

'The Luxembourg Compromise' by Georges Levhat (RTL, 30 January 1966)

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Algérie: les accords d'Evian / Euloge Boissonade, Jean-Pierre Farkas.- Oran et Alger: RTL [Prod.], 20 mars 1962. RTL, Paris. - (07:03, Montage, Son original).

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[Reporter] So now it’s all over: France has resumed its seat in the Common Market committees and in a fortnight’s time, on 14 and 15 February, Maurice Couve de Murville will be meeting his five colleagues in Brussels in order to continue the discussion on the Financial Regulation of the common agricultural market. Georges Levhat, you have just returned from Luxembourg. Has it been very difficult to arrive at this evening’s agreement?

[Georges Levhat] Definitely, very difficult! At one point in the evening, overcome by fatigue and exasperation, the participants found themselves on the brink of a breakdown several times. The French and German positions remained fixed, and neither Maurice Couve de Murville nor Gerhard Schröder was prepared to let go. Luckily, whenever another crisis threatened there was always another member of the company — Paul-Henri Spaak, Pierre Werner or even Joseph Luns himself — who, following in the footsteps of St Bernard, managed to find a conciliatory formula. However, by the end of yesterday morning, the debate had in fact regained its truly European character, and this is why I was able to rate the chances of success by one o’clock this afternoon at over 60 %.

[Reporter] This agreement, being so essentially political, is of course extremely complicated to understand. But what we still want to know is: what is the broad outline?

[Georges Levhat] You are aware that France laid down two conditions for its return to Brussels: a reduction in certain powers exercised by the European Commission that France regarded as largely responsible for the 30 June crisis, and a guarantee that, where essential problems were concerned, the majority vote rule, which is applicable from 1 January onwards as specified in the Treaty of Rome, should not be a factor. Just as in any compromise agreement, France was not entirely satisfied with the outcome. Nor were its partners, either. The European Commission will have to be much more careful in future, but it retains all the powers to propose legislation that have helped to settle a lot of problems in the past. As for the majority voting issue, total disagreement remains. On the one hand, the Five have confirmed that if it comes down to it and unanimity is not reached within a reasonable period, decisions will be taken by majority vote; on the other hand, France maintains that discussions should continue until unanimity is reached. So long as everybody shows the same goodwill, such problems will not arise, but there remains nonetheless the threat of another crisis. I asked the Head of the Luxembourg Government, Pierre Werner, who was chairing the debates, for his opinion.

[Pierre Werner] Clearly, certain people held different views on the scope of the agreement towards which we are working, but let me just say that the present agreements will allow us to resume our work, and we shall do so at all levels. We shall continue with the programmes developed last year, and these programmes are both very wide-ranging and numerous. Accordingly, there will be a breakthrough across the board, although some aspects of the agreements may not please this or that person.

[Georges Levhat] Do you believe that it will safeguard the Community from the effects of a new crisis?

[Pierre Werner] One can never judge what the future will bring. In politics, problems must be tackled where and when they appear.

[Reporter] After Pierre Werner’s consistently wise remarks, here are some more reactions to the Luxembourg Agreement. In France, leaders in the agricultural sector, as well as young employers, are clearly satisfied. For Guy Mollet, ‘This agreement’, and I quote, ‘enables us to hope that the European idea will remain alive among France’s partners and that it will be able to flourish once more in France in the post-Gaullist period.’ Lastly, in Italy, all the press has headlined the announcement of the agreement but it has emphasised that the problems are still unsolved and that much care will need to be taken in the forthcoming Brussels discussions.