

Distinguished guests,

Dear speakers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The upcoming European elections hold profound meaning. Although I am not entitled to vote, as I am a new resident of Europe, I can nevertheless contribute to this important decision, in other ways!

As we confront unprecedented societal and transnational challenges, now, more than ever, dialogue, debate, and critical thinking serve as our guiding beacons through these turbulent times.

Thank you for being here with us tonight and contribute to this discussion.

Of course, I extend my deepest gratitude to all the organizations involved in shaping this event. In alignment with their core mission of disseminating values and expanding intellectual landscapes, the Centre Europe Direct at the University of Luxembourg, the Institut Pierre Werner, the City of Esch-sur-Alzette, along with their esteemed partners— the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C<sup>2</sup>DH), the Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe in Switzerland, and the Representation of the European Commission in Luxembourg take pleasure in welcoming you for a stimulating conference programme.

“Europe at the crossroads”, promises to be a moment where ideas collide, perspectives intertwine, and solutions emerge.

For my part, I would like to underline the key role higher education institutions are playing in the shaping of the future of Europe.

Indeed, as Europe stands at a decisive moment in its history, it is imperative to acknowledge the role that universities play in guiding our continent towards a prosperous and democratic future.

Universities are not just institutions of learning and research. We support students in their understanding of the world and train them to become citizens who can make informed decisions.

In addition, Universities are vibrant hubs of innovation, driving social progress, sustaining democracy and fostering scientific collaboration that transcends borders.

Higher Education Institutions foster economic development and, most of all, impact on wellbeing and social transformation. It's also an "industry" that attract and contribute to retain high profile talents from international.

Universities also play a role in scientific diplomacy. We truly have the capacity to build bridges instead of walls. In addition, by promoting student exchanges, cultural immersion programs, and international cooperation initiatives, universities can cultivate a new generation of global citizens who understand, respect, and celebrate cultural diversity.

Yet, as we navigate an era defined by rapid technological progress and geopolitical complexities, we must also confront pressing questions. How do we ensure that scientific advancements are used for the collective good? The concept of dual use presents a challenge that universities must struggle with, balancing innovation with ethical considerations to prevent misuse of technology and, at the same time, preserving the sovereignty of Europe and protect it.

Moreover, in a landscape where global competition is fierce, how does Europe's ecosystem measure up against powerhouses like Asia and North America, particularly in strategic areas such as innovation, and

research & development? Once again, universities are key actors in this battle.

Sustaining Europe's competitiveness demands strategic investments in cutting-edge research, entrepreneurship, and strong collaboration between academia, industry, and governments. Universities and their tech transfer mechanisms hold key roles for the competitiveness of Europe.

In conclusion, universities convey multiple voices. Universities are a beacon for mutual understanding, ethic, peace, prosperity, and competitiveness. The University of Luxembourg, as the sole university in the country has even more responsibilities.

For all these good reasons, on behalf of the entire rectorate team, Europe Direct and the C2DH, I am delighted to open this conference.

Thank you, Elena, for the organization.