

Biographical details for Pierre Werner

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Biographical details

Pierre Werner was born of Luxembourgish parents in Saint-André, near Lille, France, on 29 December 1913.

After primary school, he went to an industrial and commercial school ¹ (where emphasis was particularly placed on the English language) with a view to taking over the family business from his father. ² In view of his school results, and spurred on by his teachers, who wanted to see him devoting more time to the humanities side of his studies so that he could rise to the demands of any further career, he redid his final year in Latin at the Lycée classique in Luxembourg, where he passed his baccalaureate. He enrolled in the higher preparatory course in law in Luxembourg (1934–1935) before going to Paris to take the courses at the Faculty of Law (1935–1937), at the same time attending courses at the École libre des sciences politiques. In January 1938 Werner took his doctorate of law in Luxembourg.

From early on, Pierre Werner was an active member of student associations in Luxembourg, where he was the president of the Association of Catholic University Students (1935–1937). At the international level, in 1937 he became the vice-president of the ‘Pax Romana’ movement. ³ During his time in Paris, Werner lived at the Biermans-Lapôte Foundation, ⁴ where he took part in the activities of the History Club, ⁵ which several of his countrymen were involved in running. It was here that Pierre Werner joined the European ranks of Catholic thinkers and forged useful [links with large numbers of prominent figures](#), including his teachers Jacques Rueff, ⁶ Charles Rist, Wilfried Baumgartner and Fernand Collin, who greatly influenced his intellectual development and stimulated his interest in the study of monetary questions. In Paris he also met Robert Schuman, ⁷ whom he was to run into again in the early 1950s, when the High Authority of the ECSC was being set up in Luxembourg.

As a young lawyer at the Luxembourg bar, interested in the area of [private finance](#), Pierre Werner was awarded an internship at the Banque Générale de Luxembourg in 1938 and stayed there until 1944. As he was to reveal later in his memoirs, he escaped Nazi persecution ⁸ because of the Deutsche Bank’s financial interests in the Luxembourg bank. ⁹ His work in the secretariat of the BGL prompted him to write a report on the monetary, financial and banking situation in Luxembourg in 1942 ¹⁰ which he managed to send to the Luxembourg Government in exile in London through the Martin network ¹¹ of the French Resistance.

In 1946, Pierre Werner was commissioned to make a study of the reorganisation of the banking system in Luxembourg. ¹² He was then appointed banking commissioner with responsibility for setting up an authority to regulate the organisation of the credit market and international financial collaboration. He represented Luxembourg in international negotiations on several occasions, particularly in Switzerland and within the Benelux. At a very early stage he became familiar with the two new multilateral international financial institutions: ¹³ the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

In 1949, Pierre Werner was appointed government adviser and acting secretary to the Council of Ministers. This post brought him into direct contact with the general affairs of the country ¹⁴ and gave him opportunities to work closely with the President of the Government, Pierre Dupong, ¹⁵ who soon regarded Pierre Werner as the best man to succeed him as Minister for Finance. This duly came about in December 1953 when, following the death of the Minister of State, Pierre Werner, who had just been elected to the Chamber of Deputies, was called upon to join the new cabinet ¹⁶ set up and headed by Joseph Bech. ¹⁷

After the 1959 elections, Pierre Werner became Minister of State and President of the Government, in which capacities he served from 1959 to 1974 and from 1979 to 1984. This post was combined with other ministerial portfolios in what were seen as priority areas: Finance (1959–1964 and 1969–1974), the Treasury (1964–1969 and 1979–1984), Foreign Affairs and Justice (1964–1967), the Civil Service (1967–1969) and Cultural Affairs (1969–1974 and 1979–1984).

In 1974, the Christian Social Party (CSV), which had been in power since 1926, went into [opposition](#). During that parliamentary term (1974–1979), Pierre Werner had a seat in the Chamber of Deputies (as chairman of his party's parliamentary group) and also on the Luxembourg City Council.

In July 1984, when his party emerged as the winner in the general election, Pierre Werner withdrew from political life but remained active in public affairs. His favourite fields of action were the promotion of [Economic and Monetary Union](#) and the euro, and the development of the media and the audiovisual sphere,¹⁸ particularly through the project for the [Société Européenne des Satellites](#). In 1991, he published his memoirs under the title *Itinéraires luxembourgeois et européens. Évolutions et souvenirs: 1945–1985*.

Werner had been aware of the importance of European issues since his university days, and his commitment to [European unification](#) took firm shape in 1949, when he became convinced ‘of the urgent need for the countries of Western Europe to undertake the economic and political construction of a united Europe. His experience of working in the international arena, particularly his awareness of the weakness and the divided state of Europe, made it almost an intellectual obligation.’¹⁹

By becoming more and more closely involved, through his posts in the Luxembourg Government, in the great issues of European integration, Pierre Werner, who was drawn to act as both a Luxembourger and a European, was to leave his imprint on the key events in that process.²⁰

In recognition of his long-standing commitment to the building of a united Europe, Pierre Werner received the Robert Schuman Gold Medal (1971) and the Prince of Asturias Award (1998), ‘for [his contribution] to the process of European monetary integration that has culminated in the creation of the euro’.

Pierre Werner died in Luxembourg on 24 June 2002.

¹ This was the Limpertsberg commercial school in Luxembourg, where lessons were primarily given in English but also in German and French. Pierre Werner also attended intensive Italian lessons.

² His father Henri Werner had an oil products company in Luxembourg that was bought up by Shell in 1932 (Robert Franck, *Biographies luxembourgeoises: Pierre Werner*, Éditions Saint-Paul, Luxembourg, 1988, p. 17).

³ ‘Pax Romana’ is the International Movement of Catholic Intellectuals, set up in Fribourg on 20 July 1921. The Association of Catholic University Students (Association Luxembourgeoise des Universitaires Catholiques — AV) was one of the founder members. In 1934, the registered secretariat of the international movement was set up in Luxembourg, and Pierre Werner, Lambert Schaus and Fr Pierre Elcheroth, on proposals by the AV, became members of the secretariat’s board of directors. In 1936, Pierre Werner was elected vice-president of ‘Pax Romana’.

⁴ The Fondation Biermans-Lapôte in Paris was founded in 1926 thanks to a donation by Jean-Hubert Biermans and his wife Berthe Lapôte, for the expressed purpose of ‘hosting academic, scientific or cultural activities organised, in particular, by Belgian, French and Luxembourgish universities’, thereby becoming the outcome ‘of commendable cooperation between Belgium, Luxembourg and France’. Since its creation, the Foundation, which is also known as the ‘Belgian and Luxembourgish Students’ House in Paris’ and is situated in Paris’s Cité Internationale Universitaire, has housed more than 25 000 students, teachers and researchers from every quarter of the compass.

⁵ This *Cercle historique* was a discussion group for Belgian and Luxembourgish students run by Joseph Guill and Georges Bourg, dedicated to encouraging a more detailed knowledge of national history and developing arguments against the ideology calling for the return of Luxembourg to the Reich.

⁶ Throughout his career Pierre Werner was to keep up his intellectual exchanges with Jacques Rueff, whom he met later and who encouraged him in his steps towards monetary integration. This is the conclusion we have reached from our researches in the Pierre Werner family archives, particularly in the papers filed in the cases marked PW 036, entitled ‘1962–1971. La monnaie de compte. L’unité de compte. Le dollar comme monnaie de réserve’ [1962–1971. The currency of account. The unit of account. The dollar as a reserve currency]; PW 046, entitled ‘L’intégration monétaire de l’Europe 1962–1969’ [The monetary integration of Europe 1962–1969]; PW 047, entitled ‘Groupe Werner: Antécédents, préparatifs et réunions 1968–1970’ [Werner Group: Antecedents, preparations and meetings 1968–1970]; PW 048, entitled ‘Intégration monétaire de l’Europe. Le Plan Werner: 1970’ [Monetary integration of Europe. The Werner Plan: 1970]; and PW 054, entitled ‘1972–1973. Union économique et monétaire. Fonds européen de coopération monétaire’ [1972–1973. Economic and monetary union. European monetary cooperation fund].

⁷ When Pierre Werner was a student, Robert Schuman was a Member of the French National Assembly. Thanks to a combination of circumstances, Robert Schuman, who was born in Luxembourg, showed him round the Palais Bourbon and acted as his guide. His meeting with Robert Schuman is described in the [oral account by Henri Werner](#), son of Pierre Werner, recorded at the CVCE on 1 June 2010.

⁸ His family was not, however, spared by the war. In June 1944, Pierre Werner’s brother was forcibly conscripted for *Arbeitsdienst* (labour service) and died at the labour camp in eastern Prussia on 15 January 1945.

⁹ ‘[...] Thanks to my job at the Banque Générale, in which the Deutsche Bank had taken a major holding, I was able to escape Nazi persecution. Mr Weicker and I refused to join the *Heim ins Reich* movement despite the insistent urgings of a director who had been seconded by the German bank. [...] Meanwhile my apprenticeship as a banker was coming to an end. Following the departure of the Secretary-General, who was a Belgian by nationality, I was posted to the secretariat with the rank of senior banking executive. As such, I was responsible for closely monitoring developments in the legislation introduced by the occupying power and the headlong, unsettling reforms it made to the various areas of financial and economic life.’ It was in these same circumstances that Pierre Werner met Hermann J. Abs, chairman of the board of directors delegated by the Deutsche Bank, whose benevolent attitudes protected those who, like Werner and Weicker, refused to join Nazi organisations from the worst consequences of their stance. Werner, Pierre, *Itinéraires luxembourgeois et européens. Évolutions et souvenirs: 1945–1985*, 2 volumes, Éditions Saint-Paul, Luxembourg, 1992, Volume 1, pp. 15–16.

¹⁰ *Rapport sur la situation monétaire, financière et bancaire luxembourgeoise de 1942* drawn up by Pierre Werner in 1943 and sent to the Government in exile in London through the Martin network. Centre for Documentation and Research into the Resistance, Luxembourg. Subsequently published in *Rappel — Organe de la Ligue luxembourgeoise des prisonniers et déportés politiques, Luxembourg*, Year 49 (1994), No 1.

¹¹ Werner, Pierre, *Itinéraires luxembourgeois et européens. Évolutions et souvenirs: 1945–1985*, 2 volumes, Éditions Saint-Paul, Luxembourg, 1992, Volume 1, p. 16.

¹² He accepted this assignment on the recommendation of Léon Schaus, Secretary-General of the Luxembourg Government during exile in Canada, whom Pierre Werner met some time after the Liberation. (Source: Werner, Pierre, *Itinéraires luxembourgeois et européens. Évolutions et Souvenirs: 1945–1985*, 2 volumes, Éditions Saint-Paul, Luxembourg, 1992, Volume 1, p. 17).

¹³ Particularly the OECD which emerged from the Marshall Plan, the IMF, the BLEU and the Benelux. As Adviser on Financial Affairs, Pierre Werner, at the behest of Pierre Dupong, also took part in the dealings relating to defence: the establishment of WEU, the plan for a European Defence Community, and NATO.

¹⁴ Pierre Werner was to be associated, among other things, with the operations for the reintroduction of the franc, the refloating of banking activities paralysed by forced, irrecoverable investment in Germany, the ‘inventorying of the enemy’s wealth’ (the inventorying of German assets in banks based in Luxembourg), and the re-establishment of the Banque et Caisse d’Épargne de l’État.

¹⁵ Pierre Dupong (1885–1953) was Minister of State and President of the Luxembourg Government in exile, and, after the Liberation, Minister of State, President of the Government and Finance Minister.

¹⁶ Pierre Werner became Finance Minister and Armed Forces Minister, holding the posts from 1953 to 1959.

¹⁷ Joseph Bech (1887–1975) was Foreign Minister and Minister of Education from 1936, including in the Luxembourg Government in exile in London, and held these posts until 1953, when he became Minister of State and President of the Government (1953–1958). From 1958 to 1959 he was once again Foreign Minister and then (1959–1964) President of the Chamber of Deputies.

¹⁸ Pierre Werner became chairman of the Compagnie Luxembourgeoise de Télédiffusion (1985–1987) and of the Société Européenne des Satellites (1989–1996).

¹⁹ Werner, Pierre, *Itinéraires luxembourgeois et européens. Évolutions et souvenirs: 1945–1985*, 2 volumes, Éditions Saint-Paul, Luxembourg, 1992, Volume 1, p. 35.

²⁰ See section 2, ‘Pierre Werner and the European integration process from 1960 to 1969’ and section 3, ‘The Werner Report — drafting and attempts at implementation (1970–1974)’.