

Press release (16.11.2011)

Declaration by Jean Asselborn on Luxembourg's European and Foreign policy on 15 November 2011 at the Chamber of Deputies

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg, Jean Asselborn, delivered the Declaration on European and Foreign Policy in the House of Deputies on Tuesday 15th November 2011.

The Declaration on the European and Foreign Policy focused more particularly on the fundamental values and interests on which the Grand Duchy's European and Foreign Policy is based, as well as on the various areas where Luxembourg intends to defend these.

Minister Asselborn began his speech by noting, on the one hand, the paralysis in which Europe finds itself under the impact of the uncontrollable effects of the sovereign debt crisis, and, on the other hand, the rising of the peoples of North Africa, who are engaged in a struggle for freedom, seeking to take their future into their own hands.

Regarding the sovereign debt crisis and the socio-political tensions in Europe, Luxembourg's chief diplomat emphasized the correlation between the national interests of the Grand Duchy and those of the European Union. He focused more particularly on the principle of solidarity as the fundamental principle of Luxembourg's foreign policy. The rule of law as well as human rights are two further key cornerstones in the development and expression of Luxembourg's foreign policy.

The Minister addressed several current issues regarding the sovereign debt crisis in the European Union, calling it a "unique and very complex" phenomenon. He highlighted the various measures taken at the European level to counter the debt crisis. In this context, the Minister noted in particular the reform of the Stability and Growth Pact, the "European Semester", the creation of the European financial stability Facility (EFSF) and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), as well as the various reforms and austerity measures taken at the national level of some Member States.

"The euro is irreplaceable," said the minister, adding: "We can not exclude members of the euro area (...); on the contrary, we must prove our solidarity with struggling Member states, especially in times of crisis." He also highlighted the negative role played by rating agencies, saying it is unacceptable that they should judge the quality of a democratic process in a given country. He welcomed the proposals of the European Commission on a new regulation of rating agencies.

About the future prospects of the Union in the context of the current crisis, Mr. Asselborn praised the achievements of the integration process in Europe, mentioning in particular the creation of the Schengen area. He took stock of the latest developments in this area, particularly in the context of the increased migration flows, the applications of Bulgaria and Romania as well as the unilateral closure of borders by the previous Danish government. On a broader level, the Minister regretted that the foundations of several common policies at European level have been questioned.

The Minister then focused on the progress of the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. He highlighted the changes which will be necessary to implement certain measures in order to counter the sovereign debt crisis. In addition, he welcomed the continuing work to set up the European External Action Service (EEAS). This service will further increase the visibility and efficiency of the EU abroad, he said. Also, its action is likely to benefit particularly those Member states whose diplomatic network is modest in size. Finally, he addressed the new citizens' initiative, hailing it as a first element of direct democracy in Europe.

Also in the context of the important role of the European Union for the Grand Duchy's foreign policy, the Minister referred to Luxembourg's efforts regarding the presence of some European

institutions in Luxembourg. He stressed that the Grand Duchy will continue to further to improve working conditions in Luxembourg and to expand and modernize the infrastructure. A new identity card is also being introduced.

Despite the gloomy outlook and negative trends in the European Union and more particularly in the euro zone, Mr. Asselborn concluded that, in the history of the integration process, Europe has always been able to overcome crises by looking firmly ahead and continuing to deepen integration. "A responsible commitment to solidarity and to the strengthening the European Union represents nothing less than a commitment to the future of our country. There quite simply is no alternative", said the Minister.

Luxembourg's foreign policy also remains strongly committed to multilateralism, particularly in the field of international trade, where it is more important than ever – especially in times of crisis – to resist protectionist tendencies and to fight against international trade barriers, also in order to promote economic development of the least developed countries. The Minister welcomed the forthcoming accession of Russia to the WTO and also noted the commitment of the European Union to establish more free trade agreements around the world.

In the area of climate change, the EU has made strong commitments to reduce CO₂ emissions and has also established a funding mechanism benefiting poor countries affected by climate change. "Luxembourg and the EU can not turn inwards, but instead must remain a part of the solution," said Minister.

The Minister then turned to the enlargement process of the EU, giving an update on various related issues. On the Western Balkans, he stressed that the structural problems of the Balkans can only be solved through closer ties with the EU and thereby strengthening their European perspective. The Foreign Minister also expressed his gratitude and congratulated Luxembourg's police and army forces for their efforts in the Western Balkans. He also encouraged the continuation of the negotiation process for accession to the EU with Turkey, as well as with Iceland. He welcomed the conclusion of accession negotiations with Croatia. In addition, Mr. Asselborn praised the achieved visa liberalization in order to increase direct contacts between citizens, while warning against abuse of this system.

Regarding the EU's Eastern Partnership, the Minister noted that the achievement of its objectives is important for Luxembourg, but warned that partners must meet their commitments, particularly in the areas of democracy and the rule of law, crucial elements for the further construction of Europe.

The Minister then gave an overview of Europe's southern neighbourhood following the upheavals in the region during the so-called "Arab spring". The Deputy Prime Minister noted that these events were caused by the will of these peoples to embrace values like freedom, the rule of law and human rights. He stressed that Europe played an important role in these developments, having been a source of inspiration to the people of Northern Africa. However, "it is now up to the people to take the next steps. The European Union should provide all the necessary support in their quest for freedom and stability. The European Neighbourhood Policy represents the key instrument for the establishment of ambitious cooperation and free trade agreements with individual countries," said the minister, who also reported on recent events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria respectively.

The Minister then addressed the role of Iran in the region. He expressed the view that in light of the recent findings of the IAEA, and of Iran's refusal to negotiate with the IAEA and the "EU3 +3" (USA, Russia, China, France, United Kingdom and Germany), new sanctions are likely to be enforced. Mr Asselborn said that the military option is counter-productive.

Regarding the peace process in the Middle East, the Minister has strongly deplored that the increase of tensions between Israelis and Palestinians was being fuelled daily. The Foreign

Minister of Luxembourg recalled the position of the Luxembourg Government in favour of the two-state solution based on 1967 borders and an immediate resumption of direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. The Netanyahu government's settlement policy, representing the main obstacle in efforts to resume negotiations, was strongly condemned by Mr Asselborn. Regarding the Palestinians' application for recognition of a Palestinian state in the United Nations, the minister expressed hope that the EU will manage to defend a common position of all 27 Member states.

Luxembourg's relations with the wider region continue to diversify, especially in the areas of trade and more particularly in the Gulf region. In this context, an embassy will be opened shortly in Abu Dhabi.

The relations of Luxembourg with the African continent have a bright future, said the Deputy Prime Minister. Despite the current difficult context, the future will belong to the African continent. He referred to the numerous positive developments, noting in particular that the number of conflicts in Africa is steadily declining. He also highlighted Luxembourg's commitment to the UN Peace Building Commission as well as the different EU missions in Africa (EUTM Somalia and NAVFOR ATALANTA). The Minister explained that Luxembourg is fully committed to further deepening its relations with African countries by combining the existing political, diplomatic and aid links with economic and cultural ties. To this end, an embassy will soon be opened in Addis Ababa. Also, several recent trade missions have been led in Algeria and Angola.

The Minister then focused on Luxembourg's and the EU's key strategic partners. Referring first to the transatlantic relation, the Minister explained the importance of relations with the United States, "...because we defend the same values." Russia and China are two other important strategic partners, economically and commercially as well as politically, noted the Deputy Prime Minister. Finally, the Minister also addressed the serious events following the earthquake in Japan in March of this year.

Regarding NATO, the Minister reiterated that current challenges must be faced together with the Alliance's partners and Luxembourg will work to remain a committed and credible member within the Alliance. Luxembourg has long been committed to various NATO missions, such as KFOR in Kosovo and ISAF in Afghanistan. The Minister also took stock of the latest developments in Afghanistan and noted progress in the transition process. He outlined the international community's long-term commitment to this country, helping it on its way to stabilization. On missile defence, the Minister insisted that this project can only be realised in close cooperation with Russia.

Finally, the Minister gave more details on Luxembourg's efforts for a world free of weapons of mass destruction, as well as its efforts in the field of non-proliferation and arms reduction in general. Luxembourg calls for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and fully supports the Convention against cluster munitions, as well as the fight against landmines.

The Minister concluded the Declaration by referring to Luxembourg's candidature for a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, which represents the expression par excellence of Luxembourg's commitment within the international community.

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