



THE GOVERNMENT  
OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG  
The Prime Minister

## **Speech on the occasion of the Charlemagne Prize 2025**

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*Check against delivery*

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

My fellow Europeans,

Our history, our present, our future are shaped by our decisions. Our reality is the consequence of our choices. Imagine if the generations before us had made a different choice 80 years ago. We might have lived in a completely different Europe.

A Europe in which the endless cycle of aggression and revenge had gone on. A Europe in which borders would have continued to divide people, spark suspicion and prevent common understanding.

Today's Europe was a choice. It had to be made. And, thankfully, it was made. Made against all odds, at a moment when nothing seemed less likely. Made by men and women imagining a different future. Made through concrete actions, building our Union brick upon brick.

On this occasion, in this city, every year we celebrate those who made exceptional contributions to Europe and European unity. The long list of recipients reads like a history book of European progress. Schuman and Monnet. Mitterrand and Kohl. Delors and Juncker. Merkel and Macron. And yes, in 1986, the people of my country, Luxembourg, for its role model and perseverance on the road to European unity.

For 75 years, every year this prize reminds us of how far we have come. How much we have accomplished through dialogue and cooperation. A shared peace, a single economic market, free movement across borders, a common currency.

All of this is now a reality. Europe is now a reality.

And this is the lesson our common history teaches us. We can shape our future. With a clear vision, bold decisions, and concrete actions. And this lesson is crucial for our future. Because as much as Europe is now a reality, it remains an unfinished dream. One that needs advocates, people who carry it. People who will win the Charlemagne Prize over the next 75 years.

People from different nations and different backgrounds, with different roles and different perspectives. All of us, all of you. United. By a shared belief in European cooperation as the best means to ensure peace, prosperity and democracy across the continent. And that belief and unity are more essential than ever, as our continent is facing fundamental changes.

The post World War II and even more the post Cold War geopolitical structure is being challenged. Historical alliances are questioned. A war is taking place on European soil and protectionism is on the rise. Democratic systems are being undermined from within and from abroad. Those challenges present us with a simple choice: stand together or fall individually.

Faced with the world's other major powers – the United States, China, India – European countries can only play a significant role if they are united.

Now is the time for Europe to reclaim its own sovereignty and chart its own path.

This does not mean selfishly focusing on our own interests. Nor does it mean neglecting our partners and facing the world on our own. Being sovereign means being self-confident. It means taking one's own decisions, on one's own terms and based on one's own values. And this sovereignty is currently needed nowhere as much as it is on the question of our security. The decisions we take at this moment in time will define the European security architecture for decades to come.

The objective remains unchanged: peace. The desire for peace lies at the very origin of the European project.

The past 80 years have shown that it is possible for European nations to live in peace with one another. That is also the reason why we did the enlargements of the EU. To strengthen peace, democracy and prosperity. It is our responsibility to continue on that path, all the while recognizing that the international context has changed fundamentally. The new US administration has been clear that it will pursue a new course on some key issues.

We shall work hard to preserve the partnership and historic bond between the people of Europe and the United States, because fundamentally we share the same constitutional values and historic roots. In that sense, I believe that the United States will remain a pillar and important ally in NATO.

Russia for its part, with the invasion of Ukraine, has chosen confrontation over cooperation. The Russian society and economy have been transformed to serve the single purpose of warfare – leaving little doubt that its ambitions extend beyond Ukraine.

This new geopolitical reality marks a major shift in the recent history of our continent. We must confront that reality with a cool head and confidence in our own strength. That strength lies in a united and sovereign Europe. It is time for Europe to take on its responsibilities in security matters.

Investing in our security is not a choice for war, it is a commitment to peace.

When the Russian president chose to invade Ukraine, he undid the post-World War II security architecture that was based on rules and trust. He forced us to revert to an old way of ensuring security – one we thought we had left behind. In such a context, the best deterrence policy is strength.

That is the lesson of the war in Ukraine for all of Europe. For more than three years, the Ukrainian people have fought not only for peace in Ukraine, but for peace, stability and democracy in Europe. And they deserve our unwavering support, until a just and lasting peace is secured. Such a peace must be based on international law.

Because lasting peace is built on a rules-based system that provides a framework for resolving conflicts at the negotiating table, rather than the battlefield. Some feel that Russia's challenge in Ukraine could mark the beginning of the end of Europe, that it could signal the hour of European decline. But by supporting Ukraine, by ensuring that international law is respected, by investing in our own defense – we can make it the hour of European awakening.

The European project was designed to prevent a recurrence of conflict between Germany and France for the benefit of all of Europe. But it is not just our best path to ensure peace among member states, it is also our best policy to prevent aggression from outside. And Russia's war of aggression is but one element of a changing geopolitical reality.

Europe's united voice and insistence on the respect of international law must be expressed and heard everywhere. It must be heard at the UN, at the conferences on climate change, in the Middle East and elsewhere.

We cannot be silent in front of the humanitarian catastrophe that is taking place before our eyes in Gaza. I call on all parties to immediately engage in negotiations on a cease fire, the release of all hostages and the delivery of rapid and unimpeded humanitarian aid throughout the Gaza strip.

Next to geopolitical divisions, the world is also undergoing a new economic fragmentation.

In many countries, the rise of digital services and renewable energy have reshaped economies for some years already. Other changes have come about more abruptly. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have shown that excessive dependence on others can be a source of vulnerability. And global supply chains have had to deal with a number of policy decisions – like recently tariffs and other barriers – that hinder the free flow of trade. I welcome the talks between President von der Leyen and President Trump to prevent such tariffs.

Amid these changes, European countries must find a way to ensure their economic success. That is an integral part of a sovereign Europe. Without a strong economy, there can be no social safety net and no investments in defence or the green transition.

And rather than seeing those changes as a risk, we need to seize them as opportunities to shape our own future, to define our own destiny. Once again, the solution lies in unity. Europeans today enjoy, on average, an unprecedented living standard that is coveted by many around the world. This is the result of a simple, but powerful, principle that has guided public policies since the end of World War II: rules-based international free trade is beneficial for both sides.

Such free trade allows every country, every region, to specialize in what it does best. In turn, every country, every region, can benefit from the goods and services that others specialize in. My own country Luxembourg is providing services in the financial, satellite and data sectors to all of Europe, while importing many other goods and services from our neighbors and beyond. This conviction that rules-based trade benefits both sides is at the heart of our economic openness to the rest of the world.

And it is the founding principle of the Single Market. And yet, we are still far from a complete Single Market. I like to see this as a positive. It means that there are still many ways in which we can unlock economic potential – by eliminating geoblocking, by cutting supply restrictions, by facilitating cross-border services.

Above all, we need to simplify our regulations. There is too much administrative burden on our companies.

Beyond this traditional Single Market agenda, we can foster growth by making progress on the savings and investment union, completing the energy union, and introducing research, innovation and data as the fifth freedom – as suggested by former Prime Minister Letta in his report.

Today, Europe is suffering from a significant investment gap, compared to the US and other leading economies. This is a concern if we want to ensure that our economies remain competitive and contribute to our sovereignty.

Through the savings and investment union, we can create the foundations for tomorrow's growth by unlocking new financing sources. I want Luxembourg to be at the forefront of this project. Because we are the leading place for Europe's capital markets. We have the necessary expertise and an interest in making it happen.

Mobilizing more financing will be especially helpful to foster the energy and digital transitions. Because our digital and energy infrastructures will require massive investments for decades to come. And in turn, these infrastructures will be the basis for our economic growth and prosperity for decades to come.

Achieving that prosperity and realizing the Single Market's full potential will also require us to reaffirm the true spirit of Schengen. Because the free movement of people is the necessary corollary of the free movement of goods and services. That means, we need open internal borders and strong external borders. National border controls have serious consequences for cross-border travel and trade.

But, at its heart, Schengen – like the Euro – is a symbol of Europe and of our union. It is the tangible expression of our values and of a united Europe.

For centuries, this was unimaginable on our continent. Schengen is proof of what I said at the start of my speech: we have the power to shape our world.

If the European project stands out in history for its success in bringing about peace and prosperity after centuries of war and hardship, it did so precisely because we stood by our values.

Because Europe is not a marriage of convenience. It is a union of choice. A union among nations with different traditions and cultures, but with the same core values of democracy, freedom, rule of law, and human rights.

To this day, these values are our anchor. And they are a magnet. They are the reason so many people want to move here. They are the reason so many countries are working hard to join our union.

Europe is the home of those values. And the European Union their embodiment. Rooted in our culture and history, developed by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, put in place by pioneers after the Second World War, and now lived by all of us.

One of those visionary minds was Robert Schuman. In 1950, almost to the day five years after the end of World War II in Europe, he said: "Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity." This was true in 1950. And it is true today.

Europe was made. And Europe is still made every day. It takes vision, but it is built through concrete achievements.

The Charlemagne Prize then is as much a recognition for those who have made their contributions, as it is a motivation for those who are yet to make their mark. It can be the end of a journey, or the start of one.

Because the European idea is not confined to individual leaders. It has to be a common effort, carried by all of us. I will do my part, as Prime minister and as a convinced European citizen. Progress towards that ever-closer union is possible, but it does not just happen. Together, we will make it happen.

Long live Europe. Vive l'Europe. Vive Europa. Lang lebe Europa.