

# STRUGGLING OVER LUXEMBOURGISH IDENTITY



FERNAND FEHLEN

Université du Luxembourg,  
Unité de recherche IPSE (Identités, Politiques, Sociétés, Espaces)

## Abstract:

A recent debate over the changing of the national flag in Luxembourg will be analysed as the symbolic reflection of the economic and social changes the Grand-duchy has known the last twenty years. As Luxembourg's economic success is based on its capacity to advocate open-mindedness towards foreigners as well as on the exploitation of economic niches, xenophilia has been practically made a state doctrine and xenophobic movements cannot declare themselves openly as such and have to express an "us vs. them" sentiment in a highly euphemistic way. Nevertheless, the campaign for the Red Lion flag shows that a non-negligible part of Luxembourgers is receptive to linguistic patriotism and an ethno-cultural definition of national identity. The principal cleavage in Luxembourg's public debate is the opposition between modernists and traditionalists, but it has to be overcome by compromises as a precondition to "selling Luxembourg to the world" as an attractive place for businesses and foreign investments.

Introduction	2
<b>CONSTRUCTING NATIONAL AND LINGUISTIC IDENTITY</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>A SMALL SOCIETY IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THE FLAG DEBATE</b>	<b>6</b>
An unreckoned initiative	6
The history of the flag	7
Pros and cons	8
Surviving in the political field	9
Fostering communitarism	10
The opinion of the Lion enthusiasts	10
Compromise	13
<b>LUXEMBOURG 2007 - EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE</b>	<b>14</b>
Selling Luxembourg to the world	14
An imagined colony	15
Bibliography	17

## ***Introduction***

Luxembourg<sup>1</sup> may seem like the land of plenty from afar, boasting a GNP per capita unequalled anywhere else in the world and a cosmopolitan and multilingual population living in peaceful harmony. A haven of material well-being and full employment that compares favourably with neighboring Germany, still carrying the marks of a gloomy economic climate, France, torn apart and paralysed by the political divide between right and left, and Belgium, prey to the rifts between the Flemish and Walloon communities. But the extraordinary economic growth of the past twenty years brought not only immense wealth to Luxembourg, but also modified its social fabric. Thus, behind a facade of well-being, Luxembourg is in the throes of a modernization and growth crisis and seems to break apart in a core society of the nationals and different communities of newcomers.

The aim of this contribution is to show how the transformation of the society is echoed by a search for a new identity that seeks to define the roles assigned to the different communities living and working in the Grand-Duchy. This is the real challenge in the discussion about national identity or as Bourdieu (1991: 221) stated: “Struggles over ethnic or regional identity (...) are a particular case of the different struggles over classifications, struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and, thereby, *to make and unmake groups.*”

The first chapter dedicated to Luxembourg’s nation building shows how sovereignty was embodied in a strong patriotic and linguistic identity; a second chapter depicts the economic and social changes of the last twenty years. It is against this background that a recent debate over the changing of the national flag will be analysed in the main body of this contribution as a symbolic reflection of these social changes.

## **Constructing national and linguistic identity**

Modern Luxembourg was founded at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when a new romantic relationship emerged between nation-state and national language; a relationship that has been perceived as organic and that connects the linguistic loyalty of the individual with citizenship and national belonging<sup>2</sup>. Just as there are languages that have existed before “their” state came into being, there are also states that have pre-existed “their” language. The Luxembourgish nation-building process is an ideal-typical example for the invention of a national language and Luxembourgish is a typical *Ausbau-Sprache* in the sense of Kloss (1952): A Germanic dialect becomes a language because it has, over time, assumed the functions of a language in the small community. This process is still on-going, for written Luxembourgish in particular still remains excluded from certain domains, the most important one being the teaching of reading and writing at school.

Created as an independent state in 1815, the Grand-duchy of Luxembourg was given a somewhat precarious status: It was bestowed “entirely in property and sovereignty” on

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Sonja Kmec for her help with the English version of this article and for her insightful comments.

<sup>2</sup> This section is developed in Fehlen (2008b). Newton (1996) still has to be considered as the comprehensive introduction to Luxembourgish language history and situation.

William I, king of the United Netherlands, and incorporated into the German Confederation. The fortress city of Luxembourg was occupied by a Prussian garrison. Proof that the creation of Luxembourg as a modern state preceded any national sentiment may be found in the popular enthusiasm for the Belgian revolution in 1830. Luxembourg only survived as a state because it suited the geopolitical interests of the great powers, although the outcome of the crisis led to the amputation of its French speaking part, which was given to the new kingdom of Belgium. As a result Luxembourg became in 1839 a country, which, from a linguistic point of view, was not much different from the neighboring Rhenish territories. Ordinary people spoke a Germanic dialect, *Moselle Franconian*, the elite used German, but also French, the European language of culture. French had been the administrative language of Luxembourg at the time of the *Département des Forêts* and the local elite remained largely in place after 1815. In order to set themselves apart from the Prussian garrison, which was omnipresent in the capital, the bourgeoisie cultivated French, which became the language of the high administration. The creation of a Luxembourgish nationality, distinct from that of the Netherlands, in 1841 and, above all, limited access to civil service, which has ever since been reserved for nationals, have contributed to the development of a Luxembourgish national sentiment and of the Luxembourgish language.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, intellectual patriots invented a Luxembourgish national history, beginning with 963<sup>3</sup> and drawing a line of continuity from the medieval powerful House of Luxembourg to the modern state. The centuries during which the current national territory was part of Burgundy, the Spanish or Austrian Netherlands and later France were described as a parenthesis of “foreign rule”. (Margue 2007) Luxembourg gained in 1867, after the withdrawing of the Prussian garrison, its “perpetual independence and neutrality”, as stated in the Treaty of London. In 1890 the Grand-duchy passed from the kings of the Netherlands to the House of Nassau-Weilburg and had so “its own”, but still “German” dynasty.

It was only during the 1930s, confronted with annexationist pan-germanism, and during the Nazi occupation that the Luxembourgish language definitely became a rallying cause for patriots and focal point for the resistance. Collective memory still considers as founding act of national solidarity a population census, which the Nazi administration had planned to carry out on 10 October 1941. This census aimed at collecting information about people's mother tongue and ethnic group belonging among other things. The questionnaire insisted on certain "scientific subtleties", for instance that "a dialect such as Luxembourgish" did not count as language. Despite the threats that were being made, an overwhelming majority of participants answered "Luxembourgish" to the three categories "citizenship", "language" and "ethnicity", turning thus the census into a referendum in favour of their language and their independence.

For all those who experienced this period of precariousness and deprivation and even for those born in the post-war area, national belonging and linguistic patriotism – going hand in hand with Anti-Germanism – remain until today the major frame to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences within their life and the social world (Goffman 1974 : 21).

---

<sup>3</sup> The year the name *Lucilinburhuc* was mentioned the first time in a charter, an act of purchase of a rock spur on which count Siegfried build a castle that would develop through the centuries to become the future city of Luxembourg (Péporté 2007).

Kristine Horner's (2004: 300) analysis of a corpus based on letters to the editor comes to the conclusion that "the nation of Luxembourg is frequently 'imagined' in ethnic terms and is linked directly to the Luxembourgish language, especially in 'folk' discourse." In this perspective, a true "Luxembourger" is someone whose native language is Luxembourgish.

In 1984 Luxembourgish became the national language by virtue of a law that had been pushed through by the lower middle classes and schoolteachers against the Francophile – though Luxembourgish speaking – elites of the country. That law also declared French to be the language of jurisdiction and French, German and Luxembourgish to be accepted as languages of the administration<sup>4</sup>. Luxembourg's linguistic market is thus really multilingual and governed by a *legitimate multilingual language competence*<sup>5</sup> requiring a subtle understanding of the three languages officially in use in Luxembourg and, in addition, of English as foreign language. In the last years Luxembourgish has been further upgraded and developed (in the Klossian sense), especially as written language and French is being challenged by English as prestige language. The status of German is rather ambivalent: stigmatized as competitor and antagonist of Luxembourgish, it remains – at least in print media – the mostly used written language.

### **A small society in the age of globalization**

Sociological tradition tends to equate the society or the social space it studies with the nation-state. Only recently, through the impetus given by migration studies, has the importance of "conceptualizing social positions on a world scale" (Weiss, 2005) been recognized, given that what has been called "methodological nationalism" has become increasingly inadequate in a globalizing world.

The creation of Luxembourg's financial place since the 1970s has brought an unexpected economic prosperity making Luxembourg the richest country in the world<sup>6</sup>. As this wealth stems to a large extent from the redistribution of the profits made by the 155 banks presently established in Luxembourg, the Grand-duchy is one of the spearheads and one of the main beneficiaries of globalization. During the last 15 years, the total number of foreigners has increased by 70%, while the number of non-EU nationals has tripled. Today 42% of Luxembourg's resident population are foreigners. Furthermore, about 70% of the active population are foreign nationals, due to the fact that many inhabitants of the neighboring regions of France, Belgium and Germany cross the border daily to work in

---

<sup>4</sup> It is important to notice that the concept of "official language" is avoided and that the administration has some latitude to decide which one is used. Normally official documents and forms will be in French and German.

<sup>5</sup> The conceptual framework of Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* is the nation-state, more specifically the monolingual French context. To transpose his concept of *legitimate language* – the yardstick determining the value of the linguistic capital – in a plurilingual linguistic market Fehlen (2002) uses the concept of *legitimate multilingual language competence*.

<sup>6</sup> At least if we take the GDP per capita as indicator. This seductive image must be put into perspective. First of all, this indicator is partly biased by statistical artifacts based on the small size of the country. Secondly, one has to take into account other elements in order to depict a realistic image of the well-being of its population. For example, in the U.N.'s Human Development Index, Luxembourg ranked at 12 in 2006.

Luxembourg. Public opinion either pities these transborder commuters for their long journeys to work or blames them for their lack of interest in the Luxembourg society.

Next to the Luxembourgers, who form the centrepiece of society – not to say the core society –, other “communities” have established themselves, the largest one being the Portuguese community, which makes up 14% of the overall population. Others, such as the “eurocrats” or the managerial staff of the banking sector, do not constitute “national” communities.

The Luxembourg labour market is split into four different (yet overlapping) segments according to the recruitment space of manpower: Two of them are *non located social spaces*, which draw from an international labour market, but vary in terms of recruitment: The managerial staff of international companies belongs to a spatially autonomous transnational upper class, whereas officials of E.U. institutions come from European countries and have been recruited according to a quota system, based on nationality and native language. These officials, at least those of senior rank, are also members of national elites. Even though the number of these officials is certainly smaller than in other cities, say Brussels, Strasbourg, Geneva or Paris, their weight in the Luxembourg economy, where they represent 4% of the active population (according to the last census of 2001), is more important.

A third segment can be described as regional labour market, in the sense of *locally circumscribed but transnational* market overlapping the national borders. Transborder commuters made up 43% of the wage-earning population in 2006. Half of them come from France, 27% from Belgium and 22% from Germany. This increases the presence of the French language in Luxembourg.

There still is a **national labour** market, the core of which is civil service and some related sectors such as postal service and railways<sup>7</sup>. I do not mean to imply that employment in these sectors is reserved for nationals, but that this segment of the labour market follows the laws of reproduction of the national society. This is not the case for the regional market; a difference that may be explained by looking at the Luxembourg school system.

The national education system encourages social reproduction not merely by transforming culturally inherited capital into diplomas sanctioned by the state and recognized by the labour market, but also by defining as a legitimate culture precisely the one that has been served as yardstick in this selection process. In Luxembourg a very specific multilingual competence is the main selection criteria. But many (foreign) companies do not accept the definition of legitimate culture, as defined by the Luxembourgish school system, and prefer to recruit according to their own criteria, which are often those of their country. Even within the national territory, Luxembourgish (private or public) schools no longer have a monopoly on education. They are in competition with different international schools, i.e. a European School (that has gone beyond its original call, tending to the offspring of European officials) and schools set up by certain national communities. A final feature of the Luxembourg educational landscape is that many children attend schools abroad.

---

<sup>7</sup> More than 40% of active Luxembourgish nationals are occupied in public administration and associated sectors, 22% are civil servants.

The service industry, whether retail or food service, any company in fact that deals with a local *clientele* is confronted with a linguistic dilemma. If Luxembourgers with a strong cultural capital and thus comfortable using foreign languages (especially French) are happy to show their linguistic competence, less educated Luxembourgers will be ill-at-ease if they have to speak French to do their shopping. Not so much because they can't express themselves or communicate with the staff, but because they don't feel up to the norms school has inculcated in them. They will thus prefer shops where they are being served in their own language. On the contrary, foreigners who settle in Luxembourg and experience multilingualism, expect to be understood by administrative and retail staff when they speak French or German, even English. This explains the fast growing – but largely unanswered – demand, on all levels, for employees who not only speak Luxembourgish, but are multilingual.

This situation is the source of a latent linguistic conflict that has not broken out openly, because – at least as long as the economic situation does not deter – the overwhelming majority of Luxembourgers, non-national residents and transborder commuters profit from a win-win situation that allows everyone to develop specific strategies for social ascension. So, the counter-strategy of the established population against the perceived threat to their or their children's employment is to secure work in the national sector of the labour market, where jobs are generally well paid.

Virtually all political parties and all media praise the country's capacity to take in newcomers and advocate open-mindedness towards foreigners. They know that these elements, together with social peace and the exploitation of economic niches are at the base of Luxembourg's economic success story. Accordingly, xenophilia has been practically made a state doctrine and xenophobic movements cannot declare themselves openly as such and have to express an “us vs. them” sentiment in a highly euphemistic way.

The number of Luxembourg nationals who feel left out, because they do not profit from the redistribution of the manna of the financial place, is growing. As they are often poorly educated, they have nothing but their mastery of Luxembourgish to compete with against better trained transborder commuters. They highly value therefore their language and believe that they need to defend it: For instance, by promoting language purism against corruption by borrowings from German grammar as well as vocabulary; by requesting to establish Luxembourgish as national language in the constitution and to make it an official EU-language. This last request was given a significant boost as Malta accessed to the EU and the Maltese language gained the status of an official language.

This is the context of the flag debate that we will analyse as the expression of a soft xenophobia in a country, whose official discourse is openness and hospitality.

### **The flag debate**

#### ***An unreckoned initiative***

The passionate debates surrounding the constitutional treaty of the E.U. were ebbing, after the treaty had eventually been accepted in a referendum by a majority of only 56% – a meager result considering the enthusiasm the European idea is traditionally said to generate. Calm seemed to have returned to the country of consensus until Michel Wolter – a member of parliament representing the Christian Social party, current president of the

parliamentary group of that party and former minister of the Interior – proposed to replace the national tricolored flag (red, white, blue) with a new flag featuring the heraldic Red Lion (Roude Léiw)<sup>8</sup>, a symbol evoking the ancient greatness of a medieval past, on a background of narrow white and blue horizontal stripes. The argument put forward was that the Luxembourgish and Dutch flag were too similar.

The law proposition<sup>9</sup> the MP submitted on 5 October 2006 initiated a debate that held the country spellbound for almost a year. The argument was carried out in the letters to the editor, via the internet<sup>10</sup> and with a carsticker campaign. First appeared stickers with the new Red Lion flag and the statement “I’m in favor” followed by tricolored stickers. This inspired diverse parodical stickers with fantasy flags showing different animals on a white-blue background: i.e. a black ox, a pink panther or a blue belling deer. While the internet petition for the Red Lion quickly claimed to have raised 26.500 signatures, the rival one supporting the tricolor only gathered 1446.<sup>11</sup>

### *The history of the flag*

To calm down the debate the government asked its heraldry commission, the existence of which practically nobody had been aware until that moment, for an advisory opinion (Commission 2007). Even if the Red Lion is linked by the collective memory to the ancient dukedom of Luxembourg and if it is one of the most known *lieux de mémoire* – in the sense of Pierre Nora, those places and spaces of shared memory we all inhabit<sup>12</sup> –, specific knowledge about this period is very poor. The advice of the commission not only brought some precisions to the history of medieval use of the coat of arms<sup>13</sup>, but it drew also the attention to largely ignored origins of the national flag.

Almost all Luxembourgers are persuaded that the tricolor was inherited from the Netherlands with which Luxembourg shared its sovereign for the first 75 years of its existence (as Grand-duchy). But the origin of the national flag goes back to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the cockades which were in vogue at the dawn of modern age amongst the bourgeoisie to show their allegiances. The three colors appeared the first time in 1787 when the citizens of Luxembourg-City wore tricolored cockades to celebrate the

---

<sup>8</sup> The detailed description in the language of heraldists: Barry of ten Argent and Azure overall a lion rampant, open clawed, lampassed and crowned with gold, queue forchy and nowed gules, crowned, armed and langued or.

<sup>9</sup> Published in the Official Journal : J-2005-O-0796 5617/00 : Proposition de loi portant modification de la loi du 23 juin 1972 sur les emblèmes nationaux.

<sup>10</sup> One of the numerous discussions, which are generally conducted in Luxembourgish, can be found on the forum of the DNR radio-station: <<http://www.dnr.lu/acceuilDET/156>> (last consulted on 12 Dec 2007). Also an article in the German Wikipedia is dedicated to the subject: <[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flagge\\_Luxemburgs](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flagge_Luxemburgs)> (last consulted on 12 Dec 2007).

<sup>11</sup> This figures have to be put in relation with the total number of electors, which was 220 717 at the referendum of 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Following Nora a team of historians has edited a book of the Luxembourgish realms of memory (Kmec e.a. 2007) one of which is the Red Lion (Margue 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Count Henry V of Luxembourg, who died in 1281 was the first to use a Red Lion as seal and banner.

revocation of an unpopular law by Emperor Joseph II, ruler of the Habsburgs lands to which Luxembourg belonged. In a decree issued by municipality on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1787 red, white and blue were said to be the colours of the ancient duchy of Luxembourg and all other cockades, especially the black-yellow-red of Brabant, the symbol of the anti Habsburg revolt, were banned. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the national tricolored flag was definitively institutionalized and it was considered to be the abstraction of the medieval coat of arms. So its origins are “genuinely” Luxembourgish and the resemblance with the Dutch flag is accidental. At the same time, the Red Lion was sometimes used as flag and also as symbol in patriotic songs (“Red Lion guard your field”). The battle cry: “Red Lion attack” (*roude Léiw huel se*) stayed popular in all sorts of sports.

While facing the threat of annexation by Nazi Germany, Luxembourg lived at the end of the 1930’s moments of patriotic enthusiasm, expressed, among others, by the demand of a new flag. The argument put forward was that the Red Lion “links our present destiny with our longstanding, glorious millennial history.” (Governmental document from 5<sup>th</sup> January 1939, as cited by Commission 2007: 10). At the same time, Luxembourgish language was used for the first time in official speeches and its knowledge was considered an “absolute precondition” to Luxembourg citizenship. (Scuto 2007: 256). The legislative process to change the flag as well as the rules of procedure to define the linguistic prerequisite of the Luxembourgish citizenship that were underway at the beginning of 1940 were stopped by the Nazi occupation and forgotten after the liberation.

In 1972 the tricolor was declared national flag by law, but the Red Lion was established as the flag of the army and of the civil navigation. In 1982 the precise tones of the red and blue bands were more precisely defined: especially the light blue to make a difference with the Dutch dark blue. Nevertheless the Red Lion banner was still used especially by sport fans and it has grown increasingly popular over the last years.

The Heraldry Commission also argued that “the Red Lion evokes the past grandeur, the national myth and the differentiation from the ‘Other’ “and comes to the conclusion that “to take as flag a symbol of strong national identity can only polarize the Luxembourgish society.”

### ***Pros and cons***

Most of those who signed the petition in favour of the new flag would strongly disagree with this interpretation. Indeed xenophobic and nationalistic arguments were rather marginal in the letters to the editor and other articles published in newspapers. The most frequently stated reasons being the risk of confusion between the Dutch and the Luxembourgish flag, and also the beauty, the originality and the uniqueness of the Red Lion. The principal reason against a change of the flag was that there was no use at all for a change and that other more important social problems had to be debated and solved. The fact that almost identical Red Lion flags were already in use by the Belgian Province of Luxembourg and by some cities, was also mentioned.

In internet blogs and forums the argumentation of the Red Lion supporters was less subdued than in the printed press. The threatening presence of the numerous foreigners was often linked to the supposed regression of the Luxembourgish language. The country's pride and the lack of respect displayed by foreigners with regard to the Luxembourg identity (see below) were also major arguments, as was the loss of sovereignty by the construction of the European Union. This last argument can be illustrated by the allusion to



the Euro in a very short statement published on the forum of a broadcasting station DNR. It is typical for the elusive, almost speechless form of argumentation: “Hello DNR. I am absolutely in favour. The Red Lion is the only thing remaining of our country; we have no more currency, our language is not well off and so on ... Sonja.”<sup>14</sup>

### *Surviving in the political field*

Notwithstanding the culturalist belief in "primordial identities" – that is, identities that exist by themselves and travel down the ages unperturbed – the Red Lion debate shows that identities are not given to us by way of nature. They are the result of a more or less conscious construction. Identity strategies are put into action by identifiable actors. In the present case, the debate was initiated by Michel Wolter, the chairman of the parliamentary group of the Christian Social party, the most influential and hegemonic party in Luxembourg. Wolter had been Minister of the Interior until the elections of 2004, when he lost his portfolio.

The Luxembourgish electoral system, known as *panachage*, is a combination of the proportional representation of lists with the possibility for the voter to pick up individual candidates by giving them preferential votes. Consequently, the voter and not the party decides the composition of the parliament and even of the government, since those with the best results usually become ministers (Dumont e.a. 2008). As Michel Wolter was the fourth in his constituency and the first three were made ministers one has to consider the post of chairman as a consolation gift. He submitted a law proposition to change the flag without any prior consultation with the party establishment. This personal initiative has annoyed the party leaders and Jean-Claude Juncker, its current prime minister; for it does not correspond to the modernist image the Christian Social party wants to give of itself.

The starting point of “the flag war” was thus the initiative of a politician lacking momentum who went against his party's interests by putting a non politically correct topic on the agenda. No matter the outcome of his initiative, Wolter will have gained in popularity – for the number of signees of the pro-Red Lion petition corresponds to 12% of the electorate.

Sympathy with his initiative seems even larger. In a survey sponsored by Michel Wolter himself, a majority of 55 % favoured the new flag, while only 19% were against it. 21% had no preference and 5% ignored that there was a debate. 50% of Luxembourgish nationals supported the Red Lion. The enthusiasm for the Red Lion was particularly high with young people (76% of the 15 to 25 years old) and the less educated (71% of those with basic education). The support declined with increasing education; only 35% of the university graduates were in favour of a new flag. The denial of any nationalist and xenophobic agenda was the precondition of the popular success of the Red Lion with foreigners (i.e. Portuguese 74%).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> <<http://www.dnr.lu/acceuildet/156>> (last consulted on 12 Dec 2007).

<sup>15</sup> N=1000. Cumulation of two opinion polls conducted by TNS-ILRES (www.tns-ilres.com)

### *Fostering communitarism*

The hypothesis that the enthusiasm for the heraldic beast may also be understood as the expression of social unease translated into insecurity of identity has been corroborated by another opinion poll published in *Le Jeudi*,<sup>16</sup> a French written weekly newspaper, owned by a socialist trade union and with close links to the Socialist party. Published in the context of the national holiday, an opinion poll addressed only Luxembourg nationals, but had pretensions to scrutinizing the cohabitation of the different communities. It has been largely criticized for its tendentious questions. For instance, asked about the respect that foreigners pay to Luxembourg's national identity, 60% of the surveyed Luxembourgers replied that their national identity was not being respected by foreigners living in the country and 72% even stated that it was not being respected by transborder commuters ... Nobody seemed to worry about what this "non-respect" concretely entailed and what "national identity" was supposed to mean.

As a paper aimed at the French speaking community *Le Jeudi* does not arouse suspicion of xenophobia, but has nevertheless an intrinsic interest in fostering communitarism, in the French acceptance of this word, which means emphasizing the interest of distinct communities over those of society as a whole. In an infelicitous programmatic article, published at the launch of the weekly paper, the editor in chief had defined the target audience as educated French speakers, explicitly excluding thus Portuguese workers. This lapsus reminds us that most language conflicts are hiding social conflicts.

The same editor published in the *tageblatt* – a daily newspaper and the flag ship of the same news group, mostly written in German and aimed at the general Luxembourgish speaking public – a leading article about flags as an expression of national pride.

During the last football World Cup in July 2006, when Portugal made it into the semi-finals, many inhabitants of Portuguese origins showed their support by displaying their national flag. Some Luxembourgish people took offence at that and saw in this flight of football enthusiasm a rejection of the host country and a refusal to integrate. This argument was picked up in an editorial published in the *tageblatt*. The ensuing controversy was carried out by this newspaper and its rival, the *Wort*, close to the Christian Social party. The quarrel was not only ideological but also commercial in nature, for both publishing houses issue a weekly paper in Portuguese and did not want to lose their readership to the rival paper. Perhaps this quarrel can also be seen as prefiguration of the Red Lion debate.

### *The opinion of the Lion enthusiasts*

The *Jeudi* survey also included a question about the Red Lion<sup>17</sup>. It reads: "Do you agree with the following statement: The introduction of the Red Lion as a national flag will reinforce national identity?" At least this question is very clear about the meaning of changing the flag, it is about reinforcing "national identity". We can suppose that the overwhelming majority of those 56% of the interviewed Luxembourgers giving an

---

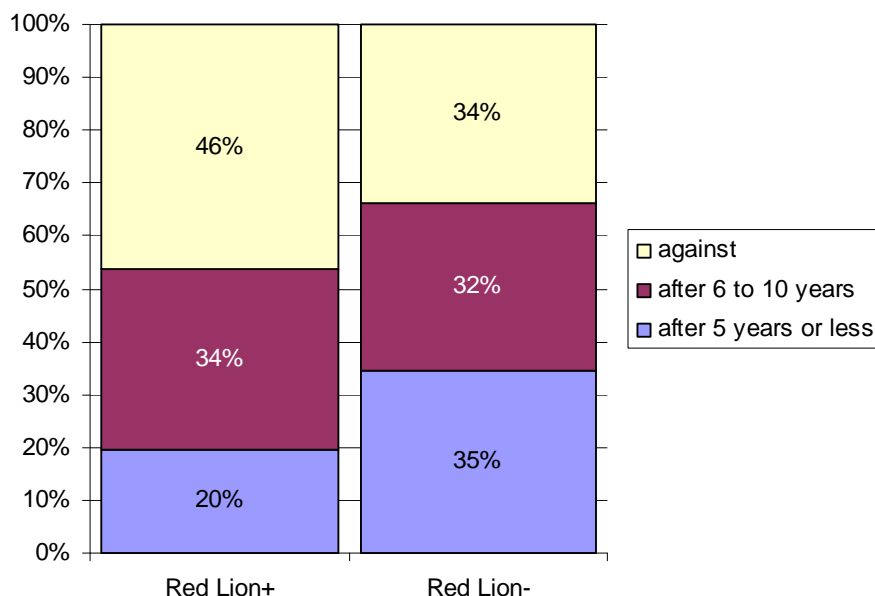
<sup>16</sup> 21 June 2007

<sup>17</sup> All quoted results are statistically significant. For details see Fehlen (2008a).

affirmative answer to this question are supporters of changing the flag<sup>18</sup>. We shall refer to them as the *Lion enthusiasts*, whereas the other shall be named *Lion sceptics* (abbreviated as Lion+ and Lion-). These two groups have different opinions on many issues. *Lion enthusiasts* are more numerous than other interviewees to believe that "foreigners don't respect their identity" (66% versus 56%), that "Luxembourgish identity is about to be lost" (73% versus 55%), that "one has to know Luxembourgish to feel as a Luxembourger" (91% versus 84%).

To incite foreigners, especially of E.U. origins, to become Luxembourg citizens, the government wants to introduce double citizenship. Among the *Lion enthusiasts*, the number of those who oppose such a measure is higher than average and those who favour it, wish at least to extend the duration of residence in the country (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Are you in favor of a double citizenship?



To the question "What does it mean to be a Luxembourger" 27% of the overall sample replied: "To speak Luxembourgish". As second and third answers were possible, the following results are based on an addition of all three answers: 71% make the connection between citizenship and national language. The second most common answer (50%) is "To appreciate the living conditions in Luxembourg", followed by "to be born in Luxembourg" (44%), "to have Luxembourgish parents"<sup>19</sup> (30%), "to have lived in Luxembourg for

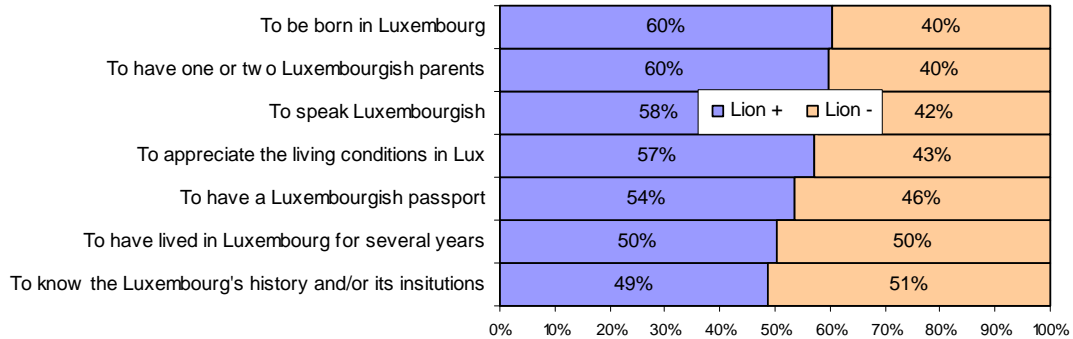
<sup>18</sup> Some rare respondents may be against the flag change precisely because they think that the new flag would increase reinforce a sentiment of national identity and because they wish to avoid this.

<sup>19</sup> 10% answer "To have **one** Luxembourgish parent". We have grouped these two answers in figure 2.

several years" (26%), "to have a Luxembourgish passport" (23%) and "to know Luxembourg's history"<sup>20</sup> (19%) etc..

Figure 2 shows that *Lions enthusiasts* favour an ethno culturalist definition of identity (insisting on the country of birth<sup>21</sup>, filiation, language), whereas *Lion sceptics* tend to have a more pragmatic approach.

Figure 2: The three most important characteristics of being a Luxembourgish



According to the last Eurobarometer<sup>22</sup> dealing with the question of the national pride, 90% of Luxembourgishers said to be proud of their country, a slightly higher percentage than the EU25 average of 87%. The *Jeudi* survey offers a similar result, but once again there is a very strong link between that question and people's position concerning the flag. Figure 3 shows that 94% of *Lion enthusiasts* but only 82% of *Lion sceptics* are proud to be Luxembourgish.

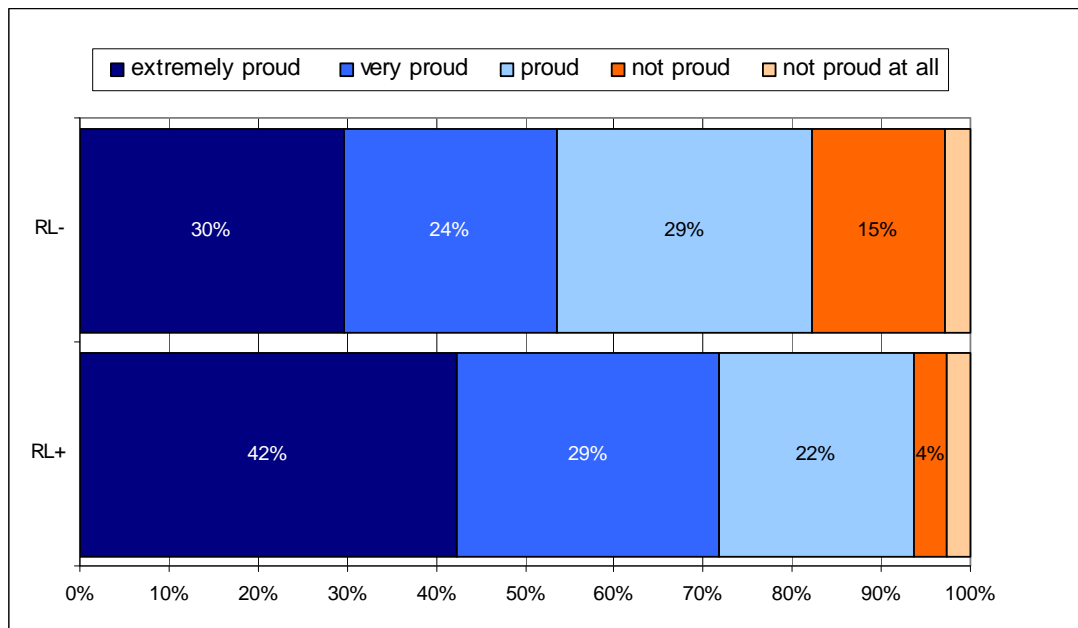
<sup>20</sup> 7% answer "To know Luxembourg's institutions". We have grouped these two answers in figure 2.

<sup>21</sup> The context shows that this is not an opinion in favor of a birthright citizenship (*ius soli*), but a euphemized rejection of immigrants (of the first generation).

<sup>22</sup> EUROBAROMETER 64 :

<[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb64/eb64\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb64/eb64_en.pdf)> (last consulted on 12 Dec 2007), p.27.

Figure 3: Are you proud to be a Luxembourger?



### *Compromise*

The controversy over Wolters' legislative proposal did not turn into a governmental coalition crisis opposing the Christian Democrats and the Socialist Labour party, since both parties comprise political forces promoting openness and modernity and others, less numerous, trying to fend off societal changes in the name of an immutable identity. A compromise had to be found, rendering thus homage to the golden calf of the Luxembourgish society, the culture of the consensus. On 6 July 2007, the government presented its answer: The national flag would be maintained, but the Red Lion could be used interchangeably at cultural and sport events, but only within the national territory. As the Premier declared at the press conference:

*“The red-white-blue flag remains and must remain because we are what we are. The Red Lion is added because our people have always accepted the two flags as their flag, also in their hearts. The two flags are not fighting each other. They belong together”.*

The old flag is linked by Juncker to the traditional rallying cry of Luxembourgish patriotism “we want to remain what we are” stemming from the first national anthem written in 1859. By personalizing the two flags he acknowledges the emotional and romantic conception of history. The compromise has the advantage of avoiding the disastrous impression a flag change would have had on the international community, while the nationalist symbol is allowed for domestic use. Michel Wolter, the initiator of the debate, reacted with satisfaction, accepting the compromise and the refusal of his initial proposition, saying that he would await the reaction of the citizens before deciding his course of action.

The compromise was overwhelmingly approved by the press and, if it weren't for the remaining carstickers, the urge to change the flag would be forgotten. The legislative

proposal of the government has been submitted to the parliament on 10 August 2007 and the legislative process is on the way ... a long way which should last at least one year.

## **Luxembourg 2007 - European Capital of Culture**

### *Selling Luxembourg to the world*

By pure coincidence, in the fall of 2006, when the flag debate took off, blueprints for a future agency for the development and promotion of Luxembourg's financial centre were announced. A crowned Lion adorns its logo and the Lion appears also in the title of an (English) article in *Paperjam* – a local manager magazine aimed at the international business community in Luxembourg – which is supposed to present the concept of the new agency. Under the headline “National Branding: Making the *Roude Léiw* Roar” (Carey 2007) Luxembourg’s Minister for Economy stigmatizes in an interview “a certain ‘*We want to remain what we are*’ attitude” persisting in the country. “Sometimes we can feel a breeze of change, but without a real political will to motivate people to embrace new thinking, Luxembourg's image will continue to be murky or non-existent to the rest of the world.” To put Luxembourg on the map “you cannot start by explaining that there are nice castles here.” The concept underlying national branding, as well as the actors involved in this process seem to be poles apart from the preoccupations discussed in the previous section.

National branding programs are primarily aimed at the international community to improve the nation’s image to attract businesses, foreign direct investments as well as tourists. In this perspective Luxembourg is presented as “A World of Advantages”.<sup>23</sup> As this national branding initiative is primarily directed at two audiences it has clumsily been labeled *Luxembourg for Finance* and *Luxembourg for Business*. Hence the headline of the political opposition's newspaper: *Luxembourg for Luxembourg*. Another initiative of city branding is aimed at the inhabitants of the immediate neighboring regions and the transborder commuters. It seeks to present Luxembourg capital as a cosmopolitan metropolis with high cultural and luxury shopping standards<sup>24</sup>. While governmental technocrats and advertising specialists tinker with a modernist image to sell Luxembourg on a globalized market, we have to address the question Simon Anholt, the pioneer of national branding, asked in a programmatic paper: “How to get the populace behind it and make them ‘live the brand’.” (Anholt 2002: 230)

---

<sup>23</sup> “Luxembourg is internationally renowned for its numerous advantages such as: Political, Economic, and Social stability; Attractive tax framework; Strong legal environment; Easy access and close proximity to local authorities; Sophisticated expertise in local and global finance; Multinational, multilingual, professional workforce; Competitive business costs; Geographical situation; Innovative and flexible legislation; Climate of confidentiality.” <<http://en.luxembourgforfinance.lu/>> (last consulted on 12 Dec 2007).

<sup>24</sup> A new internet site presents “good ideas” for shopping in Luxembourg. Note the cities Luxembourg is compared to, in a rather immodest way, in this randomly chosen example: “Inspired by a kind of urban sense of style also found in cities such as Paris, London, Amsterdam or Berlin, this new boutique offers three different sections: a book section entirely devoted to the world of street art, painting and graffiti. (...) A section dedicated to street wear collections (...) and a gallery featuring vivacious expositions of flowing lines and colours melting into each other.” <[www.goodidea.lu](http://www.goodidea.lu)> (last consulted on 12 Dec 2007).

The principal cleavage in Luxembourg's public debate is the opposition between modernists and traditionalists. While the populist party ADR is clearly rooted among the latter, all major parties are divided amongst themselves. This cleavage and the gentlemen's agreement all mass media adhere to, which consists in playing down xenophobic expressions explain why xenophobia it is not explicitly dealt with in electoral campaigns. The subject is treated euphemistically, as we have seen in the flag debate.

One of the strongholds of traditionalism can be found in the Ministry of Culture and we shall conclude this contribution with another ambiguous compromise between the advocates of an ethno-cultural identity and the technocrats; the later accepting that a topos of the imagined national history, widely forgotten by the young generations, has been introduced as sort of Trojan horse in a national branding campaign.

### *An imagined colony*

As we have seen, Luxembourg-city has become the center of an employment market largely surpassing the borders of the nation state. Thus, Luxembourg could become the capital of a new European region comprising parts of four countries, called the "Greater Region". This regional impact was reinforced in the past ten years by massive investments in the cultural field, such as a concert hall and a museum of contemporary art. In 2007 it was the turn of Luxembourg-city to become the European Capital of Culture. The ad-hoc committee decided to associate the whole "Greater Region" with this initiative. The official website explains that

For the first time the area of the Capital of Culture will be extended across a whole region – in addition to Luxembourg the whole Grand Duchy of Luxembourg as well as the French and the German-speaking Communities of Belgium, Lorraine in France and Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland in Germany. This concept gives the Capital of Culture 2007 a special touch: promoting mobility and the exchange of ideas, crossing borders in all areas, physical, psychological, artistic and emotional.

Driven by an intense desire to move the existing geographic, cultural and imaginary borders, an unprecedented cooperation has taken place to design a multi-disciplinary and undreamed of cultural programme that offers unequalled opportunities. As pioneers of a new cultural exchange these cross-border projects eliminate all doubts about cultural and linguistic barriers.<sup>25</sup>

This discourse and the fact that 130 of a total of 489 projects were regional projects seek to cast Luxembourg as model student of the European integration and forerunner of new regional policy fostering transborder cooperation.

Sibiu in Romania, a city far off from the "Greater Region", was also associated. The objective was not to welcome an accession country and to help its integration in the European Union. This was a tribute to the ethno-cultural fraction of the administration pretending that Hermannstadt, today's Sibiu, had been founded by Luxembourg immigrants in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and that the Saxons, a German speaking diaspora living in the surrounding region of Transylvania, are their descendants (Fehlen 2007). This myth is

---

<sup>25</sup> <<http://www.luxembourg2007.org/GB/pres.php>> (last consulted on 12 Dec 2007).

based on linguistic theories drawn up at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which have been proven wrong a long time ago (Dahmen and Kramer 1992). But science is powerless against the spin the state has put on this supposed kinship of the two communities and the money invested in the festivities and infrastructures in Rumania<sup>26</sup>.

\*

The flag debate as well as the fascination with the invented colony in Romania indicate that a non-negligible part of Luxembourgers is receptive to an ethno-cultural definition of national identity. By imagining a greater spatial dimension<sup>27</sup> and an historic depth to the young micro-state they try to immunize the country against any social and political change in the name of a normative cultural identity, in the sense of the German *Leitkultur* (culture of reference). By doing so the "ethno-culturalists" negate the small dimension of their country which makes Luxembourg's culture necessarily an intermixture of neighboring influences and a major part of Luxembourg nationals the result of past immigrations<sup>28</sup>.

Those who fear being "swamped" by foreigners and being unable to compete with them on the labor market forget that – to safeguard today's wellbeing and the future of the pension system<sup>29</sup> – there is no alternative for the Luxembourg micro-state but to increase the working population by immigration and by the attraction of still more transborder commuters. Thus, the small country is engaged in a spiral of growth, which appears, to the most skeptics, to be a Ponzi scheme. The dependence of Luxembourg's economy from the finance industry renders the Grand-duchy vulnerable, especially because the decision-making power of the State, vis-à-vis the financial actors, is only marginal. So, the question how Luxembourg will cope with a financial world crisis is a real one, but the ethno cultural discourse and the withdrawal into oneself, into one's own identity as the French put it (*repli identitaire*), is certainly not a valid answer.

---

<sup>26</sup> 600 000 Euros alone for the Casa Luxembourg, a cultural embassy set up in Sibiu with a number of rooms reserved for those who would want to study precisely this linguistic kinship.

<sup>27</sup> The alleged medieval precursors of the actual Grand-duchy are bigger and the 19<sup>th</sup> century immigration to North and South America has created communities which are sometimes thought of as putative colonies. *Luxembourg 2007* also helped with its funding to actualize the remembrance of the Luxembourg speaking community of the United States: The very rare offspring of the third or fourth generation of Luxembourg immigration to the US who cultivate their roots in a folklorist way were subsidized and presented in the touching documentary *Luxemburg USA*. Even if not intended by the film-makers, more than one viewer has acclaimed them examples of patriotism for all Luxembourgers ... while immigrants to the Grand-Duchy are supposed to assimilate.

<sup>28</sup> In a survey 45% of Luxembourgers declared (Fehlen 1998: 60) that at least one of their parents or grand-parents was born abroad.

<sup>29</sup> A report issued by the International Labour Organization in Geneva has shown that the precondition to maintaining the pension system would be an annual growth of 4% of the GDP and an annual job creation of 2% which will lead in 2050 to a resident population of 700 000 inhabitants. This number, mentioned for the first time in 2001, means a doubling of the population in 70 years. This study has also shown that in a short period of time Luxembourgish nationals (which today represent 58.4% of the population) would become a minority.



## ***Bibliography***

- Anholt, S. (2002): "*Nation as Brand, Special Issue, Foreword*" In. *Journal of Brand Management*; 9; pp. 229-239.
- Bourdieu, P. (1989): "*Social Space and Symbolic Power*" In. *Sociological Theory*; 7; pp. 14-25.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991): "Language and symbolic power" Polity Press; Cambridge [u.a.].
- Carey, M.: Making the Roude Léiw Roar. In: *Paperjam* (2007) S. 132-142
- Commission héraldique de l'État: Avis. URL [http://www.gouvernement.lu/salle\\_presse/communiqués/2007/04/27avis\\_heraldique/Avis\\_Comherpdf.pdf](http://www.gouvernement.lu/salle_presse/communiqués/2007/04/27avis_heraldique/Avis_Comherpdf.pdf) (last consulted on 12 Dec 2007).
- Dahmen, W. and Kramer, J. (1992): "*Ein fruchtbarer wissenschaftlicher Irrweg*" In. *Tübinger Beiträge zur Linguistik* 363; pp. 84-97.
- Fehlen, F. and Piroth, I. (1998): "*Trajectoires migratoires et mobilité sociale*" In. *Recherche, étude, documentation // SESOPI Centre; Luxembourg*, pp. 56-78.
- Fehlen, F. (2002): "*Luxembourg, a Multilingual Society at the Romance/Germanic Language Border*" In. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*; 23; pp. 80-97.
- Fehlen, F. (2007): "La colonisation de la Transylvanie par les Luxembourgeois – ou l'invention d'un passé commun" In. *Transilvania*; pp. 25-29.
- Fehlen, F. (2008a): "*La face cachée du Lion Rouge. Analyse secondaire d'un sondage sur l'identité nationale*" In. *forum* 273;
- Fehlen, F. (2008b): "*Babylon im Kleinformat: Sprachenvielfalt in Luxemburg*" in Dittmar, Norbert and Mensching, Guido" (eds.) " *Minderheitensprachen in Europa: Last oder Chance*" Frankfurt Main/Zürich/Bern : Peter Lang Verlag,
- Goffman, E. (1974): "Frame analysis" Harper & Row; New York [u.a.].
- Horner, K.: *Negotiating the Language-Identity Link*. Ph.D. Thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, Department of Linguistics, 2004
- Kloss, H. (1952): "Die Entwicklung neuer germanischer Kultursprachen von 1800 bis 1950" Pohl; München.
- Kmec, S. Majerus, B. Margue, M. and Peporté, P. (eds.) (2007): "*Lieux de mémoire au Luxembourg - usages du passé et construction nationale*". éditions Saint-Paul; Luxembourg.
- Margue, M. (2007): "*Le Lion Rouge*" in Kmec S. e.al (eds.) ( 2007) pp. 261-266
- Newton, G. (1996): "Luxembourg and Lëtzebuergesch" Clarendon Press; Oxford.
- Nora, P. and Kritzman, L. D. (1996/1998): "Realms of memory" Columbia University

Press; New York.

Péporté, P. (2007): "*Sigfrid*" in Kmec S. e.al (eds.) ( 2007) pp. 49-54

Scuto, D. (2007): "*Qu'est-ce qu'un Luxembourgeois?*" in Reuter, A. and Ruiz, J.-P. (eds.) "*Retour de Babel, itinéraires, Mémoires et Citoyenneté*", éditions retour de babel; Luxembourg, pp. 254-260

Weiss, A. (2005): "*The Transnationalization of Social Inequality: Conceptualizing Social Positions on a World Scale*" In. *Current Sociology*; 53; pp. 707-728.