The Future of Europe:

Luxembourg PM Luc Frieden's Vision for Unity

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LUXEMBOURG'S PRIME MINISTER LUC FRIEDEN, IN HIS SPEECH AT THE COLLEGE OF EUROPE IN NATOLIN, POLAND, ON NOVEMBER 4, 2024, OFFERS A PRAGMATIC VISION FOR EUROPE'S FUTURE, ADDRESSING KEY INTERNATIONAL ISSUES SUCH AS THE EUROPEAN ARMY, MIGRATION, A PERMANENT UN SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT, THE GREEN ENERGY TRANSITION, AND THE DYNAMICS OF EU INSTITUTIONS.

FRIEDEN REFLECTS ON THE EU'S ORIGINS, BORN FROM THE NEED TO OVERCOME WAR AND DIVISION AFTER WORLD WAR II, AND HIGHLIGHTS MILESTONES LIKE THE SCHENGEN AGREEMENT AS SYMBOLS OF UNITY AND FREE MOVEMENT. HE DRAWS ON LUXEMBOURG'S WARTIME EXPERIENCES AND THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF SCHENGEN'S EASTERN EXPANSION TO EMPHASIZE THE EU'S MISSION OF PEACE AND PROSPERITY THROUGH INTEGRATION. THIS HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE UNDERPINS HIS CALL FOR CONTINUED EU UNITY, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF THE ONGOING GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES, INCLUDING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR.

The Future of Europe: Luxembourg PM Luc Frieden's Vision for Unity

Luxembourg's Prime Minister Luc Frieden, in his speech at the College of Europe in Natolin, Poland, on November 4, 2024, offers a pragmatic vision for Europe's future, addressing key international issues such as the European army, migration, a permanent UN Security Council seat, the green energy transition, and the dynamics of EU institutions.

Frieden reflects on the EU's origins, born from the need to overcome war and division after World War II, and highlights milestones like the Schengen Agreement as symbols of unity and free movement. He draws on Luxembourg's wartime experiences and the symbolic significance of Schengen's eastern expansion to emphasize the EU's mission of peace and prosperity through integration. This historical perspective underpins his call for continued EU unity, particularly in light of the ongoing geopolitical challenges, including the Russian-Ukrainian war.

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Opening Ceremony of the Jacques Delors Promotion at Natolin | Coleurope

Defense and European Army
Frieden advocates for a European Army integrated with NATO, framing it as essential given the changing nature of global threats. Historically, similar proposals failed due to sovereignty concerns, but PM Frieden suggests incremental progress through coalitions of willing nations, which mirrors the EU's gradualist integration model necessitated by modern security realities.

The historical controversy of the 1950s European Defense Community (EDC) and today's debates on European defense reveal enduring tensions between sovereignty, collective security, and external dependencies. The EDC, an ambitious plan for a supranational European army, failed due to France's rejection, one of the six founding members of what would later become the European Union, driven by concerns over sovereignty, internal divisions, and U.S. reliance. This shaped European defense policy, highlighting the challenges of balancing national and collective interests.

Recently, Luxembourg's Prime Minister Luc Frieden and France's President Emmanuel Macron similarly advocate for stronger European defense but differ in approach. Frieden supports integration with NATO, favoring incremental steps aligned with transatlantic allies. Macron pushes for European strategic autonomy, seeking independence from NATO and a distinct EU defense identity, asserting: "It's the agenda of European strategic autonomy that will allow us... to build capacity and autonomy for the Europeans." These differing visions reflect Luxembourg's multilateralist stance versus France's tradition of strategic independence, showing how historical tensions continue to shape Europe's defense ambitions.

Geopolitics and European Foreign Policy

Frieden's suggestion of a permanent EU seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) is associated with the EU's ambitions as a crucial geopolitical actor, especially after the Ukrainian war; the UNSC "needs to better reflect today's geopolitical reality." Hence, the EU plays an influential role in the international arena, balancing the rise of BRICS.

Frieden's call for a permanent EU seat on the UNSC reflects his vision of a unified European voice to enhance global influence and address contemporary geopolitical challenges. He argues that such a step would amplify Europe's role while upholding shared values, though it faces obstacles due to France's unique position as an existing permanent member. The UNSC's structure, rooted in post-World War II realities, reflects the diplomatic legacy of Charles de Gaulle, whose efforts secured France's permanent seat despite its wartime defeat. This achievement became central to France's international stature and sovereignty, making the idea of replacing its seat with an EU one particularly difficult. France's attachment to this position is not only a matter of national pride but also a reflection of de Gaulle's vision of France as an independent global power. While Frieden emphasizes consolidating European influence and integration through having a permanent seat at the UNSC, the U.S. proposal to include two African states as permanent members aims to address regional imbalances and enhance the UNSC's legitimacy. Both proposals illustrate contrasting approaches to modernizing the UNSC in an increasingly multipolar world, balancing legacy with the need for reform.

Migration and Schengen

Migration policy is presented as a critical test for EU unity; Frieden underscores the importance of controlled migration, the protection of asylum rights, and stronger external border management while warning against the erosion of Schengen's principles. His emphasis on the "true spirit of Schengen" highlights the challenge of balancing free movement with security concerns.

Luxembourg, along with Germany and France, shares concerns about the Schengen Area and migration but diverges sharply in their approaches, reflecting deeper ideological and political differences. Frieden calls for reviving the "true spirit of Schengen" by strengthening external borders, empowering Frontex as a European border guard, and balancing migration policy with "the heart and the mind" to protect asylum rights while addressing illegal immigration. In his view, preserving the principles of free movement requires EU-wide solidarity and efficient external border management rather than internal border checks. In contrast, some other European countries, such as Germany and France, have recently imposed temporary restrictions on border movements, including those from Luxembourg, citing security and migration concerns. Frieden criticizes these measures as "short-sighted," arguing that such measures undermine Schengen's foundational principles by shifting the burden to neighboring states.

Luxembourg's perspective on migration and free entry is deeply shaped by the historical and symbolic significance of the Schengen Agreement, signed in the city of Schengen in Luxembourg, and its ideological commitment to freedom of movement and open borders. This legacy reinforces Luxembourg's advocacy for collective European solutions over restrictive national measures, as reflected in its relatively open migration policies, with an immigration rate in Luxembourg of approximately 48.8% in 2022. On the other hand, the growing influence of parties with critical stances on migration, for instance, Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD), France's National Rally (RN), and Italy's Brothers of Italy, has led to increasingly restrictive migration policies in these countries. These parties' influence reflects growing domestic pressures to prioritize national security and limit immigration, often at the expense of EU-wide solidarity. This divergence highlights a core tension within the EU: while Luxembourg champions cooperation and the preservation of Schengen's ideals, Germany, France, and Italy's security-driven approaches reflect the challenge of reconciling diverse national priorities with shared European values in addressing migration.

Competitiveness and the Single Market

Frieden critiques the EU's regulatory framework, noting: "Taken together, our regulations have become both too complex and too numerous. A maze and a mountain at the same time." Hence, he advocates for mutual recognition, a principle that would "truly reduce the regulatory burden on our companies" while fostering cross-border trade and investment with a truly integrated Single Market.

Luxembourg, known for its financial sector and relatively quite low tax rates, advocates for a flexible, competitive tax framework within the EU. As Frieden states, "To switch gears on completing the Single Market, we need to rely much more on mutual recognition," and suggests that a "clever mix of harmonization and mutual recognition" can reduce regulatory burdens and enhance competitiveness alongside achieving integrated Single Market. This approach allows countries with the European Union to maintain their national advantages while fostering cooperation, reflecting Luxembourg's pragmatic approach to balancing economic and financial interests with European integration.

Energy Transition and Investment

The energy transition is framed as an opportunity for EU-wide collaboration, with Frieden with fully supporting Mario Draghi's vision as well as stating: "Solar panels in Portugal could help power Luxembourg. Hydrogen from the North Sea could help power Italy."

Frieden's advocacy for interconnected energy networks and joint financing aligns with the EU's Green Deal ambitions, emphasizing integration to combat climate change and reduce dependency on external energy sources. Highlighting examples like Portugal's renewable energy success, he emphasizes the potential of collective European action to drive sustainability and economic growth. This vision stands in contrast to the fragmented strategies among member states: Germany's renewable push is tempered by energy security challenges, France champions nuclear power as a pragmatic yet contested solution, and coal-reliant states like Poland grapple with the financial and social costs of transitioning to greener systems. These divergences reflect the broader tension between national priorities and collective EU goals, particularly in balancing rapid decarbonization with ensuring energy affordability and security. Frieden's focus on solidarity through shared financing and integrated energy grids offers a pathway to reconcile these differences, framing deeper collaboration as not only essential for achieving climate objectives but also for bolstering Europe's strategic autonomy in an increasingly competitive global energy landscape.

Decision-making and Europe of Different Speeds

The Luxembourgish Prime Minister proposes a "Europe of multiple speeds" to address the varying levels of readiness and willingness among EU member states and candidates for integration. This model offers a pragmatic solution to accommodate the union's expansion while preserving cohesion, allowing states to progress at their own pace without hindering collective goals. His proposal to expand qualified majority voting (QMV) and introduce a "super-qualified majority" reflects the need for reforming decision-making processes to tackle contemporary challenges; these suggestions aim to strengthen the EU's governance framework, ensuring it can effectively address pressing geopolitical, economic, and environmental complexities.

The debate over European integration and decision-making highlights the tension between national sovereignty and shared European goals. For instance, François Mitterrand, France's former president, envisioned a deeply integrated Europe in the 1990s, advocating for a united, economically stable union that would include Eastern European countries to strengthen both the EU's cohesion and global standing. Mitterrand's support for EU enlargement was evident in his encouragement of Spain and Portugal's accession to the EU, reflecting his belief in a more integrated Europe that could unite economically, politically, and even culturally quite diverse nations. Sweden's pragmatic stance on EU decision-making values flexibility and practical solutions over Mitterrand's idealism, prioritizing national sovereignty while supporting cooperation within the broader European framework.

Luxembourg PM's proposals for QMV and differentiated integration confirm Sweden's pragmatism, aligning with broader trends to accommodate diverse member-state priorities while navigating decision-making gridlock. This practical approach diverges from Mitterrand's

idealistic drive for cohesive integration, instead reflecting the complexities of balancing national sovereignty with EU-wide objectives.

By invoking the EU's history of transformative leadership, Prime Minister Frieden concludes his speech by emphasizing the importance of bold actions to adapt to evolving realities while maintaining the European Union's core mission of peace and prosperity. Frieden's vision underscores the delicate balance the EU must strike between respecting national sovereignty and advancing collective European ambitions for a more resilient future.

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