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# Joint press conference by Luc Frieden and Dick Schoof (15.07.2024)

# Participants

* Luc Frieden, Prime Minister
* Dick Schoof, Prime Minister of the Netherlands
* Journalists

# Language

* English

# Transcript

[Luc Frieden]

Voilà, Gudden Owend, bonsoir, goede avond.

I'm very happy to welcome here today the new Prime Minister of the Netherlands Dick Schoff.

It is a great pleasure for us to welcome him on his second week in in office, but even more so that the Prime Minister Schoof decided to do his first bilateral trip to the Benelux Countries: to Belgium and to Luxembourg.

And that is something which we appreciate very much because it shows that for the new Dutch government the relationship with Benelux partners and with Luxembourg remains very important.

It is important for us as a Luxemburg government and therefore I want to thank you very much for your visit here today.

We have always had as Luxembourg very strong and good relations with Netherlands.

You know that in the countries around the world where Luxembourg does not have an embassy, based on an old treaty, it is the Dutch who represent Luxembourg's interests.

We have had close relations between our royal families and indeed they are cousins, and the Dutch king at some time was also in a personal union Grand Duke of Luxembourg.

But also today, you know, we have um a big Dutch community in Luxembourg and some of you know my wife is Dutch so...

But there are also quite a number of Luxembourgers living and studying in the Netherlands.

Our companies work together and so we have every interest in building our future also together.

I appreciate that we had today a very frank, open and instructive exchange of views.

It was very enriching.

And I can assure you Mr Prime Minister, dear Dick, that we will do everything to make sure, that the good relationship between our two countries and our governments will continue in the future.

We exchanged on European topics: Luxembourg believes very strongly in a competitive Europe.

In a Europe where the single Market is deepened.

I think that is extremely important for my country and I would dare to say also for the Netherlands because we have economies that work cross border.

So we exchanged on how we can further build the single European market to the benefit of our citizens and our companies.

We talked about Ukraine, where we believe that it is very important to continue to support Ukraine, because what is at stake there are fundamental principles, fundamental values in which we believe in Europe.

So that borders cannot be changed by force.

We believe that we need to make sure that Europe has a voice in the world and obviously the difficult situation in the United States, where we strongly condemn the attack on the presidential candidate Donald Trump two days ago, are elements that show us, that Ukraine, these political violence that we strongly condemn, all these are elements where we as European countries also have to stand side by side and exchange on those views, so that also in the future the fundamental values of Europe, which are the Cornerstone of European integration, can also be preserved.

So we will continue to work together on economic and political issues.

We will remain strong partners in Benelux and in the European Union and we hope that also on issues which we discussed this afternoon, like cooperation in renewable energy, we can find ways to do even more together in the future.

So I think there's ample room for us to work together, this is only the beginning, it's the first visit to Luxembourg and I hope, dear Dick, that it will not be the last one.

But we had the opportunity also to briefly exchange views in the margins of the NATO Summit in in Washington and I think, I am hopeful, that with the new government, which is a broad Coalition of many parties in the Netherlands, we will find um areas of cooperation, but also in the Benelux.

So thank you for being there and I give you the floor.

[Dick Schoof]

Thank you, thank you Prime Minister Frieden, thank you Luc, for kind words of introduction and a warm welcome here in Luxembourg and I can assure you this was not my last visit to Luxembourg as a Prime Minister

I appreciate being able to meet so soon after the new Dutch government took office.

Earlier today I was in Brussels for consultations with our colleague Alexander de Croo and our countries' histories are closely intertwined and our ties have been very close for yearslaterally in the Benelux and within the EU.

So it makes perfect sense, as you already mentioned, that my first bilateral meeting should be with my Benelux counterparts.

In just under two months we will celebrate 80 years of the Benelux.

Since 1944 it has been a pioneer of cross border cooperation within Europe

We are together without borders, which is, as it should be between good neighbours.

Coming together informally where possible and at high level where necessary.

The milestone we reached last year is a good example: the new Benelux treaty on police corporation which came into force in October.

It makes it easy for us to work side by side including on each other's territories in the fight against the organized crime that seeks to take advantage of our open societies.

And there are several more themes on which we cooperate, such as infrastructure in the context of energy transition, you have already mentioned it.

Your hydrogen network is being developed to connect the port of Rotterdam with the rest of Northwest Europe, branching out first, of course, into Luxemburg and Belgium.

I look forward to working together, to carry forward these plans.

There are many opportunities for our countries that can deliver green growth and the jobs of the future.

Last week I met a great many new colleagues including you, Luc, and Alexander at the NATO Summit in Washington.

And it's important that...and one thing became very clear to me, that the Netherlands is greatly valued as a reliable and constructive ally both within the Benelux, within NATO and in Europe.

Especially on those issues where the EU has an important role to play and with which the new European Commission will soon be pressing ahead.

Boosting Europe's competitiveness, continue our support for Ukraine and expanding Europe's defence industry, to name just three of Europe's priorities.

At the same time, the government will identify specific focus points on its own, so that we can achieve the aims set out in our framework Coalition Agreement.

These are aims that also resonate in other member states, like reducing irregular migration and securing a better future for farmers.

It was good to talk to each other today for first time about all these topics.

They will undoubtedly be back on the European agenda in the period ahead.

Of course, today we also reflected on the shocking events that took place in the US this weekend.

It's a relief that former president and republic candidate Mr Trump survived the attack.

We wish him, his family and the American people all the best.

Our thoughts are with the victims of the attack and their loved ones.

Let me be clear: democracy is something we uphold together, and democracy is stronger than violence.

Thank you very much.

[Luc Frieden]

Thank you, Mr Prime Minister, and now open for questions.

[Journalist]

Moien, goede avond.

The first question is on the Benelux.

After today for you, to both leaders, do you see new common ground for new cooperation inside the Benelux Union?

And the second question, if I may, is on what Prime Minister Orban is doing.

Today he was presenting a so-called peace plan and we see now more member states are boycotting informal Summits during the Hungarian presidency.

So last week the one from trade ministers and in late August, there is an informal Summit for ministers of Foreign Affairs I would like to know are you both joining the boycott?

Thank you.

[Luc Frieden]

So if I may start, I'm soon the dean of the Benelux Prime Ministers, because I started only eight months ago, but Mark Rutte, as you know just left, Aexander de Croo will most probably have to leave in a few weeks from now, so I will soon assume the senior role in in Benelux.

But also Luxembourg will have the presidency of the Benelux in 2025.

I think that the Benelux is a unique laboratorium of European ideas.

It was so when the borders were abolished.

That doesn't mean that you always have to agree on everything in Benelux.

But in a Europe of 27, I think it's very good that you have sometimes some countries that are geographically close to each other, that have close economic and historical ties, that they discuss issues together.

We talked about, we both talked about, for instance hydrogen renewable energy.

These are areas where you can work together.

And moreover, I think it's very good, and we agree to do that, that we will also continue to coordinate our views or discuss about our respective views prior to the European Council.

So I believe that Benelux is in a useful tool to coordinate, to exchange views, and sometimes to go even further in European cooperation.

But obviously that needs to be discussed, on the various topics with the new colleagues that I now um have and therefore again thank you for having come to Luxembourg and to Brussels today.

I can't speak for Belgium, but I mean it is the same spirit and I think that's very positive.

Again, you may not need to agree on everything but at least to coordinate is very useful and I obviously have to discover more about the content of the two governments that are in the process, one has just been formed and the Belgium one is in the process of being formed.

So that will depend very much on the content on where we can go.

On the Hungarian presidency: let me say that........Prime Minister Orban did not have any mandate on behalf of the European Union to travel neither to Kiev, nor to Moscow, nor to Beijing.

But it is the right of every Prime Minister to travel to the places he thinks that it's opportune to travel.

But it's a difference whether you speak on behalf of the European Union or not.

He made it clear that he had no mandate from the European Union and the European Union made it even more clear that the rotating presidency has no right to represent the European Union on external affairs.

On boycotting the informal meetings on the Hungarian presidency, my position and the position of the Luxembourg government is that boycotting is never the right thing to do.

It's much better that you talk to other people, and I think that you should talk also to people with whom you disagree.

We both talk talked about this terrible attack on presidential candidate Donald Trump in the US.

That is the result of if people use violence to discuss with each other or if they don't talk to each other.

I think both are the wrong ways to move forward in democracy.

In a democracy people choose their leaders, in democracy people talk to each other, and since I became Prime Minister, I insisted so much on unity and on respectful discussion with people who have other ideas.

The democracy is rich if different ideas are expressed.

Obviously then in a democracy a majority needs to decide respecting the minority, respecting the opposition.

I think our voice is better heard if we go to Hungary, if we talk to the Hungarians, if we make our values, our voices heard.

And by the way you do not only go to Hungary to meet the presidency, you go there to meet the 26 others as well.

And therefore, we will not boycott these informal ministerial meetings.

[Dick Schoof]

My shortest answer could be, I just echo the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, but to say a few things about it.

First the Benelux: After 80 years, I mentioned in my statement, my impression of the Benelux, and I had some experience with the Benelux before in my in my previous positions, is still alive and kicking to put it that way.

And I think it's also important that the Benelux: Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands together...when we really stick together, we are a powerhouse, also in Europe, but also on trade, on economy, on a lot of things.

And I think that's a worthwhile addition to all the other international relationships we have.

That it's very special because it's 80 years old and we should therefore cherish it.

I certainly believe it has a future and I'm looking forward for the presidency that Luxembourg is taking in 2025.

And I hope that I will be able to visit here, this probably my third or something like that.

But we'll see.

So that's for the Benelux.

In regard to Mr Orban and Hungary: it's just like the Prime Minister just said, it was made very clear to Orban, that he didn't speak on behalf of the European Union.

I think that is the most important statement we could make, and bilateral, every country can do whatever it suits him or her and at the same time we should have talks.

We will look together with our all our member states on a case-by-case basis how we would react and how we would proceed.

And as far as the [...] are concerned, there's no formal blockade on any meeting.

[Luc Frieden]

Any other question?

[Dick Schoof]

It wasn't this question, wasn't it?

[Journalist]

Mr Schoof, Eric Ewald from Radio 100.7 here in Luxemburg.

I just wanted to know the context of the Benelux, which will be your central vision for the Benelux for the next years?

What will you emphasize on?

Will it be especially the topic of illegal immigration?

[Dick Schoof]

I think there are several topics, and we should also look into some specifics of the Benelux, so of course the agreement of the Dutch government focuses very much on lessening irregular migration and also more perspective for farmers.

And I think that also in the Benelux we could very well work on that together.

So that's important but as I mentioned just in my statement, for example the police cooperation in relation to the fight to organized crime, is something that is very specific also within the Benelux context.

So there are different kind of topics where we work on, but if you would ask what is the main topic for the Dutch government: irregular migration and perspectives for the farmers are two key issues for us in relation to all our EU members, but also in the Benelux, but as I said, there are other topics as well.

[Luc Frieden]

Last question, if there is any?

Okay, thank you very much.

[Dick Schoof]

It was a pleasure being here.

Thank you, Luc. Great.

[Luc Frieden]

Thank you again.