

Press release (15/11/2012)

Declaration by Jean Asselborn on Luxembourg's European and Foreign policy on 14 November 2012 at the Chamber of Deputies

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg, Jean Asselborn, delivered his Declaration on Luxembourg's European and Foreign policy at the Chamber of Deputies on Wednesday, 14 November 2012.

The Minister recalled the importance of foreign policy for a country like Luxembourg. He stressed how crucial it is to lead a foreign policy which signals commitment, solidarity and responsibility, and which defends both the values and the interests of the country.

The Minister first referred to the vote at the UN General Assembly on 18 October 2012, which gave Luxembourg a seat as non-permanent member on the UN Security Council. Minister Asselborn expressed his appreciation for this vote of confidence from the international community. He underlined that he is fully aware of the magnitude of the task as well as the responsibilities it incurs upon Luxembourg.

Whilst emphasizing the values underlying Luxembourg's approach in meeting this historic challenge, the Minister stressed the importance of applying an integrated approach based on diplomacy, development and defense when addressing specific issues. In an interconnected and multidimensional world, crises have implications that an approach based on security factors alone cannot solve. Economic development, the promotion of human rights and the

rule of law, are crucial factors in conflict resolution which Luxembourg attaches particular importance to.

The Minister then welcomed the renewed impetus provided by the signing of the new Benelux Treaty. The Treaty will further strengthen the role that the Benelux has always played in European and international affairs. In this respect, Luxembourg will seize the opportunity provided by the fact that Luxembourg will chair both the ministerial committee of Benelux and the Benelux Parliament in 2013, in order to enhance cooperation between the three member states.

Minister Asselborn continued his speech with an analysis of the key challenges facing the European Union, namely the consequences of the financial and economic crisis and of the sovereign debt crisis. In spite of the complexity and of the difficulties, the EU has come together and has taken action. Over the last twelve months, the member countries of the euro zone have taken crucial decisions that have provided a solid foundation, and the creation of relevant instruments. In this context, the Minister mentioned the reform of the Stability Pact, the European Semester, the creation of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), as well as the signature of the Fiscal Pact.

Whilst Greece is still facing financial difficulties, Minister Asselborn welcomed the recent decisions taken by the Greek parliament, which will allow the Greek people to benefit from the implementation of these instruments and allow them to break the vicious circle of austerity and recession. In this regard, Minister Asselborn insisted that each country should stabilize its situation at a

suitable pace in order to be able to restore balance in the budget and resume growth in a rational manner.

In order to allow the EU to pursue its efforts in the fight against the crisis, Minister Asselborn pleaded for a strong multiannual financial framework 2014-2020, which is the only way to support effectively efforts carried at a national level. The multiannual financial framework is a key instrument to restore confidence and growth in Europe.

Minister Asselborn renewed his firm commitment to EU enlargement. He stressed that Luxembourg has the responsibility to support the call for peace, prosperity, democracy and the rule of law in the countries of the Balkans. In addition, the Minister stressed that Turkey should not be kept out of the EU, a country with a dynamic economy, a strategic geographic position and crucial role in the region. Minister Asselborn also encouraged the negotiations with Iceland. While underlining the importance of visa liberalization as a means to increase direct contact between people, Minister Asselborn warned against abuse.

With regards to the Eastern Partnership of the EU, the Minister noted how important it is to reach the objectives set out, but underlined that the partners must meet their commitments in the areas of democracy and the rule of law, which are crucial factors in the construction of Europe.

Luxembourg's foreign policy is also strongly committed to multilateralism, especially in the field of international trade where it is more important than ever, especially in times of crisis, to resist protectionist tendencies, to fight

international trade barriers and to promote the economic development of less developed countries. The Minister welcomed the accession of Russia to the WTO and also noted the commitment of the European Union to establish more free trade agreements worldwide.

The Minister then gave an overview of the EU's southern neighborhood, taking stock of the upheavals that occurred in this region during the "Arab Spring." The Deputy Prime Minister recalled that these events were spurred by the aspiration of the people towards values such as freedom, the rule of law and human rights. He stressed the role the EU has to play in this regard in order to support these countries on the path of economic, social and democratic development.

The Deputy Prime Minister also provided an update on the situation in Syria. Regretting the double veto by China and Russia in the UN Security Council, he said that this forum provides the only instrument available to the international community to resolve the crisis, excluding any military intervention. Fully subscribing to the establishment of a constructive working relationship between international community and the committee bringing together all of the Syrian opposition, which was formed on 11 November in Doha, Minister Asselborn demonstrated his determination to provide his full support to the efforts of the UN Security Council in elaborating a resolution based on the achievements of the meeting of 30 June 2012 in Geneva.

The Minister then addressed the role of Iran in the region. He said that in light of the recent findings of the IAEA, Luxembourg supports the process initiated by the "E3 +3" (US, Russia, China, France, UK and Germany) and favors a

double approach, based on both the adoption of sanctions against the regime, and on the promise of economic and political cooperation with Iran if it agrees to cooperate with the IAEA.

Regarding the Middle East peace process, the Minister strongly deplored the increase of tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. Whilst the history of Europe demands that everyone possible be done to ensure the security of the State of Israel, the philosophy that guides Europe also renders necessary all that no efforts be spared to ensure the dignity of the Palestinian people. Advocating a two-state solution based on 1967 borders, the Minister said that the creation of a Palestinian state cannot be interpreted as a gift to the Palestinian people, but it constitutes the cornerstone of a solution allowing Israel to live in peace and security. However, the constant pursuit of the settlement policy will result in making any two-state solution physically impossible. Luxembourg welcomes any initiative which strengthens the multilateral process and would welcome the enhancement of Palestine's status as an observer state by the UN General Assembly.

Regarding relations with the African continent Luxembourg, the Deputy Prime Minister said that despite the current difficult context, the future belongs to Africa. He referred to the positive developments, recalling progress made with regard to democracy, but also highlighting Luxembourg's commitment to the UN Peacebuilding Commission, as well as its participation in EU missions (EUTM Somalia and EU NAVFOR ATALANTA). Aware of the threats facing the Sahel, the Minister stressed the need for the restoration of national unity and the establishment of a democratic transition process in Mali. The Minister underlined that Luxembourg is fully committed to further deepening its

relations with the African countries by combining political, diplomatic and cooperation efforts with economic and cultural means.

The Minister then focused on the strategic partners of Luxembourg and the EU. Referring to transatlantic relations, the Minister explained the importance of relations with the United States. Russia and China are two other strategically important partners, from an economic and commercial point of view as well as from a political point of view, noted the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Minister also gave details of Luxembourg's efforts in favor of a world free of weapons of mass destruction, as well as in the field of non-proliferation and arms reduction in general. Luxembourg calls for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and reiterates its commitment to the full implementation of the Convention on cluster munitions. Minister Asselborn also stressed Luxembourg's efforts in the elimination of anti-personnel landmines through its adherence to the Ottawa Convention, as well as its fervent support towards the efforts led by the international community to establish a universal arms trade treaty (ATT).

The Minister concluded his speech by underlining the importance of support from the members of parliament, and of their critical thinking, in order to contribute to the work of Luxembourg in the UN Security Council, which is the ultimate expression of Luxembourg's international commitment.

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