

Pierre Werner, Luxembourg and European meanderings

Caption: In his memoirs, Pierre Werner, former Prime Minister of Luxembourg, recalls the course of the negotiations which, in January 1966, led to the Luxembourg institutional compromise that enabled the empty chair crisis to be brought to an end.

Source: WERNER, Pierre. Itinéraires luxembourgeois et européens, Évolutions et souvenirs (1945-1985). Volume II. Luxembourg: Editions Saint-Paul, 1991. 351 p. ISBN 2-87963-124-6. p. 73, 75-78.

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Pierre Werner, *Luxembourg and European meanderings*

[...]

When all was said and done, everyone agreed to patch things up. The main topic of the Conference was no longer a possible collapse of the Treaty or the recession of a partner but rather the concessions that each side was willing to make in order to apply the Treaty without upsetting the legal and ideological sensibilities of all the partners. My task as Conference Chairman was not simple. A fresh start in the right direction required a delicate balancing of the proposed resolutions and, above all, harmonious relations without winners or losers. I felt doubly involved because the name of our capital city would be associated with the results.

[...]

The venue for the extraordinary session of 17 January was the Town Hall's *Council Chamber*, described by one French journalist as *exquisitely provincial*. For the first time since 30 June 1965, the group of the six Member States was intact again. The governments were represented by their Foreign Ministers: Maurice Couve de Murville, Joseph Luns, Gerhard Schroeder, Paul Henri Spaak and Pierre Werner. In Italy, the Fanfani Government had resigned in December. Emilio Colombo, who was about to move from Foreign Affairs to the Treasury in the new Moro Government, remained at his post of Head of the Italian delegation because of the important role that he had played in recent months. Several heads of delegation were accompanied by other Ministers or State Secretaries, at times to make it clear that the events were governed by the Treaty and its procedures. Gerhard Schroeder was flanked by Minister Kurt Schmücker and State Secretary Rolf Lahr, and Paul-Henri Spaak by Minister Henri Fayat.

In introducing the debate, I did my best to set out in plain language the two main issues at hand: majority voting and relations between the Council and the Commission.

Mr Couve de Murville made a curt and precise statement, which we thought sounded rather inflexible and discouraging, although he no longer insisted on a revision of the Treaty. The problem of majority voting required a political arrangement such that the Treaty would not be interpreted in any way that might do serious harm to the interests of any Member State. The day was spent staking out positions on the two topics, and talks were still arduous. The next day, we decided to take up the subject of relations between the Council and the Commission.

[...]

On the eve of the session of 28 and 29 January, hopes of a definitive breakthrough were still minimal, and some thought that a third session would be necessary.

Talks over the two days were indeed painstaking, with many ups and downs. The wish to wrap things up spurred many to take part in the debate.

[...]

The first day focused on Council-Commission relations and was introduced by a document presented by Gerhard Schroeder.

[...]

We had agreed to spend the morning of the following day on a subject that appeared the most likely to muster the support of everyone, i.e. rules governing relations between the Council and the Commission.

[...]

In the afternoon, we took up the conundrum of majority voting. There were seven or eight proposals on the

table; throughout the afternoon, bilateral contacts were held, and many notes were exchanged. While the Five agreed that any decision that ran counter to the vital interests of a Member State should not be taken lightly, they were unwilling to scupper the provisions of the Treaty. Nor could they accept the French proposal of negotiating in such cases until unanimity was achieved.

Mr Spaak was very active and secured the backing of the level-headed Mr Colombo. In the end, realising that it was impossible to reach an absolute agreement on this point, we went along with the idea put forward by Mr Spaak and Mr Luns of making an announcement that there was a difference of opinion between the Five and France. The announcement would be drafted in such a way that it would not stand in the way of a resumption of Community activities. A final agreement was struck at 1.45 a.m.

[...]

Weariness showed on our faces, but the overriding sentiment was relief. A huge load had been lifted from the project to unite Europe. It was like the rebirth of the Community. When leaving the Town Hall, Joseph Luns asserted that there had been no winners or losers, a phrase quickly and sympathetically taken up by the French press. Mr Luns' declaration was all the more credible because he had sided with the hardliners during the critical phase of negotiations and, during a previous visit to London, had implied that the Community could move ahead without France.

Our successful consensus was a source of great satisfaction for my colleagues and myself.

[...]