

Pierre Werner's appointment as chairman of the committee of experts — three different accounts

Source: DANESCU, Elena Rodica. 'Pierre Werner's appointment as chairman of the committee of experts — three different accounts', in A rereading of the Werner Report of 8 October 1970 in the light of the Pierre Werner family archives. Sanem: CVCE, 2012. Available at: www.cvce.eu.

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Last updated: 07/07/2016

Pierre Werner's appointment as chairman of the committee of experts — three different accounts ¹

This was how the idea of bringing together the chairmen of the Monetary Committee, the Committee of Governors of the Central Banks, the Medium-Term Economic Policy Committee, the Conjunctural Policy Committee and the Budgetary Committee came about. They were all prominent figures who were listened to for their expertise, well-known for their wide experience and respected for their commitment to the European ideal. The composition of the group was such that only Luxembourg was not represented: no one from the Grand Duchy chaired any of these committees. It was at this point that Pierre Werner's name was put forward.

The decision-making process concerning the structure of the ad hoc committee and the choice of chairman was not straightforward, given the differing interests at play; it gave rise to complex diplomatic negotiations and confidential discussions

As to why he was chosen to chair the ad hoc group, our researches have turned up three different accounts.

The first version of what happened was given by Pierre Werner himself, in his memoirs, where he says that it was 'Baron Snoy, the Belgian Finance Minister, [who] telephoned on 25 February 1970 to see if I would agree to take on the chairmanship of the group on a proposal from himself and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the French Minister for Economic and Financial Affairs. The advantage they saw in this was that the political authority would thereby be represented in the group and they saw a parallel between this structure and that of the Spaak Committee which had drafted the Treaty of Rome. After thinking it over for a few days and having been given an assurance that the six governments would look favourably on such an appointment, I accepted. Pierre Harmel, the Belgian Foreign Minister, also encouraged me to do so. Emilio Colombo lost no time in siding with the Snoy-Giscard proposal, and Gaston Thorn had welcomed it and supported it. Mr Schiller, the Minister from Germany, was also in favour. Only the Dutch Finance Minister, Mr Witteveen, had had reservations to begin with.'²

The verbatim transcript of the Council session on 6 March 1970 confirms that at this point it was Baron Snoy who put forward Pierre Werner's name for the chairmanship of the group of experts.³ In his speech, the Dutch Prime Minister, Joseph Luns, welcomed the proposal, stressing that '[...] regarding the very interesting and detailed speech which the Belgian Finance Minister, Baron Snoy, has just made [...] I regard his proposal that the Prime Minister of Luxembourg be invited to assume the chairmanship of the ad hoc group as very timely, since, aside from his many other qualities, Mr Werner has had a great deal of quite specific experience in this field; what is more, the importance of the office which he holds will make a definite contribution to the work of the group which Baron Snoy proposes we set up [...].'⁴ On a proposal from Prime Minister Luns, the deadline for the completion of the group's report — May 1970 had been mentioned in the debates but was seen as being too short — was put back to the end of August of the same year.

A second account came from Bernhard Molitor,⁵ who revealed that '[...] it was Mr Raymond Barre who put forward the name of Mr Pierre Werner — who was highly respected both for his political, economic and financial skills and for his commitment to Europe — for the chairmanship of the group [...]. Raymond Barre felt that it should be a minister from a

Member State who made this proposal to the Conference of Finance Ministers in Paris which followed the Commission's adoption of the proposals. He talked about it to the Belgian Finance Minister, Baron Snoy, who thought it was an excellent idea. But Baron Snoy did not put the proposal forward at the first exchange of views and it was the German Minister for Economic Affairs, Karl Schiller, who took on the task.' ⁶ According to this account, it was therefore Raymond Barre who was behind the proposal, most probably supported by Baron Snoy, to whom he was very close — the latter had consulted Pierre Werner on his availability to chair the group of experts — but it was Karl Schiller who actually voiced the idea.

Gaston Thorn supplied a third explanation of events. In a filmed interview he gave in 1998, he said: 'Had Pierre Werner not made a start — and such a good start — I'm not sure, we might have had the euro one day all the same, but certainly not now! [...] When Pierre Werner produced his report, I was the one who put his name forward. I was Foreign Minister and it was at the Foreign Affairs Council where people were saying: "What shall we do?" It was the old argument [...]: some people were saying you had to complete the economic union first and the currency would follow from that; others were saying "you have to set up the currency and then the economy will follow". Of course, what you had to do was both of those things! Which we did in the end, but it took a long time. And then when people were saying: "Which working group shall we get to do this report and who is to chair it?", I was the one who proposed Pierre Werner, and certain people were surprised [...] A Foreign Affairs colleague, ⁷ quite a high-placed one at that, came to see me and said: "Gaston, withdraw this proposal! We've decided to do this report but some people are keener on it than others! The day might very well come when we will want to kill off this idea and it will be hard to do if the Prime Minister (Werner) is the head of the working group." I said: "Don't you see? That's exactly why I want him to be the head of it!" And that's how the Werner report was launched.' ⁸

Gaston Thorn's account seems apposite, because the Foreign Ministers of the Six met from 19 to 21 December 1969 and the agenda included discussions relating to the harmonisation of economic policies and monetary cooperation following on from the conclusions of the Hague Summit. ⁹ As the final communiqué from the summit only set out the Council's objective, which was, working in concert with the Commission, to draw up a plan by stages in 1970 looking ahead to economic and monetary union, it is conceivable that responsibility for the technical discussions on defining the framework and the practical means of achieving it was given to the Foreign Ministers of the Six. It is therefore quite possible that political negotiations concerning the name of the chairman took place there and that Baron Snoy, with an agreement in principle from the specialist ministerial grouping already in place, then officially put forward the name of Pierre Werner.

The reality, though, was more complex, and sometimes quite different from the accounts that witnesses have left us. Documents recently identified in the German diplomatic archives throw a new and unexpected light on both the structure of the ad hoc committee and the choice of its chairman. ¹⁰

We learn, for example, that at the meeting of Ministers for Economic Affairs and Finance on 24 February 1970, the question of the group of experts (consisting of the five chairmen of the specialist committees) being jointly chaired by a Luxembourg representative and a representative of the Commission arose. On that basis, a French-German proposal ¹¹ to put forward the name of the chairman of the Monetary Committee, Bernard Clappier, emerged. On 3 March 1970, the Permanent Representation of Belgium to the Commission distributed, through confidential diplomatic channels, a proposal by Baron Snoy, the Belgian Finance

Minister, whose country held the the Presidency of the EC Council of Ministers in the first half of 1970. It was suggested that in the event that Prime Minister Pierre Werner became the Luxembourg representative, the chairmanship of the committee of experts should then be held by him alone. In his memoirs, Baron Snoy confirms that Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was hoping to offer the chairmanship to Bernard Clappier, Deputy Governor of the Banque de France at the time. He reveals that in these circumstances, he himself recommended that Hubert Ansiaux, Governor of the National Bank of Belgium, become chairman. 'After several private discussions, I proposed that Luxembourg be [represented] too, through its Minister of State, Pierre Werner himself.'¹²

The Belgian diplomatic communication stated that all the delegations had come out in favour of this proposal, except Germany which had not yet given its view. The German Permanent Representative received this news with concern, 'as the Luxembourg chairmanship might serve as a counterweight to the German position, which was in favour of harmonising the members' economic policies'.¹³ A day later, the Belgian Ambassador to Bonn sent a personal letter to the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs officially reiterating Baron Snoy's proposal and attaching a draft decision to be submitted to the Council of Finance Ministers for consideration at its meeting of 6 March 1970.¹⁴ This document contained the final structure of the ad hoc committee (comprising the chairmen of the five specialist committees, a representative of the Luxembourg Government and a representative of the Commission), the timetable and the results expected from the committee's work (the drafting of a report to be submitted to the Council and the Commission in May) and the fact that the Commission would make its own proposals (which would be put before the Council for consideration at its meeting of 8 June 1970). 'Baron Snoy hopes that his colleagues will be able to accept the suggestion that Mr Werner be appointed chairman of the ad hoc committee. [...] Mr Werner, having received favourable opinions from Mr Colombo and Mr Giscard d'Estaing, declared that he was prepared to take on that task.'¹⁵ Germany had to decide its position quickly, and it was not an easy matter. This was firstly because, in taking as its basis the principle of a joint chairmanship of the ad hoc committee and relying on the French-German proposal putting forward Bernard Clappier, it had made no provision for the about-turn executed by France (without informing Germany, what is more), nor had it given any other thought to the matter; and secondly because the prestige Pierre Werner enjoyed as the Prime Minister of a friendly country meant that extreme care had to be taken.

The Belgian proposal was of great interest to the Dutch, who wanted to react, but at the same time avoid a diplomatic blunder at all costs. Finance Minister Witteveen reportedly intended to oppose a single chairmanship, and Pierre Werner's name being put forward, citing as his official argument that Werner was of too high a rank compared to the group as a whole. The fact was that the Netherlands considered that the Luxembourg Prime Minister's views on economic and monetary union differed too widely from its own and that it might have too strong an influence on the work of the group. The counter-proposal from the Netherlands for the chairmanship of the ad hoc group (subject to acceptance by the person concerned) was State Secretary Schöllhorn, Chairman of the Medium-Term Economic Policy Committee. The Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs rejected any such invitation, on the pretext of the joint agreement reached with France to put forward the name of Clappier, but the Germans were not in fact planning to oppose the choice of Pierre Werner under any circumstances.¹⁶ Note, too, that on 5 March 1970 the *chef de cabinet* of Finance Minister Giscard d'Estaing asked the German Embassy in Paris if it was State Secretary Rohwedder who had put forward Werner's name! A few hours later, the French informed the embassy that they would not oppose the

name of the Luxembourg Prime Minister being put forward, and the candidacy of Bernard Clappier was therefore dropped.

In the end Germany's position was to back Pierre Werner's candidacy, which also had the support of the other delegations, including that of France, but to remain open to any other solutions which might emerge at the Council of Ministers' meeting.

Each of these versions of Pierre Werner's appointment as chairman of the committee of experts is true, but the reality seems to have been more complex. In the light of the archive documents and accounts (from memoirs, books and recorded interviews) cited above, we have reached the following conclusion. It was Belgium (Baron Snoy) that made the proposal concerning Pierre Werner, obtained his agreement, drafted and published the diplomatic document and worked to secure the agreement of the three partners. But it was thanks to Germany — which managed to bypass the double-dealing by France and bring the Netherlands on board — that the initiative actually came to fruition.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, the source of all the documents cited in this study is www.cvce.eu.

² Werner, Pierre, *Itinéraires luxembourgeois et européens. Évolutions et Souvenirs: 1945–1985*, 2 volumes, Éditions Saint-Paul, Luxembourg, 1992, Volume 2, p. 116

³ Proceedings of the 105th session of the Council of 6 March 1970, reel No 2385, direction 1 — OJ 8 and 12. Source: the Pierre Werner family archives

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁵ Former Director for National Economies and Short-Term Economic Affairs in the Directorate for Economic and Financial Affairs of the EC Commission (1968–1975) and subsequently Director in the Ministry of Economic Affairs of the German Federal Government (1979–1994)

⁶ Molitor, Bernhard, ‘Les origines du plan Werner’, in *Le rôle des ministères des Finances et de l’Économie dans la construction européenne (1957–1978)*, 2 volumes, Paris. Publication of the proceedings of the preparatory sessions held in Bercy on 14 November 1997 and 29 January 1998. *Comité pour l’histoire économique et financière de la France*, 2002, Volume 2, pp. 109–111

⁷ This may have been the meeting of Foreign Ministers held in Brussels on 27 January 1970. It was, therefore, before the meeting of Finance Ministers held in Paris on 23 and 24 February 1970, at which the name of Pierre Werner as chairman of the group of experts was made public.

⁸ Source: Address by Gaston Thorn (time code 0:20:29–0:23:59) in the film *Les pères de l’Europe: Pierre Werner* (produced by CLT-UFA, length 1:06:24), Luxembourg, 1998, and in the Pierre Werner family archives. Available for consultation at www.cvce.eu.

⁹ ‘European Yearbook 1969’, in *European Yearbook*, Vol. XLVII, 1999, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Kluwer Law International, Dordrecht, 2001

¹⁰ See, in particular, ‘[Wirtschafts-und Währungsunion in der EWG. Einsetzung des 5-Präsidentenausschusses](#)’ [Economic and monetary union in the EEC. Establishment of the committee composed of the five chairmen]. Telegram No 4160 from the Director, Department E, Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs, to State Secretary Rohwedder, with copies for information to State Secretaries Arndt and Schöllhorn, Bonn, 3 March 1970. Copy from the Federal Archives, Koblenz. BArch B 102 (Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs)/93469, and ‘[Wirtschafts-und Währungspolitik in der EWG. Bestellung des Präsidenten des ad-hoc-Ausschusses](#)’ [Economic and monetary union in the EEC. Appointment of the chairman of the ad hoc committee]. Telegram from the Director, Department E, Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs, to State Secretary Rohwedder, with copies for information to State Secretaries Arndt and Schöllhorn, Bonn, 5 March 1970. Copy from the Federal Archives, Koblenz. BArch B 102 (Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs)/93457. (Documents consulted on 10 October 2012.)

¹¹ This was the conclusion reached at the talks between Detlev Rohwedder, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs, and Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, French Finance Minister, in Paris at the end of February 1970. *Ibid.* *Wirtschafts-und Währungspolitik in der EWG. Bestellung des Präsidenten des ad-hoc-Ausschusses*, Bonn, 5 March 1970, Koblenz. BArch B 102 (Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs)/93469

¹² Snoy et d’Oppuers, Jean-Charles, *Rebâtir l’Europe. Mémoires. Entretiens avec Jean-Claude Ricquier*, Éditions Duculot, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1989, p. 174

¹³ *Wirtschafts-und Währungspolitik in der EWG. Einsetzung des 5-Präsidentenausschusses*. Telegram No 4160 from the Director, Department E, Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs, to State Secretary Rohwedder, with copies for information to State Secretaries Arndt and Schöllhorn, Bonn, 3 March 1970. Copy from the Federal Archives, Koblenz. BArch B 102 (Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs)/93469

¹⁴ [Letter from Constant Schuurmans, Ambassador of Belgium, to Prof. Dr. Karl Schiller, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs](#), No. D. 41, Bonn, 4 March 1970. Copy from the Federal Archives, Koblenz. BArch B 102 (Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs)/93457. (Document consulted on 10 October 2012.)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3

¹⁶ This took place in a telephone call on 4 March 1970 to the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs in Bonn from a representative of the Dutch Finance Ministry, informing him of Mr Witteveen’s intentions and sounding out the German reaction. In *Wirtschafts-und Währungspolitik in der EWG. Bestellung des Präsidenten des ad-hoc-Ausschusses*, Bonn, 5 March 1970, Koblenz. BArch B 102 (Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs)/93469, p. 3