



LE GOUVERNEMENT
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Ministère des Affaires étrangères
et européennes

Foreign Policy Address

presented by

Mr Jean Asselborn
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs

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Mr Speaker,
Ladies and Gentlemen Members of Parliament,

1. When the year began, none of us could have predicted that in 2020 humanity would face the greatest crisis since the Second World War. Experts had indeed warned in recent years that the world was vulnerable to major health crises. But the COVID-19 pandemic surprised us by the virulence and speed with which it hit one region after another, like a global tsunami.
2. COVID has changed our daily lives. We have to adapt our pace of life and our behaviour to the health rules. This affects the way we work, travel, live together, the way our companies and administrations function. However, when we look at events on the world stage and observe ongoing or emerging conflicts, we must conclude that the COVID pandemic is accelerating and reinforcing a global trend that already existed before. This trend is complex and multifaceted, but I would like to sum it up in one word: vulnerability. I am talking about the vulnerability, the fragility, of the world order that we have built since the Second World War.
3. This crisis has also posed a challenge to Luxembourg's diplomacy and required us to implement a crisis diplomacy.
4. We must act urgently to address the Corona crisis, and at the same time we must continue to devote all our energy to addressing the vulnerability of the world order, to strengthening a world order based on the rules of international law. We are called upon to make our contribution as Luxembourg: in our immediate environment and in our relations with our neighbouring countries, within the European Union, and beyond in the multilateral system, and in our relations with our partners around the world.
5. The American presidential election is of paramount importance for the whole world, for better or worse. Starting in January 2021, America will have a President who will recommit to bringing nations closer together on the world stage, to respectful relations among nations, and with a clear sense, once again, for international law. Four years of disasters in all these areas were four years too many.

Crisis diplomacy

6. The Corona-crisis has direct implications for the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and for our foreign policy, which was particularly marked in the first phase, in the spring, by active crisis diplomacy. This included helping our citizens around the world to return to their homeland. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the help of our European partners, organised the largest repatriation operation in our history. It was also about keeping open or reopening our borders.
7. Another important task was to help obtain, through our embassies, medical supplies and essential medicines, in close coordination with the logistics unit within the Ministry of Health. Cargolux played a key role in this context. Coordination within the EU was another major challenge.
8. During the pandemic, Luxembourg showed concrete solidarity. We treated French patients in our intensive care units. We provided specialised protective equipment to China and Spain. In the framework of NATO, we helped transport materials such as respirators to our partners. For our part, we received medical supplies and medicines from partners in Asia such as China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Luxembourg's Cooperation has endeavoured to support our partners in developing countries, particularly in Africa, and to offer the World Health Organization, the WHO, stronger support in this critical situation.

Consular assistance

9. The pandemic posed challenges, particularly for the services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the area of consular assistance, which we had never experienced before.
10. In the case of Wuhan, in China, from where we were able, with our colleagues from the HCPN and the CGDIS, and with the support of our European partners, to repatriate three Luxembourgers, consular activity could still be described as of a

more traditional nature. But from mid-March onwards, we were very much under pressure from our fellow citizens who needed help to return to their homeland.

11. We have managed to adapt our consular services to be able to respond to all calls as quickly and efficiently as possible. During the crisis, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs helped more than 1000 Luxembourgers and Luxembourg residents to return to Luxembourg. We also helped many people who had to move from Luxembourg to our neighbouring countries and to other countries in the Schengen area, or who wanted to return.
12. We had citizens stranded on five continents - because the borders were closed and there were no more commercial flights - and they wanted to return home quickly after the outbreak of the pandemic. Our consular assistance at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and our diplomatic network were in touch with everyone who contacted us and asked for help, and we tried to support them as best we could. Our services worked around the clock to ensure that our fellow citizens could return to Luxembourg as soon as possible, and I am pleased that in most cases they were successful.
13. This crisis has once again shown the importance of a good and extensive diplomatic and consular network, so that we can guarantee service to our citizens even in such situations. Without our embassies, consulates, and honorary consuls on the ground, this would not have been possible. Without the special contacts between our embassies and our EU and Schengen partners, the return of our citizens would often have been difficult to organise. They have worked tirelessly to ensure that our citizens remained on the passenger lists or were added to them at the last minute. These contacts have been and remain essential and have greatly contributed to the success of our efforts.
14. As a small country at the centre of Europe, we are of course even more dependent than others on cooperation with our EU partners to achieve this, and we have tried to enable our citizens, as far as possible, to be on a return flight. This has not always been easy, because we are talking about hundreds of thousands of EU citizens who were trying to return home, in a situation where each country looked after its own citizens first.

15. This was often only possible thanks to the support and good cooperation with our closest partners - such as the Benelux partners and our direct neighbours - who took our citizens on their repatriation flights, even though they themselves had many citizens who were still having to wait. That is why I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for the solidarity they have shown towards the people of Luxembourg.
16. Our participation in the EU's action, which set up its own task force to coordinate the repatriation effort, has also been of great help and I would like to stress in particular here the European dimension of coordination. For us, this effort to bring our citizens back home has always been an act of European solidarity. We also organised two repatriation flights from Cabo Verde, from where we brought back to Luxembourg a large number of Luxembourgers as well as citizens of other EU countries and the Schengen area, in an act of European solidarity. 341 Luxembourgers and other EU citizens were repatriated in this way. These flights were also largely co-financed by the EU within the framework of the European Civil Protection Mechanism. As a sign of solidarity, we wanted to support our European partners, who helped us enormously in many other countries.

Our neighbours and the Greater Region

17. This crisis has shaken much of what we took for granted. For example, no one could have imagined that on 26 March, the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Schengen Agreement, there would be controls in Schengen, at the border bridge. Where borders had been virtually invisible for decades, where hundreds of thousands of people had witnessed and lived Europe every day in our small country and its border regions, there was once again a real border separating people from each other. We took open borders and freedom of movement within the EU for granted. This has become a crucial challenge again for our foreign policy.
18. We have been working intensively on this issue over the last few months and it is no coincidence that in the second wave of the pandemic there are no more controls

at our borders. However, free movement across borders remains a challenge. Because the classification of Luxembourg as a risk zone by some European countries has, in practice, very similar consequences to those of border controls. A quarantine obligation based solely on the fact of living in Luxembourg is also a restriction on freedom of movement.

19. We have been working since the beginning of the crisis to ensure that the more than 200,000 cross-border commuters who normally come to work in Luxembourg every day - including thousands of Luxembourg citizens living in the border area - can continue to work in Luxembourg without any problems.
20. However, cross-border traffic is not only a matter for cross-border commuters. Many categories of people are suddenly confronted again with the existence of a border in many aspects of their lives.
21. The questions that citizens ask us every day are very diverse, as the rules that apply in neighbouring countries are often unclear. Here too, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tries to help the public as best it can. Since the beginning of the crisis, we have taken numerous initiatives on behalf of private individuals: in the capitals, in the regions or federal states, but also in universities, clinics and schools.
22. We have also argued that no arbitrary and unilateral criteria should lead to Luxembourg being declared a risk zone, which would result in restrictions on freedom of movement. From the outset, we have argued that the situation in Luxembourg could not be assessed solely on the basis of the number of new infections. The specific Luxembourg context of an exemplary policy, including large-scale testing, has been explained on several occasions. This has brought about an incremental shift in opinion and an ever-increasing understanding.
23. The last few months have been marked by a stark reduction in cohabitation within the Greater Region and everything must now be done to restore confidence in open borders. We agree with our neighbours that this must not be repeated.
24. The crisis has helped to raise public awareness on both sides of the border about the real strength of interdependence. Nowhere else than here, in our Greater

Region, is Europe lived and felt on a daily basis, nor has Europe developed, in such cohesion.

25. The cross-border solidarity that we experienced at the height of the crisis in the Greater Region must now be built on a sustainable basis. The contacts that have been forged during the crisis between the actors on the ground must now be anchored within a stable framework. At the Greater Region level, we are currently working on a common pandemic plan, and this is the direction we must take. We must also further expand our "proximity diplomacy" or neighbourhood diplomacy to take account of these realities and expectations.
26. Beyond these bilateral fora, however, it is also very important to maintain the consistency of our diplomatic efforts within the multilateral framework. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation are two sides of the same coin. I am thinking of the potential of the Greater Region Summit and its numerous bodies and working groups, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Corinne Cahen in particular for the good cooperation.
27. Now it is a matter of working together to ensure that this region continues to grow within a co-development logic, and can play a pioneering role in Europe. This is our ambition, and we are working on it with all the administrations.

European Union

COVID coordination

28. The rapid development of the COVID pandemic has also stress tested the European Union, something not previously seen. Where we have had open borders for decades, the free movement of people in Europe, free movement of goods within the internal market, the same rights for all citizens - all this was almost gone overnight, or widely questioned.

29. As if after a long hibernation, national reflexes have awakened. No sugarcoating here - in March and April, things were not looking good in the EU. Long-held certainties were suddenly gone. Our eyes were opened to the EU's fragility. Those who had been complaining for years about the European institutions' excessive powers suddenly noticed that in the field of health, the Member States decide alone, according to their national priorities. We have witnessed how such a selfish approach leads to awful scenes.
30. It took us some time to turn things around. Luxembourg has been committed from the outset to strengthening European coordination. It was clear to us from the beginning that we could only overcome this crisis together. We have worked tirelessly to ensure that all controls and measures are kept to the bare minimum, proportionate to the situation, without discriminating against citizens, for example on the basis of their nationality.
31. Above all, we have made a commitment at European level to ensure that border residents working in important areas such as the health sector, and essential goods such as medicines, medical devices and protective equipment, and of course food, are not halted at the borders.
32. For the past few weeks, the virus has been back in full force, even more so than at the beginning of the year. But if we no longer have closed borders, if the internal market is once again providing us with all our needs, and if no one has to justify themselves because of their passport or their origin, it is thanks also to the efforts of Luxembourg, with its partners, since the beginning of this crisis.
33. In the meantime, we have managed to put in place some coordination at EU level to fight the virus together. The Commission has made useful proposals in many areas, such as cross-border commuters, transport of goods, external borders, purchase of vaccines and internal coordination of EU measures.
34. The introduction of the "Next Generation EU" recovery instrument (€750 billion), which is linked to the next financial framework, the EU budget for the years 2021 to 2027 (€1,074 billion), is of crucial importance in managing the economic impact of this crisis. The European Commission will be able to borrow money on

international markets on behalf of the 27 to invest in economic recovery. This is a historic step forward for European integration. Now it is a matter of making sure that the money can be used as quickly and efficiently as possible.

35. With regard to the assessment of the situation in the various countries, we are committed to applying uniform criteria in all Member States, taking into account our overall testing strategy. We have had a lot of persuading to do with the Commission and the ECDC, but the message has now got through and is accepted by the European Council.
36. There is also broad agreement among Member States on the introduction of uniform rules concerning restrictions on entry from third countries. If the external borders are controlled more closely, this should help to guarantee more freedoms within the Schengen area. The Schengen area has been put to the test during this crisis. We must ensure that no lasting damage is done to this central element of European integration.
37. The EU Council of Ministers has also adopted a recommendation regulating restrictions on the free movement of persons. We would have liked to have given clearer guidance at EU level on how exactly to enforce this fundamental EU right. Further efforts are therefore needed.
38. What lessons should Europe learn from this unprecedented crisis? Crises are also always opportunities, and the European Union has so far learned from each crisis and emerged stronger as a result. Of course, the crisis is not over, and it will still take time to overcome all this. However, the following five lessons can already be drawn:
39. (1) As the EU, we need to reflect on how we can establish a better dialogue on public health with other countries in the world. COVID is not the first dangerous virus to appear in recent years, and if you listen to the experts, it will not be the last. We need to talk about environmental protection, human intervention in nature, regulation of the food chain, and global early warning systems for diseases.

40. (2) Within the EU we need closer coordination and the mandate of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, ECDC, needs to be addressed. It is a question of having the necessary staff and financial resources available. We will also have to discuss the creation of a European structure for medical research and development (BARDA). We generally need more funding for research on communicable diseases.
41. (3) There have been several concrete solidarity measures between Member States, such as the admission of COVID patients and the distribution of protective equipment. This solidarity was born out of necessity and was implemented on an ad hoc basis. Here, in the aftermath of the crisis, we will need to create the necessary framework to enable Member States to support each other more effectively in crisis situations.
42. (4) It is now clear to everyone that the health sector is a competence of the Member States. As we have seen, however, diseases know no national boundaries. Why should a COVID test performed in one Member State not be accepted in another? Why does each Member State have different arrangements for quarantine, contact tracing, movement, lockdown, etc.? Of course, measures must always be tailored to the specific situation in a region. But it is difficult for citizens to understand why there is one situation on one side of the border and another on the other, even if the epidemiological situation is the same!
43. (5) We need to anchor the concept of border communities more firmly at European level. Europe is experienced differently in a border region than in the middle of a large country. There, communities have developed together for decades, economically and at a human level. Luxembourg is committed to better protecting these realities at EU level.

Rule of law

44. The COVID crisis has put the European Union to the test, beyond issues of borders and competences. In many countries there have been lively discussions on how, despite a crisis, we can remain true to the principles of the rule of law and defend our values.

45. The values of the EU are enshrined in the second article of the Treaty on European Union. They must also guide us in a crisis and should not simply be set aside. We must commit ourselves again and again to the respect of the rule of law to maintain the foundations on which our Union was built.
46. It must be borne in mind that the foundations of European cooperation are called into question as soon as confidence in the judicial system of another Member State is lost. This problem extends far beyond the framework of the internal market, which is why the Commission, the Council, the Parliament, the Court of Justice and all of us here must assume our responsibility.
47. What should be self-evident is unfortunately no longer so, even before the COVID crisis. A so-called Article 7 procedure concerning the protection of the rule of law had to be initiated against two Member States. The Court of Justice of the European Union also had to address the situation.
48. Given the worrying developments in the area of the rule of law, we must ensure that EU subsidies are used as intended. Here too, what has long been self-evident is suddenly being called into question.
49. As a result, the EU considered in July, and for the first time, a conditionality regime as part of the EU budget and the economic recovery plan. Luxembourg is committed to an effective mechanism, which now needs to become reality, within the framework of an EU budget to be approved as soon as possible. The compromise that has recently been reached with the European Parliament allows precisely this: where the rule of law in a Member State is no longer guaranteed and the proper management of EU funds or the protection of the EU's financial interests is called into question, the Commission will in the future be able to propose a suspension of payments to that Member State. The Council of Ministers will then be able to take this decision by qualified majority, which should enable us to act. This is what we have committed ourselves to: EU funds are only available if EU rules and values are also respected. We will see in the next few days how far Poland and Hungary are willing to go to oppose a rule of law mechanism.

50. In terms of the rule of law, as a European one cannot feel comfortable when, out of the blue, the Slovenian Prime Minister supports Mr Trump's statement that he won the American elections, before millions of votes had even been counted. This is not only a sign of false solidarity at the wrong time, but it shows that there are governments in the EU that simply and deliberately ignore the very foundations of basic democratic rules. This is collateral damage caused by a so-called "illiberal" interpretation of the basic rules of the rule of law. This is fundamentally unworthy of the EU.
51. Poland's record on abortion is also unworthy. Hundreds of thousands of people, especially women taking to the streets, do not accept that the party of Mr Kaczynski, the President of "Law and Justice", and reactionary movements as well, want to take away women's right to decide about their bodies in all circumstances, even in cases of rape. Such developments, coupled with attacks on the LGBT community, have no place on this continent in the 21st century.
52. Karolina Markiewicz, a teacher and artist of Polish origin wrote last Friday in the "Land": *"At the heart of this vision are the Polish women: mothers, wives, sisters. Thus, women's rights defenders are described as dangerous agents of Western liberal propaganda"*.
53. This should make us think!
54. "The future of democracy does not begin by explaining it to others, but by its development at home," wrote German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in a newspaper article at the beginning of the week. And he added another sentence: "The future of democracy, however, cannot be secured without an idea of the democracy of the future." Two profound statements addressed to all of us in the EU, who today have the political responsibility to guarantee our children and grandchildren a democratic Europe in the future.

Migration

55. Even if the migratory pressure in the context of the pandemic has generally eased compared to last year, we should not disguise the fact: this easing is only of short

duration. On 15 October we had a discussion in this House on European migration policy. The Parliament supported the government's European refugee policy by a clear majority. Even if the room for manoeuvre for an ambitious new migration concept is limited, Luxembourg will be determined to find a solution that establishes solidarity within the EU. Solidarity should not be granted à la carte. Nor one-way.

56. We will support the German Presidency to move forward and develop political guidelines by the end of this year.
57. The migration pact presented by the Commission can be an opportunity for a more humane European migration policy, and this opportunity must be seized. The Dublin Regulation is at the heart of the current problem. The current rules are unfair to EU Member States exposed to migratory pressure at the external borders. And when they are overwhelmed, migrants leave these countries to seek asylum in other countries. The reform we are negotiating must respect the needs of all EU countries - countries of entry, transit and destination.
58. We urgently need a fairer system where countries rescuing people at sea or exposed to greater influxes can count on the predictable solidarity of all Member States. Luxembourg alone cannot solve the problem of the Schengen system. We therefore need a European dimension. Luxembourg will continue its commitment to provide a binding system of solidarity and, in particular, to ensure that the European Commission can, as a last resort, propose binding figures for relocation. Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Ireland, Finland, as well as Greece, Italy and Malta share this view.
59. Luxembourg does not just preach solidarity, we also practise it. Since 2018, we have relocated and resettled 145 people. Proportionally speaking, this is a big effort for our country. On 16 October, despite the pandemic, we admitted 14 refugees from Niger. Even though we are going through difficult times, we provide assistance to people who are in even more difficult situations. During the spring lockdown, we were also the first country in Europe to take in minors following a Greek appeal. In Europe, we must also succeed in showing collective solidarity. It works, and we see it with the sad example of Moria. So far, 1,362 people have been admitted and a

further 4,981 people need to be relocated from Greece. Total commitments number 6,343 people.

60. The EU must be able to protect its external borders. In this context, all border protection has been improved in recent years, both that of the Member States and of the Frontex agency.
61. Whereas in 2015 there were 1.82 million people on our external borders, in 2019 there were only 142,000. With an effort of solidarity within the EU, it should be possible to share this burden fairly.
62. Behind these figures, there are human beings. It is our duty to treat everyone with dignity and to deal with each individual case in full compliance with international and European law.
63. For border protection, there are concrete rules that must be respected in all circumstances. Push-backs of migrants are illegal and should not be tolerated. With its migration pact, the European Commission has proposed a mechanism to monitor these push-backs. Luxembourg therefore supports the proposal that in the future the European Agency for Fundamental Rights should monitor the actions of border guards on the ground.
64. Our government is committed to beginning negotiations on the migration pact. We need results for a more humane and effective European migration policy. The problem is not migration, but how we manage it.

EU-UK relations

65. As of 1 February, the UK is no longer a member of the EU, but is still part of the EU's internal market under the Customs Union until 31 December. After that date, major changes will take place, whether or not we reach agreement on our future relations.

66. The withdrawal agreement between the EU and the UK remains the best and only way to protect peace on the island of Ireland, and the single market. This agreement must be respected and the latter safeguarded.
67. Since the start of the negotiations, Luxembourg has been committed to an ambitious relationship between the EU and the UK. The UK will remain an important partner for us, especially in the services sector and, of course, in the financial sector. In many areas we will continue to work closely together, just in a different framework.
68. Negotiations on future relations between the EU and the UK continue to be complicated and we are now at the decisive stage. The aim is and remains to find a mutually acceptable solution in the days and weeks ahead.
69. But we have not yet reached an agreement and we cannot rule out a “no-deal” scenario. This would have important consequences for citizens and economic actors. At a time when our economy, both in the EU and in the UK, is suffering the consequences of the COVID crisis, it is all the more important that we can prevent it.
70. Whatever the outcome of the negotiations, on 1 January 2021, there will be changes for our citizens and businesses. I would like to stress once again: even if we negotiate an agreement, the United Kingdom will leave the single market and the customs union on 1 January, which will automatically create new barriers to trade in goods and services. For example, additional customs controls will be introduced, we will have two different control regimes and the cross-border mobility of our citizens will be affected.
71. At national and European level alike, we have therefore endeavoured to raise awareness of these far-reaching changes among all those involved.
72. Citizens are of course of particular importance in this matter and their rights are also clearly stated in the withdrawal agreement. I am pleased that we have been able to give clarity to the more than 4 million people - EU citizens in the UK and Britons in the EU - about their rights.

73. In order to enable British citizens here in Luxembourg to continue living their lives as far as possible as they have lived them to date, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was one of the first in Europe to launch the procedure in July enabling them to apply for their new residence permit, and thus secure their rights.
74. The year 2021 will certainly mark a new beginning in our relations with the UK, but the UK will also remain a close partner of Luxembourg and the EU in the future. The challenge for the years ahead will therefore be to ensure a balanced and sustainable relationship through rights and obligations.
75. From a less technical point of view, Brexit, which dates back to 23 June 2016, six months before Mr Trump's election, is and remains an element that politically weakens Europe as a continent. The Union has lost a "masterpiece" from a political, economic, and cultural point of view. With the former President of the United States, a fervent and aggressive Brexit supporter is leaving the game. A fact that the UK Prime Minister and government must bear in mind. They should not continue to play poker, neither with what has been agreed nor with what should be established for the future before the end of this year. Seriousness and rationality would do the UK and the EU good.

EU climate agenda

76. Even though we have been working in crisis mode in recent months, this does not mean, of course, that our priorities before the COVID pandemic are suddenly out of date. On the contrary.
77. Climate change remains one of the greatest global challenges. To limit the global temperature increase to 1.5°C, the EU decided last December to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest.
78. Luxembourg is committed to raising the EU's climate target for 2030 - starting this year. In fact, we are currently championing in the Council the idea of jumping from our old target of at least -40% to an adjusted target of at least -55%. We have to do this before the end of 2020, because we have to notify our more ambitious

contribution - that is, our nationally determined contribution - to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in accordance with the Paris Agreement. The European Union will do this collectively. This is an extremely important moment in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and it is crucial for its future and its effects.

79. With the Green Deal, the European Commission has presented an ambitious plan to provide us with an adequate framework. The financial framework 2021-2027 and the "Next Generation EU" must now be used for recovery in the context of the COVID crisis, but also for our action against the environmental and climate crisis.
80. The strengthening of EU climate diplomacy should continue its contribution to involve as many "large emitters" as possible, as soon as possible. Recent announcements from Canada, China, South Africa, South Korea or Japan, which also have high ambitions, show that the EU is a source of inspiration and that climate change remains one of our top priorities even during the pandemic.

Future of Europe

81. It remains important for us that the debate on the future of Europe be conducted as broadly as possible. During the COVID crisis, we realised how important it is to be able to rely on our European partners, and how important the European Union is. Of course, not everything is perfect and there are certainly some points that can be improved. Here in Parliament, in February, we talked about the conference on the future of Europe. Luxembourg did not wait for the initiative to continue the dialogue on Europe with its citizens. Following the success of the Citizens' fora, the government decided in its coalition agreement to intensify the debate on Europe, thereby strengthening the concept of participatory democracy.
82. Democracy needs to be further strengthened. As citizen consultation is a fluid process that requires regular input, we have supported this initiative about a conference right from the outset.
83. Citizens will to a large extent present their expectations of Europe in the context of the COVID crisis. Understandably, this is the subject that concerns us all. At the

same time, however, we must be careful not to create unrealistic expectations that cannot subsequently be met.

84. The question also arises as to how to organise the conference under the current conditions. A virtual platform is envisaged, but we wonder whether this will be sufficient. We are waiting for proposals from the institutions and are open to any good ideas.

Enlargement

85. The Western Balkans - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia and Serbia - are part of Europe. Since 2003, they have had a prospect of membership, which we must honour, even if some people consider that these countries' convergence with our values and standards is not quick enough.
86. We must give these countries time to overcome their difficult past and heal their wounds. They need time because we expect them to make far-reaching reforms in all areas. There are clear benchmarks to be met here, particularly in the areas of the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and the fight against corruption and organised crime. The speed with which these reforms are implemented will determine how quickly these countries can join the EU.
87. Luxembourg will continue to accompany the six Balkan countries on this bumpy road, notably through our technical assistance programmes to the benefit of the different countries.
88. The Western Balkans can only be strengthened through enhanced regional cooperation to give young people prospects as well.
89. We are working on the forthcoming launch of accession negotiations with Northern Macedonia and Albania, in addition to Montenegro and Serbia, where nothing is easy.

Turkey

90. Unfortunately, the situation in Turkey is very different. While many - not all - countries in the Western Balkans are moving towards the EU, it is a fact that Turkey has recently moved away from the EU by its actions.
91. As the Commission's latest enlargement report demonstrates, Turkey has taken several measures that are incompatible with the Copenhagen criteria on human rights and the rule of law. This has led, inter alia, to the complete halt of accession negotiations with Turkey.
92. Under certain conditions, the EU was ready to launch a positive political agenda and to work on revitalising this agenda. Unfortunately, the signals are not at all encouraging, or even frankly disappointing.
93. In the Eastern Mediterranean, a diplomatic solution is only possible through dialogue. Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus must sit down around a table and find a solution through dialogue.
94. The dialogue organised in the framework of the German mediation must continue, so that work on solutions for all parties concerned - Cypriots, Greeks and Turks - can begin. The road until we find a concrete solution will be long and difficult. As you know, the demarcation of the exclusive economic zones is a very difficult issue.
95. It is particularly important for us that international law be respected, in accordance with the principle of good neighbourly relations.
96. Solidarity is important not only on the issue of migration, but in this context as well. Luxembourg remains in solidarity with Cyprus and Greece as regards the respect of their sovereignty and sovereign rights. Turkey and its President are neither above nor separate from international law.

Trade policy

97. The pandemic has not only demonstrated the importance of an effective trade policy, it has drawn attention to the interdependence within the international trading system and highlighted the fragility of our supply chain, not only at the international level, but also in the context of the single market. Luxembourg has the most open economy in the world and we have not only found our place within the international trading system, but also in international supply chains, and have been able to demonstrate this during the crisis.
98. We also proved that even at the height of the crisis, it was still possible to obtain the essential products we needed on the international market, particularly in the medical field, and to transport them to Luxembourg. We did this for ourselves, but also for so many other countries that we were able to help in this way.
99. Yet COVID-19 has highlighted the fragility of our supply chain. A discussion is therefore needed on the diversification of production and supply chains.
100. But above all, we need to have a discussion on how to make the European economy and our industry more resilient and even more competitive in the world in various areas.
101. Over the last few months, as Minister for International Trade, I have asked that our thoughts focus not only on our needs for medical devices, medicines or personal protective equipment, but also on the need to elevate the debate to a more strategic level. In this context, we remain of the opinion that the steel industry is of strategic importance for Europe and that the European Union must do everything possible to stop the haemorrhage that this sector has been suffering for many years.
102. Luxembourg is committed to a balanced and transparent trade policy. We have succeeded in making negotiations between the EU and third countries more transparent and in having the negotiating mandates already published.

103. We have thereby succeeded in changing the direction of EU trade policy in our trade relations with third countries. In the context of international agreements, this cannot of course be a revolution, but an evolution. I understand that for some people things are not moving fast enough, but there are international commitments that cannot be jettisoned overnight.
104. The final agreement negotiated with Mercosur falls into this category. Since the adoption of the mandate in 1999, the world has changed, and this has to be taken into account. The Luxembourg government was one of the first in the EU to take a clear position in this respect. Before we can conclude this agreement, we need concrete commitments, in particular from Brazil, against climate change and deforestation. The current provisions of the agreement are not sufficient to ensure concrete changes with respect to a government that is not prepared to comply with the most important agreements in the field of environmental and climate protection, in particular the Paris Climate Agreement. The Commission is currently working on this. We are analysing in detail what might emerge from this.
105. This dossier shows how a country like Luxembourg can leave its mark at EU level, in close dialogue with civil society.
106. At the same time, however, I am also aware that some will reject even an improved agreement, because it would be better for them not to have an agreement at all than to support an agreement that does not go far enough from their point of view. But here we have to ask ourselves whether it is not in our strategic interest to positively influence the policies of these countries through cooperation, with the risk, if we do not do so, that other partners, who are less demanding and less concerned about sustainable development, will take our place. Is it not in our interest to establish a trade relationship that promotes the establishment of sustainable export chains in third countries and the respect abroad of our norms and standards? At the end of the day, it is about ensuring that tomorrow the EU can still convince its partners to adopt high standards.
107. The Commission is also aware of the importance of a close exchange of views with our citizens on our trade policy. To this end, a wide-ranging consultation exercise on the evaluation of the Union's trade policy has been launched. We need an

honest and open debate on the future of trade policy. I am confident that the results of this democratic exercise will allow us to give new importance to local, regional or European production, to introduce shorter routes and also to achieve a certain degree of independence.

108. The current debate on the future of trade policy therefore presents a real opportunity to redress the balance. In this context, our attention will also have to focus on the issue of the openness of the internal market. The single market is open to companies from a range of third countries, but these often make it difficult for our own companies to gain access. In many cases, competition in the internal market is also distorted because foreign companies receive subsidies in their own countries to become more competitive on our market. We therefore support the Commission's work to stop these abuses and make trade relations with third countries fairer.
109. We therefore support the development of the so-called border adjustment mechanism to allow for stronger and more binding conditions linked to the environmental and climate aspects of global trade policy.
110. We will also put the analysis of foreign direct investment in Luxembourg on a new basis. Together with the ministries concerned, we are currently working on the implementation of the European Regulation on the screening of direct investments. The government will soon present its draft law, which on the one hand guarantees the attractiveness of Luxembourg and on the other hand provides us with a framework for a detailed review of direct investments from outside the EU that could have an impact on our security.
111. We are also making our voice heard in EU trade policy with regard to the sustainable protection, promotion and respect of human rights. In December last year, the government adopted the second National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights, covering the period 2020-2022. The issue of due diligence is of concern to all of us, and I know that expectations in this area are high. As Minister for European Affairs, I consider myself fully in my role when I call for European solutions to problems that can best be solved at the European level. The question

here is how and at what level we can achieve the greatest possible effect. This is what we are analysing at the moment.

112. We are of the opinion that action at European level gives us the greatest credibility and effectiveness in taking this issue forward at international level, particularly within the framework of the UN. I also believe that the internal market is a reality that we cannot ignore and that the laws relating to this internal market should preferably be discussed at EU level. The fact is, however, that we have embarked on a parallel process and have commissioned a study from the University of Luxembourg to examine how a national legal framework could be established.
113. When this study is finalised, it will be up to the government, including the ministries in charge of Luxembourg as a business location, and to Parliament to take a decision in consultation with representatives of civil society and Luxembourg businesses, as provided for in the coalition agreement.

Headquarters

114. When referring to Luxembourg as a business location, I am also thinking of Luxembourg as headquarters of EU institutions. Our commitment to the European project is reflected in our active headquarters policy.
115. Luxembourg is proud to be one of the historic headquarters of the EU institutions and we strive every day to ensure the best working and living conditions for the more than 14,000 EU officials and agents working in the EU institutions and agencies in Luxembourg.
116. We will therefore continue our commitment to ensure the implementation of the Asselborn-Georgieva agreement of December 2015, which provides for a strengthening of the Commission's presence in Luxembourg, in particular around the three pillars (the legal pillar, the financial pillar and the digital pillar).
117. Unfortunately, there was, as you know, less positive news in this context in the spring: the Commission, without prior consultation with the government, announced plans to withdraw CHAFEA - the EU's Consumers, Health, Agriculture

and Food Executive Agency - from Luxembourg and transfer the agency's activities to Brussels.

118. Since this announcement, we have repeatedly stressed in many discussions with the Commission, whether with the President, Mrs von der Leyen, or with the Commissioner in charge, Mr Hahn, that it would make more sense to strengthen an agency that has been working well in Luxembourg for 15 years than to spread it over several different agencies in Brussels, especially now.

119. I know that the government can count on the support of the Parliament in these efforts, and I thank you very much.

120. Allow me also to stress here that the attractiveness and durability of Luxembourg as a location is not in question. As I have already mentioned, more than 14,000 civil servants and EU agents work in Luxembourg today. Over the past 18 months, we have also been able to welcome two new EU agencies here in Luxembourg, the European Public Prosecutor's Office and the European High-Performance Computing Joint Undertaking (EuroHPC).

121. And just last Friday we officially submitted our application for the seat of the future European Cybersecurity Competence Centre. Like the EuroHPC, it is a project that supports research and innovation in Europe and offers many opportunities for cooperation, including for the Luxembourg economy.

122. We want to continue working in this direction; in the interest of the country and the European Union.

Beyond Europe

Mr Speaker,

123. After Europe, I want to discuss the direction of our foreign policy in the global international context.

124. The COVID-19 pandemic shows that no country can meet global challenges alone. We must be united and work together, including at the international level, otherwise we will not succeed! This is also true for the fight against another global threat, terrorism, which has targeted Europe again lately.
125. Multilateralism remains a clear priority for our foreign policy.

United Nations, multilateralism, human rights

126. 75 years ago, when the United Nations was founded, Luxembourg regained its place as a free country in the international community.
127. This place, as a free and independent country, also carries responsibilities, and Luxembourg does not hesitate to assume its responsibilities. After having been elected as a member of the United Nations Security Council in 2012 for the first time in our history, we have proved during our term in 2013 and 2014 that countries like Luxembourg can also make a difference in the Security Council. We have submitted a new candidature to the Security Council for the years 2031 and 2032, thus confirming our willingness to make our contribution to the UN for peace and security.
128. Our multilateral commitment is also at the service of human rights. In 2019-2020, at the 74th session of the UN General Assembly, our Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, Ambassador Christian Braun chaired the Third Committee, which covers human rights and humanitarian issues. In this context, Luxembourg organized an innovative informal consultation between the Third Committee and civil society, thus opening a new space for dialogue that is appreciated by many NGOs.
129. Pressure on civil and political rights is increasing worldwide. There are ever more attacks on organised civil society and on people committed to human rights: journalists, lawyers, activists - women, in particular, are often targeted.

130. Last year I was talking about the case of the Iranian lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh. It is to be welcomed that Ms. Sotoudeh was released on furlough a few days ago from her prison in Iran. But the overall trend remains negative.
131. In this context, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has initiated work with ministries dealing with civil society matters to provide greater support to human rights defenders. This is also one of the priorities we have set ourselves in the context of Luxembourg's candidacy for election to the UN Human Rights Council for the years 2022-2024.
132. We are working hard to get the necessary support for the elections to be held in October next year. This would be Luxembourg's first term on the Human Rights Council since its creation in 2006.
133. There, we want to promote all human rights. In addition to its support for human rights defenders and the rule of law, Luxembourg has made the fight for gender equality and the protection of vulnerable groups against violence and discrimination a priority for its mandate. This includes commitment to women's rights, children's rights and also the rights of LGBTI persons. Commitment to sustainable development based on respect for human rights is another of our priorities. Through its development cooperation policy, Luxembourg plays its part and promotes economic and social rights and the right to development. We also want to take better account of the link between climate change and human rights.
134. Luxembourg's commitment to combating climate change is essential for our future as a country, but it is also vital for the protection of the human rights of those around the world who are exposed to the negative effects of the climate crisis.
135. Human rights are an integral part of our diplomacy. This does not mean that we only talk to democratic countries. We also talk and cooperate with other countries, in mutual respect, without naivety, and we are also committed to human rights in those countries, knowing that the human rights situation in Luxembourg and in Europe as a whole is not perfect either.

136. A foreign policy that makes it a priority consistently to uphold human rights is a foreign policy that emphasises the fundamental principles of human dignity and equality of all human beings, in accordance with the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This of course includes equality between women and men.
137. The feminist foreign policy to which this government committed itself in the 2018 coalition agreement means that we systematically and repeatedly commit ourselves to the rights of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and their unrestricted physical and mental freedom. Our feminist foreign policy includes the implementation of the "Women and Peace and Security" National Action Plan, in the context of UN Security Council resolution 1325. This resolution was adopted 20 years ago. We will continue our efforts in the years ahead to make progress in this area.
138. Multilateralism, the international approach is under fire. Yet there is no better approach to solving today's problems. Let us simply take the example of health. It is to the WHO, the World Health Organisation, that we owe the eradication of smallpox, following a global vaccination campaign. The WHO has learnt from the successive outbreaks of viral diseases such as SARS in the years 2002-2004 or Ebola in West Africa in 2014 and has improved its procedures. Further improvements are desirable. It is now important for all countries to come together to strengthen the multilateral instruments that can help us stem the pandemic.
139. I hope that there will be a positive impetus under President Biden's future US administration. We can certainly make more progress if the US re-engages with the WHO and the UN in general.
140. The same applies to the existential fight against climate change: here too, a new dynamism will emerge when the United States finds its way back to the Paris Climate Agreement.
141. The result of the US presidential election gives hope that multilateralism will once again have the wind in its sails from across the Atlantic.

142. But we Europeans must also assume our responsibility in this area. And we have done so in recent years, without waiting for a change in the White House.
143. The German and French Foreign Ministers thus created the Alliance for Multilateralism in September last year, within the framework of the United Nations General Assembly. Luxembourg has participated in this alliance from the very beginning. We are committed to a number of initiatives, among others to ensure respect for international law. We support the important role of the International Criminal Court against impunity for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. We also appreciate the work of the International Court of Justice, which, for example, ordered important measures in January this year to protect the Rohingya people in Myanmar.
144. In addition to our global commitment to multilateralism, contributing to peace, security and stability in the European Union's neighbourhood, both East and South, is also a foreign policy priority.

Eastern Neighbourhood

145. Following the tenth anniversary of the Eastern Partnership last year, we the European Union, must set ourselves new priorities, adapted to the specific situations of the six countries in our Eastern neighbourhood.
146. The situation in the region has deteriorated dramatically in recent months. In Belarus, Mr Lukashenko's regime falsified the results of the 9 August elections. The regime represses peaceful opposition with massive force and uses all the instruments of state terror, kidnapping and torturing demonstrators. This should not exist in the 21st century in Europe.
147. As the EU, we have adopted targeted sanctions against those responsible in Belarus, including Mr Lukashenko himself. We support the courageous work of the opposition and all efforts to find a political solution through dialogue and to pave the way for new free and fair elections, the outcome of which will reflect the will of the citizens of Belarus.

148. We are also very concerned about the renewed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. According to some reports, cluster munitions have been used. Civilians and civilian infrastructure have been targeted. Mercenaries from Syria were deployed in the operations.
149. The day before yesterday, an agreement was reached for a complete ceasefire, through the mediation of President Putin. Russian soldiers are being deployed in the region to take positions between the conflicting parties. One can only hope that this will stop the bloodshed. However, it must also be said that this agreement has a very bitter aftertaste for the Armenians, who have had to abandon many areas.
150. What particularly shocks me is the fact that the Turkish authorities have fuelled the conflict, rather than fulfilling their role as mediators, as members of the OSCE "Minsk Group". They are thus co-responsible for hundreds of deaths and tens of thousands of refugees. This is another example of the destabilising and aggressive foreign policy pursued by Turkey under President Erdogan in its neighbourhood, from Libya to Syria and the Caucasus via the Eastern Mediterranean.
151. Mr. Erdogan will not like the change at the White House. It would be extremely important to put NATO member Turkey on the spot and make it clear that operations such as those in Nagorno-Karabakh are unacceptable.
152. In response to the humanitarian crisis triggered by the war, Luxembourg supports the essential work of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the field. At the diplomatic level, we have joined calls for a ceasefire and the resumption of talks to bring a lasting solution to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
153. Following the election of President Zelensky in Ukraine, there has been some movement in the negotiations with Russia to resolve the Donbass conflict. The end of this conflict is unfortunately still not in sight, despite the efforts of Germany and France in the Normandy Format to move forward with the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Luxembourg continues to support the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the OSCE monitoring mission. At the invitation of the Ukrainian authorities, we will carry out a joint visit to Ukraine with the Prime Minister, when the situation allows.

154. Russia plays a key role, not only in Donbass and the Caucasus, but also in many other hotspots of the world. This is why Luxembourg's position is to maintain a dialogue with Russia. In this context, I was on a working visit to Moscow at the end of February this year.
155. We seek to cooperate with Russia without calling into question EU principles and EU sanctions associated with the illegal annexation of Crimea and the destabilisation of Ukraine; and without forgetting to highlight the human rights situation in Russia.
156. The attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny with the nerve agent "Novichok" was a serious violation of international law. As the EU, we had to respond to this use of a chemical weapon. At the suggestion of Germany and France, we adopted sanctions. This led to a new tension in relations between the EU and Russia. And yet Russia remains an unavoidable neighbour on the European continent. That is why we need to talk to each other, in all clarity, no matter how difficult it may be, in order to work towards restoring a basis of trust. This also applies to the dialogue between NATO and Russia.

Southern Neighbourhood

157. The stability of our Southern neighbourhood depends on the situation in the Sahel. Luxembourg is strongly committed to helping stabilise the Sahel, together with the EU and the UN and with its long-standing partner countries in the region - Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger - as well as with Senegal.
158. The situation is tense. This can be seen in the attacks that have increasingly targeted Burkina Faso, in particular since last year. We have seen it again this year with the military coup of 18 August in Mali.
159. The crisis in the Sahel is multidimensional. Therefore, it is right that we continue to apply the "3D" approach: diplomacy, development and defence. Our effort for the Sahel amounts to about 100 million euros per year. The focus is on development

cooperation. The security of our teams in the field is of course a priority for the government.

160. With the agreement of the Parliament, we have strengthened our commitment to security in the Sahel. The Luxembourg Army is gradually deploying a contingent as part of the EU military training mission in Mali (EUTM Mali). We are also participating in the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Mali, providing experts and GovSat satellite communication capabilities, to better connect the MINUSMA headquarter with the mission's regional sectors. This shows how Luxembourg can make a valuable and highly specialised contribution to a UN mission, which also improves the security of the peacekeepers.

161. In order to address the root causes of insecurity in the Sahel, we support political processes that can contribute to conflict resolution. The aim is to strengthen the rule of law, governance, and institutions and to ensure that trust between the peoples and governments of the Sahel countries is restored and sustained.

162. Between the Sahel and Europe are the countries of North Africa. We are deepening our political and economic relations with two countries in particular, Morocco and Tunisia.

163. Libya is a country of particular concern to us. Diplomatically, some progress has been made since the Berlin conference of 19 January. Last week agreement was reached on practical measures to implement the ceasefire in Libya. But the UN arms embargo is not being enforced. The EU's operation Irini, in which Luxembourg is involved, aims to improve monitoring of the embargo.

164. In Libya, there are too many weapons and too many external actors. As Europeans, we must do everything in our power to ensure that Libya does not become a second Syria.

Middle East

165. In Syria, the situation remains dramatic. Fighting continues, although there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria. It is time to prepare the ground within

the framework of the UN process, under the leadership of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, for a political transition in Syria.

166. Bringing to justice those responsible for the countless crimes against humanity in Syria is a priority for the international community, and Luxembourg is contributing to this as well. We support the international, impartial and independent UN Mechanism to advance the investigations into the worst Syrian war crimes and to establish files that can be used later in judicial proceedings.
167. We are also continuing to provide humanitarian aid with an annual support of €7.5 million, which will be donated, among others, to UNICEF's programme for the education of Syrian refugee children in neighbouring countries.
168. Allow me also to comment briefly on the humanitarian catastrophe triggered by the war in Yemen. More than 24 million people, three quarters of Yemen's population, depend on humanitarian aid. Women and children are particularly affected.
169. Here too, Luxembourg is actively engaged in assisting the civilian population, supporting in the Human Rights Council the mandate of experts documenting human rights violations, and encouraging a diplomatic solution to the conflict.
170. We cannot talk about the conflicts in the region without underlining the destabilising role of Iran. Let me make it clear that we do not turn a blind eye to Iran's destructive regional policies, nor to the brutal repression and human rights violations in Iran, from which religious minorities such as the Baha'i, for example, suffer particularly. Last June I wrote a letter to the Iranian Foreign Minister on that issue. Over the past two years, we have welcomed Baha'i families to Luxembourg who had been imprisoned for years both in Iran and in Yemen.
171. At the same time, we see very clearly that the policy of maximum external pressure against Iran only leads to maximum resistance. Europe continues to support the nuclear agreement with Iran: the JCPOA is and will remain an important element for our security and for ensuring that no new nuclear bombs are developed in the region.

172. Nor can we talk about the Middle East region without mentioning the so-called peace process. Peace between Israel and Palestine is not in sight. The process that should lead to it has long been deadlocked. Now that a new President has been elected in America, I am once again a little more confident that we will break the deadlock.

173. Every step that brings Israel closer to the Arab countries in the region is to be welcomed. The recent agreements between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are good for the people of these countries, who can now travel freely in both directions and establish business relations more easily. However, these agreements do not contribute to the resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

174. Palestinians continue to live under a military occupation that has already lasted 53 years. They remain exposed to the threat of annexation of parts of the West Bank. Prime Minister Netanyahu has indeed declared that the annexation of the Jordan Valley was only postponed and not cancelled.

175. Luxembourg continues to support the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and Palestine, in accordance with international law. The Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are a flagrant violation of international law. We also condemn the destruction by the Israeli authorities of Palestinian infrastructure, as happened again last week in the northern Jordan Valley. As a result, 71 Palestinians, including 40 children, have lost their homes.

176. Luxembourg is in favour of a resumption of discussions between the two parties. We are also open to new proposals, as long as the legitimate aspirations of both parties are respected.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

177. Beyond the European Union's neighbourhood, I would now like to turn to our strategic partnerships with America, Asia and Africa. These regions are very

important partners for Luxembourg, politically speaking and also in the framework of our economic diplomacy.

America

178. Relations with our transatlantic partners, with the United States and Canada, are of paramount importance to us, not only within the framework of NATO, but also economically.
179. Despite President Trump's "America first" policy, the United States remains our largest trading partner outside Europe, and our diplomacy is determined to further deepen economic relations with the United States.
180. We followed the presidential elections in America very closely last week. The result is now known. The American people voted by a clear majority in favour of change. Voter turnout was higher than ever, despite the pandemic. In this difficult context, the conduct of the elections was remarkable. The elections undoubtedly showed how unshakeable American democracy is.
181. The fact that it was the votes of the city of Philadelphia, in the State of Pennsylvania, where the American Constitution was signed in 1787, that tipped the balance in Joe Biden's favour is also highly symbolic. In 70 days, Mr Biden will take his oath as the 46th President of the United States. President Trump would take one of his few good decisions if he were to recognize that he has to leave.
182. With President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, the first woman to hold this office, new energy is sure to enter our transatlantic partnership. This does not mean that on 20 January next year everything will be different overnight. The Democrats still do not have a majority in the Senate. The new President will initially focus strongly on domestic policy issues, in order to bring the Americans closer together after a period in which they have been increasingly divided. That will certainly not be easy.
183. From a foreign policy point of view, however, I am confident that as Europeans we will once again establish a genuine relationship of trust with our new American

partners and that we will be able to engage in a dialogue that will allow us, even on difficult issues on which we disagree, to move forward and work together. It is in our common interest, whether it concerns climate change, trade or security and disarmament. In doing so, it will be important for the EU to show team spirit and act as cohesively as possible.

184. In our bilateral relations with the United States, we can rely on a very solid foundation.

185. In this context, we can highlight, for example, our ever-closer cooperation with America in the field of space, as well as the important links in the fields of information and communication technologies and FinTech. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will strive to further strengthen these ties in the future, together with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Economy.

186. As far as Canada is concerned, we are also increasing our support to Luxembourg small and medium-sized enterprises interested in the Canadian market and wishing to benefit from the EU-Canada trade agreement.

187. In Latin America, we are expanding our diplomatic network to meet the demand of economic players. In this spirit, last autumn I proposed to the government to also accredit our embassy in Brasilia for Chile as well. Chile is our leading partner in Latin America in terms of trade in services, and the country is of great importance for our funds sector. We also signed a new air agreement with Chile last year. We hope for Chile that, after the referendum of 25 October, which was supported by 79% of the population, this big and important country will be able to consider the very broad social movement when drafting a new Constitution. Last December, the Parliament ratified our first tax treaty with Argentina, which was signed in April 2019. Our companies are showing great interest in the Argentine market, even though the country is currently facing economic difficulties.

188. In November of last year, I visited Colombia and Ecuador where we also have a number of economic interests.

189. Following my visit, we were able to sign an agreement with Ecuador to remove Luxembourg from its tax policy blacklist. This should soon allow us to be off the blacklist anywhere in the world.

190. In Colombia, I was also able to get an idea of the difficulties that the protracted crisis in Venezuela has caused at the regional level. Taking in the more than 4.5 million migrants and refugees who have left Venezuela since 2015 is a major challenge. In Colombia, this is also likely to have an impact on the fragile peace process. Luxembourg remains committed and is helping with the regional crisis through the UNHCR, the UN agency for refugees. We continue to support the peace process in Colombia with a project that supports the transitional justice process in the country.

Asia

191. One thing is clear: Asia will become increasingly important in the coming decades, both politically and economically. Luxembourg is well positioned there with its network of embassies and trade and investment offices. We have also continued to work in the fields of research and innovation to promote Luxembourg in Asia.

192. China is and will remain an important partner for us in Asia. The rail link between the Chinese city of Chengdu and Bettembourg, inaugurated in 2019, is a good example of our strengthened cooperation. It diversifies our trade routes with China while making them more environmentally friendly.

193. We are of course aware that China is not only a partner, but also a competitor, with different values and a different vision of the world order from ours. It is important that the 27 EU Member States remain as closely united as possible. Only in this way can we engage in a dialogue with China on an equal footing, without hiding our concern for human rights. In this context, I would like to underline that we regularly express our views in our bilateral contacts and in the multilateral framework, be it in Geneva or New York, together with like-minded countries, on the very worrying human rights situation in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

194. We have particularly close relations with Japan. Last year, Emperor Akihito came personally to our embassy in Tokyo to pay a last tribute to Grand Duke Jean. At the end of 2019, Grand Duke Henri was in Tokyo to attend the succession ceremony. Next year, we hope that the exchanges will continue at the highest level, also within the framework of the Olympic Games. Japan's importance for us as an economic partner will continue to grow in the future. In the wake of Brexit, a number of Japanese companies have already moved their European headquarters to Luxembourg, for example in the insurance sector.
195. India is increasingly important for Luxembourg and Europe as a whole, in order to diversify our relations on the Asian continent. The number of Indians in Luxembourg has more than doubled in recent years. At present, there is no other Luxembourg consulate that processes more visa applications than our embassy in Delhi. As our relations become ever closer, we are also closely monitoring the human rights situation in India.
196. During my visit to New Delhi at the end of January, I had a conversation with my counterpart, Foreign Minister Jaishankar, about the Citizenship Amendment Act, a law that is causing quite a stir in India. We agreed that everything must be done to prevent people from becoming stateless.
197. Of course, we do not only focus on the large Asian countries. For example, in March of this year, just before the lockdown, we organised the second edition of the "ASEAN Day" at the Chamber of Commerce. ASEAN is a political organisation that unites ten South-East Asian countries. These countries are often overlooked, even though they have a population of 650 million and a growing middle class. This "ASEAN Day" was a great success, with more than 100 participants from 30 Luxembourg companies and representatives of the ten ASEAN embassies. The free trade agreements that the EU has concluded with Singapore and Vietnam will enable closer cooperation not only on the economic level but also on the political level.

Africa

198. Africa remains an important partner and a priority of our foreign policy. We welcome the European Union's efforts to modernise our partnership with Africa and adapt it to the new realities.
199. We need to look beyond the cliché of poverty and misery to get a more complete picture of the continent, without distorting the reality. Many people in Africa still live in extreme poverty. Wealth is increasingly distributed unfairly. And because of climate change and population growth, resources are becoming increasingly scarce. Such imbalances can quickly lead to conflict.
200. However, this is only part of the picture. Africa is also home to a large number of young and dynamic people who have the potential and the will to transform and advance their continent politically, economically and socially. This requires decent jobs, access to social services, energy and infrastructure, and opportunities for greater political participation. Young women and men in Africa are strongly committed to this. Luxembourg stands by their side.
201. Through our presence in Addis Ababa, headquarters of the African Union, we support the continent as it strives to develop and implement African solutions to African challenges. With our embassies in Cabo Verde, West Africa - Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger - and Ethiopia, as well as through economic missions in other African countries such as Morocco, Rwanda and Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire or Ghana, we are equipping ourselves to further expand our long-term partnership.
202. Luxembourg companies have also recognised Africa's strengths. Several of them have gained a foothold on the continent, for example in the fields of steel, inclusive finance, satellites, telecommunications, and air freight. To improve the business environment and enable the necessary investments, Luxembourg supports the strengthening of banking and financial systems, as well as sustainable business projects in several areas: digitalisation, information and communication technologies, and FinTech.

203. Of course, cooperation with our African partners also includes the promotion of democratic values and the respect for human rights in an inclusive governance. This is the only way for Africans to lead their continent on the road to sustainable development.

Conclusion - Commemoration and Commitment

Mr Speaker,
Ladies and Gentlemen Members of Parliament,

204. I have tried to show you our commitment, in the European Union and beyond, in the international community: our commitment to our values and interests, to the rule of law, to human rights and multilateralism, to peace and also to the prosperity of our citizens and our economy.

205. Our commitment is also based on the lessons we have learned from the past. 2020 is a year of crisis, but it is also an important year of commemoration.

206. In January we commemorated the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp 75 years ago. Luxembourg was able to make its contribution through our chairmanship of the IHRA, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Ambassador Georges Santer for his tireless efforts. We have adopted an IHRA Ministerial Declaration, in which we commit ourselves to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive, to fight against the falsification of history and to combat antisemitism and other forms of discrimination with new energy.

207. Looking back on the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel rightly stressed the danger of indifference. I quote his words when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize: *"We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."*

208. This year we also remembered the liberation of Luxembourg 75 years ago. In December last year, on the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, one of the

bloodiest battles of the Second World War, we were once again able to thank from the bottom of our hearts the veterans, our liberators, the Americans and the Allied troops for giving us back our freedom.

209. 75 years ago, Luxembourg participated in the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco. And 70 years ago, Robert Schuman made his declaration, which was to serve as a guideline for European integration, the European peace project.

210. We are in a year of commemoration, of contemplation of what preceding generations have accomplished to emerge from war and misery. We must build on this foundation for the future.

211. It is precisely in this current era of vulnerability that we cannot and must not hide. It is our duty, as Luxembourgers, as Europeans, as members of the international community, to show our colours, not to be indifferent. We must, more than ever, be actively committed, in Europe and beyond, to the interests of our country and its citizens, to the fundamental values of democracy, to a world order based on clear rules, to a peaceful, socially equitable and climate-friendly coexistence, where no one is left out.

212. In our foreign policy, we must strive to make a difference, set priorities and proceed strategically, because our means are not unlimited - even if we have been able to strengthen them in recent years. In June next year, we will take stock of our work with our ambassadors at the next diplomatic conference.

Mr Speaker,
Ladies and Gentlemen Members of Parliament,

213. It remains for me to express my hope, which is also the will of the Luxembourg government, that everything possible will be done to rekindle the idea that peace will only have a chance if the stronger side respects international law and the weaker side can rely on international law for its defence; in short, when we once again see very clearly what is working well, and what is not, in the clockwork of our planet.