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Speech by President of the Republic Tarja Halonen at the Luxembourg City Hall on 24 November 2008

I wish to thank you, Mr Mayor, for the kind words you addressed to me and to Finland.

Luxembourg is one of the six founding fathers of the European Communities. Now the family has grown and become a Union of 27 Member States. Today, we live in a very different Europe than 50 years ago. Integration has deepened and most controls at our internal borders have been abolished. All the Member States are not yet members of the Schengen area and cooperation. Still Schengen as a term has become the symbol of Europe without frontiers.

We Finns are internationalists and strongly in favour of multilateral cooperation. You, Mr Mayor, have served as a diplomat also in Helsinki and participated in the preparatory talks on what is today know as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The Helsinki Final Act was signed in 1975. Even though there were some doubts, the result was a success. The principles of the Act, especially in the field of human rights, were in the following years often referred to by all those who wanted to see an end to the division of our continent.

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In today's globalized world, international activities of people have increased. It is important that people feel at home where they live. You and your colleagues have a vision to transform City of Luxembourg into a lively place where people of different origins would feel this. Your city is certainly one of the most international capitals in Europe – or maybe in the world – if one looks at the composition of its inhabitants. Over 60% of the residents are not citizens of Luxembourg. The fact that your city is one of the three EU capitals, and a host to many EU institutions, has also brought many Finns here. There are over a thousand Finnish people living in Luxembourg, most of whom work for the European institutions.

I have been told that generally Finns enjoy very much living in Luxembourg. They appreciate the clean nature and the high standard of living – very similar to conditions back home. And the two capitals, Luxembourg City and Helsinki, have other things in common, too: both capitals are ranked either number one or number two in the international comparisons of the world's safest cities. This is something we can be very proud of and for which it is worth of working in the future.

City of Luxembourg is also a city for gender equality. I firmly believe that a high participation level of women in this City Council – but more broadly in society, too – is not only right in terms of equality but often results in better thought-out political decisions. Equality and openness are key objectives in a successful society.

The cultural offer in Luxembourg is extensive and the municipality is an important player in this field as well. There has been lively cultural cooperation between our two capitals for over 10 years. For example, the Helsinki City Museum and the Luxembourg City History Museum have

had joint projects almost every year. The repeated themes of this cooperation have been children and youth, and dissimilarities in the cities. The title of one of the exhibitions "Everybody is a stranger – somewhere" highlights this fresh approach. Cities are not only part of our cultural heritage but they are also places where very different kinds of people meet every day and are living together.

At this very moment, a sample of Finnish Christmas traditions can be seen as part of your traditional Christmas market outside this City Hall. I have been informed that there are future plans to deepen the cooperation between Luxembourg City and Helsinki. I hope these will also materialize and become a success.

Thank you, Mr Mayor, for receiving us in your beautiful City Hall. I wish to You, to the Members of the City Council, and more widely to the inhabitants of Luxembourg, all the best for the future.