



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

# **After the elections to the European Parliament: where are we heading now?**

At the invitation of  
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by

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*Check against delivery*

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to speak to you today. I want to talk to you about the consequences and implications of the elections to the European Parliament, and the crucial question we all ask ourselves: where are we heading now? I will keep my remarks brief so that we have time for an interactive discussion afterwards.

However, during my speech, I will also address some other very important issues, amongst others migration. On my last visit to Athens in December 2017, I visited the Schisto and Skaramanga refugee camps; today I attended the launch of a training centre. In view of the upcoming challenges, consider it as one element and a modest contribution of Luxembourg to a bigger solution. Let me be very clear – solidarity is the only way to tackle the ongoing consequences of migration. All Member States must contribute, and unfortunately the past years haven't proven that this is not achieved by voluntary contributions. The EU is not a technocratic partnership of convenience, but above all a union of values, a community. At least Luxembourg intends to continue contributing to efforts aimed at ensuring that we do not fail in the refugee issue.

I would like to start with the topic that is currently shaping the political day-to-day business the most. The European Union just held their biggest elections ever. I will start by laying out some of the impressive numbers of these elections. More than 350 million people were eligible to cast ballots in the world's biggest multi-country election that took place between May 23 and May 26. The citizens from 28 member states – indeed the United Kingdom still took part – had the opportunity to vote for 751 members who will represent them in the European Parliament for the next five

years. The two main parties have lost seats, the European People's Party now has 179 seats (-42 compared to 2014) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats has 153 (-38). The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group, now called Renew Europe, picked up 39 seats (106 in total) and the Greens/European Free Alliance picked up 25 (75 in total). The so-called "Europe of Nations and Freedoms" group now has 73 seats and renamed themselves "Identity and Democracy" last week. So most importantly, we see that the extreme right forces have not had the success that some had predicted or feared. The ENF is only the fifth largest group in the European Parliament and fell far short of its expectations. To put that in perspective, of the 751 Members in the European Parliament, the nationalists (ENF and EFDD) will only receive 116 seats. In France, the far-right even got fewer votes than five years ago. The pro-European forces therefore maintain a very comfortable majority of more than 500 seats. All this against the backdrop of an impressive increase in the participation rate across the Union (50.96%), which not only exceeds the 2014 rate by 8%, but is the highest in two decades.

Fortunately, the traditional parties and the large blocs in the Parliament - EPP, Social Democrats, Liberals and Greens - will retain the upper hand. What the coalitions will look like afterwards is not as important as the fact that the forces that want to destabilize Europe did not get a majority to achieve their goal. So it is certainly important that we take note of far-right parties' increase in support, but I firmly believe that the results of the election confirm that the European project remains the main reference point of the political life on our continent.

Now we are waiting for decisions on the appointments of important top jobs in Brussels, including the President of the European Commission. In order to confirm

the candidate for the head of the European executive, you need a majority of 376 seats. Therefore, a broad coalition will have to be found.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A topic that has received a lot of attention during the elections is the fight against global warming, which appears to be a number one priority for European voters, especially for the younger generation. Luxembourg made it clear that we want more Europe in this and in many other regards, not less.

Man-made climate change is an omnipresent and major threat, and the fight against it must continue. It is no coincidence that the Katowice Declaration identified a "significant gap" between the measures taken and the intended objectives. Time is playing against us, so the pressure will only increase. Luxembourg strongly pleads for measures to be taken to ensure that Europe becomes carbon neutral by 2050. This will allow us to contribute to efforts in order to stay below the 1.5 degrees Celsius target in terms of global warming. Huge changes need to take place in our societies and economies in order to achieve this target.

Climate change is but one example among many that can prove that no country can solve its problems alone. Luxembourg is a strong supporter of effective multilateralism, as we believe that a rules-based system is the best guarantee that the legitimate aspirations of citizens and countries alike are protected when needed. It is a necessity, in order to guarantee durable peace and security in the world. The international rules-based system must be preserved – unilateralism cannot be the answer to the challenges of today.

As Europeans, we should be proud of our democracy, of our values. The EU is based on these ideas. Human dignity, freedom, equality, the rule of law, respect for human rights and democracy are and always will be non-negotiable. But our values and rules-based international system is currently being put into focus by a number of developments. This brings me to my next topic: migration.

First things first, I want to commend the substantial efforts made by the Greek government and the people of Greece to tackle the challenge of migration. Greece has succeeded in building a new asylum service under very difficult circumstances. Greece has not been standing alone: I would like to emphasize that Luxembourg was the first country to accept refugees under the European relocation mechanism in November 2015 and has fulfilled its commitments throughout the last years. Nevertheless, there are still thousands of people in the hotspots on the Greek islands, with some of them living in dire conditions. Improving these conditions is an absolute necessity.

Although the number of irregular entries to the EU+ has dropped significantly, Europe is increasingly becoming a fortress; some say that we have closed the doors on Europe. A policy of isolation is not a solution for the current migration crisis. It is our duty to save people fleeing from war and persecution and preventing them from drowning at sea. This is about basic human rights.

However, this does not mean that we no longer have to monitor our Schengen borders. Neither does it mean that there is no control at all, quite the contrary! There must be clear external controls to respond to our citizens' legitimate expectations that we know who enters EU territory, where, and when. In order to protect our external borders we do not need a national solution, but we need a

common European solution. Sustainable and responsible management of migration is achievable and, as I have already mentioned, I believe that solidarity between Member States is our most important asset. Only by standing united can we truly help those who carry the heaviest burden. Also, safeguarding the Schengen acquis remains an absolute priority. The EU needs to create a solidarity-based distribution mechanism to reach a fair sharing of the burden. Third countries will cooperate with the EU, but therefore we have to establish credible legal pathways to our territory. We should provide legal and safe access to protection in the EU to those in real need of it, whilst simultaneously deterring human smugglers and traffickers in their criminal activities. Each Member state must understand that international protection and solidarity are a legal obligation and that their disregard is unacceptable, as stated by the European Court of Justice. This is certainly one of the great challenges Europe is currently facing.

Besides migration, we are facing other big challenges. The economic crisis for example had a strong impact on the people in Europe and in particular on people in Greece.

I have to commend once again the many efforts of the Greek government, its citizens and the businesses to overcome the situation. Greece left its third international bailout program in August 2018, following eight years of austerity measures. The support from Member States and institutions was sizeable, but let's not forget that your country went through a particularly tough adjustment, which other countries perhaps would not have managed without damage to their social fabric. As you know, Luxembourg has always been a strong supporter of Greece's role in Europe and in the Euro. I believe that I can say that Luxembourg stood with

Greece at particularly difficult moments over the past years. Greece is one of the birthplaces of Europe, we should never forget that.

And I am also confident that the situation has stabilized and that conditions will steadily, albeit slowly, improve. More investment, especially from outside the country, is needed. In this sense political stability, a social consensus and a solid legal system will benefit all people and future generations.

I already touched upon the importance of our common European values. We are committed to these principles, both externally and internally. Sadly, those values are not respected anymore by each Member state as much as they should be. There are over 500 million inhabitants in the EU-28, some 7 % of the world total, but we consider ourselves a role model for the entire world because of those values. What are we without them? We must stress that respect for the independence of institutions and the rule of law is not negotiable.

It is of the utmost importance that to ensure the proper functioning of the state and the respect for the rights of citizens'. The growing inequality between rural and urban areas, between those who stand to gain from globalisation and those who feel left behind, is one of the reasons for the populist rise in Europe. We have to take people's needs seriously. Because in the end, our European process is about the benefit of the people, they must be at the heart of our efforts. Strengthening the middle class has an important part to play here. People should be paid an appropriate minimum wage for their work and precarious working conditions must tackled.

Allow me to leap forward and say a few words about developments in the area of foreign and security policy. A multilateral approach, with everyone at the table, is

a precondition for resolving conflicts. On Monday, at the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union in Luxembourg, Ministers discussed the tensions caused by the attacks against oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz.

I join the call made on Friday in New York by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres for an impartial investigation. It is important to prevent any actions that could exacerbate the already tense situation in the region.

That is why Luxembourg calls on all stakeholders to exercise restraint and de-escalate. I hope that, in the end, reason will prevail. The international community needs to seek a negotiated solution to the tensions in the region.

Now is not the time for finger-pointing, but for restraint, de-escalation, and investigation. Freedom of navigation must be preserved. We know how important this sea route is for international trade.

Concerning the situation regarding Iran, I deeply regret the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the nuclear deal concluded in 2015 between Iran and the Permanent 5 plus Germany in order to ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme. It is also clear that Iran needs to continue implementing in full its commitments under the JCPOA. It is in everyone's interest that the deal continues to deliver. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has already certified on fifteen occasions that Iran is fully abiding by its commitments under the Agreement. This does however not mean that we should turn a blind eye to Iran's problematic policies, such as its ballistic missile program, its regional policies, mostly in Syria, and several planned attacks on European soil.

While Europe is united in its efforts to support the JCPOA, it is divided on other important issues. Concerning the peace process between Israel and Palestine, we



no longer have a common EU position. While Luxembourg continues to advocate strongly for the two-state solution according to the internationally agreed parameters, the support from some EU Member States for these parameters has decreased.

Coming back to Europe, and given the current state of affairs in the United Kingdom, I will only briefly mention Brexit. Following the United Kingdom's request for an extension of the deadline provided for in Article 50, the European Council has agreed on an extension until 31 October 2019. The European Council also recalled that the withdrawal agreement, and this is very important to us, cannot be reopened. In order to drive forward the ambitious priorities that the EU has set for itself, the EU's work cannot keep being dominated by Brexit. But unfortunately, for the time being, it is difficult to see in which way we're heading. Now that Prime Minister May has announced her resignation and a new leadership contest is underway within the Conservative Party, all options remain on the table and no scenario can be excluded. Faced with this uncertainty, the EU27 have no choice but to continue preparing for all outcomes.

Another important issue is the EU's enlargement and stabilisation process. Regarding the Prespes Agreement, I must particularly compliment Greece for overcoming, after 26 years, their differences with North Macedonia to find a mutually acceptable agreement. This is an achievement based on dialogue and diplomacy and could be a role model for many other countries. It leaves no doubt that the best way to resolve disagreements is through joint talks - and not by unilateral approaches. This diplomatic success is an important signal. I believe that the progress achieved also needs to be recognised as regards North Macedonia's

European aspirations. Therefore Luxembourg has supported opening accession talks with North Macedonia at this week's General Affairs Council. However we take note that not all Member States support this view, and that some need more time in order to assess the situation.

Luxembourg is also closely following the European integration process of the other Western Balkan countries. As regards Albania, the internal situation is currently delicate. However, we have signalled that we would be in a position to support a positive step.

As regards other countries, the top priority lies in the respect for the conditions of accession, in particular for the Copenhagen criteria about our shared values and very importantly, the rule of law.

Let me mention in this context that in recent years, Luxembourg has financed a series of technical assistance programs worth around 2.6 million euros to provide EU integration formations for national administrations in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo. We will continue the stabilisation of these countries in order to bring them closer to the EU.

Finally, let me say a few words about Turkey. The European Union had strongly condemned the 2016 military coup and reaffirmed its full support for Turkey's democratic institutions. However, the state of emergency has led to a serious deterioration in the areas of the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and human rights. No less than 36 decrees were issued constraining civil and political rights, expanding police powers and foreseeing the dismissal of more than 150.000 civil servants. The broad scale and collective nature of the measures taken since the attempted coup - which have continued after the end of the state of emergency -

continue to raise serious concerns. We see further backsliding when it comes to Turkey's judicial system. Political pressure on judges and prosecutors continues and has a negative impact on the independence of the judiciary. The respect of fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of expression and assembly has deteriorated significantly. At the beginning of the year, I was in Turkey, and I expressed my concerns to the Turkish Foreign Minister.

As of today however, key recommendations of the EU and the Council of Europe have yet to be addressed. In the midst of Turkey's economic woes, the recent report of the European Commission also highlights concerns over the functioning of Turkey's market economy. Let me point out, however, that Turkey made some progress when it comes to the fight against organized crime and good progress in the area of migration and asylum. Let us not forget indeed that Turkey provides humanitarian support and development aid to close to 4 billion refugees, thus hosting the largest refugee community in the world. On the positive side, I also note that a judicial reform strategy has recently been adopted. So far, the strategy exists on paper. I encourage the Turkish authorities to quickly take the necessary steps to implement it on the ground. We need clear and tangible results. I also expect Turkey to respect international law and to commit to good neighborly relations. In this context, we condemn the continued illegal actions of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea. These actions have a negative impact on the overall EU-Turkey relationship. However, despite these setbacks, we continue to believe that the dialogue must be maintained, as Turkey is a key partner for the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by reiterating how pleased I am to be here today. Greece was marked in the past years by the economic and migration crises. While difficulties

remain, the handling of these crises has clearly shown that a joint European approach is needed more than ever.

Luxembourg will continue to stand with Greece to resolve those issues.

I am happy to hear any questions or comments you may have.

Thank you for your attention.

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