

Luxembourg, permanent capital of the Community institutions

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Luxembourg, permanent capital of the Community institutions

From 1952 onwards, Luxembourg was the workplace and the seat of the High Authority of the ECSC. As soon as the European Economic Community (EEC) was established, political and legal wrangling began over where the European institutions should be located. The Member States were unable to reach agreement on a permanent seat, particularly since the concept of a 'European District', proposed by Jean Monnet, won little support.¹ From 1958, the Commissions of the EEC and of the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom) had their seats in Brussels.

Until such time as the Member States reached agreement on a [single permanent seat](#) for the Community institutions, European officials were assigned to Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg, an arrangement which led, in particular, to a considerable increase in overheads. Brussels was chosen as the seat of the Single Commission and of the Council of Ministers. In practical terms, this meant that most European officials were employed there. Luxembourg sought compensation for the loss of the High Authority and the Special Council of Ministers of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), both of which were relocated to Brussels. However, Luxembourg became the seat for the new European Investment Bank (EIB) and was given the assurance that some meetings of the Council of Ministers would be held there, in April, June and September. The Court of Justice, the Statistical Office, the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, the Consultative Committee and financial services of the ECSC and the Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly also remained in Luxembourg. Meanwhile, France refused to renounce its claim that Strasbourg should be the seat of the Parliamentary Assembly. A compromise was reached whereby Parliament's Members met in plenary session in Strasbourg but meetings of parliamentary committees were held in Brussels. Some part-sessions were also held in Luxembourg, which remained the seat of the Secretariat of the European Parliament.

The hesitation and reluctance displayed by the Luxembourg Government² and its preference for a 'split seat' made the continuance of the country as a capital of the Communities precarious. In these circumstances, the priority for the Werner Government which emerged from the June 1964 elections was to defend Luxembourg's position as the seat of the European institutions.³ Determined to play a direct and ongoing role in defending Luxembourg's interests, Prime Minister Pierre Werner also took on the Foreign Affairs portfolio.⁴ He thus played an active part in the difficult negotiations which culminated in the signing of the Merger Treaty establishing a single Council and a single Commission of the European Communities.⁵

On 2 March 1965, he got the EEC Council of Ministers to sign a document stipulating that 'Luxembourg, Brussels and Strasbourg shall remain the [provisional places of work](#) of the Community institutions'. This convention, which laid down that the Community's financial and legal institutions should be grouped in Luxembourg, led to a specialisation of the seats.⁶

Luxembourg was to continue to fight its corner in the 'politics of the seats', as it was an issue which kept coming up. On 7 July 1981 the European Parliament adopted a resolution providing for a review of the functioning of the secretariat and the technical departments, while a growing number of Members of the European Parliament called for a single, final seat for their institution. This resolution seemed to herald their eventual transfer to Brussels, but it ran counter to the 1965 treaty merging the executives, which laid down that the secretariat and its departments should be established in Luxembourg. Subsequently, the Maastricht European

Council (23–24 March 1981) decided that the status quo as regards the places of work of the Communities should be maintained.

- 1 Jean Monnet mentioned the idea of a single seat, ‘which he would have been glad to see in Luxembourg’, and spoke of the creation of a European district on the American model. The Luxembourg Government had reservations and was more in favour of the principle of a split seat. (Rieben, Henri, À Luxembourg, au cœur du chantier européen avec Jean Monnet et Pierre Werner, Fondation Jean Monnet pour l’Europe, Centre de recherches européennes, Lausanne, 1993)
- 2 ‘Luxembourg wanted both to keep the ECSC and not to lose its soul,’ according to Joseph Bech, who feared a second European invasion.
- 3 With a view to making Luxembourg a modern, forward-looking country and a true international platform, a major town-planning scheme to redevelop the Kirchberg plateau was launched in 1961. Specifically, this ‘European quarter’ of Luxembourg City was developed to serve as a major asset for the country in the battle for the location of the Community’s seats.
- 4 As Foreign Minister, Pierre Werner also helped to set up Luxembourg’s own, independent system of diplomacy, thereby continuing the process launched by Joseph Bech at the start of the Second World War, and to form Luxembourg’s diplomatic and intellectual elite. At the Foreign Ministry, Pierre Werner worked together closely with the professor and lawyer Pierre Pescatore, Secretary-General of the Ministry from 1950 to 1967. In 1957 and 1958, Pierre Pescatore, who was also his brother-in-law, led the Luxembourg delegation at the negotiations establishing the Benelux Economic Union.
- 5 After three years of difficult negotiations, the treaty merging the executive bodies of the three Communities was signed in Brussels on 8 April 1965 and came into force on 1 July 1967. From then on, the Commission of the European Communities was a single body for the three Communities (ECSC, EEC and Euratom).
- 6 The European Parliament Secretariat and the Court of Justice remained in Luxembourg. Meetings of the Council of Ministers were held there periodically. The European Investment Bank and various services (the Court of Auditors, the Statistical Office and the Official Publications Office) were to be installed in Luxembourg.