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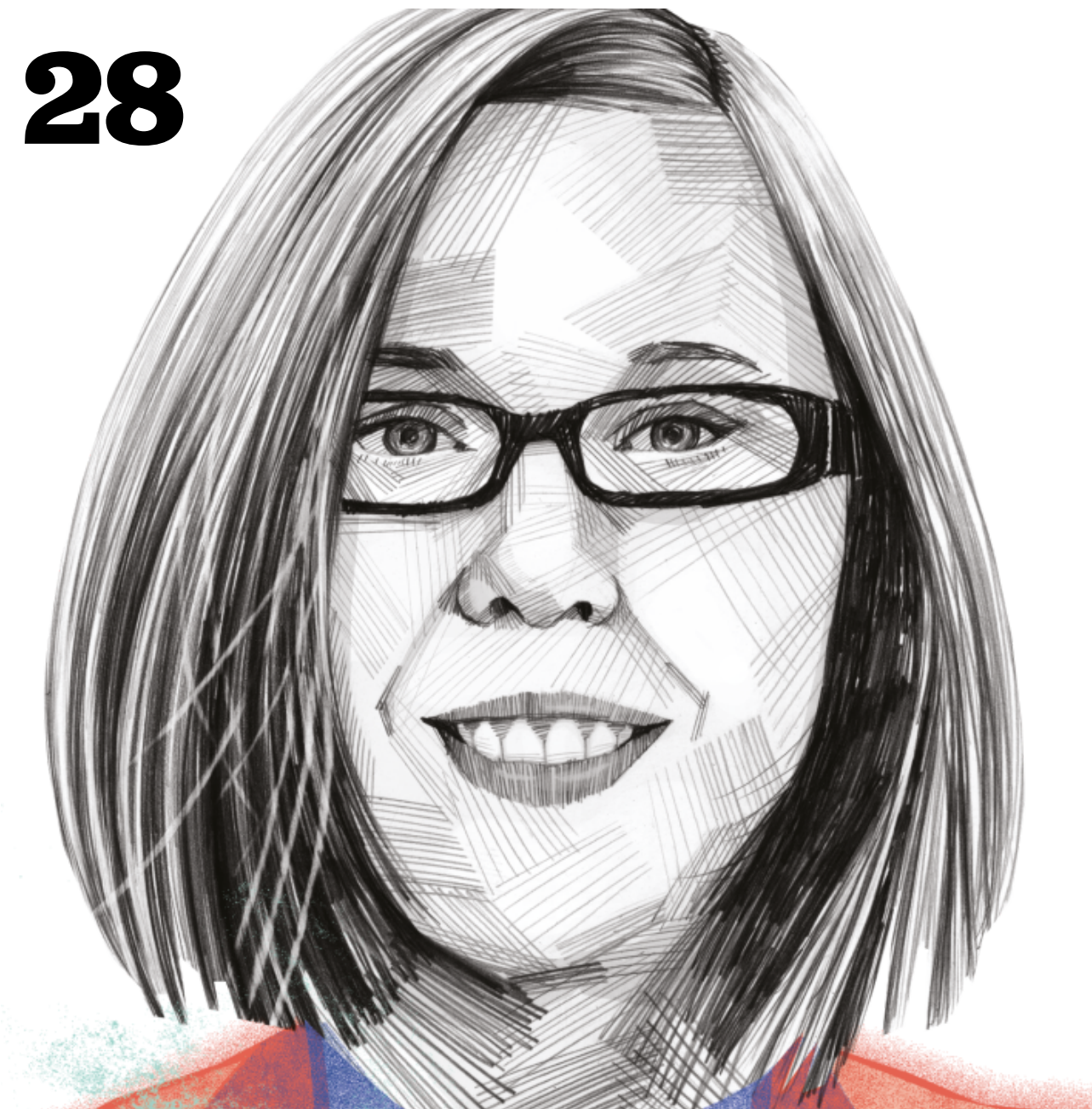
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LIZ WENGER
LUXEMBOURG

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THE INTEGRATION CHAMPION

Luke Waller

I magine a country where almost half the residents are foreigners, laws are debated in one language and published in another, and where this year the prime minister became the first EU leader to have a same-sex marriage. That's the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg — the EU's richest and second-smallest state, with 550,000 people in an area just three times bigger than New York City.

The Duchy offered to take in about 700 refugees under the EU relocation schemes, making it one of the bloc's most generous hosts on a per-capita basis. But what language will the new arrivals learn?

There are three official languages: Luxembourgish is spoken among locals, while all legal texts are in French and many media are in German. Luxembourgers switch seamlessly for "frontaliers," who work in the Duchy but live in France, Germany or Belgium.

"It's not that we're more talented than other people, it's a necessity," says Liz Wenger, the 31-year-old author of the first English-speakers' guide to learning Luxembourgish, published this year.

"You cannot go and buy a pair of shoes without speaking French ... At six we start German in school."

Wenger married a Canadian and now lives in Toronto with her four-year-old son. She uses Skype to teach Luxembourgish to students all over the world, including a Pole who has no intention of visiting Luxembourg, but learns for aesthetic pleasure alone.

Wenger sees herself in a long line of people who've kept the language — which she likens to a "cute," less guttural version of Dutch — from being subsumed by its more popular rivals.

She is lobbying the government to support initiatives like hers to teach refugees Luxembourgish via English, a language she says many of them already speak.

"It's not just about making friends, it's also about really participating in the local cultural life, which takes place mostly in Luxembourgish, especially in the villages," Wenger says. "In my village there are lots of fairs, people make apple juice right there in the square next to the town hall."

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Your advertising slogan for Europe. *Moving forward together, slowly but surely.*

Which historical figure do you most admire? *Edmond de la Fontaine — or “Dicks” as we call him — is the national poet of Luxembourg and wrote the first play in the Luxembourgish language, performed around the middle of the 19th century. Luxembourgish was still considered a dialect referred to as “Lëtzebuenger-Däitsch” [Luxembourgish-German] and wasn’t a written language at all, especially not in public texts. Dicks’ work really did a lot for the creation of the Luxembourgish national identity.*

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