



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

Declaration on Foreign Policy

presented by

His Excellency Mr. Jean Asselborn
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs

before the Chamber of Deputies
in Luxembourg

on 8th March 2016

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen Members of Parliament,

1. The earth is still orbiting the sun, as it was in November 2014 during my last declaration on foreign policy, and sadly our world is still just as tormented as it was then. If anything, it has become even more divided, more disoriented, and more dangerous. Wars and civil wars in our immediate neighbourhood, terrorist attacks all across the globe, are the reality which we have to contend with today. The images of refugees risking their lives crossing the Mediterranean, who have to crawl under barbed wire at European borders or are forced to sleep in the mud without shelter, because nobody wants to welcome them, have become indelible from our minds.

Allow me, on this 8th March, International Women's Day, to say that it is the women who suffer most of all from the refugee crisis. I have seen this for myself on Lesbos and on Lampedusa, and the images in the media, such as those from Idomeni, illustrate this time and again. It is the women who often suffer from assaults and humiliation during this crisis. And yet, it is so often the women who, with their children and the greatest courage, make their way to our countries. Especially today, these women deserve our respect, as well as our readiness to understand and support them on their journey.

2. First the euro crisis, now the migration crisis, in combination with the instability in the European neighbourhood, have thrown the European Union off balance. Today, our solidarity, our community as Europeans, which has thus far been our hallmark, is no longer a given.
3. The migration crisis is a tough test for Europe. It greatly impacts the functioning of the European Union. As the Presidency, we have sought to find European solutions to this crisis, since that is the only way to confront this challenge. Sadly, today, this approach is not shared by all 28. Individual actions of particular countries or regions threaten our collective acquis.
4. Of course, Europe has had to face problems in the past, there is no doubt about that, but there has probably never yet been so much division. At times, we Europeans have quarrelled over the prices of agricultural products, or we have had our differences in the negotiations toward the European budget, but never have we found ourselves in a situation where our fundamental values and principles were questioned as they are today.
5. The differences between North and South, and most of all between the eastern and the western Member States of the Union, are difficult to bridge. This is partly the case

because the dangerous tendencies towards populism and nationalism are gaining ground in many Member States, while traditional parties and politicians are struggling. The fundamental values, which we have embraced since the founding years, and which we now hold dearer than ever; the principles, which are the backbone of the Union, are today being challenged, and among those values are liberty, democracy, equality and the rule of law – all of them enshrined in the treaties of the European Union. The essential principles of the European integration process are being trodden upon and the future of Europe is frivolously jeopardised. This is not our Europe. This is not the Europe that we want and that we need. Solidarity in Europe cannot become a matter of picking and choosing!

6. On top of this come the discussions regarding a possible Brexit: we have agreed that everything possible has to be done to keep the UK in the European Union. In this regard, great efforts have been made at the European Council on 17th and 18th February. A compromise has been reached: not a good one, yet not a terrible one either. It is now the job of the British government to convince its citizens that the UK can take a firm and forward-looking role in the European Union. This would be the best for the Union and, it seems to me, the best for the United Kingdom, too.
7. The combination of these crises, together with the threat of a Brexit, make for an explosive cocktail for Europe and could result in a shock from which the EU could only recover with difficulty. While many well-intentioned people in Europe, among whom Luxembourg can count itself, do everything in order to create European solutions to these crises, there are also those who think that they can draw a profit from the situation, both within the EU and outside of it. To those, we have to prove that we believe in Europe and have the will and the capacity to overcome these crises.
8. Our Presidency of the Council of ministers of the European Union gave us the opportunity to seek such European solutions. We have attempted to establish a coherent strategy with regards to the migration crisis, a collection of measures that should allow to better manage it, in the interest of humanity, in the interest of the refugees, and with the help of our citizens. We have prioritised actions to effectively combat terrorism. All the while, we have sought to keep in mind the other issues which we included into the programme of our Presidency.
9. In the context of our **Presidency**, we set ourselves the goal of putting the citizen back at the heart of the European project. We did everything necessary to include the concerns of the people into European politics. We pushed for a “Union for the citizens”. Also, we have yet again proven to our partners in the Union that we are a modern, open, and

forward-looking country, which is perfectly able to steer the fate of the Union for six months.

10. Just as soon as the Greek crisis was somewhat under control, we were confronted with two more challenges: I am referring to the migration crisis and the terrorist attacks in and around Europe, most notably those on 13th November in Paris.
11. With regard to the **migration crisis**, our action, from the start, aimed at helping those who were forced to flee their homes. I repeat today what I have been saying for six months already: the migration crisis cannot be solved by isolating Europe and certainly not by building a wall or a fence. Europe has seen enough barbed wire and teargas. History has taught us that barbed wire and teargas have never solved anything. We have to, and we did during the Presidency, manage the crisis with reason and care and in the respect of humanity, as it is enshrined in the 1951 Geneva Convention. That which was humane 65 years ago is still humane today and we have the duty to live and implement these values every day. Particularly for those refugees who flee the worst situation on our planet, we must secure the highest level of protection of human rights. The only way to do this is through a coherent policy, based on the principles of responsibility and solidarity.
12. Yet, Europe has to draw conclusions from the current state of affairs and become aware that it is not possible to welcome everyone. A stronger message has to be sent to the people, who are not protected by the Geneva Convention, before they leave their country, and the EU has to find agreements with their countries in order for them to accept the return of their citizens. However, this is not enough. The EU also has the duty to commit to reducing poverty in these countries, so that these people have a perspective if they remain in their country. Nobody leaves their country unless they are forced to.
13. The Commission is currently also working on so-called *incentive packages*, which would benefit those countries ready to cooperate with the Member States. These measures are going to be tailor-made to fit each individual country. The countries concerned are Bangladesh and Pakistan, as well as African nations like Ivory Coast, Ghana, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria and Senegal.
14. Europe must offer legal ways of migration for people to come here. One must not consider migration as a threat to be stopped, but also as an opportunity to be recognised and harnessed, also in the economic and social interest of the European continent that relies on immigration. According to demographic studies, Europe's population will start diminishing in 2050. Most of all, our population is aging, and migration is an important element for the rejuvenation of Europe. Without immigration, it would become difficult over the next 30 years for Europe's active population to support those who have finished

or have not yet started working. The ratio of professionally active to inactive people in Europe would change from 4:1 to 2:1.

15. Under our presidency we accomplished the work on the difficult subject of students/researchers. The agreement that we finalised together with the European Parliament offers a perspective to around 250.000 young people from all over the world. Moreover, in Valletta, we signed a plan of action together with our African partners, which will create legal ways for people to come to Europe, as well as opportunities for young people in Africa itself.
16. At yesterday's EU-Turkey Summit in Brussels, it has on the one hand become clear that the EU needs Turkey when it comes to finding solutions for the question of refugees, while it has also become much more evident that Turkey needs the EU as well. Some ideas have emerged and have been included in the statement asking President Tusk to check their feasibility with Turkey. Allow me to express some spontaneous doubts of a legal nature – regarding the 1951 Geneva Convention – as well as in terms of politics and humanity, if refugees – even Syrians – who are in Greece, are to be returned to Turkey, while the same number of refugees are to be brought to the EU from Turkey, in exchange. Much further clarification is needed on this. I believe it would be risky to talk about a breakthrough at this stage.

It will be easier to implement visa liberalisations for Turkish citizens, as well as to increase EU funds for Turkey. Even the opening of further chapters in the enlargement process, particularly chapters 23 and 24 that concern justice and the rule of law, is realisable if we agree on it among 28.

17. It is important to maintain an overview over the fast and effective implementation of the measures taken. These measures include the relocation and resettlement of refugees, the implementation of the new policy on returns and readmissions, the creation of “hotspots” and, most importantly, the strengthening of the external borders of the European Union. We are glad that it was possible, during our presidency, to find an agreement on the relocation of 160,000 people and the resettlement of 22,504. The agreement must now be implemented. In October, the Council adopted a financial aid package of 455.7 million euros to tackle the refugee crisis. Phase two of the EUNAVFOR MED SOPHIA mission was launched to actively combat human trafficking in the Mediterranean. Council conclusions were adopted for a new policy on returns and readmissions.
18. Each of these measures is, without any exception, an essential component of the reform of the European migration policy, but this is not sufficient in itself. It is equally important that the proposals, which the Commission made on 15th December 2015 in its

communication on the efficient management of the external borders, are quickly adopted by the European decision making process to allow the Union to be better prepared to deal with the flow of refugees that is expected to increase in the months to come.

19. In this context, the proposal regarding a *European Border and Coast Guard* (Frontex plus) is particularly important. It is essential to find an agreement with the European Parliament as quickly as possible, in order to see a new kind of cooperation become a reality on the ground. In the meantime, individual decisions on the stubborn application of national sovereignty cannot be the solution. That way, none of us makes any progress whatsoever. We require collective responsibility with collective answers, in the case where one country is not able to guard and protect its borders. An upgrade of Frontex is a crucial step to manage the current situation.
20. This is about the future and the integrity of the Schengen area. Schengen can only work if all the common rules are respected. I can understand that some countries reintroduce temporary border controls, but it has to be clear that this can only happen within the framework of our previous agreements and with the understanding that the controls are temporary and geographically limited. It is unacceptable to abandon the basic principles of freedom of movement, and thereby even jeopardise the functioning of the internal market. If Schengen fails, the Union is headed straight for another economic crisis. A recent study reveals that long-term border controls would cause a damage of 470 billion euros. Following a more pessimistic approach, this amount could reach 1.4 trillion euros!
21. Therefore, once more: it is urgent in Europe that all the decisions, which we have taken in the Council of ministers, are put into action. It is not enough to decide on something in Brussels just to see some Member States act as if nothing had happened. Everybody has to fulfil their duty and it is simply not acceptable that there are countries trying to dodge their responsibilities. If some Visegrad countries think they can solve the migration crisis on their own, then they are mistaken. If solutions are motivated by demagogy and populism, that approach can only lead to a dead-end. And this happens at the expense of people fleeing the horrors of war.
22. This is about the solidarity between Member States, which is a political question, rather than a merely legal one. Solidarity cannot be a one-way street to take advantage of when it's convenient and to ignore when it comes to bearing responsibility. Solidarity commands us today to support Greece in order to get the impossible situation on its border to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia under control. In this context, I welcome the Commission's plan to support Greece and other EU countries welcoming large numbers of refugees, with a new package of 700 million euros over three years.

23. In order to properly implement our decisions, we all have to work together on every level. Through well-coordinated measures with our third-country partners, we have to ensure that no alternative migration routes are created, for instance towards Italy. Our actions have to honour international and European law by abiding by the principle of non-discrimination. Those countries that eventually sealed off the Balkan route should now support Greece all the more, by providing humanitarian aid among other things. Furthermore, we have to work with the Balkan countries to make sure that no problems emerge when it comes to law and order, as well as to security. Each of these components will of course require a certain investment, both in terms of financial and human resources. Luxembourg too must do its part!
24. In Luxembourg, we are currently implementing our commitments. Just a few figures to illustrate this: OLAI currently houses around 3,000 people in its facilities. At the beginning of 2015, this number was only 1,500. OLAI now has a housing capacity of 4,000 beds, which is twice as much as at the beginning of the crisis. Last year, 2,447 people requested asylum in Luxembourg, among whom 669 Syrians and 539 Iraqis. By the end of February this year, 89 Syrians and 99 Iraqis had made a request for asylum in our country. We have committed to welcoming 751 people who are currently in Greece or Italy, through the EU relocation mechanism. The first 30 of them have come from Greece last November. Assuming the system works, we are, from now on, ready to welcome about 30 people a month to Luxembourg in this framework. Apart from this, we are making our contribution to the resettlement objective of the EU. Last year, we resettled 46 Syrian refugees from Turkey to Luxembourg, and this year we are expecting around 50, as well. Luxembourg also contributes to the reinforcement of Frontex and EASO on the ground. At the moment, three police officers are detached to Frontex missions: one in Sicily and two on Lesbos. This year, the Directorate for Immigration will put six people at the disposal of EASO, the European Asylum Support Office, one of whom is already in Italy. In last Friday's cabinet meeting we decided to recruit five additional staff to put at the disposition of Frontex. The police will also put four more personnel at the disposal of Frontex.
25. The Presidency has also been actively involved in the **fight against terrorism**. Since the last declaration on foreign policy, many countries have had to pay a high price because of terrorism. Copenhagen, Karachi, Sousse, Tunis, the Garissa University in Kenya, Istanbul, Ankara, the Russian airbus over the Sinai peninsula, the attacks on hotels in Bamako and Ouagadougou, Boko Haram's suicide attacks, Damascus, Homs, Jerusalem, Jakarta, Mogadishu, and many others. The threat of terrorism is a global one, and therefore every country has to play its part in combatting it.

26. The terrorists seek to divide us, to destroy our societies and radicalise them, to turn Europe and the Islamic world against one another. We cannot let this happen. Those barbarians will stop at nothing, not even at crimes against history, which they proved by destroying World Heritage Sites in Palmyra and Timbuktu. The recent attacks in Paris have shown that the fight against Daesh has to be led on several fronts: be it militarily, or, more importantly, politically, and of course, ideologically.
27. The management of our external borders, the exchange of information, the use of and data entry into existing databases were the main areas which had to be reinforced during our Presidency, as were the capacities in the fight against radicalisation, and the coordination with third-countries. After Paris, we were able to find an agreement regarding the introduction of a European system to record and share advanced passenger data, the so-called PNR. At the same time, we managed to improve the protection of data privacy in Europe. We insisted on keeping that package linked to the PNR and thus creating a balance between necessary measures in the fight on terrorism and the protection of the privacy of our citizens. We have to remain vigilant not to let the struggle against terrorism lead us into the trap of sacrificing freedom in the name of security. Human rights violations under the guise of short-term security considerations are not acceptable: in the medium term the limitations of freedom are a threat to the stability of the State and can result in a generalised climate of fear. We cannot sacrifice our fundamental values and our liberty in the name of security: if we do so, we will eventually have neither liberty, nor security.
28. I am pleased that we were able to reach a political agreement concerning the EUROPOL regulation. In the context of the implementation of the European Union Internal Security Strategy 2015-2020, we composed a programme that will serve as a basis for further work. Yet another result of our Presidency is the reform of the Court of Justice of the European Union. The Court is now capable to work more quickly and more efficiently. This is also in the interest of our citizens.
29. Luxembourg has led the first **political dialogue between all Member States on respect for the rule of law** - a practice which will be continued by the next Presidencies in a climate that has shifted dramatically following the elections in Poland. Freedom of the press and the independence of the judiciary are indispensable attributes of the rule of law and we cannot accept that they are no longer guaranteed in the European Union. Therefore, we will continue championing fundamental freedoms and human rights not just outside of Europe, but crucially also within the European Union. We are supporting the European Commission in the implementation of this new mechanism on the rule of law, and welcome the role of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, the analysis of which the EU uses. Concerning Poland, the Venice Commission is about to finalise its

opinion on the reform of the Constitutional Court. According to early information, the Venice Commission recommends to the Polish authorities to rescind most elements of the reform of the Constitutional Court, as they are incompatible with democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

30. Regarding the **economy**, I will take the liberty of briefly summarising a few of the main issues. One of our priorities was to support investments in favour of growth and job creation. We have worked on establishing favourable conditions for mobilising investments in all areas of the EU, we have taken important decisions in favour of a Capital Markets Union, and we have taken steps to increase the stability of the financial markets and the competitiveness of the European steel industry. In the domain of research and innovation, we have made advances in the development of the European Research Area.
31. Another important priority of our Presidency was the strengthening of **the European Union's social dimension**, stressing the "social Triple A". A Union for citizens is inconceivable without a well-developed and equitable social dimension. It is not sufficient to push the European integration process just in the economic and financial fields. We cannot trample the social needs of Europe's poorest by applying inhumane structural reforms. As the Presidency, we organised a number of exchanges on the social dimension in the EPSCO Council. The social dimension was the main subject of the "Tripartite Social Summit" in October 2015. We have championed the strengthening of the social dimension particularly in the domain of the Economic and Monetary Union. Moreover, a number of new directives in the area of labour were adopted. Health and safety in the workplace was an important subject, just as the reintegration of people in long-term unemployment.
32. The reinforcement of the **internal market** was another priority of our Presidency. The digital single market was developed further, notably through the permanent abolition of roaming fees inside the EU by mid-2017. We have thereby proven that it is possible to place the interests of our citizens above the profits of a few large corporations.
33. I could now tell you about the intellectual property rights file, the Energy Union, the fourth railway package, or the decisions in the areas of finance and taxation, which will result in more fiscal transparency, but I would prefer to focus on trade policy.
34. International trade has become an essential part of our foreign and economic policy, particularly when it comes to exporting our values and standards. This applies to our social and labour laws, our consumer rights or our environmental standards. Yet it also means that we, as the EU, want to contribute to the development of norms in new technologies, for instance.

35. Luxembourg has strongly insisted on a coherent, inclusive and responsible **EU trade policy**. Coherent, since growth, economic development, the protection of social rights and of the environment, go together. Inclusive, since this policy should be to the benefit of everybody, companies and workers, who are also consumers. Yet, inclusive also because the life span of any global economy lacking local support is a short one. Responsible, since the EU advocates open, free, and fair trade, which finally integrates the world's poorest countries most of all. These basic principles are to be found in the conclusions adopted by the Council in November, regarding the new European trade and investment strategy "Trade for all". I insist on this point, because these conclusions will deeply influence trade policy for the five years to come. It was our Presidency that managed to put a number of controversial subjects – which have often been discussed in this Chamber – on paper. We have not been reluctant to find clear words when it came to services, data protection, or the transparency of trade negotiations.
36. From a European perspective, one has to admit that Europe cannot dictate the rules of trade in the 21st century: for us to be heard, we have to find a strong partner. A partner who, despite our differences, shares our convictions. Of course we, as the EU, do not seek to exclude anyone, but we want to take part in determining the rules, rather than have others decide them for us. And this leads me to the negotiations on the partnership with the United States, the TTIP.
37. When listening to the debates surrounding **TTIP**, one notices that they focus less of the pros and cons of open markets, which are unquestionable for our country, but more on what kind of an influence States can maintain in a globalised and interconnected world to guarantee public services, in the public interest. Because those are the concerns of people, the question of transparency in the negotiations is so crucial.
38. During our Presidency, we have most notably sought to make progress in one of the more sensitive areas: reforming investment protection through a permanent investment court, with qualified judges subject to a strict code of conduct, transparent proceedings with publicly available documents, and the possibility for appeal. This is a minor revolution, as it abolishes the so-called ISDS mechanism, which can, however, still be found in a large number of bilateral European investment protection agreements. This makes it even more crucial that this new system can prevail as a global standard on investment protection. It was already possible to include this new system into the trade agreement with Vietnam, as well as into CETA with Canada, which already contained individual elements of this reform and could now include the reformed rules on investment protection in their entirety. As we can see, more and more of our partners are convinced that this is the right way to develop clear and transparent rules on investment protection, after the old system, the ISDS, was devoid of legitimacy.

39. In this context, I would like briefly to mention a subject of which I know that you are very concerned about, namely the access to TTIP documents. Similarly to other Member States, we have recently opened a reading room for confidential TTIP documents at the Foreign Ministry. By the way, the only confidential documents in this regard are the American suggestions in response to our European proposals. Everybody is free to view the European proposals: they are publicly available on the Commission's website. This is a vital step in the area of transparency, in order to have an informed debate, based on facts.
40. Allow me to say a few words on trade relations with China. The negotiations on an agreement on investment between the EU and China have constantly advanced. This agreement is a priority in the extension of our relations with China, which must be based on reciprocity.
41. Luxembourg remains committed to multilateral solutions within the framework of the World Trade Organisation. Under our Presidency, the EU has insisted on the importance of a strong and coherent multilateral framework for negotiations, which also places greater expectations on countries whose development is well underway than on those which have only just begun to develop. This is the perspective in which I have deposited the EU's instrument of accession for the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) in Istanbul at the margins of the G20 in October 2015.
42. In December 2015, at the **10th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation in Nairobi**, the Member States of the WTO were able to find an important agreement on export competition for agricultural products and preferential treatment, meaning improved access to our markets, for least developed countries.
43. Another important priority of our Presidency was the commitment to a green economy with lower emissions. We were deeply involved in the preparations for the **COP21 in Paris** and the UN Summit that resulted in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The success of the COP21 is also a success of our Presidency, which has greatly contributed to defend the positions of the 28. The Paris agreement is a strong one, as it is the first one to oblige states parties to renew their mandatory commitments for the reduction of emissions every five years, and, if possible, to increase them. Moreover, this applies to all developed countries as well as to developing countries, and thereby also to the major emerging economies like China or India. In the context of the fight against climate change, the Presidency has advocated a reform of the Emissions Trading System. We have lent our support to the revision of the European Biodiversity Strategy and the implementation of a sustainable fishery and agriculture policy.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen Members of Parliament,

44. Allow me to say a few words on the **accession policy of the Union**. Currently, there are five candidate countries for accession: Turkey, Serbia, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Albania. We are currently leading negotiations with three of these: Serbia, Montenegro and Turkey. The conditions for the negotiations to commence with the other two candidates have not yet been met. Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are currently considered potential candidates for membership.
45. In Thessaloniki in 2003, the European Union committed itself to a future within the EU for the Balkan countries. Despite the current crisis in Europe, and despite the challenging demands that come with the process, our neighbours remain committed to accession. This also remains the most effective instrument at the disposal of the EU to produce far-reaching and sustainable transformation in these countries. Bosnia's decision to submit their candidature on 15th February, the considerable progress in the normalisation process between Belgrade and Pristina over the last summer, and the commitment of the other Balkan countries to meet the criteria of the EU, constitute clear evidence for this.
46. Therefore, I am particularly pleased that our Presidency was the first in years to be able to open new negotiation chapters with three candidate countries. One of them was Turkey, with which there had been no progress since 2013. Allow me to highlight here that any democracy worth its salt cannot crack down on freedom of the press. This freedom is the cornerstone of any free society. Without freedom of the press, a country cannot be free, and nor can its people. One can only hope that this huge and important country extends the same generosity, that it showed by welcoming 2,5 million refugees since 2011, to the rule of law. The EU is willing to support it in both areas.
47. We were also able to open negotiation chapters with Montenegro, which has currently 22 (out of 35) open chapters, and Serbia, with which we could open the very first chapters, after Belgrade and Pristina were able to find important agreements in their normalisation process in August 2015 – which was not an easy task for either of them and which required great political courage. Moreover, these agreements permitted the EU to sign the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo.
48. In order for the candidates to better comprehend the EU's internal decision making process, the Luxembourg Presidency decided to invite them to all eight informal high level meetings, which is twice the number of invitations that were extended by other Presidencies.
49. Our relations with **Asia** were another subject high up on the list of priorities during our Presidency. In November, we organised the 12th Meeting of Foreign ministers of the

"Asia-Europe-Meeting" (ASEM). This was the largest event during our Presidency, with 53 ministers and 500 delegates coming together on Kirchberg to discuss the relations between Europe and Asia, most notably in the areas of climate change and connectivity between both continents. Other subjects were the situations in North Korea and Afghanistan.

50. All things considered, I am confident to say that we have delivered, once again, a good, a solid Presidency. It was not an easy Presidency, but we managed to keep the promises that we made in our programme. Our Presidency was about the citizens of Europe, and we did everything in our power to show the citizens that the Union is there for them and deals with their worries and aspirations.
51. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to everybody, and in particular to the 200 young "chargés de mission", for their commitment and performance for our Presidency. We were a good team, be it in Brussels, in Luxembourg or in many other places in Europe and beyond, and we managed to work together on every level. I would also like to thank the Chamber of Deputies for their work during the Presidency and the support they extended to the government.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen Members of Parliament,

52. Much like 2014, the year 2015 was also defined by the crisis in **Ukraine**. Let us remember that, after the Maidan revolution, Russia occupied and illegally annexed Crimea, before eastern Ukraine was set ablaze. Since April 2014, more than 9.000 people have lost their lives to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, among them the 298 people aboard Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, which was shot down on 17th July 2014.
53. After the terrible escalation of violence in the winter of 2014, the arrangement regarding the implementation of the Minsk Agreement of 12th February 2015 created some hope for a permanent political resolution of the conflict. Beyond demanding a cease-fire and the retreat of weapons in accordance with the Minsk Memorandum of September 2014, this package asks for a political process of decentralization and local elections, at the end of which Ukraine shall regain sovereignty over its eastern border.
54. After long negotiations, both in the Normandy format, where Germany and France mediate between Russia and Ukraine, and the Trilateral Contact Group, where the OSCE takes the role of mediator between Ukraine, on the one hand, and Russia and the separatists, on the other, the cease-fire is by now mostly being respected. The retreat of heavy weaponry still requires further progress.

55. The parties to the conflict must also proceed with the implementation of the political dimension of the Minsk Agreement. A constitutional reform providing for decentralisation passed the Ukrainian parliament on its first reading in August. It is now essential that the reform is adopted on its second reading. In parallel to this, the consultations within the Trilateral Contact Group are being continued, in order to find an understanding on the modalities for local elections in the areas controlled by the separatists. These have to be maintained in order for the Ukrainian government to have legitimate and generally accepted interlocutors in the East of the country. Dialogue is the only means by which to solve the Ukrainian crisis. The internal political crisis, which Ukraine is currently struggling with, is less than helpful to the implementation of Minsk, which is why the French and German Foreign ministers have travelled to Kiev in order to encourage those in positions of political responsibility to reconcile their differences and to keep working on the necessary reforms.
56. In the context of the crisis in Ukraine, the OSCE, as you know, created a Special Monitoring Mission with the aim of recording and retracing the events as they occur on the ground. This mission also contributes to the dialogue between parties on the ground, and thereby the stabilisation of the situation. We are actively working on dispatching an observer from Luxembourg to the mission on the ground.
57. Following the annexation of Crimea and because of the destabilization of eastern Ukraine, the European Union was left with no other choice than adopting targeted sanctions against the separatists and Russia. The EU sanctions against Russia remain a means to an end, rather than an end in themselves. Luxembourg is absolutely convinced that the sanctions are only one instrument among many to defuse the conflict. They are intimately linked to the implementation of the Minsk agreements in their entirety, and can be lifted as soon as the conditions are being met. The sectoral sanctions have been prolonged until 31st July 2016. At that point, the Council of the EU has to reassess the situation. In this context, a constructive commitment of all parties to the conflict is required for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.
58. The full implementation of the Minsk agreements remains absolutely essential, not just to stabilise eastern Ukraine, but moreover to normalise our relations with Russia. We have to keep seeking dialogue with Russia, because, in the long run, it is inconceivable to share a continent without communicating and without working on the creation of a common, shared, space. A return to the Cold War is in nobody's best interest, neither in ours, nor in Russia's. In those areas that are not affected by the sanctions, mainly the prevention of and fight against terrorism, our cooperation with Russia can and should be enhanced. We are also well aware that a solution in Syria is not conceivable without Russia, and therefore it is crucial to sustain dialogue with Moscow. In order to maintain our dialogue

with Russia, I have visited my Russian counterpart twice since the beginning of the crisis, and our Prime minister visited President Putin and Prime minister Medvedev last October. minister Etienne Schneider visited Moscow in February in the context of the BLEU-Russia Mixed Commission.

59. Concerning **Iran**, we have supported the process of the E3+3 States and its double-track approach from the start. The approach consists in putting pressure on the regime through sanctions on the one hand, while negotiating political and economic relations on the other, on the condition that Iran cooperates with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA. To this end, the EU had adopted a set of complex sanctions. They were aimed at the regime and its members and designed to prevent the creation of a nuclear programme for military purposes. These sanctions had a strong effect on the regime. They contributed to a change of hearts in Teheran and to the commitment in favour of the normalisation of relations between Iran and the West.
60. The agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), finalised in July 2015, after 12 years of tough negotiations, was a decisive step towards a diplomatic solution of the issue of Iran's nuclear programme, as well as a major diplomatic break-through.
61. This agreement helps minimising the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. The agreement is a good one: it is strong, sustainable and verifiable. It is an important and the right step and one of the few pieces of good news to come from the Middle East.
62. We have to reiterate that, like any other country, Iran has the right to the civilian use of nuclear energy. The sole condition is complete transparency on Iran's side and the comprehensive respect of the obligations in the framework of its international commitments, and thus full cooperation with the IAEA. The implementation of the agreement allows for the assurance of an exclusively civilian nature of Iran's nuclear programme, and grants Iran the rights in the domain of civilian nuclear power resulting from the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
63. President Rouhani and his Foreign minister Zarif made this agreement possible, and we granted them our support for doing so. In June 2014 and again last November, I was in Teheran, while a delegation from this Parliament visited this January. Foreign minister Zarif carried out a bilateral visit to Luxembourg in September 2014 and Luxembourg hosted a round of negotiations between Iranians and Europeans in June 2015.
64. The agreement stands as proof that diplomatic efforts are able to put an end to long-lasting conflicts that could have led to military escalation. This shows that diplomacy and stamina are worth the effort and serves as a model for the resolution of other conflicts elsewhere.

65. The lifting of the international sanctions against Iran is part of the agreement. This concerns firstly the lifting of all the Security Council's sanctions against Iran, and secondly of the multilateral and regional sanctions targeting the Iranian nuclear programme, but also trade, access to technology and financial markets, as well as the energy sector.
66. On this last part, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2231 shortly after the agreement. This resolution suspends all UN sanctions against Iran, while providing for a snap-back mechanism that can reactivate those sanctions with immediate effect in case Iran falls short on implementing its obligations as set by the agreement.
67. The EU endorsed the resolution through Council conclusions. Under Luxembourg's Presidency, the legal acts were adopted that allow for the effective suspension of the EU sanctions. These legal acts provide for the suspension of the sanctions on the so-called "Implementation Day", which was the date on which the IAEA determined that Iran had implemented its most important commitments from the agreement on its nuclear programme.
68. This "Implementation Day" was 16th January. This date marks the moment of transition from the agreement as a set of ambitious promises on paper to effective actions with quantifiable progress in reality.
69. Since "Implementation Day" the sanctions against Iran are thus suspended. The final lifting of the sanctions will occur only after ten years, when the IAEA determines that the Iranian nuclear programme has not deviated from its civilian nature.
70. Allow me to stress the following: verification is the main pillar of this agreement. I explicitly welcome the fact that Iran has let actions follow its promises. It has kept its word. And the EU will do the same. However, we will remain vigilant and verify if Iran observes its obligations according to the agreement. All parties have shown good intentions and courage during the negotiations and a steady and timely implementation is crucial to keep building confidence. The quality of the agreement can only be verified through its implementation.
71. Last week's election results have shown that President Rouhani's policy of openness is strongly supported in Iran itself. Our hope is that these developments are further strengthened by an effective improvement of the human rights situation.
72. One can well be confident that the agreement will be a way for the improvement of Iran's regional and international relations. The nuclear deal offers some potential for advancing the dialogue between the international community and Iran and thereby contributes to

the defusing of regional tensions and conflicts. It is in our interest to see Iran take a role in resolving the security problems in the region, most of all in Syria.

73. Apart from Iran, there are very few positive developments in the Middle East, much to the contrary in fact. The **conflicts in the North Africa and the Middle East** are all still ongoing: since the last declaration on foreign policy, there has sadly been no substantive progress, and the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen have each become more tragic. Power vacuums have appeared there and have been filled by Islamist extremists.
74. The critical humanitarian situation further compounds the situation, putting the stability of neighbouring countries in peril. The conflicts in this region – in our neighbourhood – have a direct impact on Europe’s future. The immediate consequences on Europe are most apparent in the refugee crisis and the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters. These are fighters who left more than 80 countries, among which Luxembourg, as we know, to join extremist organisations in Syria.
75. The Middle-East is region haunted by endless divisions: between sovereignty and sectarianism, Sunni and Shia and other religious and ethnic groups, secular and religious nationalists, modernity and tradition, the State and religion, the elites and the people, the urban and the rural, extreme wealth and extreme poverty, a list that could go on and on.
76. Yes, a century after the secret 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement between France and the United Kingdom on the partitioning of the Middle East, the region is yet again caught in a period of profound upheaval. It would be too simplistic to reduce the complex reality to a conflict between Sunni and Shia or even a so-called “clash of civilisations”. The current crises arise from much more traditionally political reasons, often from mundane questions of distribution of power, the drawing of borders, political representation, or the struggle over influence both within and outside the borders. I am convinced that there is no “clash of civilisations”. What there is, however, is a clash between civilisation and barbarism.
77. Everything points to the Arab Spring being stuck in a dead-end. Tunisia is so far the only country in the region where the transition to democracy appears to be well underway, although extremists keep attempting to derail the young democracy, as has to be seen in yesterday’s jihadist attack on a military base on the Libyan border, causing 53 fatalities. In Syria, Libya, and Yemen there is no evidence for democratisation. The extremely complicated situation in Egypt underscores the difficulty of combining stability, security and democracy.
78. In **Syria**, a peaceful protest against a dictatorial regime turned into a bloody civil war. In fact, we are witnessing wars within a war in Syria, which creates such a convoluted

situation: the Assad regime and its allies are pitted against a rebellion, the Global Coalition against Daesh, Turkey against Kurdish groups, Iran against Saudi Arabia, and all of this in a context of tensions between Turkey and Russia and between Russia and the West. The conflict is so hazardous that it could lead to consequences beyond anybody's control and that nobody could have wished for. The incident between Turkey and Russia has shown how volatile the situation is. We are pleading with both parties to engage in dialogue to defuse the situation.

79. This conflict caused the largest humanitarian crisis since the end of World War II. More than 260.000 dead, over a million wounded, many of them maimed for life, millions of refugees, and a horrendous situation, particularly for those in besieged cities, where over 480.000 people dwell under the most appalling circumstances, often close to starvation. In the many indiscriminate bombings, hospitals and schools have been destroyed wantonly. Even war has rules, as dictated by international humanitarian law, but in Syria, in their abysmal cynicism, the parties to the conflict don't even shrink from breaking these most basic rules of war.
80. In order to put an end to the civil war in Syria and thereby getting to the root of the refugee problem, a political solution has to be found. Therefore, one can only hope for the negotiations between the regime and the opposition to finally start and for the humanitarian situation to improve as quickly as possible – particularly through the guarantee of humanitarian access, an end to attacks on civilians, and an end to the sieges. The cease-fire, agreed on by the United States and Russia on 22nd February and recently implemented, is essential to the quick implementation of humanitarian measures in order to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population even a little bit. While the cease-fire between the regime and the non-jihadist elements of the opposition is extremely fragile, at least the civilian population can benefit from it, and it is a very clear shimmer of hope. If the cease-fire can hold, it would be proof that a political solution is feasible. The negotiations are set to begin in Geneva in the coming days, and one has to hope that the United Nations special envoy, Staffan de Mistura, will be successful.
81. Here, I would like to plead for a cease-fire between Turkey and the Kurds in Syria. These are two of our partners fighting one another. As I was able to witness during my visit to Iraqi Kurdistan last April, the Kurds are our allies in the fight against the extremists; they are the ground troops of the Global Coalition. As we have seen in Kobani in Syria, the Kurdish militias were the ones to drive out Daesh in June and thereby shatter the myth of their invincibility.
82. Improvements of the living conditions of refugees in the neighbouring countries are urgently needed, not least to avoid further destabilisation in these countries. This would

inevitably also lead to lower incentives to flee the countries, which is in the direct interest of Europe. I would like to remind you that the UNHCR counts 4,8 million Syrian refugees, 2,5 million of whom are in Turkey, one million in Lebanon and over 600.000 in Jordan. In a second phase of the political process, the question of a transitional government has to be seriously considered.

83. I think that, despite the extremely dire situation, one should not be completely abandon hope. It seems to me that the international community does not entirely disagree on the objectives that have to be achieved: the last weeks have shown that there is an understanding when it comes to the main points: 1) achieving a stable cease-fire, 2) a quick implementation of a political transition reflective of the will of the Syrian people, 3) respecting the territorial integrity of Syria, and 4) the destruction of Daesh.
84. The political transition should not lead to a breakdown of Syrian institutions. A situation like that in Libya in 2011 and in Iraq in 2003 has to be averted. The resulting vacuum would be filled by extremists.
85. A sustainable political solution is also largely dependent on the attitudes of the countries wielding political, military and economic influence on the parties to the Syrian conflict. It is up to these countries to persuade the Syrian parties to join the negotiations and deliberate seriously. An important point, when it comes to ending the conflict, lies in the improvement of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and of course also in the rapprochement between the United States and Russia.
86. A fundamental problem of the conflict remains that there are parties that still hold the conviction that they can achieve a military victory and are therefore unwilling to compromise. A situation in which the only remaining choice was between Assad and the jihadists would make a new beginning for a pluralistic Syria extremely difficult. It cannot be a choice between two tyrannies. This is why there can be no alternative the Geneva negotiations. In December, UN Security Council Resolution 2254 established an ambitious timeline toward a political solution: the creation of a “credible, inclusive and non-sectarian” transitional government within six months and democratic elections within 18 months.
87. Yet another important issue is the financing of terrorism. In order to attain a credible cease-fire, it is decisive that no jihadist organisations have access to external financing. Every country that is directly or indirectly involved in Syria would make a wise choice to concentrate its resources on a political solution.
88. In **Libya**, we are confronted with the threat of a political vacuum that has to be filled as quickly as possible by stability and the rule of law. It is essential to invest massively to

preventing Daesh from taking root and spreading out in the country, although they are already present and occupy 300 km of territory along the coast. In order to consolidate the political situation in Libya, a government of national unity must as soon as possible lead the destiny of the country. This government is formed, but has to be recognized by both parliaments, in Tobruk and Tripoli. The international community has to further put its support behind the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, Mr. Kobler. Commitment to stability in Libya is not only essential for the stability on Northern and Western Africa, but also for the security of Europe.

89. In order for a government of national unity to be able to work, pressure on some armed groups, that are not yet convinced by such a government, is required most of all.
90. Libya's humanitarian situation is deteriorating. More than three million people, half the population, are directly affected by armed conflict and political instability. 2.4 million of them require protection and humanitarian assistance. 1.3 million even require food assistance – and this in a wealthy country!
91. Regional actors, most notably the Arab League and the neighbouring countries, have to support all these efforts. In order to overcome the crisis, the neighbours in the region have to be supported in controlling their borders and creating a better cooperation in the fight against terrorism.
92. As long as Libya is caught in a state of civil war, without a central authority to oppose the militias, Daesh in Libya will be difficult to combat. The only way to build an effective strategy against Daesh is through a sustainable political solution that puts an end to the country's institutional divisions.
93. However, even among these crises, we cannot forget about **the longstanding conflict between Israel and Palestine**. This conflict has not lost any of its strategic centrality: almost every day, we witness deaths in Israel, in the West Bank or in East Jerusalem, and, in the summer of 2014, Gaza suffered a third explosion of violence within five years, the deadliest to date. This conflict also remains one of the reasons for radicalisation in the Middle East as well as in Europe. A solution would help to stymie extremists and reduce regional tensions.
94. The peace process only exists in name at this stage and the people of Palestine and of Israel also still have to pay an unacceptably high price because of an unresolved conflict, for which the parameters of resolution are well known.
95. It is high time for the international community to make progress here, and this time to find a sustainable solution. Despite all the criticism that one has to express regarding the

current Israeli government policy, the right to Israel's existence can never be put into question. The people of Israel have a right to live in peace and security, just as the people of Palestine have a right to self-determination. Luxembourg supports both these rights.

96. Sadly, one has to see that Israel's illegal settlement policy still continues and stands in the way of a political solution. Yet, one cannot give up on the idea of a two-state solution. Today unfortunately, the direct contact between Palestine and Israel is interrupted since the failure of John Kerry's initiative in the spring of 2014. Mr. Netanyahu's government bears the main responsibility for this, as it decided to proceed with the settlement policy: almost 600.000 Israelis now live in the West Bank and occupied East-Jerusalem.
97. The announcement of further plans for dwellings in the settlements in East-Jerusalem and the West Bank, the demolition of homes and provocations around the Haram al-Sarif/Temple Mount, keep pouring oil on the fire.
98. This policy is also an insult to the Palestinian people and to the international community. Moreover, Israel's proceeding with the settlement policy casts doubts upon the continuation of its serious commitment to a two-state solution. In order to find a way out of the current stalemate, Israel's policy has to change.
99. The situation isn't just difficult in the West Bank, but also in Gaza, where the humanitarian and security situations remain volatile. The last conflict in Gaza was almost two years ago, but since then the necessary improvements have not yet been made. The priority of Luxembourg and of the international community has to be in the lifting of the blockade and the faster reconstruction of the destroyed Gaza Strip. Unfortunately security issues and a lack of financing have recently caused frequent problems with this, as I was able to see for myself in November.
100. Gaza, as it is right now, is no longer viable. 1.8 million people cramped into a territory one seventh the size of Luxembourg, without perspective, without motivation, mostly without work and without hope. Unless there are decisive changes, Gaza will explode again, as it has done every second or third year in the past. This with much death, hatred, and misery. Opening up Gaza would make many things easier, both on a human and on a diplomatic level. Leaving Gaza locked down necessarily means violence and misery, for Palestine as well as for Israel.
101. Most of all, the idea that there could be an alternative to the two-state solution might be the most dangerous delusion, which keeps becoming more popular and more deeply seated. A permanent peace in the Middle-East can only come about through the coexistence of two sovereign and independent States.

How can we advance towards a diplomatic solution?

102. First of all, the Israeli government has to be convinced that the existence of a Palestinian State is the best guarantee for their own security.
103. Secondly, we have to agree on a framework and a timeline for the negotiations, ideally through a Security Council resolution.
104. Thirdly, a new format for the negotiations is necessary: the European Union and the Arab States have to work together to find a solution to this conflict. Europe cannot be considered a simple “payer”. It has to be a “player”, too. Europe has to use all available political and financial means to push the parties to return to the negotiating table, to underline the positive aspects of a peaceful solution and finally to take tangible measures in case the two-state solution is put into question.
105. Fourthly, the European Union has to support the efforts of Mahmoud Abbas, which are based upon a return of the Palestinian authorities to Gaza and on a process of reconciliation in accordance with the principles of the international community. It is difficult to negotiate with a divided Palestinian representation.
106. Finally, as I have said, the blockade of Gaza has to be lifted to allow for fundamental improvements of the population’s living conditions.
107. The international community has long been trying to find an agreement on this issue. What will happen if, once again, there is not substantial progress in the negotiations, which France is trying to revive and which we are supporting? As called for by the Chamber of Deputies in December 2014, Luxembourg will, certainly together with other EU countries, recognise the Palestinian State. A recognition is not be a favour, nor a free pass, but simply reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to their State. For the resolution of the conflict, Luxembourg always keeps in mind the conditions of security for Israel and justice for the Palestinian people.
108. The instrument of recognition should, however, not be purely symbolic, but a tangible step towards peace. A bilateral recognition has to be based on a well thought-out decision that gives consideration to the international political context. The government will coordinate every step in this context with the Chamber of Deputies.
109. **Africa** currently also occupies an important spot in our foreign policy. Every year, the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa in January is an important gathering for me. Again this year, I was there to emphasise our solidarity with the countries of Africa. Particularly today, when we are confronted with the refugee crisis and the spread of terrorism in Africa, too, we have to stand by the side of this continent as a strong partner.

110. The refugee and migration crisis also shows us how close together Africa and Europe are on the world map. Europe is still a source of great attraction for those who want to leave behind poverty, repression, corruption, and war; those who hope for a better life and take on the dangerous journey through the Sahara and across the Mediterranean. Under our Presidency, a major Summit on migration was held between the EU and our African partners in Valletta, as I have mentioned before. This was an important opportunity to engage in an open and sometimes difficult dialogue concerning the great challenges arising from the crises and migration, which both our continents confronted with.
111. Africa and Europe share many common interests and values that are worth defending. Respect for human rights, human dignity, and solidarity are important preconditions for any free and democratic State and for a well-functioning international system. Africa and Europe also have common enemies: terrorism, extremism, corruption, intolerance – a culture of exclusion, which we have to counter together.
112. The recent terrorist attacks in Ouagadougou and Burkina Faso prove once again that terrorism and violence recognise no borders. The same is true for Nigeria, where the government is leading a tough battle against Boko Haram; Mali, where two years after the French intervention the threat of extremism still remains, or Somalia, where the terror campaign of the Al-Shabaab militia has still not been halted.
113. In the fight against terrorism and extremism we have to work side by side, and therefore it is particularly important to maintain and further consolidate our partnerships in Africa. This is self-evident for Luxembourg and coherent with our decades-long commitments in Africa and particularly in the Sahel region with our partner countries Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Burkina Faso. Luxembourg also remains committed to Africa in the framework of our Common Security and Defence Policy. Luxembourg participates in the military missions in Mali (EUTM Mali) and in the EUFOR RCA mission in Bangui, in the Central African Republic, as well as in the civilian EUCAP missions, through the participation of policemen in Niger and Mali.
114. However, in many African countries, the internal situation is still tense. In Burundi, one can once again see to which extremes a President is willing to go in order to maintain his grasp on power. If the ethnic issue is brought into this, the result is a recipe for war, poverty and desperation.
115. The crises east and south of Europe have led NATO to adapt its stance and to invest more into common and collective security again. In this context, the decisions taken at the last NATO Summit in Wales are being implemented, and Luxembourg does its part to underline its solidarity with its allies.

116. In the framework of the **civilian European Common Security and Defence Policy**, we are proud to have been able, in 2015, to participate in no fewer than five civilian missions simultaneously: in Kosovo (EULEX), Georgia (EUMM), Niger (EUCAP Sahel), Mali (EUCAP Sahel), and Ukraine (EUAM). Moreover, we are pleased to have been able for the first time to second a magistrate to a European civilian mission, the EULEX Kosovo mission. This increase in participation in civilian missions is a priority for this government, as it is the logical complement to a lasting stabilisation of conflict situations.
117. Luxembourg will remain committed to its striving for a more secure world, a world with **fewer weapons**. With this objective in mind, we will continue to take part in initiatives aiming at disarmament and arms reduction. We are particularly dedicated to achieving progress based on legally binding agreements and conventions with clear and distinct criteria, which commit States to achieve tangible targets.
118. We have ratified the Arms Trade Treaty and have been implementing it since its entry into force, one year ago. For this, we have deposited a draft bill, in order to further strengthen our system for export controls. I am convinced that the Chamber of Deputies can quickly consider the bill, to allow the competent authorities to assume their responsibilities.
119. Another aspect is that of the financing of arms trade and of the regulation of such financing. The Luxembourg Government takes this issue very seriously. We are, for instance, one of the very few countries where the law on the prohibition of cluster bombs also includes the prohibition of the financing of such weapons. With this, we went beyond the commitments required by the convention. We are endeavouring to include a similar rule into our law on the prohibition of landmines.
120. The threat of the use of **weapons of mass destruction** is still not under control. The joint UN-OPCW mission managed to dismantle the Syrian chemical weapons programme in record time and under the most difficult and dangerous circumstances, in an effort of exemplary international cooperation. However, in Libya, where a certain stock of chemical substances remains to be destroyed, there is a danger that these could fall into the hands of terrorist groups. This is why Luxembourg will keep advocating for the universalisation of the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.
121. Another kind of weapons of mass destruction is still of great concern to us: nuclear weapons. Despite the agreement with Iran, the international community of States, at the important Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, was not able to agree on how to solve certain fundamental problems in the future. Nuclear disarmament and counter proliferation of nuclear weapons – particularly

in the Middle-East – are crucial questions to which the international community absolutely has to find answers.

122. Luxembourg will consistently continue to finance projects aiming at the disposal of landmines, cluster munitions and unexploded ordnance, particularly in the regions that are most affected, in order to combat the pernicious effects of contaminated territories on the civilian populations, and particularly on children.
123. On 1st January, Luxembourg assumed the year-long Presidency of the **Benelux** Committee of ministers. We are aiming for an ambitious Presidency: Benelux remains, together with the Greater Region, one of the main vectors of our foreign policy action. The role of the Presidency consists in the identification of issues in which we share common positions with our Belgian and Dutch friends, so as to increase the political weight of our three countries in the EU through common statements. It is not by accident that, combined, our three countries dispose of the same number of votes in the Council of ministers than any single one of the largest Member States. In an enlarged EU of 28 members, such collaboration has been gaining relevance over the last years: when the Benelux is in agreement, its positions are taken seriously and gain a certain influence on other Member States. In my capacity as President of the Benelux Committee of ministers, I have suggested to my Belgian and Dutch colleagues to organise a meeting with the Baltic Foreign ministers, as well as with those of the Visegrad States. Luxembourg is indeed very committed to cultivate its relations with other small and medium-sized countries in the EU. Aside from often having more common interests as might be obvious at first glance, this also allows for a different perspective on some foreign policy issues. The meeting with the Visegrad countries is important to me not just because our Czech friends are currently holding its Presidency, but also because I am convinced that there is even more need for dialogue when there are disagreements on some issues, as there currently are, than during periods of fair weather. Moreover, I will suggest to my Benelux colleagues to organise a common visit to a third country. When we travelled to Kiev together last autumn, I could witness that such a joint visit was considered an important signal.
124. When it comes to our priorities, the mobility and security of persons is at the top of the list: this concerns cross-border mobility on the labour market, as well as the elaboration of the fourth Senningen plan of action in the domain of police and civil protection cooperation.
125. The promotion of environmental protection: For instance, how can we implement our COP21 commitments together?
126. The consolidation of the Benelux internal market: For instance, why are there still territorial restrictions within Benelux when it comes to supplying businesses?

127. As you can see, these are very tangible issues that will benefit our citizens. While Benelux cooperation on these issues often happens imperceptibly, this does not make it any less important, and we will do our utmost during our Benelux Presidency to achieve a maximum of progress.
128. There has been a lot of good work over the last months in the framework of our **Nation Branding** strategy, which was adopted by the government in 2014. Together with all parties as well as with the civil society, a profile of our country has been established. According to it, Luxembourg is an open, dynamic, and reliable country. Now we need to focus on implementing those values, which is why a plan of action has been established and is currently being implemented in close cooperation with all parties. It is a long-term process to which everybody has to contribute.
129. As the **host State** of several European and international institutions, Luxembourg is entirely committed to providing those who work for these institutions with the best possible working and living conditions. From an economic, social and cultural perspective, the presence of about 12,000 civil servants and their families is an important asset for our country.
130. When it comes to new construction projects, the new structure which will host all the services of the European Parliament, the Konrad Adenauer II building, is making good progress. Construction on the Konrad Adenauer II was able to begin under good conditions, and the cooperation with the Parliament is going very well.
131. We are still in the planning phase for the new Jean Monnet 2 building. In a few years' time, it will bring together all Commission staff in Luxembourg under a single roof.
132. In light of the precautionary principle, the Commission took the decision to leave the Jean Monnet 1 building, since it contained asbestos. The government decided to support the Commission in its search for new facilities. The Commission accommodates its staff in two buildings at the Cloche d'Or, while the Luxembourg authorities support the Commission, inter alia by constructing a provisional building on Kirchberg, which will house around 500 staff, . This building should be completed in the beginning of May. In return for our cooperation, we have been assured that the financial, legal and digital pillars of the Commission in Luxembourg will be reinforced. From now on, a fixed percentage of Commission staff (12.48%) will be working in Luxembourg.
133. The construction of the third tower of the European Court of Justice is about to be launched. This last extension is expected to be completed in 2019 and will allow the Court to house all its employees at a single site.

134. The planning phase for the seat of the Court of Appeal of the new Unified Patent Court is well underway and we are expecting that this new entity can start its work in Luxembourg before the end of this year.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

135. As Willy Brandt once remarked: “Peace is not everything, but without peace, everything is nothing”. When we look around us, look at the neighbourhood of the European Union, we see very little peace. We have no other choice than to do whatever we can to contribute to peace; otherwise nothing will remain of our world view and of our values. If we do not tackle these problems together, we stand to lose very much.

In order to tackle these problems, we have to get to the root of the conflicts that force people to flee by the millions. In the beginning of this speech, I stated my opinion that the world today is more dangerous, more divided, and more disoriented than it was even a year and a half ago. Each and every day, we are confronted with images of unspeakable misery around the world, and right at our front door. These images hurt, but they must not discourage and paralyse us. We cannot accept these conditions as unalterable fate, but, again and again, we have to collectively mobilise, and together, in the EU and on the world stage, look for solutions that will bring peace. Shared solutions to foster and strengthen what we have jointly achieved since the founding years. Next year will see the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. This is the moment to again become fully aware of what is at stake. The Union has overcome many crises, and has grown stronger by doing so. I remain convinced that, with the refugee crisis, we have to succeed in doing this again.

However, material crises can be solved materially; human crises have to be solved with humanity. Everybody in the EU must realise this. It is this understanding that is so special to the EU peace project.

Thank you very much.