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Speech Blanche Weber Congress Mouvement Ecologique asbl 2024

Dear Members, Dear Friends,

The Ecological Movement has been rather reserved in its assessment of the government's work so far. The coalition agreement allows for a lot, but it is also quite vague in many respects, and it's not clear which direction it should take. We wanted to give the new team a chance to organize themselves and set priorities.

But that time is over now! We are starting to become nervous and uneasy about what this legislative period will bring from the perspective of sustainable development.

We were invited by the new government team to participate in the coalition negotiations. This was a first; previous governments did not include environmental organizations in such discussions. But the question is: Was this invitation a genuine recognition of the importance of ecology, both at a high level and for the environmental organizations themselves? Or was it a clever move to appear environmentally conscious, knowing that large parts of society expect ecological policies? An honest dialogue or a PR stunt, that is the question we must now ask ourselves.

So far, very little is known about what concrete actions are planned or should be taken in the field of sustainability. There is hardly any visible line from the Ministry of the Environment. It's also not clear whether ecological considerations, for example in the Finance or Economy Ministry, will play a significant role. The results of the discussions on agriculture are also unclear in this regard. If the Environment Minister was present there, it was probably more to hear what procedures should be simplified rather than to represent environmental interests at the table. Being told what to do instead of being able to set our own priorities is not acceptable!

What is noticeable is that the problematic language of election campaigns still seems to prevail: "For a pragmatic environmental protection" or "An environmental policy that doesn't annoy people".

Ecology as a procedural problem! Making procedures shorter and more efficient, resolving administrative issues... that's all we've been hearing about sustainability in recent weeks. Just to be clear: as a movement, we have repeatedly told the Ministry of the Environment and others in the last legislative period that it is nonsensical to have regulations that hinder the installation of solar panels while being equally problematic for biodiversity, thus turning people against environmental causes! That unnecessary conflicts would arise and projects would be delayed due to formalities, while biodiversity is being destroyed elsewhere under our feet. Urgent changes are needed. But there was little response at that time. Criticisms of many people about poor procedures were understood, but under the last government, mistakes were made.

But to only talk about ecology, about the nature conservation law, etc., when it comes to procedures, is a no-go. It's a complete misrepresentation of the situation. While our animals and habitats in Luxembourg continue to suffer, while there are huge problems with water quality, while the energy transition is not progressing as necessary, and much more... it's as if procedures are the biggest problem.

It is known: the ecological transition will demand sacrifices from us as a society, even if no path seems easy. The next generation cannot live as we do today. Changing lifestyles is not something that happens easily. But it works when, on one hand, the real causes of the problems are clearly identified, reasons for the necessary changes are explained, and the positive impacts are emphasized. To simplify, it's like a doctor advising a patient with high body weight for health reasons to start exercising. The doctor doesn't say, "Healthy eating is annoying," and yet the patient becomes aware of the situation and decides to live healthier. Instead, the doctor highlights the health issues, assures the patient that they will live longer and feel better, be more active, and that healthy eating can actually be enjoyable.

But at this stage, our government sticks to the metaphor: "Healthy eating is annoying." Our biodiversity, the climate... are they just seen as nuisances? Yet, with the example of our patient, it's all about him. The energy and climate crises are about the survival of humanity on this planet and, alongside individual responsibility, a collective, political responsibility.

We don't need a government that treats the ecological transition as if it were just a "participation activity". According to this motto: the prettiest flower bed gets a prize and a geranium for the flower box's long-term health. Freely according to the motto that everyone should decide for themselves: who wants to cover their flower bed with gravel, that's fine.

Let's not misunderstand. The ecological transition depends on acceptance. And when this government emphasizes that more attention is needed, that people need to be involved, that's correct.

But the government also has the responsibility to set the framework and not shift the responsibility onto individuals and see what happens. Responsibility cannot be left to the individual's discretion and thus completely transferred to them. We only have a few years left to set the course. This kind of politics is a no-go.

When, for example, I listened to RTL's interview with Health Minister Martine Deprez, I was a bit stunned. It was about how people should adopt different behaviors through prevention. The journalist asked if it is the state's responsibility or if people should be left to decide for themselves. The Minister said: "If everyone had a personal interest in everything, then we wouldn't need traffic lights, we wouldn't need laws. Because then everyone would always pay attention to everyone and everything. But unfortunately, that's not the case. People are different, people have different interests, and my task is to guarantee public health." Well, I was stunned. I was expecting the same stance from the Prime Minister or our Environment Minister, where it's about "People are behind the ecological transition, that's clear from all surveys. But we cannot leave it to the individual when to do what is right. It only works when we pull together. And leaving it all up to choice is not an option. That's why we set the framework for the necessary transition, discuss the implementation details, but commit to the overarching goals. It is my task to ensure that our livelihoods are not permanently destroyed. And for that, we need legislative and regulatory rules and clear guidelines." It is essential that there are corrections to the system. System change.

I'll start with a very concrete dossier: the energy transition. The previous government established a national energy and climate plan, to which the new government has committed, which is a positive step. However, it's clear that we'll only achieve the goal of reducing greenhouse gases if Luxembourg has a CO2 tax high enough to limit cross-border fuel tourism and support the energy transition through pricing. The fact is: our neighbor Germany has already raised its CO2 tax. The result is obvious: now we are becoming cheaper again, and consequently, consumption will rise. This means that we won't achieve the climate protection goals! And we won't be able to adhere to our international agreements either.

Secondly, from 2027, there will be a European CO2 price for heating and the transport sector. Luxembourg must implement this by 2030 at the latest, and there are even people who think the price could be 200 or even 300 euros per ton. But no matter what, it will be significantly higher than our very low tax of 35 euros per ton of CO2, which is only supposed to increase to 45 euros by 2026. Is there any talk about this? Does the government have a strategy on the table regarding what this means for the individual sectors, how the tax should develop gradually (and not suddenly), and what accompanying measures need to be taken? We don't know. But if there is no reaction now, I don't even want to imagine what will happen in 2030.

Another example: Luxembourg, like other EU countries, squanders millions on combating the climate and biodiversity crises. Those infamous "harmful subsidies", i.e., environmentally harmful subsidies. We had a brief interview with the Environment Minister some time ago. We talked about it with him. But it didn't really sound like he had already worked on the dossier or had it on his radar. However, this should be the first thing to do: stop wasting state funds not only out of the window but also to actively work against one's own goals!

Or another example: agricultural policy. It's positive that there was the Agriculture Desk. I can also make a clear use here: as the Ecological Movement, we partly understand the frustration in the farming community.

For years, there has been no serious strategy at the EU level, but also in Luxembourg, regarding where the journey of agricultural policy should go. Much is going wrong, and the conditions for farmers often change. Important services by farmers for the general public are not sufficiently recognized financially, farmers continue to be exposed to increasing pressure from the world market, and much more. It is understandable that in Luxembourg, X farms close every year. We do not see, however, from the outside, that there were discussions about the fundamental questions of what agricultural policy we want tomorrow and what the way to get there is. It also apparently was not discussed that - it is just like that - the abysmal agricultural policy is largely responsible for species extinction, that is, the decline in biodiversity. That it cannot continue like this. That the goal of preserving our livelihoods and that of a sustainable agriculture must be combined. So, once again, it was about giving approvals from the outside that would annoy the environment. Therefore, we advocate that environmental organizations also be invited to the next Agriculture Desk.

Another example: urban sprawl and settlement policy. We can turn and twist it as we like: it's getting warmer, much warmer. We urgently need green spaces in our settlements so that one can still feel comfortable there in 20 years, and the number of heat waves doesn't increase too much. This presupposes that building is done differently, that the land is distributed differently. Without fewer cars, you hardly get more greenery.

I could go on and on. Choices are necessary - structural corrections to the system are necessary! And we don't hear anything about such fundamental approaches at the moment.

For the elderly here in the room, don't expect too much now, as bad memories come back high. Do you remember 1970? The misery in the countryside at the time?

Because you know, in 1970, the global Overshoot Day was reached on December 29th. So actually, we weren't doing so bad globally regarding respecting the ecological limits of the planet. Today it's May

27th, in Luxembourg even February 15th. Does it mean that compared to then, we're doing so much better that it was worth destroying our planet? And just for information: in the 1960s, there were also around 6,000 pairs of lapwings in the fields, today it is probably extinct.

Sure, not everything was good in 1970, and developments, especially in the Southern countries, were necessary. But why do I take this example? On the one hand, to show that if the government had made the right decisions in 1970, we would be standing totally differently today. It's almost unimaginable what would have happened if back then the energy transition had begun or our settlements had been reorganized or a regionalization of production had been pursued.

On the other hand, also to draw lessons from it. Why has the situation deteriorated so much since the 1970s? On the one hand, it's certainly because, for example, the right technologies were not developed as needed. But surely also because everything was put on growth and consumption.

And how does it continue now: the pressure of growth has become self-sustaining. The system must know that it does not collapse. Today, growth is no longer there to really remedy deficiencies, but to keep the system running, which doesn't do us any good.

I just feel like reading you the following quote from a sports shoe company: "To tie your shoelaces properly, you first have to find a style that suits you and your shoes. Take the time to do this before you step out in your new kicks so you look cool from head to toe. Every detail counts if you want to be a streetwear champ." and further: "show your personality". Are they just here so the system still keeps turning? Are we forced to find new things to consume to keep consumption going?

Allow me a leap into the future. The year 2049.... Where I ignore geopolitical tensions and wars.

Scenario 1: Millions of climate refugees coming to Europe, massive storms and floods here, and suffocating heat in the summer where many people die. Radically depleted forests that couldn't cope with the climate crisis. People, like now in parts of China, artificially pollinating plants because the natural ones are extinct. Luxembourg even more built up and sealed.

Okay. Scenario 2: Despite massive efforts against the climate catastrophe, there are still many climate refugees, but massive investments have also been made in the Southern countries so that people don't have to leave their homes.

Free trade agreements are social and democratic and no longer based on the exploitation of people and nature. Greened cities are a matter of course, renewable energies ensure our energy supply safely. We

have moved away - even with a few stumbling blocks - from the dogma of growth, and models like the common good, sharing, solidarity, and moderation are a matter of course. Farmers in 2049 don't even understand why their predecessors weren't all organic, because the benefits are immense for them too.

We as the Ecological Movement believe in Scenario 2. We are committed to it. Because when we set the course here, it's not - as Mr. Juncker would say - because we have a nostalgic relationship with laws or the like. But because we stand for positive visions of the future and for acting consistently now. **There are those who say you can hardly leave a better world for children today, you should be happy if it doesn't get worse. No! That's not what we think. We see the future where things get much better!**

However, fundamental decisions and choices are now needed, not bureaucratic administration of files:

This government presents itself as a "doer government". Then it should demonstrate this "doer mentality" now and start the transition. 22 concrete and clear demands from us, which are representative for others:

1. The question of growth must no longer be a taboo subject: We must openly discuss that not an entire societal and economic model can depend on growth, but we need a gradual transformation of the system. We need an analysis and initial instruments to be created so that our social system is no longer dependent on growth rates of 3-4% per year.
2. The GDP of well-being must be taken as the basis for political priorities.
3. Abolition of environmentally harmful subsidies: The state should no longer subsidize climate and biodiversity crises with taxpayers' money.
4. "Divest": no financing of gas, nuclear power, and corporations that violate human rights.
5. Implement a consistent plan to reduce pesticide use - promote organic farming properly.
6. Clear regulations and instruments to make our municipalities greener to preserve the quality of life and counteract the effects of heatwaves.
7. For a sustainable tax reform: higher taxation of environmental consumption and capital.
8. Organic and regional products in all public canteens.
9. Adherence to the Paris Climate Goals and investments in the Loss and Damage Fund due to our historical responsibility compared to Southern countries.
10. Introduce "green budgeting" as in other countries.
11. Reform agriculture: moving away from the world market, away from premiums based on the size of the area - towards rewarding real social achievements of farmers.
12. Halt biodiversity loss, especially in open landscapes.

13. Increase the CO2 tax and implement support measures for businesses in transition.
14. Clear implementation of the supply chain law.
15. Consistent promotion and implementation of "reuse, repair, share" and cooperation with work initiatives.
16. Pay people less along the path of transition - create a truly socially just ecological transition.
17. Absolute priority for the expansion of tram, public transport, soft mobility - no more roads, and no more Käerjeng and Hesper bypass.
18. Reform the compensation system that brings nothing to nature conservation, and yes to the Nature Conservation Action Plan.
19. We need urban development where it makes sense, sustainable construction with attractive public spaces.
20. Commitment to fair world trade, No to the Mercosur Free Trade Agreement.
21. Yes to a Luxembourg that consistently advocates for an ecological Europe at EU level!
22. NO to nuclear power.

Ultimately, we need not only technical but also societal innovation and transition.

And maybe to conclude: we humans are part of this wonderfully beautiful world. From the breathtaking nature, the beauty of landscapes, mountains, seas... to the inspiration of the animal world... We are not long on this earth, let's enjoy and preserve it for future generations, and not waste our time with excessive consumption and the pursuit of ever more. And let's show politics what the meaning of life in this world is for us, and let's appreciate moderation, solidarity, and friendship, and not greed and competition.

In that sense: I wish us a good congress.