

## **ANKARA NATIONAL DAY (21 June 2019) – WELCOMING REMARKS**

Distinguished Guests, Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends, L & G,

Today, it is my my great pleasure to welcome you - together with my wife Barbara - to our Residence to celebrate the Luxembourg National Day together. A warm welcome also goes to the representative of the Turkish Presidency, Mr. Metin Kiratlı, and the Foreign Ministry, Director general, Mrs. Nilgün Erdem Arı.

May I now ask for your attention while listening to the national anthems of Luxembourg and Turkey.

Before delivering my remarks, I thank the students of the Ernst-Reuter-Schule, the private school of the German Embassy in Ankara, under the direction of their music teacher, Mr. Robert Seidel, for performing our national anthems. I am particularly impressed by the Luxembourg language skills his students acquired in a record time.

I kindly ask my wife to offer them a small token of our appreciation.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we celebrate Luxembourg's national day; two days ahead of the official date which is 23 June, the eve of Saint John's day. The date does not relate to a specific event with regard to our independence, but to past sovereigns birth- and name days but has since been kept. One of them was H.R.H. Grand Duke Jean (John), Luxembourg's sovereign from 1964 to 2000. It was with great sadness that we witnessed him passing away this year.

Luxembourgers like to celebrate National day outside, mostly gathering at street parties and public concerts as well as a whole range of other out-door activities on the eve of 23 June. Hence, the day fits well as the weather conditions are usually good, even in Luxembourg, at this time of the year.

Officially, Luxembourg became independent in 1839 at the conclusion of a complicated political process, in which we were mostly the playing ball of the power games of our neighbors.

It is only after WW2 that my country got the chance to make its first steps in the international arena. Most important in this process has been our membership in the European Union. Being a founding member of the UE permanently guaranteed the independence of the small Luxembourg nation-state. Being a part of a supranational organization and strengthening nationhood are not necessary mutually exclusive choices.

Luxembourg has actively contributed to shape the EU. Today this exceptional and unique creation is part of our DNA. The EU serves as the foundation for Luxembourg's multi-national and multicultural society. It also largely explains Luxembourg's diversity, its openness, its prosperity as well as the well-being of its citizens, including a very high number of foreign residents (+50%).

Celebrating Luxembourg's national day in Turkey is also an opportunity to celebrate our bilateral relationship. It is deeply rooted and diverse. My country serves among others as a major logistics hub for Turkey's exports to Western Europe.

Luxembourg is of obviously much smaller than Turkey: 600.000 citizens on one side, 80 million on the other. 133 times more. As a territory, Turkey is even 290 times larger than Luxembourg. Turkey's GDP however is only 14 times bigger than Luxembourg's GDP.

It demonstrates that Luxembourg, despite its small geographic size, is an economic powerhouse and ranks among the most competitive business and investment locations in the world. It also shows that there is a significant potential for additional business, trade and investment ventures between Turkey and Luxembourg.

The visit of Luxembourg's Foreign Minister to Turkey at the beginning of the year was an excellent occasion to explore additional mutually

beneficial opportunities. The potential is there but opportunities need to be seized, including at the level of people-to-people contacts. This is why I am pleased that the Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra was on tour in Turkey last week, with outstanding performances in Izmir and in Istanbul. I am also happy with the success of the Arts at the Luxembourg House program, which we launched last year in Ankara. The next musical events will take place in autumn.

Before concluding, let me briefly turn to the EU-Turkey relationship, which is - as you know - facing a few challenges from both sides right now.

The European project certainly needs adjustments do deal with a range of internal and external pressures. True, we struggle sometimes to find the appropriate solutions and we need to do our homework. I am convinced, however, that we will ultimately be able to take the required action. This has always been the case and there is simply no viable alternative to guarantee peace and prosperity on the European continent.

As you know, the EU has been utterly successful in doing just this. Also, more Europe is often the solution and rarely the problem. This is why we need to think more than twice before we wash everything down the drain under the pressure of newly emerging nationalisms, fueled by weird populists and xenophobes, reinventing antiquated and dangerous ideologies.

However, we also need Turkey to do its homework and to remain fully part of the European project. A democratic, stable and prosperous Turkey, firmly anchored to Europe, is what we all wish for. This is why Luxembourg has always been supportive of Turkey's accession process to the EU.

As you know, the EU and Turkey have been sailing through some rough waters over the past years. However, until now, we have managed to keep sailing together and this is important. Sure, issues remain on the

table and have to be discussed. Yet, I am convinced that if the political will is there, we will be able to address them in a constructive manner.

Like the EU, Turkey currently faces a number of internal and external pressures. We face the scourge of terrorism together. Turkey has paid a particularly high price in this context. We have to deal with several regional conflicts and face the dramatic consequences of migration together.

I want to seize this opportunity to highlight my appreciation for the unwavering hospitality and the extraordinary generosity of Turkey and the Turkish people while dealing with the largest inflow of refugees ever seen. Within the EU, Luxembourg keeps fulfilling its obligations when it comes to relocating and resettling refugees.

Turkey is a candidate country and a key partner to the EU. I sincerely hope that we will succeed in moving forward on a common path together, in the interests of our citizens and our children. It is actually about the next generations. They deserve to grow up in a peaceful and prosperous environment, wherever they are born.

On a personal note, I would also like to add that my wife Barbara and I are having good time in your country. Since our arrival, 3 years ago, we have been enjoying the hospitality and kindness of our Turkish friends and neighbors while discovering the beauties of your country.

Let me conclude by thanking Barbara for supporting me 24 hours a day and 365 days a year and by thanking all of you for coming!

Now, dear Guests, dear Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen, our tradition request that we raise our glasses to the well-being of TT.RR.HH. the Grand Duke and the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg and the everlasting links of friendship between the people of Turkey and the people of Luxembourg.

Thank you for your attention. Enjoy!