

## **European and Foreign Policy Declaration by Jean Asselborn at the Chamber of Deputies, on Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2010**

The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, Jean Asselborn, delivered his Declaration on the European and Foreign Policy of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg before the Chamber of Deputies on Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2010.

The main theme of his Declaration is the need to adapt to the numerous challenges the international community faces since the end of the Cold War, and since the occurrence of unrestrained globalisation.

Minister Asselborn began his speech with an analysis of some of the key challenges, in particular the consequences of the economic and financial crisis, poverty and famine in the world, the ecological crisis, terrorism, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, organised crime and drug trafficking. He highlighted a number of ways to face these challenges: first, the urgent need as an actor in international relations to adapt to the changes in the world, the need for better cooperation with partners, the necessity to promote multilateral relations – notably through membership in and commitment to many international organisations – and, finally, the defence of common values, such as human rights, solidarity and the rule of law, democracy and tolerance.

The Minister went on to discuss the specific areas and instruments of Luxembourg's foreign policy.

He announced his intention to adapt Luxembourg's diplomatic network in the world to the new political and economic challenges facing our country by the following steps:

1. Opening of an Embassy in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates;
2. Opening of an Embassy in Ankara in Turkey;
3. Expansion of the diplomatic network by co-accreditation of non-resident Ambassadors in all the Balkan countries, in the Middle East, including Palestine, and in Brazil;
4. A merger of the Permanent Representation to the OSCE in Vienna into the bilateral Embassy in Vienna.

The Minister stressed the country's active participation in numerous international organisations, thus ensuring the success of Luxembourg's diplomacy. First, the Benelux, the engine of European integration, continues to be a crucial vehicle in defending Luxembourg's interests. The three founding members of the EU have to remain a model for the European values of a multicultural society, of non-discrimination of minorities and of tolerance. The role of Luxembourg in the Greater Region is also becoming increasingly important and remains a key to the country's prosperity. The Foreign Minister of Luxembourg also underlined that despite some recent divergent opinions, Luxembourg continues to maintain excellent relations with France and Germany.

Finally, the Minister addressed a number of current European policy issues, thus emphasizing how important it is for Luxembourg to be firmly anchored in the European Union. He drew particular attention to the crucial nature of common projects led by EU Member states, such as the Euro. He also commented on the recent economic and financial developments in the Euro zone, thus pointing out the crucial developments in Europe's economic governance which allow a qualitative leap in terms of integration of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). In addition, the Minister praised the work of the "Task Force" and the establishment of "European Semester", noting the crucial role the Grand-Duchy played in this matter. Luxembourg is strongly in favour of enhanced surveillance of budgetary policies of EU Member states in order to ensure stability in the Euro zone, the Minister recalled. He noted that these countries share the same destiny because they share the same currency. The credibility of the Euro as a common currency has been consolidated through the solidarity shown by Member states, underlined the Minister.

The Minister then looked at the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. He addressed the challenges posed by the peculiarities of the new institutional architecture, referring to the new roles of the European Parliament and the European Council, the establishment of the citizens' initiative, the strengthening of the influence of national parliaments, as well as the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS). In the first months following the entry into force of the Treaty, the EU has certainly struggled to find the right balance between new institutional powers, the Minister admitted. But he went on to emphasize the importance of defending the Community method in this crucial phase and warned against the tendency towards the *de facto* creation of a *Directoire*. Especially in the context of the economic and financial crisis, the EU has suffered from a certain tendency by Member states to become more inward-looking and to adopt a more selfish attitude, concluded Mr Asselborn.

The Minister then addressed the process of enlargement and underlined the need to pursue this process further, as it functions as an engine to spread prosperity, security and the values of the European Union. He gave an update on the accession negotiations and the various membership applications to the European Union. He mentioned progress made and the challenges remaining for the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), as well as the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean.

The Minister then turned to Luxembourg's important strategic partners. Referring first to transatlantic relations, the Minister highlighted the importance of Luxembourg's relationship with the United States, emphasizing that "we share the same vision of freedom and democracy." In this context, he gave his strong support to President Obama in his efforts to revive the peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as in the field of the reduction of nuclear arsenals and, generally, non-proliferation.

Russia too is an important strategic partner, economically, commercially and politically, noted the Deputy Prime Minister. He recalled in this context the European support with regard to the political modernisation in Russia.

Mr Asselborn then analysed the increasingly important role of China, noting the rapid economic growth in this country, but he also stressed the challenges that remain to be tackled, particularly regarding human rights and the implications of the rapid development of the Chinese economy.

Turning his attention to the African continent, the Minister expressed his opinion that despite the prevailing difficult circumstances, "the future will belong to Africa". He particularly mentioned the positive aspects, noting that the number of conflicts in Africa is steadily declining. The Minister also mentioned the increasing role of the African Union for the stabilisation of peace on the continent. He concluded by expressing Luxembourg's support for the African Union, and outlining the various areas where Luxembourg is actively contributing to peace on this continent through its participation in EU missions (assistance to security sector reform in the RDC, training of Somali security forces, the EU Operation ATALANTA).

Regarding the Middle East, the minister raised the need for a more sustained international commitment to address the many challenges in this region. He criticised the Israeli settlement policy in the occupied territories, which is "illegal and violates international law", which represents an "obstacle to peace and to the creation of a Palestinian state" and also a "humiliation of the Palestinian people." As for the situation in the Gaza Strip, Mr. Asselborn called it "disastrous" and lamented the collective punishment which Gaza's population is forced to endure solely because of Hamas' destructive policies. The blockade of the Gaza Strip provokes nothing but despair and hatred, the Minister added. Finally, he said Luxembourg supports the efforts to create a Palestinian state.

The Minister continued by stating that "only the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can counteract some of the regional aspirations of the regime in Iran." Luxembourg, which supports

the UN resolution 1929, worked to ensure that sanctions target first and foremost the Iranian regime and not its people, he said, adding that the path of nuclear talks remains an option. The Minister further expressed his concerns about the human rights situation in Iran.

Finally, the Minister gave an update on the current situation in Afghanistan. He welcomed the substantial changes in Afghanistan which have resulted from the efforts of reconciliation and reintegration. The process of "Afghanisation" is developing gradually and should succeed in transferring full responsibility to the Afghan authorities by 2014.

The Minister then addressed the role of NATO, welcoming the imminent adoption of the new strategic concept at the NATO Summit in Lisbon on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> November. The Minister is pleased that "common defence remains the *raison d'être* of the Alliance and will not be questioned." He further recalled the determined efforts within NATO of Luxembourg alongside Germany, Belgium, Norway and the Netherlands, leading the disarmament initiative in NATO and aiming to stimulate discussions on the reduction of tactical nuclear weapons held by the Alliance.

In conclusion, the Minister reiterated that Luxembourg has to face the above described challenges together with its partners and must work to remain a committed and credible member of the international community. In the European context, "we will continue to engage in the process of European integration and we will invest more in joint projects – not only projects such as the Euro or the Schengen area, but also in civilian and military missions of the European Union".

Regarding European institutions based in Luxembourg, the Minister stressed how important their presence in the Grand Duchy is and gave an overview of the construction and renovation projects currently being finalised.

In the area of cooperation and development aid, Mr Asselborn stated his satisfaction that this policy remains a central element of Luxembourg's Foreign Policy despite the economic, financial and budgetary constraints. Current levels of funding will be maintained.

The Minister concluded his statement by mentioning Luxembourg's candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, which confirms Luxembourg's commitment in the international community.

**For any further information, please contact:**

Robert Steinmetz

Office: (+352) 2478 2447

Mobile: (+352) 621 202 773

E-mail: [Robert.steinmetz@mae.etat.lu](mailto:Robert.steinmetz@mae.etat.lu)

*Press release by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg*