

Europe Day Reception, Vaduz

Tuesday 14 May 2019

Speech by H.E. Mr Michael Matthiessen

Ambassador of the European Union

Sehr geehrter Herr Regierungschef Hasler,
Herr Landtagspräsident,
Landtagsabgeordnete, Vertreter der Gemeinden,
Exzellenzen,
Kolleginnen und Kollegen der Liechtensteiner Verwaltung,
Meine Damen und Herren,
Liebe Freunde Europas,

Ich freue mich sehr, wieder einmal in Vaduz zu sein und mit Ihnen heute den Europatag feiern zu dürfen. Mit dem Europatag gedenken wir der Rede des Französischen Aussenministers Robert Schuman am 9. Mai 1950. Diese Rede legte den Grundstein für die europäische Integration und die Schaffung eines gemeinsamen Raums des Friedens, der Freiheit und des Wohlstands. Als Europäer ist die Aufgabe von uns allen, dieses Erbe zu schützen und zu vertiefen.

Ein Beispiel für dieses wichtige Engagement ist der 25. (fünfundzwanzigsten) Geburtstag des Europäischen Wirtschaftsraums. Er wurde dieses Jahr im März in Anwesenheit von Regierungschef Hasler in Brüssel gefeiert. Sie haben die Bilder von diesem aussergewöhnlichen Europäischen Rat auf unserer Einladungskarte, sowie auf dem Video vor meiner Rede gesehen.

Es ist eine besondere Ehre für mich und meine Frau, die Botschafter der EU Mitgliedstaaten und für meine Kollegen von der Delegation, heute in Vaduz mit Ihnen den Europatag zu feiern – besonders in diesem Jubiläumsjahr für Liechtenstein. Ich möchte mich auch schon

jetzt bei allen bedanken, die bei der Organisation dieser Veranstaltung mitgeholfen haben.

Gerne möchte ich meine Rede heute mit einem Glückwunsch zum 300. (dreihundertsten) Jubiläum des Fürstentums Liechtenstein beginnen. Die Geschichte Liechtensteins ist Teil unserer gemeinsamen europäischen Geschichte. In den letzten 300 Jahren hat das Fürstentum die Herausforderungen und die Erfolge Europas hautnah miterlebt. Ich möchte Ihnen zu dem großen Vorbild für Stabilität und Wohlstand gratulieren, zu dem Sie sich mitten in Europa entwickelt haben.

----- Part on the EU -----

This year is also an important year for the European Union, even if we have a few years ahead of us before having the chance to celebrate our own 300th anniversary!

On 9 May, EU leaders were united in the beautiful city of Sibiu (Hermannstadt) in Romania. This informal Summit of 27 EU leaders on the Europe Day signalled that the EU-27 are united in pursuing the European project and in working together for a stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world. Leaders adopted the Sibiu declaration on the future of Europe, containing 10 commitments setting out the strategic direction of the EU in the years to come.

69 years after the Schuman declaration and 30 years after the fall of the iron curtain, Europe still needs the European Union. The world around us is changing. It is becoming more fractured, multipolar and unsettled. New global powers are emerging, which do not share the same values of freedom and democracy that we Europeans do. The rules-based multilateral order is under pressure and the primacy of national interests is resurging. More than ever, if we want to preserve our European way of life and reinforce Europe's global influence, EU Member States must act together and cooperate with like-minded states sharing our values.

After a challenging period, Europe is bouncing back. The EU's economy has now grown for six consecutive years. Moreover, there is an international demand for Europe and the EU, as a trading partner. In the last five years, new trade agreements between the EU and 15 third countries entered into force, those with Japan and Canada being the most important ones. And more are in the pipeline!

Being the largest trading power in the world, the EU is able to set standards such as with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which inspires many countries worldwide and shape the digital economy. At UN level and in other international fora, the EU takes the lead in addressing global challenges: fighting climate change, promoting peace and sustainable development.

Two weeks ago, on 1 May, we celebrated the 15th anniversary of the EU's enlargement to 10 Member States in Central, Eastern and

Southern Europe. Three further states joined a few years later. The EU enlargement has stabilized the continent. The iron curtain is history!

Currently, the EU is exporting stability and promoting political, economic and social transformation in the Western Balkans, by offering countries in this region a prospect to join the European project.

In the meantime one Member State, the United Kingdom, has decided by referendum in 2016 to leave the European Union. We regret this decision by the British people, but we respect it.

In the remaining 27 Member States, Brexit has sharpened the citizens' awareness of the many benefits of the European integration: open borders, free movement of people, goods & services, a digital single market with no roaming charges, a common research space, and many others advantages. Recent opinion polls show that the popularity of the European Union among the citizens of almost all remaining 27 Member States has gone up considerably in the last couple of years.

“The Union of today is stronger than that of yesterday and we want to continue to build its strength for tomorrow. This is our commitment for the future generations”. This is the main message conveyed by the EU leaders in Sibiu a few days ago. The EU-27 stand together and are committed to continue the path of European integration! Unity was therefore the first of the commitment taken by the EU leaders.

In this context, we are approaching the European elections, the world's largest transnational elections! In ten days from now, from 23 to 26 May, some 400 million EU citizens in voting age are called upon to elect their representatives for the next five years in the European Parliament. The European elections are the most important moment in the EU's democratic life!

The elections will have a major impact, of course in the Member States, but also here in Liechtenstein, where you are so close and so connected to what is happening in the EU. This is not to mention the many EU citizens living in Liechtenstein and the Liechtenstein dual nationals having the right to vote. I encourage these citizens to make use of their democratic right to vote and to shape Europe's future.

----- Part on EU-Liechtenstein relations -----

Liechtenstein and the EU belong to the same European family and we are moving forward together.

A demonstration of our unique relationship was the special meeting that gathered the 31 leaders of the European Economic Area in the margins of the European Council in Brussels on 22 March 2019. You saw their picture on our invitation card and in the video before my speech.

This event celebrated the 25th anniversary of the EEA. I know that the formal anniversary of the entry into force of the EEA in Liechtenstein

will only be next year. We will have the occasion to celebrate this important date again together. But let me still say a few words today about our special partnership through the EEA agreement. I believe that the meeting of the EEA leaders in March was a clear sign that EEA/EFTA members belong to the EU's closest partners. Our model of cooperation is a great success; we should be proud of it and celebrate it.

To quote the President of the European Council Donald Tusk, "the EEA Agreement is not a short-term transaction, but a long term partnership, where everyone contributes, and everyone benefits". Indeed, the EEA directly impacts the life of about 520 million people in 31 countries. It allows us to choose where we want to live and work. It protects our rights as consumers, our health, and since recently even our data when navigating on the internet. The EEA is one of the biggest markets in the world, worth more than €16 trillion. It has showed its benefit in terms of economic opportunities for businesses, also here in Liechtenstein.

I said it before and I will repeat it again: the EU-Liechtenstein partnership goes far beyond economic cooperation. As like-minded partners, we are acting together on the international stage, in particular in multilateral fora. We work together to ensure the security of our citizens within the Schengen area. We are partners in the domain of education, notably through the Erasmus programme that allows student to study abroad. We also cooperate in the area of taxation and transparency, a field in which we saw positive progress

over the past months. These are some examples of what our successful partnership entails.

Together with the Ambassadors of the EU Member States accredited to Liechtenstein, we are deeply committed to this strong and diverse relationship. We are proud of this cooperation and of the different anniversaries that we are celebrating today. They remind us of what we have already achieved. They can also inspire us to be ambitious in building our common future and the future of Europe.

Thank you very much! Vielen Dank noch einmal, dass Sie heute zum Europatag gekommen sind!