

Speech of H.E. Prime Minister Xavier BETTEL on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of London, 11 May 2017.

Your Royal Highnesses,

Excellences,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am not a historian, but please allow me to introduce you to a decisive moment in the modern history of my country, since the city, and its fortress, were borne in 963. Indeed, the foundation stone of modern Luxembourg was laid exactly 150 years ago this very day, at the international conference of London on 11 May, 1867.

To understand today's Luxembourg, it is important to understand how and why Luxembourg became a nation state in the 19th century. 1867 is a milestone for the development of Luxembourg, and like often in history the events of 1867 could not have taken place without two other important events which took place a few decades earlier.

The Congress of Vienna in 1815 created the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg and bestowed its sovereignty and property on the King of the Netherlands. At the same moment, the congress decided that a Prussian garrison totaling up to 4.000 men would stay in the impressive fortifications of Luxembourg.

The whole city lived in the rhythm of the fortress, and though many benefited of the business thus generated, let's keep in mind that Luxembourg, as a whole, was a poor country.

Lacking a promising perspective, a great majority of Luxembourgers in the countryside joined in the Belgian Revolution of 1830. Only the capital city, Luxembourg, well-guarded by the Prussian garrison, remained loyal to the King of the Netherlands.

The instability of that situation was resolved by the first conference of London on 19 April 1839. At that date, the current Western border of the Grand-Duchy was decided upon. Subsequently, the territory of the Grand-Duchy was divided along a linguistic line. The Western part with the city of Arlon was to become the Belgian province of Luxembourg. The Eastern part, speaking the Luxembourgish language, remained the Grand-Duchy with the King of the Netherlands as its sovereign. By the way, allow me to note that back in 1839 none of the concerned Luxembourg citizens was allowed to sit at the table of negotiations..., just like in 1815.

However, the diplomatic arrangement of 1839 did not solve the issue of the delicate balance of power surrounding Luxembourg and its fortress, with the Prussian soldiers therein. And indeed, the crisis about Luxembourg, which broke out in early April 1867, was caused by an imminent risk of change in that balance of power. What did trigger this crisis? Even in those times, the media had already considerable leverage and when the news transpired that Emperor Napoleon IIIrd intended to buy the Grand-Duchy from the King of the Netherlands, William IIIrd, for 5 million guilders, there was much uproar.

When the Prussian Chancellor von Bismarck strongly opposed the intended sale of what he called an “old ancient German land” with a strategic fortification – remains of which you see here -, the “question of Luxembourg” quickly developed into a big crisis. A general European war could not be excluded.

It was at this fateful moment in April 1867 that Prince Henri of the Netherlands, the brother of the King-Grand-Duke and since 1849 the King's permanent representative in Luxembourg, became active behind the scenes. Fearing no doubt that the purchase of Luxembourg by France would leave him as a "Prince without land", Henri encouraged the Luxembourg government under its president, Baron Victor de Tornaco, to defend the Grand-Duchy's independence and autonomy under the Nassau dynasty. To this, we should add the fact that King William IIIrd and

his brother Prince Henri were right cousins to Tsar Alexander II through their mother, Queen Anna Pawlovna, the widow of King-Grand-Duke William II.

The big powers, Prussia, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the newly established Kingdom of Italy, but above all the United Kingdom and the Russian Empire started diplomatic consultations and by the beginning of May, an agreement was reached on the basic features for a compromise: 1. Evacuation by Prussia and demolition of the fortress of Luxembourg; 2. Neutralization of the Grand-Duchy under the collective guarantee of the European powers, on the model of Belgium back in 1839; 3. Continuity of the dynastic links with the Orange-Nassau family of the Netherlands.

It was agreed that a conference would take place in London on 11 May 1867 and that two representatives of the Grand-Duchy would also be present: the President of the Government, Victor de Tornaco and the Vice-president of the Council of State, Emmanuel Servais. It is their both signatures that you are able to see in the exhibition under the eight copies of the treaty of London, alongside those of the European guaranteeing powers.

Herein lies a fundamental novelty of the second treaty of London of 1867, as compared with that of 1839. From a mere "object" of international politics, from an entity about which for centuries decisions were taken in the absence of its representatives, Luxembourg became again a "subject", though neutral and unarmed.

It is this beginning international emancipation of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, which started on 11 May 1867, which we are proud to commemorate today in the presence of the representatives of the guaranteeing states. There is a direct line between 1867 and today's role of the Grand-Duchy within the United Nations and the European Union.

However good the progress through the unarmed neutrality was in the beginning, it did not prove to be powerful enough to protect my country forever. Today, the European Union is the backbone of Luxembourg's independence and prosperity. We are happy to be part of this European family, which is based on the rule of law, justice and peace. While the Treaty of

London made us a neutral and unarmed subject, the European Union has enabled my country to be an actor in Europe, equal in rights and obligations alongside the other member states.

Luxembourg will not forget the long and sometimes strenuous way which it had to go over the last 150 years, and at today's ceremony I would like to thank the representatives of the guarantor states for having laid through peaceful negotiations in London the foundation for Luxembourg's European destiny of today.