



**Visite de LL.AA.RR. le Grand-Duc et la Grande-Duchesse
à Madrid
du 5 au 6 mars 2026**

**Discours de S.A.R. le Grand-Duc
“Europe at a Crossroads: Navigating a Time of Profound Change”
IE University
6 mars 2026**

Dear CEO,
Dear Rector,
Dear Dean,
Dear ministers,
And above all, dear students,

It is a great pleasure to visit the renowned IE University today.

As you may know, I took up my duties as Head of State of Luxembourg only in October. Yet even though I am still young in office, for many years I had the privilege to represent Luxembourg around the world in my role as Crown Prince, engage with our partners, and deepen my understanding of the challenges and opportunities that shape our societies. Throughout this time, I have been guided by values that are deeply rooted in Luxembourg’s national identity: a commitment to dialogue, to openness, to responsibility, and to the European Union which continues to anchor Luxembourg’s place in the world.

As Head of State, I address you not from a political standpoint, but as someone whose role is rooted in long-term continuity. My grandfather landed on the beaches of Normandy in the fight for Europe’s freedom and later witnessed, as Head of State, the emergence of what would become the European Union. My father, in turn, accompanied its steady deepening and the building of an ever-closer Union. And I have no doubt that my generation will also face and help shape defining moments in Europe’s journey.

Guided by this legacy, I am particularly pleased to address you today to speak about the values that unite us as Europeans and the conviction that cooperation across borders is not only necessary: it is our greatest strength.

The European Union stands today as one of the most ambitious expressions of the Enlightenment belief in reason, human dignity, and the rule of law. Thinkers such as Montesquieu, Rousseau and Immanuel Kant wrote about a world in which peace would not be secured by the balance of power, but by cooperation among free peoples choosing to bind their destinies together. Kant's writings remind us that "*the law of nations shall be founded on a federation of free states,*" a vision rooted in the conviction that lasting peace arises from law, trust and shared purpose.

In a world marked by rapid change and renewed uncertainty, these values - solidarity, freedom, democracy, equality and an unwavering respect for the rule of law and human dignity – must remain our moral compass.

Europe's journey has never been linear, but it has always been purposeful.

This sense of continuity gives perspective - a reminder to look beyond the headlines that confront us daily with new reasons for indignation. It is by lifting our gaze beyond the immediate that we honour the legacy of our past and the responsibility of our future. But perspective must be paired with honesty and responsibility.

Imperial ambitions, a war of aggression on our continent, an escalation of hostilities in the Middle East, and trade tensions: it is no exaggeration to say that the European Union is facing external challenges of a magnitude not seen since the end of the Cold War. Yet it is also under pressure from within, particularly due to the rise of extremism and Euroscepticism. Europe has always moved forward by pairing realism with ambition. Today, as we face renewed geopolitical rivalry, we must once again look beyond the horizon.

Dear students,

Some may argue that talk of values is outdated. At the Munich Security conference a few weeks ago, we heard calls to anchor our partnerships in something more enduring and reliable: **shared interests rather than shared values?**

It is an intriguing idea. One that invites all of us, especially you as students, as the next generation of thinkers and leaders, to reflect on what truly holds our societies together:

Is it simply our needs, or is it also our vision of the world we want to live in? Should partnerships rest on interests alone? Can durable cooperation be built only on convenience?

It is true that we must remain relevant and appealing, even to those who may consider the notion of values too abstract.

But interests shift with markets, elections and crises. Values, in contrast, offer a common compass of a shared vision to pursue, together.

I believe that we must never lose sight of the principles that give Europe this vision and compass; its unique credibility on the global stage. These are not relics of the past; they are the foundations that have made us who we are and allow us to navigate an uncertain future with clarity and purpose.

As the Treaty of Rome so clearly stated nearly seventy years ago, Europe's founders were *"resolved, by thus pooling their resources, to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty"*. That commitment was not merely an aspiration of its time, it was not only rooted in temporary common interests: it remains the guiding star of our Union in a world once again marked by shifting power blocs and strategic uncertainty.

There is no doubt that Europe needs to pull its forces together to claim its rightful place at the forefront of technological innovation and collective defence. Yet in this necessary effort to bolster our capabilities, we must never overlook what already makes us profoundly powerful: policies grounded in the rule of law which reflects our principles and values, a steadfast commitment to societies that are equal and just, and bonds of cooperation between sovereign nations that have grown deeper and more resilient with every test we face.

For while our Union is also shaped by shared interests, its endurance, its very soul, rests on something that is far more enduring: the fact that Europe is above all a community of values rooted in the respect of law, human rights and equality.

It is this vision and these values that define the voice I bring today. Not a political voice, but one rooted in continuity, stability, shaped by history, and guided by the enduring principles that have long defined our continent.

Dear students,

Europe stands at a crossroads. The choices we make today will determine the kind of Union we pass on to the next generation.

These are moments that call for clarity about what truly sustains the European project. It is not only the policies we adopt, but the foundations on which they rest. And as we look ahead, we are reminded that safeguarding our common future requires more than reacting to immediate pressures: it requires investing in our shared endeavour.

Investment is never merely financial: it is strategic, it is human, and above all, it is a collective endeavour.

The great thinkers who shaped the foundations of Europe's values, our economic principles, and the functioning of our societies remind us that true investment extends far beyond capital.

Investment in people, in knowledge, and in the institutions that safeguard our freedoms is the bedrock of a stable, prosperous and peaceful society. It is this deeper, more enduring form of investment that has allowed Europe to thrive; and it is this investment that must continue to guide us as we navigate the challenges of our time.

Let me raise a few points that I consider particularly important in this context.

To remain a place where young people see their future - and where businesses can innovate – we must reinforce our competitiveness.

Competitiveness is indeed not simply an economic imperative; it is the foundation that enables the Union to protect its social model, uphold its values, and offer opportunities to all its citizens.

Our greatest asset in this effort is the Single Market: the engine of our prosperity and the platform that allows Europe to scale ideas into global impact.

I have the honour of speaking today in the presence of **Mr Enrico Letta**, who knows these matters well. His report on the future of the Single Market sets out a compelling vision for a more dynamic, and strategically united Europe, reminding us that Europe's future depends on acting decisively today.

Research and innovation are central to that future. Across Europe, extraordinary researchers and companies are shaping the world of tomorrow. I have had the privilege of meeting many of them.

Innovation and research thrive in an environment that celebrates courage and self-confidence. I am confident that Europe can produce a new generation of true pioneers. We need consciously to foster a culture of creativity and innovation.

But competitiveness and innovation alone are not enough. **Social cohesion** is the glue that holds our Union together. The Schengen Treaty - of which Luxembourg is of course justly proud since Schengen, where the treaty was signed, is a town in my country - transformed freedom of movement from an ideal into a lived reality. It strengthened our social fabric and ensured that talent can flourish wherever it is needed. Schengen is not just a policy; it is a declaration of trust in our shared future....something we sometimes take for granted when we travel in Europe – yet it must be upheld and defended.

Let me turn then to the essence of what we are all about: **peace**.

The European Union is the most ambitious peace project of modern times, not because it erased differences, but because it turned them into strengths.

Borders that once instilled fear have become bridges. Yet peace can never be taken for granted. The conflict on our Eastern borders reminds us that the values on which our Union was built remain indispensable.

This is why investing in multilateralism is investing in peace.

Cooperation is not a constraint; it is a catalyst. Europe has never prospered in isolation.

When the rules-based order is attacked, we must not retreat: we must reaffirm Europe's role as a responsible, reliable actor committed to international law and partnerships.

For countries like Luxembourg, multilateralism is not an ideal: it is a strategic necessity.

Finally, there is a subject especially close to my heart, and which concerns you directly: **Europe's youth.**

You carry the spirit of cooperation more powerfully than any institution. Born into the European Union, you are truly European citizens, shaped by Erasmus+, by mobility, by curiosity.

Your aspirations, your creativity and your profound sense of justice are indispensable to keeping the European project alive in a world undergoing rapid change. You remind us of the meaning of unity, and you challenge us when we fall short.

Leaders of today, must ensure not only that you are heard, but that you may also participate meaningfully in shaping public policy. Your engagement will enrich our decisions, strengthen our democracies, and fortify the European Union as a whole.

This of course also brings responsibilities for you: to remain engaged citizens, committed to upholding the values that define Europe and carrying them forward with conviction. Because when young people stand firm in their democratic convictions, they form the most powerful defence against extremist ideologies that seek to undermine our democratic institutions.

Dear students,

Before closing and handing over to the members of our government, I would like to say a word about my country and its European engagement.

As one of the six founding members of the European Union, Luxembourg has consistently upheld its commitment to building a united, peaceful and prosperous Europe. From the earliest days of European integration, our country has recognised the strength that comes from cooperation and the transformative power of a shared project rooted in peace and solidarity.

For Luxembourg, this conviction has never been abstract. Our history, our economy, and even our national identity are closely intertwined with the success of European integration. The

opportunities created by the European Union have been the framework in which the Grand-Duchy has been able to thrive, demonstrating that unity and openness can turn limitations into strengths. Europe has provided us not only with stability, but with the space to contribute meaningfully to a collective endeavour far greater than ourselves.

This longstanding commitment is also visible in Luxembourg's role as one of the three capitals of the European Union, hosting several key European institutions: the European Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors, the European Investment Bank, as well as various Commission and Parliament services. Additionally, all Council formations meet in Luxembourg during the months of April, June and October.

All in all, about 15.000 European civil servants work in Luxembourg. They contribute significantly to the vibrancy of our society, enriching the Grand-Duchy's multicultural and multilingual character and strengthening the deeply European identity of our capital. I might add that there are many Spanish citizens among them.

Dear students.

The European Union and its institutions stand as a powerful testament to what is possible when we unite our efforts and invest in a shared future. They show that cooperation can transcend borders, that solidarity can deliver tangible progress, and that a genuine community of values can guide us forward - because when we act together, our collective strength becomes a force for stability and progress.

Given today's geopolitical landscape, unity is our greatest asset - and it is sustained by the firm belief that Europe's strength lies in finding solutions together.

Luxembourg is honoured to contribute to this endeavour and will continue to support a Europe that is stable, forward-looking and committed to the common good.

This is the path that has brought us here, and it is the path that will carry us forward.

Thank you all for listening.

I look forward to a fruitful exchange between you and the representatives of the Luxembourg government.