



LE GOUVERNEMENT
DU GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG
Ministère des Affaires étrangères
et européennes

Statement on Foreign and European Policy

presented by

Mr Jean Asselborn
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Mr Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen Members of this Chamber,

On the international stage, the year 2022 began on 24 February, the day on which Russian tanks rolled across the Ukrainian border early in the morning and the first missiles fell on Kyiv. What none of us wanted to be true, what none of us could believe, became brutal reality: Despite all the efforts to maintain peace, Europe was to experience **war again** in the 21st century..

There were, of course, the terrible Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, the aftermath of which is still being felt in the region. There was also the war in Georgia and, of course, before 24 February 2022, there was also February 2014, when Russia began to annex Crimea.

But it is clear to all of us that the military attack that began on 24 February **has surpassed anything this continent has experienced since the Second World War** in its scale, its brutality and its global consequences. We must be aware of one thing: This war is not just pitting Russia against Ukraine, it is a confrontation between two political systems, between two world views. **This is above all about values, and it is our common responsibility to uphold the universal values of freedom and independence.** We thought that there could never be another war in Europe. Now we must do our utmost to ensure that this is the last time that the force of international law cedes to the law of military force.

For years, President Putin had consistently suppressed any democratic opposition in his country and systematically expanded his power. Now he is trying to impose his ideology of the "Russkiy Mir" with brute force. We here in our part of Europe had long **believed that we could somehow integrate Putin's Russia** into our community of values or at least integrate it into the rest of Europe in such a way that peaceful coexistence on the European continent would be possible. That is obviously not the case.

Putin wanted this war. History will prove that he decided this already a year ago, in autumn 2021. All efforts undertaken up until December last year, either by the EU, NATO, the NATO-Russia Council or the OSCE, to tell Putin that the "West" is ready to take into consideration

and listen to Russia's viewpoint concerning security architecture, and to give diplomacy a chance to find solutions, were in vain.

However, who knows whether Putin would have carried out this criminal action if he had known where he would be standing politically, economically and above all militarily almost 9 months after the attack.

Russia **has been brutally trampling on international law for more than 8 months now**. All these crimes committed by Russia, which have also been condemned by the UN, cannot be ignored. There **can therefore be no neutrality** in this war. Not condemning Russia means supporting Russia, means accepting that **the strongest is right**. If Putin were to win his war, it would be nothing more and nothing less than the death sentence of the international world order as we know it and as we have helped to build after the Second World War.

The war in Ukraine has changed many things. There is often talk of a paradigm shift in geopolitics. The war that the people in Ukraine have been suffering for almost 9 months now has **consequences at all levels**, here at home, in Europe and around the world.

Ukraine needs all the help we can give it to defend itself against Russia's murderous aggression. Article 51 of the UN Charter says it clearly, and I quote it here:

***"Nothing** in the present Charter shall impair the **inherent right of individual or collective self-defence** if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the **exercise of this right of self-defence** shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security."*

Article 51 also puts its finger firmly on the wound that war has torn into our world order: **The UN Security Council, where Russia has a veto power, is currently completely incapable** of playing its role for world peace. It is therefore up to all of us to act within the framework of

international law, which is particularly close to our hearts as a smaller country, indeed, is vital for us.

Luxembourg reacted quickly and decisively with its European and international partners immediately after 24 February and has been resolutely committed ever since. **Now it is important not to become despondent, not to tire** in our support for Ukraine. If we do not resolutely oppose this aggression, where would Putin - or another Putin - invade next?

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We have taken decisions here at home and in the EU that would have been unthinkable just a few months ago. Luxembourg has also **supplied weapons to a war zone** for the first time in our history. Luxembourg has so far delivered weapons and equipment worth more than 72 million euros to Ukraine. This corresponds to 16% of our defence budget. These weapons help to make a difference on the ground. As an EU member, we also make a financial contribution to the joint effort under the European Peace Facility (EPF), which has so far allowed 6 times 500 million to be made available for arms deliveries and other equipment.

One must not make the equation that military aid to Ukraine would mean more war and, conversely, that no more military aid to Ukraine would bring peace closer. This is a false conclusion that would basically give Putin a blank cheque to completely destroy Ukraine. Yes, without military aid to Ukraine, the war would be over. With the consequence that there would be no more Ukraine and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian dead.

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Shortly after 24 February, the first people who had to flee the war arrived here in Luxembourg. Here too, Luxembourg has **accepted its responsibility** and offered direct protection to the people who had fled Ukraine. Since the end of February this year, we have granted **temporary protection status** to around 4500 people, some 3000 adults and 1500 children. The status, initially valid for one year until March 2023, has recently **been extended for another year**. Until March 2024, the people who had to flee Ukraine can live in our country

under this status, work and send their children to school. In other words, they can lead a normal life, as far as this is possible when you have been driven out of your country by war.

Seeing how Russia is escalating its brutal war against Ukraine, it may well be that more people from Ukraine will come to the EU and Luxembourg. We have to be prepared for that, and that is why we are continuing to work on **further increasing the number of beds in the relatively short term, until the beginning of 2023**. This is not only for people from Ukraine, but also for people applying for international protection in Luxembourg. There, too, we have seen **a new influx since the end of summer 2022: many** people are arriving here again.

I will not attempt to hide it: it is a great challenge that we continue to face with all the actors and partners concerned in order to offer people the best possible reception conditions. In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to **once again say THANK YOU to numerous actors**. First and foremost, our fellow citizens who- on a voluntary basis - have taken or are still taking many people into their homes. The municipalities, the many NGOs - above all the Red Cross and Caritas - and the ministries and administrations with whom we work closely. The staff of the Office national de l'Accueil, ONA, have effectively set up, in record time, a new **parallel reception and accommodation system** for people who have fled Ukraine. The first point of contact takes place at the **Guichet Unique**, a one-stop shop where all services, i.e. immigration, ONA, health, education and police, have been brought together so that requests can be processed as quickly as possible. The state services have done a good job there and have shown great responsiveness and flexibility, together with the partners who support the people with temporary protection status through the structures.

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As seen in the management of the Ukraine crisis, an **EU-coordinated response on migration policy is possible**. We managed to take in more than 6 million Ukrainian refugees across Europe in a very short time. It was the first time that the **Temporary Protection Mechanism** was activated by the European Commission, and we see every day how valuable this status is because it allows us to act in a non-bureaucratic, quick and thus humane way.

Since the migration crisis in 2015/2016, the EU has failed to show an image of unity in this area. Fortunately, this time, however, the EU has shown that joint action is possible if the political will is there. This does not mean that a distinction should be made between Ukrainian and other migrants. Such a distinction would not be acceptable. The EU must remain a place that offers protection to persecuted people. **All over the world, we must stand for solidarity with those, who have to leave their homes in order to survive.** Refugee law has been enshrined in the **Geneva Convention** since 1951. This must not be changed. However, if one listens to various EU states regarding non-Ukrainian refugees, one might think that they have forgotten that the right to asylum is an international obligation, and that the ratification of the Geneva Convention was and still is one of the conditions for joining the European Union.

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The war in Ukraine also represents a paradigm shift for the European Union, the end of an era. 70 years after the European Coal and Steel Community began its work here in Luxembourg, a country in our immediate vicinity has become the victim of a brutal invasion.

This is an entirely novel situation for the EU. The **Russian aggression is also an attack on everything the EU stands for in the world: peace, democracy, the rule of law and multilateralism**, to name but a few. As such, the EU cannot and must not remain indifferent to the conflict. We have a moral duty to stand by the Ukrainians and leave no stone unturned to end this bloody conflict.

That is why the reaction has been swift. Since the invasion, the EU has significantly tightened its **sanctions**, which had already been imposed on Russia since 2014 in the context of the illegal annexation of Crimea, by so far adopting 8 successive sanction packages. We have now established a sanctions regime that has never existed in this form before. The objective is to **deprive** those who call the shots in Russia **of the means to be able to continue this war**. The aim of the sanctions is to increase the pressure on Russia significantly, to make the war so expensive that Russia has to stop the invasion. We owe that to the Ukrainians, and we owe it to ourselves in order to remain credible.

These sanctions are therefore not a choice, but a necessity. We cannot simply stand by while Russia tramples on international law, the Geneva Conventions and human rights on our

borders and causes so much misery. Those who do not see this and fall for Putin's mendacious propaganda have not yet understood that this is about much more than a conflict between two countries.

We can be proud of the **unity** that the EU as a whole has demonstrated to the outside world. We can be proud that we in the EU have moved closer together in this crisis and have not drifted apart, as many had feared. There were very different starting positions in the various member states, and it was not at all easy to adopt 8 sanctions packages. So far, we have largely managed to pull together. Our export restrictions are designed to deprive the Russian military-industrial complex of the technologies and equipment that enable it to develop its military capabilities. The import restrictions make the war much more expensive for Russia. Those who financially or materially support or benefit from this conflict will be held accountable for their actions through these financial sanctions.

Even the perfidious Russian propaganda machine has been slowed down considerably by implementing media restrictions, a decision which was not taken lightly.

The EU has proven here that it can act decisively and collectively in record time to defend the security and objectives of the Union. I do not deny that the attitude of the Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán in particular has very often not been constructive. On several occasions, it looked as if our unity might fall apart. So far, we have made progress together, also because no one has dared to be the only one to hinder our common policy. Unity also means that we have had to make concessions. For example, when one country holds a protective hand over various people who should be subject to sanctions, like Patriarch Kirill, who glorifies Putin's war. Now the Hungarian Prime Minister has announced a referendum to ask the Hungarian people if they agree that the sanctions are bad for Hungary. A populist masterpiece.

To maximise the impact of sanctions against Russia, the EU is coordinating closely with its international partners, in particular the US, Canada, the UK and Japan. A number of countries have joined our sanctions in part or in full so far, and more will follow suit. We know that not all 193 UN members will do so. Russia's influence in many countries, both politically and in terms of arms supplies, is very strong.

As far as the effectiveness of the sanctions is concerned, **more than 17 billion euros have been frozen by the Union so far**, of which over 5.5 billion euros in Luxembourg. The inter-ministerial committee for the follow-up of restrictive measures in the financial sector is doing excellent work here with regard to the implementation of sanctions at the national level. Together with the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Finance, we have set up a helpdesk in the Chamber of Commerce to accompany and guide our companies in this new environment and thus ensure a coherent and complete implementation of the sanctions. Some new ground had to be broken here and we are in close contact with the European Commission and with our partner countries to ensure a coherent and robust implementation of the sanctions at national level and also to avoid possible circumvention.

The sanctions have a concrete impact on the Kremlin and on the Russian elite, which supports or condones the war. Despite the high oil and gas revenues that Russia could count on, especially in the first months, the OECD expects a recession in Russia of between 4.5 - 5.5 % for 2022 and 3.6 - 4.5 % for 2023. The Russian financial sector is also largely crippled. Its ability to support the economy in the future has diminished considerably. In addition, inflation is very high at 13 %. The federal budget has been in deficit since September, despite high energy revenues.

The massive sanctions will continue to affect the structural stability of the Russian economy. Foreign companies are increasingly withdrawing from the country and Russia can only replace EU imports with its own production or imports from third countries to a limited extent, which massively weakens Russian industry. The embargo on oil and oil products, which will come into force in December 2022 and February 2023, will further restrict the room for manoeuvre. It will therefore be even more difficult to sustain the war effort.

This is not about punishing the Russian population, but about depriving those responsible for the war of their resources in the long term.

From the outset, Luxembourg has been among those who have advocated acting in a **considered and thoughtful manner**. We have worked to ensure that the measures taken do not unduly affect our own capacities in the EU. We also have to ensure that we can maintain

the sanctions we impose in the long term and that, as far as personal sanctions are concerned, they will stand up in the Court of Justice.

If Russia does not give in, further sanctions will be unavoidable. It will be important to **preserve the unity we have had in the EU so far**. That is our real strength, and we should not jeopardise it lightly.

Luxembourg has also worked to minimise the impact on uninvolved third countries. The EU's restrictive measures **do not target agricultural products** and contain explicit exemptions, particularly with regard to the transport of such products. It is therefore wrong to claim that the sanctions caused the food crisis. Putin's war is solely to blame.

As it is, **the sanctions we have imposed will have to remain in place for some time**. It is also difficult to imagine the moment when, after the end of the conflict, with all the red lines that have been crossed, we could simply pick up where we left off in our relations with Russia. One should not have any illusions here. Even if Putin and his regime were to no longer be there, Russia will remain the largest country in the world sharing the continent with us. We in the EU have voted with a majority of member states against a visa ban on Russian citizens. We continue to do this in a much-targeted way, especially so that separated families from Russia and Luxembourg can continue to come together. All applications from Russian citizens seeking asylum in Luxembourg are also accepted in our procedure.

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We are facing profound changes in the way we live together on our continent. It is the biggest upheaval in Europe since 1989, the medium and long-term consequences of which are yet be known. As is so often the case, such developments contribute to accelerating already existing trends. In this case, the tragic events in Ukraine will help to **reduce our dependencies on Russia much faster than was thought**. We must all move in the same direction in the coming months. In solidarity with Ukraine, in solidarity with those who are fighting on the front lines for their freedom and for our common values.

To all those who believe that there is an alternative to sanctions, I would say this: you do not do business with a country that so cynically and brutally opposes international law and human

rights. That would be against our values and against everything we stand for in Luxembourg and in the EU. We are here in solidarity and ready to pay the price so that this cruel war and the terrible suffering of the people in Ukraine comes to a swift end.

There is so much more at stake than our wallets. **Luxembourg is on the right side of history, as a reliable, credible and serious partner** in the international community of states that is prepared to take responsibility even in difficult times. This is what our diplomacy stands for, this is what this government stands for, and I see no fundamental difference here with the Chamber of Deputies.

The government stands by its responsibility to help the people here in Luxembourg to cope with inflation, the rise in energy prices and other consequences of the war.

The current conflict has also thrown the **European energy market** into disarray. Russia, like the Soviet Union before it, was until recently always a reliable energy supplier, regardless of the tensions and differences that existed over the various decades. This was also obvious when you look at European geography. But in this area, too, we are currently undergoing a paradigm shift; in this area, too, the crisis is an accelerator for change.

The task now is to **become independent of Russian fossil fuels** as quickly as possible.

Reducing our energy consumption is the first and best solution in case of energy shortages: In the short term, we can adapt our habits in terms of mobility and heating, at home and at work. In the long term, we need to invest massively in the thermal renovation of buildings, but also in more efficient industrial processes that do not rely on fossil energies.

Luxembourg has been promoting European measures to reduce energy consumption; the **"Save Gas for a Safe Winter"** plan is a key element to solve the current situation. In this context, the Commission has proposed measures and recommendations to reduce our gas consumption by 15% in a coordinated way.

At European level, Luxembourg is also committed to accelerating the expansion of renewable energies in line with the European Commission's proposals in the REPowerEU plan.

If we see that the **price of gas** is now stabilising, or even falling, in any case on the gas market, this shows that there is movement in a good sense. The EU will buy gas collectively and thus have a greater influence on the price. Alternative suppliers have been found. LNG capacities are being expanded. Energy and electricity market mechanisms are being scrutinised. The energy crisis is far from over - winter is still to come, and the winter after that, and the next after that. But Europe has managed in a short time to act decisively and present solutions. That is not always easy. What counts is the result. A number of issues are still open, such as the gas price cap. It is not easy to come to a decision here, because the international market has its own laws. Flexibility and foresight are necessary.

But in a few years' time we will look back and see that the energy transition in Europe has really taken off in 2022.

In the context of energy security, I would like to underline that a quick adoption of the **Fit for 55** package, with which the EU wants to implement its climate targets, is one of our best responses to the climate crisis and the current energy crisis.

We want to reach agreement on this package quickly so that it can have an impact on our 2030 **climate targets** as soon as possible. An important intermediate step was taken here on 27 October with the agreement on the end of the internal combustion engine in 2035. However, I would like to stress that we will not sacrifice the quality of the package just to conclude the negotiations quickly. This package must be a response to the EU's climate ambitions and ensure impeccable environmental integrity. In this sense, we will also work for a strong signal at **COP27**, which started yesterday in Sharm el-Sheikh. Another important meeting will be the Biodiversity COP in Montreal in December.

In this context, and especially with regard to the fight against deforestation, we hope that the election of President Lula in Brazil a few days ago will allow better progress on the major climate issues. **Lula's election**, even if it was close, is good news for the rest of the world, which now has one less autocrat, and good news for the Amazon and for our joint efforts against climate change.

In our eyes, **nuclear energy is a bad solution**, too dangerous, too expensive, too slow and, above all, not sustainable in its implementation, and something with which we will burden

future generations, given the unsolved nuclear waste problem. That is why we also support Austria's action before the European Court of Justice against the delegated act on the so-called green taxonomy.

Certainly since the COVID pandemic, the importance of our **European Single Market**, which celebrates its 30th birthday this year, has once again come into focus. Based on our four fundamental freedoms, the Single Market is undoubtedly one of the most fundamental prerequisites for our European unification since 1992 and a guarantor of our economic success - within Europe and out in the world. I believe I can say that business and politics alike share this opinion.

But the whole truth is that **the potential of the Single Market is still not fully realised** and further deepening is urgently needed. The integrity of our common market, which came under severe pressure during the pandemic, and the current disruptions in value chains underline all the more the need for a deeper and more integrated single market. When we talk about the resilience of our economy, we have to start with the Single Market.

The particular situation of our country - geographically, socially and economically - has **traditionally made Luxembourg one of the greatest advocates** of a well-integrated single market in Europe.

Entrepreneurs in Luxembourg and the Greater Region are aware of the potential of the border regions and how important **a functioning internal market** is for cross-border trade and the labour market. Especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, it is an enormous effort to comply with 27 often diverging national legislations.

For years, Luxembourg has been advocating **maximum harmonisation and mutual recognition**. That is why we want more efficiency and less additional cost through fewer national derogations that restrict market access for providers. As part of our Benelux Presidency this year, we are also fighting for a further reduction of territorial restrictions on supply in the Single Market.

Together with some other member states, we are also resisting the increasingly frequent attempts to erect new barriers. Within the EU, Luxembourg was the country with the highest share of intra-EU exports in 2020: 80% of Luxembourg's goods exports stayed within the EU.

For Europe to act on the international stage, we need an open and sustainable economic model, based above all on a strong network of international trade partnerships and thus also on a strong internal market. This is the only way in which we can strengthen the **resilience of our European economy** and reduce our dependence on strategically important products.

The Corona crisis in particular proved how much we as a Union depend on ourselves, on a functioning internal market and on open borders. Our **cross-border cooperation** has also emerged significantly stronger from the crisis and will similarly overcome this new crisis through cooperation and solidarity, with the well-being of the citizens as our primary concern.

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We are currently confronted with a number of developments at the international level that run counter to Luxembourg's fundamental interests. We have to take countermeasures. The crisis of multilateralism, geopolitical tensions and the temptation of economic decoupling have been putting the **rules-based trading system** at risk for several years. The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on value and supply chains, and of course the war in Ukraine, have only exacerbated this.

The impact of the Russian aggression on food exports from Ukraine and the debates on European energy autonomy perfectly illustrate the consequences that wars have on an international trading system based on the development of international trade as the cornerstone for the prosperity of nations. In this sense, we Europeans have undoubtedly been a little naïve. Because we believed that our partners would also think and act rationally to the benefit of their citizens and businesses.

However, the international climate has become much harsher in recent years. The EU has had to adapt and respond to this to protect our economy and our businesses from actors who do not always behave according to purely economic interests. In the framework of its **new trade policy**, the EU will therefore defend its interests more confidently in the future.

Therefore, a framework for screening direct **foreign investment** has been established in the EU to ensure that it does not endanger security and public order. For the same reason, a new legal instrument is also being created to avert and combat **coercive measures** by third countries. With regard to our national draft law on direct investments, we hope for an early agreement in the inter-ministerial committee in order to be able to present an improved version, which takes into account the comments of the Council of State. I am convinced that we will then soon be able to reach a conclusion here in the Chamber of Deputies as well.

These initiatives will make it possible to **protect our companies and our economy better from those who want to use trade as a weapon** against our security or impose their positions on us. We support not only these instruments, but also the European Commission's initiatives to ensure fairer treatment of European companies vis-à-vis foreign companies when these companies do not follow the same rules of the game, especially when operating in the Single Market.

We support this new EU approach, which ensures transparency and diversification of our supply chains, primarily by identifying and reducing our strategic dependencies. However, this also requires that we simultaneously strengthen and further develop our international trade partnerships, especially with those who, like us, adhere to the **rules-based international trading system**. Only in this way can we continue to ensure our economic development and pursue the implementation of the twin green and digital transition for which we need key raw materials.

Luxembourg is therefore committed to strengthening security of supply at EU level and developing technological leadership, as is the case for example with the European Chips Act. With this constructive approach, we are building on the strong foundations already in place in the EU to further develop **technological excellence** and ensure our long-term resilience in sensitive areas. Thus, it is about finding a delicate balance in this changing world.

In the current tense geopolitical situation, we not only need secure supply chains, we also need to ensure that the products offered in the internal market have been produced sustainably. They must not only comply with our rules and standards, but also with our values. This is why Luxembourg has also been working at EU level to **strengthen human rights in the**

area of international trade. Not least because of our commitment, we now finally have a draft directive on **sustainability obligations for companies** on the table. Negotiations on this draft directive are in full swing in Brussels. Luxembourg is actively participating in this process. We have established common positions between the ministries concerned. This was not easy, but it is important to me that Luxembourg does not miss the opportunity to set ambitious targets at EU level.

The main lines of our position are as follows:

1. We are committed to a project that is **aligned with these international norms and standards** as far as possible.
2. A project that guarantees effective access to justice, for example by reversing the burden of proof in favour of potential victims. We want strong victim protection!
3. Luxembourg stands for **upstream and downstream control of the supply chain**, i.e. the entire supply chain, with a focus on the greatest exposure.
4. The specificities of the financial sector must be adequately taken into account in the Directive. A number of countries are calling for the **exclusion of funds from the directive**, as already stated in previous EU texts. We support this position.
5. We support **both administrative and civil responsibility** for companies.
6. Luxembourg supports the designation of national control authorities and the creation of a European decentralised coordination network.
7. With regard to the number of companies that should be affected by the Directive, we also support the limits proposed by the Commission.

With the same logic, we also support the proposal for a regulation that will ban products produced by **forced labour** from the European internal market.

In this way, we want to contribute to carrying our standards out into the world and, on this basis, to further consolidate and expand our international trade relations.

Let us not kid ourselves: while these initiatives will better frame international trade, we should not expect countries that do not share our values to change their behaviour overnight. However, I hope that the standards to which our companies will be held in their relations with foreign countries - to return to due diligence - will spread, showing the world that different trade is possible.

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If we want to set an example, we must also ensure that these fundamental principles and rights in a democracy are not called into question in the Union itself. **Respect for the rule of law** and our democratic values guarantees security and peaceful coexistence. The European Union as a great peace project has this as its central mission. Anyone who puts the judiciary, the media and civil society in chains is far removed from European values and undermines the fundamental values of our common Union. This concerns us all, and we cannot simply look the other way. Right now, it is important to leave no doubt about what we stand for in Europe. This is exactly the opposite of what Putin's Russia stands for. That must be clear to everyone, and there must be no ambiguity here or anywhere in Europe.

With this in mind, in recent years instruments have been developed to ensure respect for the rule of law. With the so-called Article 7 procedure, we hope that Poland and Hungary will get back on track, even if it requires a lot of patience. The conditionality mechanism to protect the EU budget is now being used in the case of Hungary. In concrete terms, this means that Hungary will soon have the European tap turned off if it fails to put its house in order in terms of the rule of law. It cannot be that money flows to member states that ignore the values of the EU. Here, Luxembourg, together with its Benelux partners, has pleaded for the Commission to carry out concrete analyses of Hungary's proposed measures so that we can see what Hungary is really prepared to do. This is necessary to restore the trust that has been lost in recent years.

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The war in Ukraine has also brought a new dynamic to the **EU enlargement process**. On 23 June 2022, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova were granted EU candidate status, with the expectation that a number of reform processes would be implemented quickly. Georgia was

promised EU candidate status if a number of conditions were met. These are historic decisions! A series of courses have been set for the future of the EU, the importance of which we must not underestimate.

Offering **Ukraine a European perspective** was an important signal to the Ukrainian people. A signal that should not be underestimated in its symbolism. Of course, we are aware that Ukrainians have other concerns and priorities at the moment and cannot implement the profound reforms required by the accession process overnight. However, despite the difficult circumstances, the Ukrainian authorities are working to implement these reforms and can also count on the necessary support from Luxembourg.

The criteria for membership of the EU have been known for a long time and are the same for all candidates. It is a transparent process, the pace of which is controlled exclusively by the governments of the candidate countries. The sooner the reforms are implemented, the closer one gets to membership.

In this respect, **North Macedonia** was unfortunately an exception. Although all the necessary reforms were carried out, they were prevented from starting negotiations on their EU accession due to a bilateral problem. This damages the credibility of the EU and must not be repeated. Luxembourg has worked to ensure that negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania could start and we welcome the fact that the first intergovernmental conferences could finally take place in Brussels on 19 July 2022.

Luxembourg will continue to play its part in anchoring the values and principles of the EU in the Western Balkans. That is why we support civil society in these countries. We will continue to provide **support, especially to young people who want their countries to join the EU**. Thus, in 2022, we have again offered the countries of the Western Balkans our technical assistance - in the form of training and expertise - as well as scholarships for studies in EU law. In this way, we are helping them to introduce and implement the *acquis communautaire*.

As the recent report on enlargement by the European Commission has shown, progress remains uneven in the different countries, especially as regards the implementation of fundamental reforms. Here we will work for strict compliance with the criteria.

However, here too we cannot ignore the current geopolitical situation. We must not allow actors who do not share our values to call into question the progress made in recent years. To this end, **Bosnia-Herzegovina** was also called upon to send a clear signal so that the EU can hopefully also grant this country candidate status this year.

With regard to **Kosovo**, a country with which we have a particularly close partnership, we support the recommendation to take the necessary steps to enable visa liberalisation. Kosovo has done what was asked and we should send a clear message to the country's citizens that these efforts will also pay off.

Many efforts have been made in the framework of the **EU-facilitated dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo**. The current very dangerous tensions over number plates must end and both sides should stick to what was agreed in the dialogue.

The last 9 months in particular have made it clear how important the Balkans are for Europe's security. At the same time, it is also very clear what the EU expects from the candidate countries: a comprehensive alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. If the candidates want to be credible and make progress on the road to the EU, there is no way around **alignment with European foreign policy, and this also applies to the sanctions against Russia**

The new developments in the enlargement process have put us in a very different situation to a year ago. There are now 10 countries that either have candidate status or have the prospect of getting it. What does this mean for a European Union with potentially 37 member states? How can such an **enlarged Union** still function with the current rules? Solutions will have to be sought here in the coming years.

In any case, we must continue to pay attention to the right balance between the EU enlargement process and the **EU integration process**, balancing the horizontal with the vertical. This is an ongoing process in which we cannot afford to take shortcuts.

As a founding member of the EU, Luxembourg is committed to preserving the **DNA of the European Union**. Together with our partners, we will ensure in the next stages that our principles and values are not watered down, that there are no "political" concessions in

respecting the clearly defined criteria. The experience of recent years has shown us that more rather than less attention needs to be paid to implementation in the areas of the rule of law, good governance, independence of the judiciary, the fight against organised crime and the fight against corruption.

There is also the question of the Union's **absorption capacity**. The question of how an enlarged EU should function in concrete terms on a day-to-day basis and how it can continue to finance its various policies. This discussion must be held if we want to ensure that the EU can continue to work as efficiently as possible. We are ready to support possible adjustments in the interest of the EU and Luxembourg.

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** has produced a number of proposals that now need to be seriously addressed. A large number of the proposals by European citizens can be implemented on the basis of the existing European treaties and are already - or will soon be - the subject of European legislation.

The government is not convinced that a **European Convention** would be the best way forward at this stage. Considering the current political situation in the member states and the challenges posed by the war in Ukraine, the risks are too great, especially the danger that a Convention would not reach a satisfactory conclusion. It is important not to underestimate the political consequences of the successive crises since 2008 - the financial crisis, the migration crisis and the Covid pandemic. We cannot turn a blind eye to the **resurgence of nationalist and far-right forces in Europe**, as seen recently in Sweden and Italy. These are realities we cannot ignore. Is this the best time to open up our European treaties? We must not jeopardise the European acquis lightly here.

The call for a Convention was not at the centre of the discussions with citizens, who were more interested in concrete proposals for improvement than in inter-institutional discussions. However, citizens want the EU to be able to take decisions more easily, and the conference report stated, among other things, that in some cases the modalities of voting in the Council should be changed to allow qualified majority voting instead of unanimous voting.

In the coalition agreement, we agreed in principle that Luxembourg would actively promote **qualified majority voting** in the Common Foreign and Security Policy. We continue to stand

by this position. However, qualified majority voting is by no means a miracle solution in all areas, as we have seen in recent months, also in the discussions at European level in the field of energy. That is why we have to be careful in this discussion and make sure that other Member States do not try to help themselves "à la carte". We saw this when it came to the gas price cap. This means that if there is a point of vital interest for one country or another, QMV should be put back in the drawer to make room for unanimity again.

As a founding member and as a country that has taken European integration to heart, it is important that we continue to see EU integration as something fundamentally positive, without of course forgetting our national interests as a small country in a changing environment. With this in mind, we continue to work actively on our headquarters policy to further strengthen and develop Luxembourg as one of the three capitals of the EU.

To commemorate the **70th anniversary of the first meeting of the CECA "Higher Authority"**, the College of Commissioners organised its weekly meeting in Luxembourg in July - in the very room in Luxembourg City that the High Authority had assembled 70 years ago.

Luxembourg is also proud that the **European Court of Justice is celebrating its 70th anniversary** in the country this year. The new European Public Prosecutor's Office also plays a central role in defending the rule of law. We can only welcome the fact that the European Public Prosecutor's Office has been able to recruit more highly specialised staff this year. The Court of Appeal and the offices of the **Unified Patent Court** will help to further strengthen the legal pillar in Luxembourg next year.

In finance, the good news came from the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) opening a regional office in Luxembourg, consolidating our position at the front of the sustainable finance pack.

In the third major pillar of our headquarters policy, the digital domain, the International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC, has decided to open its first "Delegation for Cyberspace" in the world in Luxembourg.

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It is important to us that the **Franco-German engine** works well and does not stall, and continues to provide the necessary impetus to move forward. There is a lot of talk at the moment that the **centre of gravity of the EU** is about to shift. In my experience, it has always been the case that the countries that made concrete proposals to move the EU forward as such were also the ones that had the most influence. So far in practice, this has been mostly Germany and France, but also the Benelux Union, whose presidency we hold this year, has in its history often shown a pioneering role in this context. More important than discussing the system of gravity is that in the current situation we should remain true to the ideas of the EU's founding fathers and not compromise on our values. If Ukraine becomes a member of the EU one day, and all the countries of the Balkans, then it is obvious that the centre of gravity will shift to the east. That is elementary mechanics. It is important therefore that values spread eastwards in the same way, so that we do not get two kinds of EU. Rumsfeld's 2003 view of the old and new Europe must not be re-legitimised by a later eastward expansion.

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This **European security architecture** is an overarching construction based on the **10 principles** laid down jointly with the Soviet Union in 1975 in the **Final Act of the Helsinki Conference** within the framework of today's OSCE. These basic principles include **democracy and respect for human rights**. A balance between states is only possible if violence is renounced and no borders are violated. The Final Act will soon be 50 years old. It remains as relevant as on the first day. With its war in Ukraine, Russia has violated every single one of these 10 principles, starting with the very first, that of the **sovereign equality** of states and **respect** for the rights that sovereignty entails.

Since the beginning of its invasion, Russia has been taking innocent lives every day and causing irreparable damage. Russia has deliberately upset the balance on which our security depends. Our position in Luxembourg is clear: we cannot accept an "**à la carte**" **security architecture** that would disregard the human dimension of security.

We have been working with Russia for years on these three pillars on which our security architecture is based: security, democracy and human rights. On security issues, we sat

together with the Russians in the **OSCE, as well as in the NATO-Russia Council**. That is where trust should be built. There, transparency should help not to see each other as a threat.

In defence of democracy and human rights, we sat together in the **Council of Europe**. Those days of cooperation are over for the time being. Russia has left the Council of Europe. In the OSCE, Russia is completely blocking normal functioning, starting with the budget. **Russia has lost all credibility as a partner** and is not prepared to discuss seriously anyway.

The question arises: **What is the way forward?** What will Europe's security architecture look like in the coming years? In short: "**More NATO and more European Union**". That was already the answer for the newly independent countries from Eastern Europe in the 1990s. It is now the answer again, for all of Europe. With the accession of Finland and Sweden, a new wind is blowing in NATO. A few years ago, we practically declared NATO dead. Today it is almost experiencing a new youth. The discussion about the sense and usefulness of NATO is off the table.

NATO is not a belligerent party in Russia's war against Ukraine. It plays an important role in supporting Ukraine. Above all, collective defence has taken on a new meaning for the NATO allies. The alliance established in Article 5 remains the fundamental guarantee on which we can rely: an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all.

However, the war in Ukraine has **also raised the profile of defence in Europe**. "Strategic autonomy" is no longer a taboo, but a necessity, both in defence and in many economic areas. There is active work on common European weapons systems and defence technology. Autonomous Europe is **complementary to NATO**, as this crisis has shown: NATO provides the Alliance's defence and nuclear deterrence. The EU, for its part, exerts enormous economic pressure on Russia and builds its defence in such a way that NATO can focus on deterrence. The EU supports Ukraine militarily, as well as with humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, in areas where NATO has no instruments.

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Allow me to say a word here about the **nuclear threats** that Vladimir Putin more or less openly expresses. We must be very clear that this **Russian war is also a business of fear**. It is an attempt to drive us in the West apart, to make us afraid, so as to break our solidarity with Ukraine. At this moment, when Russia is relatively weak on the front and is trying to get through the winter by any means, it also seems to be about forcing negotiations with ever-increasing escalations - according to standards dictated by Russia - which is of course out of the question.

Russia, together with the other four nuclear powers on the UN Security Council, has signed a declaration that **a nuclear war cannot be won and must therefore never be waged**. We must assume that Russia will abide by the unwritten laws that exist here between the nuclear powers. There is nothing on the ground to suggest that Russia is in the process of preparing tactical or strategic nuclear weapons. And even though we must of course take this threat very seriously, and NATO is also prepared for such a strike at any time, we must not let ourselves be distracted by it. After all, Putin would like nothing more than for Western governments to stop supporting Ukraine because their populations are very afraid of Russian nuclear weapons.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe remain important elements of the security architecture. In the Council of Europe, countries that were often able to hide behind Russia in the past must now clearly show their colours. **This crisis is welding Europe together in a broader sense**. This was also evident at the first summit of the new "**Communauté politique européenne**", the **European Political Community**, in Prague on 6 October, where 44 countries from Europe came together to distance themselves from Russia. The purpose and goal of the EPC remain relatively vague in terms of content, but this summit showed once again how isolated Russia (and Belarus) are and how united the continent is when it matters.

The OSCE, as I said, is currently relatively blocked in its day-to-day business, but nevertheless plays an important role, not only because the "**Moscow Mechanism**" **has been activated to document the terrible human rights violations in Ukraine**. This mechanism, which has existed since 1991, is intended for cases in which member states do not comply with their obligations in the area of democracy, rule of law and human rights. Similar efforts are being made by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, where Prosecutor Khan has launched

an investigation into the serious international crimes that Russia is committing day after day in Ukraine. Luxembourg is supporting this investigation financially, and we are also currently examining whether other material contributions would be possible. **Peace without justice is not possible.** When the time of peace finally comes, it is very important that we are ready to hold those responsible for war crimes accountable.

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The United States has traditionally played an important role in security and stability in Europe. For some years, we had cause to doubt this transatlantic partner. Since President Biden took office, **transatlantic relations have become reliable again.** Especially in the current context, one notices that the Trump years are behind us. Let us hope it stays that way - today sees the so-called "Midterm Elections", in which the entire House of Representatives and a third of the Senate will be renewed. There we will get a first indication of whether we could experience a Trump déjà vu, a trauma, in two years' time. For now, we in Europe can rely on a serious partnership with the US. This applies not only to defence, security and NATO, but also to other areas and many multilateral issues, and it must also apply to international trade. The United States is again ready to take responsibility on global issues, and that is a good thing. However, not everything is rosy, and the United States remains a highly polarised country that is very self-absorbed. **The EU stands on its own two feet and must continue to work towards being perceived as a reliable partner on global issues.**

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We have been talking about a crisis of multilateralism for some years now. The multilateral scene has now become a place where different narratives and different worldviews clash head-on. A number of countries are trying to divide fundamental rights into categories of different importance, claiming that they can only respect political and civil human rights if they are as economically developed as we are. Luxembourg and its partners are committed to the universality, inalienability, interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights. **Human rights are a whole and they apply to everyone, everywhere, simultaneously and equally.**

For many **countries that traditionally have** or have had **good relations with Russia**, the war in Ukraine is a test. They declare their support for the values and principles contained in the United Nations Charter and at the same time are afraid of feeling the long reach of Moscow in their supply chains, in their defence or in dossiers for which they depend on the Russian vote, for example in the UN Security Council.

In the last vote in the UN General Assembly on a resolution against the annexation of parts of Ukrainian territory, we voted together as 143 countries, two more than in the first vote in March. Nevertheless, the **countries abstaining worry us, including important players, even partners like India**. It is absolutely essential that the EU remains open to dialogue with these countries, listens to them and takes their situation seriously. Some of them are simply too caught between Russia and us. It is to be hoped that, given time, they will reorient themselves and reduce their dependencies.

I am thinking, for example, of countries in Central Asia, like Kazakhstan, or the Caucasus, like Armenia. We must not simply write them off, so to speak. Of course, this crisis is an opportunity to identify clearly who our essential partners are. At the same time, the EU must show foresight in this crisis and not pigeonhole countries, but give them a chance to enter into a partnership with the EU. When you have more than 7000 km of border with Russia, like Kazakhstan, it is not so easy and it takes time.

It is worth recalling in this context, for example, the **Eastern Partnership**, which governs our relations with 6 former Soviet republics. In addition to Ukraine and Moldova, which are now candidates for accession, and Georgia, whose European perspective has been clearly reaffirmed, Armenia and Azerbaijan are also members of the Eastern Partnership. After the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, the EU took on an important mediating role in this area. Above all, we must not forget Armenia, a democratic but weakened country. With this in mind, I welcome the fact that the EU has had an observation mission to Armenia on the border with Azerbaijan since the end of October.

Under President Biden, there has been a return to multilateralism in the US and the need to tackle global problems together. In the **United States' relations with China, however, the motto "America First" still applies** and rivalry prevails. This applies both to international trade

and to global security structures. The US sees China as the greatest threat because China has gained enormous political, economic and military weight worldwide in the last 20 years. The fact that China and Russia have strategically important relations with each other only intensifies the rivalry in the current context. Seen from Europe, however, American policy towards China risks bringing Russia and China even closer together - even though, fortunately, there are still international moments when it becomes clear that the relationship between China and Russia is primarily an alliance of convenience.

The Chinese position on the war in Ukraine can be described as neutrally pro-Russian. So far, there is no indication that Beijing would support Moscow with weapons. Direct Chinese support for the Russian war effort would be completely at odds with Chinese statements that independence and territorial integrity are fundamental. In multilateral forums, the Chinese are partially protective of Russia, but it is quite remarkable that China is not among the countries in the UN that vote with Russia. There are only a handful of them, including Syria and North Korea. China abstains.

China has also unequivocally warned Russia against resorting to nuclear weapons.

In all our **contacts with Chinese diplomats, we also address the war in Ukraine**, which of course also has negative consequences for China. High energy prices and an unstable international environment are not at all in the interest of the People's Republic. Beijing is analysing the Ukraine conflict very closely and is certainly also examining what our sanctions policy could look like if China provoked a military escalation in the Taiwan Strait. Our clear stance on the war in Ukraine is an important building block for contributing to global political stability not only in Europe, but also in Asia. We strongly advocate maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.

However, **China** is and will remain a partner in many areas, even though there are clearly major disagreements, especially of course with regard to human rights. Without China, for example, we cannot get a grip on climate change. For this reason alone, we must not allow the kind of bloc mentality we experienced during the Cold War to develop again. The West on one side, Russia and China on the other - that would not be good for anyone and would put all the countries in between in an impossible situation.

Luxembourg and the EU will continue to defend universal human rights, including in China. We seek critical and constructive dialogue on all issues here. This year is the 50th anniversary of our diplomatic relations. In such a relationship, you have to be able to discuss everything, including difficult issues.

Luxembourg is aware of its responsibilities on all issues in the Human Rights Council in Geneva, of which we became a member for the first time in January. We also strongly supported the proposal to discuss the report on the situation in Xinjiang. **The situation in Xinjiang** is deeply worrying and it is a shame that the vote in the Human Rights Council, which was only supposed to put a discussion on the agenda, ended negatively.

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As for **Russia in the Human Rights Council**, many actors have been calling for the establishment of a mandate for a Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council to document and monitor the human rights situation in Russia for several years, even before the war. With the war of aggression against Ukraine, the situation in Russia has worsened. Because the human rights violations in Russia are so flagrant, Luxembourg took on the role of penholder for such a resolution in Geneva, coordinated the work of the 26 EU member states who acted as co-authors, and formally tabled the text.

In the **vote, our resolution passed with 17 votes in favour, 24 abstentions and 6 against**. The 6 countries that voted against are Bolivia, Cuba, Eritrea, Kazakhstan, China and Venezuela, which are always against country resolutions in the Human Rights Council. Again, it is the many abstentions that are a cause for concern and show that Moscow still has too much influence. However, the adoption of this resolution is a great success mainly because it was the first time that a resolution on the human rights situation of a P5 country, a permanent member of the Security Council, was on the agenda of the Human Rights Council. This sends a strong message that human rights apply everywhere.

The new Special Rapporteur will start work shortly and present a first report in September 2023, at which time his mandate may also be extended.

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Respect for international law and multilateralism are existentially important for small states. This is also why we are working so hard in all international organisations to isolate Russia as much as possible and to denounce the terrible Russian violations of international law. **The credibility of multilateralism** and all international mechanisms based on cooperation depends on it. Russia has destroyed so much in terms of international cooperation. I am fundamentally convinced that Russia is doing enormous damage to itself. As long as Russia maintains its aggression against Ukraine, we cannot reach out to Russia.

The moment for diplomacy must come again and we in NATO and the EU must be ready. I am counting on the **UN and Secretary-General Guterres to play an important role** if and until it is possible to negotiate a ceasefire and an end to the war. However, that moment will only come when the Russian tanks roll back across the border. Depending on the outcome of the battle for Kherson, there could also be the possibility that Russia would be forced to come to the table not from a position of strength but, on the contrary, from a position of being on the defensive.

It is clear that no initiative in this sense can be imposed on Ukraine.

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With the conflict in Ukraine and all the consequences of Russian aggression, some are now claiming that the food crisis was the result of economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU and other countries. They are deliberately confusing the real trigger of the crisis and the reaction to it.

The food crisis obviously has a disproportionate impact on countries that were already weakened, especially on the African continent. The war was the straw that broke the camel's back for many countries after the pandemic, and the social consequences of the effects of war can become dramatic. The arguments that the West is to blame for everything do not fall on deaf ears in these countries. In this context, it is extremely important that we maintain

unity in the EU and that **our communication** is crystal clear and convincing, both at the multilateral level and in relations with the various regional groups.

In this context, I welcome the fact that Secretary-General Guterres, with the help of Turkey, has succeeded in extending the so-called "**Grain Deal**". However, the fact that Moscow still wanted to overturn the deal in a first phase must cause us concern. After all, in recent weeks the agreement has allowed millions of tonnes of grain to be moved from Ukrainian warehouses to people in need. Moreover, the agreement helped to lower food prices worldwide. It is therefore important that Ukraine can continue its deliveries as before. More than 10 million tonnes have been exported since 3 August.

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The war on our continent must by no means make us forget that there are **wars in many places in the world**, old and new, with enormous humanitarian consequences, where the EU is also called upon to seek solutions. The values for which the Ukrainians are fighting are the same values that we need to stand up for all over the world.

In Africa, food insecurity and high prices have **exacerbated already existing humanitarian emergencies**. Add to this the worst drought in 40 years, especially in the Horn of Africa. These acute challenges come on top of well-known problems and long-standing conflicts: lack of democracy and governance, and human rights violations. And all this on the continent closest to us.

For some years now, we have been witnessing a new wave of **military coups in West Africa**, for some time in the Sahel region, where Luxembourg has traditionally been heavily involved, and most recently in Burkina Faso. These coups illustrate the dramatic loss of confidence of the populations in their governments, as these governments lose more and more ground to rebel groups and terrorists. The coup plotters fill a vacuum that could only be bottled with solid governance and consistent reforms, and a vicious circle develops from this.

With the withdrawal of the French mission Barkhane, the military-political **situation in Mali** has further deteriorated. Barkhane was, after all, the French military operation that has also

guaranteed security for all other military and civilian missions in Mali since 2014. Barkhane has become a victim of the deeply anti-French and anti-European attitude of the Malian junta, which prefers to cooperate with the Russian mercenaries of the Wagner Group. With the announcement of a constitutional referendum in 2023 and presidential elections in 2024, this transitional military government has been able to reassure its regional and international partners in the short term. However, this does not mean that the country is in a good state: the security chaos, between terrorist groups, poorly organised military or mercenary forces, has already displaced almost half a million Malians internally or forced them to flee to neighbouring countries. Add to this the 2 million people in acute food insecurity. **Mali thus remains the epicentre of the crisis in the Sahel.**

In this context, at the beginning of this year, I travelled for the first time to **Mauritania**, a country that forms the bridge, so to speak, between the Maghreb and the rest of Africa. Mauritania is incredibly interesting and important for the Sahel because it manages to demonstrate a certain consistency in terms of governance and peace. We were able to initiate a co-accreditation of our ambassador from Dakar to Mauritania and recently also to appoint an honorary consul, Abderrahmane Sissako. Mauritania is a pole of stability in the region, just like **Niger**, where President Bazoum manages to shield his country from instability in the rest of the Sahel with good governance and democratic rule.

Less good news, as I said, comes from **Burkina Faso**, where the second coup d'état this year took place in October. This reset to zero all international efforts to return to a civilian-led government. As in Mali, it is important to remain in dialogue with the authorities in spite of everything, in order to accompany Burkina back on the path to democracy. There is a great danger that external actors like Russia, with their simplistic anti-European discourse, will continue to appeal to the population. As a bilateral, but also as a European partner, we must not turn our backs on Burkina in these uncertain times. Only the civilian population, which we have been supporting for years with our development aid, would suffer.

On the other side of the continent, in the **Horn of Africa**, a complicated war has raged for two years in the north of **Ethiopia**. Hundreds of thousands of people have fallen victim to this brutal war, including many women and children. The neighbouring country Eritrea was involved in the war against the Tigray region in the north of the country from the beginning

with its troops, but so were other external actors. Fortunately, both parties were able to agree on a **ceasefire** in South Africa on 2 November. Hopefully, this important positive step will also materialise on the ground in the coming weeks, so that humanitarian aid finally reaches the people who need it: In northern Ethiopia, 13 million people are now dependent on humanitarian aid. In addition to the acute famine, there is a severe drought in several regions, and elsewhere the rainy season has brought floods and infectious diseases - almost 200 people have already been diagnosed with cholera.

The EU must now actively engage in the region and support the peace process. Without peace in Ethiopia, the entire region cannot be permanently stable.

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In **Iran**, two young women, Niloofer Hamedi and Elaheh Mohammadi, about 20 years old, are on trial and risk life imprisonment! What crime have they committed? They were the first to tell the story of Mahsa Amini. A young woman who was only 22 years of age. We are fully aware of this tragedy: she was visiting Tehran with her parents when she was arrested by the so-called "morality police" on 13 September this year. The reason was that part of her hair was peeping out from under her veil. We are all familiar with the consequence. Mahsa was beaten for three days at the police station; she fell into a coma and was then taken to hospital where she died on 16 September.

The ensuing revolt in Iran has been violent, as has the repression. 300 people have lost their lives so far in the country of 85 million inhabitants, 14,000 have been arrested. Many young people, primarily women.

"Women, life, freedom" - this is the slogan of the **protest movement in Iran**. Young Iranian men and women feel they are suffocating under the theocratic regime of the mullahs. Above all, young women want finally to be able to live in freedom and equality with their male compatriots. Their daily struggle deserves our deepest respect and the brutal repression by the Iranian authorities must finally stop.

Iran has become a downright military tyranny after the glimmer of hope under President Rohani in 2015 to 2017. All justified criticisms receive a single response, wrote the newspaper

Le Monde a few days ago: "**Whenever challenged, the Iranian Republic has only one answer: it kills**".

As the EU, we have set guidelines on how we will protect and support human rights defenders around the world. These guidelines must now be applied consistently. On 17 October, the EU therefore placed 11 individuals and 4 organisations on the sanctions list, and new sanctions under the Human Rights Mechanism are being prepared. Added to this are the sanctions over the supply of kamikaze drones to Russia, which Russia is using in Ukraine.

Since, after these events of the last six weeks, there is no possibility of **resuming talks on the JCPOA nuclear agreement**, let alone bringing them to a conclusion, we have to face the reality that this regime of ayatollahs can have the most murderous weapon there is in its hands in a short time. A fact that the world must face.

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Repression is also getting worse in **Palestine**, whether by the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli army in the West Bank or by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The Gaza Strip, which has been under Israeli blockade for 15 years, was bombed again by Israel this year. It cannot be repeated often enough: **The residents of Gaza have nowhere to flee**. They are trapped in the world's largest open-air prison and in an endless cycle of violence and destruction. The West Bank is about to explode and the threat of a third intifada is real. The two-state solution has become de facto impossible. Just one figure to illustrate this: over 600,000 people live in the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Approximately the population of Luxembourg, in the area where the Palestinian state was supposed to be created. If you talk to young people in Palestine and also Israel today, many say: If there can't be two states, then just one state in which everyone has the same rights. That, however, will not work, because then the Jewish community in Israel would no longer be in the majority, and as you know, Israel declared itself a "Jewish nation state" in 2018. **Therefore, we are in a vicious circle: there can be neither two states nor one state. What remains is an eternal occupation.** De facto one state, but with unequal rights for some and for others. This cannot be the answer. The results of the recent Israeli elections give no cause for optimism in this context. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the European Union only has a chance of being heard if it has one position, not two

or three. In this sense, Luxembourg continues its efforts and strongly advocates the right of the Palestinians to have their own state. This is the only long-term viable solution that will allow Israel to live side by side with Palestine in peace.

At this point, let me also say a word about **two conflicts that are increasingly being forgotten because they have been going on for so long and seem so hopeless: Syria and Yemen**. The situation in Yemen is generally considered the worst humanitarian disaster in the world. And that is saying something after I told you about the terrible situation in Tigray. In Syria, Assad, with the help of Russia, has destroyed the whole country to stay in power. **The Russian bombings and the Iranian drones that we see today in Ukraine are not a coincidence: we have been seeing all this for years in Syria and Yemen. They continue to leave nothing but misery and destruction in their wake**. This shows how important it is to hold war criminals accountable around the world. It also shows how shortsighted such wars are. In the Arab world, there are concrete signs of rehabilitating Assad, of making him politically presentable again without holding him accountable.

And when we speak of the banditry of this world: we must not lose sight of the situation in **Afghanistan**. Contrary to what the Taliban promised when they took power in August 2021, young women still have no access to education beyond primary school. This cannot bode well for a country. A country where 50 percent of the population is no longer allowed to go to school is a country that has condemned itself to absolute stagnation. In Afghanistan today, there is no, no prospect at all of any future for the people and their children. We continue to work for the improvement of the situation of girls and women in Afghanistan. But gradually we are realising that we no longer know how to deal with the Taliban. At the same time, a bitter winter is arriving in the Hindu Kush, and the people in Afghanistan are of course suffering even more than all of us from the drastic increase in energy and food prices.

Afghanistan remains one of the countries from which most people flee to us. When the Taliban brutally took over in August 2021, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg evacuated residents of Afghan origin and people with ties to our country. Third countries like Qatar or Pakistan helped a lot in the first weeks to facilitate the evacuations and emergency exits. Luxembourg also agreed to take in Afghan nationals who were particularly vulnerable in their

home country. In total, we have taken in about 60 people as part of the humanitarian evacuation from Afghanistan. All of these people have received international protection in Luxembourg. Among them are some who worked for the EU and NATO, but also others who were particularly threatened, for example female judges and their families. At the same time, since mid-August 2021, we have issued a residence permit for family members to 65 Afghans within the framework of family reunification. From 2021 to 20 October 2022, a total of 263 Afghans have applied for international protection. During the same period, 210 Afghans were granted international protection, including the 60 people who came to us as part of the humanitarian evacuation. Even though the year 2022 is strongly marked by the war in Ukraine, we must not forget the people in Afghanistan and so many other places.

Currently, **migration pressure in Europe as a whole is once more increasing strongly**, after it had declined sharply since the pandemic year 2020. In the Mediterranean region and especially in Italy, but also in Cyprus, there has again been an increase in arrivals since the beginning of this year. Many people are also coming into the EU via the Western Balkans route. At our external borders in the east, we had to deal with an instrumentalisation of migration by the autocratic regime of Lukashenko in Belarus.

In the EU, the numbers are still below those before the crisis year of 2015, but they are significantly higher than in recent years, and it remains clear to me that we **urgently need new rules in the Union for orderly, automatic and compulsory migration management**. Unfortunately, the negotiations on the migration pact are making only slow progress as far as the solidarity aspect is concerned. We are also committed to these issues at the United Nations: Luxembourg was a co-facilitator in New York this year at the High Level Migration Review Forum, which took stock of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which was adopted in 2018.

In Geneva, our **commitment to human rights goes hand in hand with our commitment to a humane migration policy**. We as the European Union must send clear signals. We need healthy legal migration to Europe and to Luxembourg. Third-country nationals carry out 13% of the essential professions in Europe. I leave it to you to do the maths for Luxembourg. Without third-country nationals, we would have an even greater shortage in various sectors, such as ICT.

Taking in refugees is a **strong sign of solidarity**, a principle that is writ large in EU law, at least on paper. For a country like Luxembourg, solidarity is enormously important, as became clear during the pandemic. We depended on the solidarity of so many partners to overcome the crisis. Migration and asylum is one of the areas where we can and do reciprocate this solidarity.

In this spirit, we have constantly shown **solidarity** with other Member States by receiving more than a hundred asylum seekers in the framework of resettlement from the Mediterranean since 2018. Just a few weeks ago, more refugees arrived in Findel from Italy in this context. Unfortunately, two-thirds of EU Member States have not yet accepted refugees through redistribution. This is one of the reasons why **compulsory solidarity** within the EU is becoming increasingly indispensable. It cannot be that the countries that are the first destination of many refugees in the EU due to their geographical location are left to their own devices. It is also not enough for individual member states to show solidarity and continue to take in migrants in need. Solidarity is one of the absolute fundamental values of the EU. Solidarity must bring real relief on the ground. Solidarity does not only go in one direction. So-called "push backs" at some of our European external borders are the absolute opposite of solidarity.

But solidarity does not only exist within the framework of the EU. Our country also shows solidarity internationally and takes responsibility, especially towards people who have had to leave everything behind due to war and violence. Since 2015, more than 300 people from Turkey, Lebanon and Niger have been taken in as part of the resettlement scheme.

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The current upheavals require, even more than in the past, that we regularly review how we function and ensure that we equip ourselves with the necessary means to fulfil our international responsibilities and represent our interests in the world in the best possible way. This includes adapting our **diplomatic network** when necessary.

The war in Ukraine has once again given the security dimension a completely different status. Our security remains guaranteed by **NATO**. In this context, we have decided to strengthen our representation to the Alliance in Brussels. In future, the Luxembourg Ambassador to

NATO and his team will focus one hundred percent on our interests in the Alliance and will not also be responsible for our relations with our Belgian neighbours, as has been the case up to now. At the same time, this will enable us to cultivate relations with Belgium, and in particular with its federal entities, more effectively. This step was long overdue and has become inevitable due to the war in Ukraine.

I said at the beginning that we also need to rethink our trade relations and work even more closely with partners with whom we share the same values. Our relations with **South Korea** have developed a dynamic in recent years that requires a permanent presence in Seoul. For this reason, we have decided to open an embassy in Seoul. In doing so, we want to further expand our close cooperation with Korea, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

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This foreign and european policy statement in 2022, the 16th since I have taken office, has been the most difficult one to prepare for, given in how much turmoil the international situation is.

A military aggression on this scale was unimaginable to many on this continent, and of course I include myself in that. When we tried to bring young people closer to Europe, we often raved about the great peace project that has emerged over the last 70 years. Not infrequently, however, I have had to conclude that the young and also the less young of today could no longer really relate to this argument, because peace had become the norm that one could no longer imagine it in any other way.

Since 24 February, we know that peace on the European continent is no longer to be taken for granted. That there are powers and actors who are stuck in old thought patterns, who do not share our way of thinking and who do not shy away from using brute force to try to push through their goals. We have had to realise that peace comes at a cost, and that it is not enough to create a lasting peace architecture in Europe, but that it must also be nurtured and maintained and, above all, made resilient.

In this sense, 24 February is a **paradigm shift**. It is the day when everything changed. The day when we understood that the post-war order in Europe has been called into question. Peaceful coexistence has been unilaterally terminated by the Russian President, with all the suffering and misery that war brings. We now realise once more how valuable and indispensable the great peace project of Europe is. And we see again with absolute clarity, after the Balkan wars of the 1990s, how pointless any war is. How obvious it is that a war cannot be won, or at least not without such enormous losses that no war aim could justify them. Not on the battlefield, not in people's minds and certainly not in their hearts.

Everyone must now see where they stand, on which side of history they want to be. There is no neutrality and no ambiguity in the correct assessment of this war, and history will judge whether you were on the right side.

In Conclusion: We need to invest even more in the future to maintain peace. To protect ourselves. Our citizens, our way of life, our values and our ideals of tolerance and respect towards our fellow citizens.

This new **situation is also an accelerator** for a number of projects we had already launched. Be it the energy transition, creating greater resilience in our economy, reducing our dependencies, better protecting our infrastructures or expanding our defence capabilities. All this now needs to be done much faster than we thought. This has profound implications for our daily lives, our societies and our economies. I am firmly convinced that we will emerge stronger from this crisis.

It is therefore imperative that we preserve the strong unity that we have demonstrated so far in the EU. We can only play the role that the EU should play in the 21st century at the international level. The EU as a peace project is more relevant than ever. A sovereign union that has a direct responsibility for its neighbourhood, promoting stability and prosperity, but which must also be prepared to think strategically and resist foreign interference and influence.

"Democracy is not everything, but without democracy, everything is nothing", to paraphrase Willy Brandt. My message would be not to give up a millimetre of the rule of law, neither here

in Luxembourg nor in the EU. A millimetre quickly becomes a metre, then a kilometre, and finally you end up with autocrats having a free hand because the counterweights to political power have fallen away.

I am confident that Putin's war has shaken us all up, and has ultimately strengthened us to defend democracy without concessions.

Thank you for your attention.