

Speech of François Reinert

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Only the speech as made may be considered authentic

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear guests of honor,

As delegated Director and so to speak commander of the fortress, it's a pleasure for me to welcome you in the exhibition 1867. Luxembourg Open City.

Yes, you are in the right place here, in the exhibition about the Treaty of London! But why didn't we call it that way? The reason is that we intended to focus on its most important consequence, the dismantling of the fortress, which in the words of the Mayor, Mrs. Polfer, was the second birth of the City of Luxembourg. At last, the country has a capital of its own, without the fortress.

On the invitation card, you see the City of Luxembourg as we know it today, painted by Nicolas Liez in 1870. But with one big difference: the impressive fortifications built over the old castle on the Bock, the origin of the Luxembourg dynasty, are still there!

How come? Doesn't the article V of the treaty stipulate the conversion of the stronghold to an open city by means of its demolition? And now, three years later, one of its main fortifications is still standing. Wasn't it taken seriously enough? In fact, this was the exact impression of France and Germany.

On the other side of the City, on the front of the plain, the works were nearly finished. The city was open, the main thoroughfares (Marie-Thérèse, Monterey, Émile Reuter, Porte-Neuve) were nearly finished; the building plots and the public park "Kinnekswiss" (the "King's Meadow") were planned.

This was definitely of the highest importance for the citizens but didn't comply at all with the expectations of our French and German neighbors. In their opinion, the fortress could easily be rebuilt because all the modern forts, like our fort Thüngen, still existed. Thus, due to its strategic importance given by the many railway lines converging here, Luxembourg could have been drawn into the war of 1870. Our neutrality was at stake.

But demolishing 400 years of fortification was no piece of cake. Millions of cubic meters had to be moved by hand, even with occasional blasting. The official end of the dismantling was only declared in 1883.

In 1876 and 1881, Prussian and French engineer officers came to Luxembourg to check whether Luxembourg really fulfilled its obligations. Each time, more parts of the former fortress had to disappear, even monuments like fort Charles – the site of nowadays Grand Theatre of Luxembourg –, the Bock and the Porte-Neuve which were to be maintained. These excessive demolitions annoyed the townspeople very well. They were really fed up by the fortress, they wanted to move freely and make business. Away with the old, damp and unhygienic walls! Didn't three percent of the population die of cholera in 1866?

The Three Acorns, a part of the large fort Thüngen built in 1732 and 1836, were one of the few parts of the fortress which remained. Since 2000, it has even been rebuilt and thus, basically,

the treaty was broken. Didn't article V state : Furthermore, His Majesty, the King Grand Duke promises that the fortifications of the City of Luxembourg will not be rebuilt in the future?

You can imagine our concern when we were contacted by the Representatives of the HPC for the commemoration of the Treaty of London in our M3E (museum). Voilà, Mr. Prime Minister, we were caught red-handed. Yes indeed, we did rebuilt, but it was for a peaceful purpose. The fortress museum which celebrates its 5th birthday this year, is now in the middle of Park Dräi Eechelen which was laid out on the former fortifications. And nowadays, gun shots are only to be heard on national holiday. And our exhibition shows you how well the demolitions were executed.

Let me briefly thank all the people who gave their support to this exhibition.

The lenders were Mr. Charles Munchen, Family Marschall-Luja, Family Servais, Mr. Marc Besch, Family Jordan and Mr. Guy May.

Our partners, the National Archives, particularly its director, Mrs Josée Kirps and the curator Mr. Philippe Nilles, as well as Mrs. Evi Bange of the Municipal Archives.

The Ministry of Culture and especially Mr. Gilles Lacour.

The graphic artist Mr. Arnaud Hanon for his efforts and Mr. Romain Goerend for his interpretation of Prince Henry.

Special thanks to my team, Mrs. Simone Feis, Mrs. Cécile Arnould and Mr. Änder Bruns who will now give you a tour of the exhibition which this time is shown on the ground floor because the main piece, the bronze model of the fortress, was simply too heavy to be brought upstairs.

François Reinert, conservateur délégué à la direction du Musée Dräi Eechelen