts, we are witnessing a form of warfare that fails to respect international humanitarian law. This leads to massive international crimes: war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocides. In this context, it is all the more important to support the International Criminal Court. Last year, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Rome Statute, and I am pleased that

today the Chamber will also be debating the bill through which Luxembourg approves the continued development of the definition of war crimes in the Rome Statute.

186. In today's conflicts, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people are displaced within their country or have to seek refuge abroad. These are conflicts in which our conventional diplomatic means no longer seem to apply, conflicts in which the UN Security Council is blocked.

187. Against this trend, we uphold the non-negotiable foundations I mentioned earlier. Human rights apply to all humans everywhere; they are a complex system, whose civil and political dimension is as important as its economic, social and cultural dimension, and they cannot simply be restricted except under strictly regulated circumstances. For Luxembourg, it is more important than ever to support a model of positive international cooperation, all the more so as the major challenges we are facing – climate change, socio-economic inequalities, conflicts, technological progress, migration, pandemics, globalisation – can only be tackled collectively, primarily through an efficient multilateral approach with the United Nations at its core.

188. The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement form the basis of an international agreement for greater sustainability and intergenerational solidarity. But we should not forget that this falls short of our targets and that more far-reaching action will be required to keep global warming below 1.5°C and ensure that future generations benefit from the same opportunities as us.

Feminist Foreign Policy

189. The coalition agreement stipulates that Luxembourg will implement a feminist foreign policy. The question is: what exactly is a feminist foreign policy and why do we need such a policy? Above all, conducting a feminist foreign policy means acknowledging women's rights as human rights and systematically defending the fundamental rights of women and girls. These fundamental rights include political and economic rights, as well as the right to sexual self-determination.

190. As a member of the UN Security Council in 2013 and 2014, we strongly defended this cause. We not only tried to denounce the violations of the rights of women and children, but also took concrete action to stop these violations and strengthen protection of women and children in conflicts.
191. A feminist foreign policy also aims to strengthen the representation and participation of women at all levels, whether in diplomacy, cooperation, defence or civilian missions abroad. A better representation of women at all levels of society is not a goal in and by itself, but a means to strengthen peace, security and democracy in the world, as stipulated in UN Security Council resolution 1325 on “Women and peace and security”. A feminist foreign policy is therefore not only in women’s best interests, but in everyone’s best interests, and contributes to our commitment to a stable and secure world.
192. Following this train of thought, the government adopted an Action Plan on “Women and Peace and Security” in July last year. Over the next five years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will coordinate the implementation of this plan, in close cooperation with the relevant ministries and services. In addition to the participation of women in security matters and in peace processes, at all levels of responsibility, this plan also sets goals for the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence as well as for protection, relief and recovery, both nationally and within the framework of the international missions in which Luxembourg takes part.
193. In civilian missions abroad, we strongly encourage equal participation of women. In the past two years, Luxembourg has sent an equal number of women and men to EU election observation missions.
194. Support for women and girls is one of the key priorities of Luxembourg’s Development Cooperation. This is also emphasised in the new strategy it has presented at the end of 2018. In all of Luxembourg’s interventions – whether bilateral, multilateral or implemented by NGOs – the strengthening and empowerment of women plays a central role.

195. It is in this spirit that Luxembourg's Development Cooperation has launched the Initiative "She Decides", together with our Belgian, Dutch and Scandinavian colleagues. Luxembourg continues to work concretely with specific UN agencies, such as UNFPA or UN Women, to support projects in the field of maternal health and the provision of contraception. In the micro-finance sector as well, in which Luxembourg has long been playing an important role, efforts are targeted at micro-credits for women in order to strengthen their socio-economic role in their respective communities.

196. We want to look at where we stand rather than give lessons to others. A lot has happened in recent years. Without adopting an active quota policy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has achieved a 50/50 quota in its recruitment over the past few years. Simply because we only looked at skills when employing young people. From the first woman in the diplomatic corps in 1979, we have gone to 29 women in 2015, and just 3 years later, in 2018, to 50 out of a total of 143 civil servants. This is 35% of the corps, and the trend goes up. Of 40 ambassadors today, 13 are women. Our ministry supports parental leave and all the other measures, such as working from home or part-time work, for those of our colleagues who want to commit more time to family life. This is a cultural revolution for a field – diplomacy – in which women have long been marginalised, and where the word "*ambassadrice*" traditionally referred to the ambassador's wife.

197. So a lot has been achieved, but we have no intention of stopping there. There is room for improvement in this policy. To this end, we are looking to the feminist foreign policies of countries like Denmark and Sweden for inspiration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

198. We need a diplomacy that defends our interests without sacrificing our principles, values and obligations. Therefore, it is important to call a spade a spade; not to shy away from touching upon sensitive issues. It is important to tell the truth, even if it hurts, if we want to solve problems collectively on an

international or global scale. But this is not the end of the matter. We must also think in terms of strategies and networks, propose solutions and try to anticipate.

199. We need a foreign policy that accounts for the complexity and speed of the changes in today's world. A foreign policy that understands the security context, that recognises the risks and issues and counters them – jointly with our international partners. This is why we call for a strengthening of international law, of the norms devised to protect humanity from itself, and of the institutions we have built with great effort and commitment over the past few decades. This is why we also act multilaterally – both in the longer term, through our candidacy for the UN Security Council in 2031-2032, and in the shorter run, through our candidacy for election to the Human Rights Council for a three-year term, from 2022 to 2024.

200. We stand at a crucial moment in history for Luxembourg, for Europe and for the world. In this complex constellation, it is up to us to make the right decisions so that those who come after us may benefit from a Luxembourg, a Europe and a world in which they can develop freely and live in peace and security, prosperity, social justice and a healthy environment. To achieve this goal, the participation of citizens is essential – participation in elections, such as the upcoming elections to the European Parliament, but also more generally speaking.

201. Finally, I would like to thank you, dear Members of Parliament, and the many people in our society who, day by day, work to defend the interests and values of Luxembourg and Europe.

202. This has never been as important as today, because without values, or with fake values, any democracy is at risk of being undermined.

Thank you.