

150^e anniversaire de la Signature du Traité de Londres (11 mai 1867)

Discours de Madame Lydie Polfer, Bourgmestre de la Ville de Luxembourg

Musée 3 Eechelen, Luxembourg, le jeudi 11 mai 2017

en présence de représentants des Etats signataires : Autriche, Hongrie (Empire austro-hongrois), Belgique, France, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, Allemagne (Royaume de Prusse), Russie, Royaume-Uni.

Your Royal Highnesses,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of my fellow citizens it is my privilege and a great pleasure to welcome you to our city to celebrate with you the 150th anniversary of the London Treaty. We are especially honoured by the presence of Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cambridge and Their Royal Highnesses the Hereditary Grand Duke Guillaume and the Hereditary Grand Duchess Stéphanie as well as the representatives of the signatories of the London treaty 150 years ago today.

As you have discovered earlier at the Lëtzebuerg City Museum, the date of 1867 has had a huge impact on the development of this more than millennial city and I believe it is safe to say, that the London treaty is the second birthdate of our City. Indeed, once liberated from the straitjacket of the fortification works, the City of Luxembourg was able to expand and become what it is today: one of the capitals of the European Union and an international business center. Today we proudly present ourselves as a "multiplicity" - a city of 115.000 inhabitants, 70% of which are non Luxembourgers, where over 160 different nationalities live and prosper together, thanks also to the many people commuting to Luxembourg from France, Germany and Belgium, thus doubling the number of citizens of the city every working day of the week.

But let's come back one moment to the times of the fortress. Due to its strategical situation and specific topography, Luxembourg was predestined to become a fortress and since the mid-16th century, its fortifications were developed by the Spanish, the French, the Austrians and the French again, creating what was called the "Gibraltar of the North". In the 1st half of the 19th century, of a population of roughly 13.000, around 4.000 were members of the Prussian garrison, Luxembourg having been a federal fortress of the German Confederation since 1815.

These numbers explain why, in the lead-up to the London Treaty, the City Council as well as the tradespeople and craftsmen were very worried that the dismantling of the fortress, coupled with the departure of one third of its population, would be the ruin of the City. It was indeed a real challenge but also a new chance (opportunity) and the dismantling was in fact a serendipity as the disappearance of the fortress gave rise to an urban expansion the scale of which had never happened since the Middle Ages – in fact, between 1867 and 1878 Luxembourg resembled an enormous building site as new urban quarters emerged and the public park was created on top of the dismantled fortification works surrounding the city centre. As it was henceforth able to expand geographically, the city also experienced an important economic growth.

Unfortunately in the first half of the 20th century, the development of the city was twice painfully disrupted: between 1914 and 1918 and between 1940 until 1944 the Nazi troops seized the country and its capital. Only after 1945 has our city been able to put its military past - made of wars and invasions - behind it and turn towards its new destiny, a European one.

It is indeed in this very city that Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of the European Union was born and raised and it was also in this very city – more precisely at City Hall - where on August 10th 1952, was held the first meeting of the High Authority, the executive body of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the very first of the European Communities which went on

to become the European Union. Today our city hosts various entities (14) of the European Union, among them such important institutions as the European Court of Justice, the European Investment Bank, the European Court of Auditors, the Publications Office of the European Union and the General Secretariat of the European Parliament. Today over 12.000 EU officials call Luxembourg their home!

The City of Luxembourg can thus rightly claim to be the first of the European capitals. The European Union was born out of the need to strengthen the economic assets of its founding member states but also to preserve our continent from another nightmare such as the Second World War. The City of Luxembourg has for over centuries been the setting or excuse for bloody confrontations between the great powers of Europe. We have lived through annexations and occupations and still, Luxembourg was able to keep its identity and its originality.

Luxembourg is located at the crossroads of two great civilizations and even though we had to suffer from their confrontations, we were able to also benefit from these tribulations as they strengthened our culture which has become truly international and cosmopolitan. Luxembourg City is proud to show that it is a place where cultures meet rather than differ, and where the living together of many nationalities from Europe and the world results in a stimulating exchange which is, in fact, one of the major assets of our City as a center for international business and cooperation.

And even though the fortress has been dismantled starting in 1867, we still cherish its remnants and we are very happy that our military past is today used in a more peaceful manner, namely as a major tourist attraction in our city as in December of 1994, the old quarters and fortifications of Luxembourg city have been listed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, an honour that we are very proud of.

May I in closing, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, tell you again, on behalf of the City Council and the citizens of Luxembourg, how proud and happy we are to have you in our midst. We thank you for sharing this important moment with us and we wish you a pleasant stay in our city.