



Chambre
des Députés
GRAND-DUCHÉ
DE LUXEMBOURG

THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

FROM THE INVASION
OF LUXEMBOURG
TO THE RETURN
TO PARLIAMENTARY
DEMOCRACY
IN 1945

EXHIBITION FOR THE
OCCASION OF THE 80TH
ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FIRST LEGISLATIVE
ELECTIONS AFTER THE
WAR IN OCTOBER 1945

DEMOCRACY IN THE 1930S



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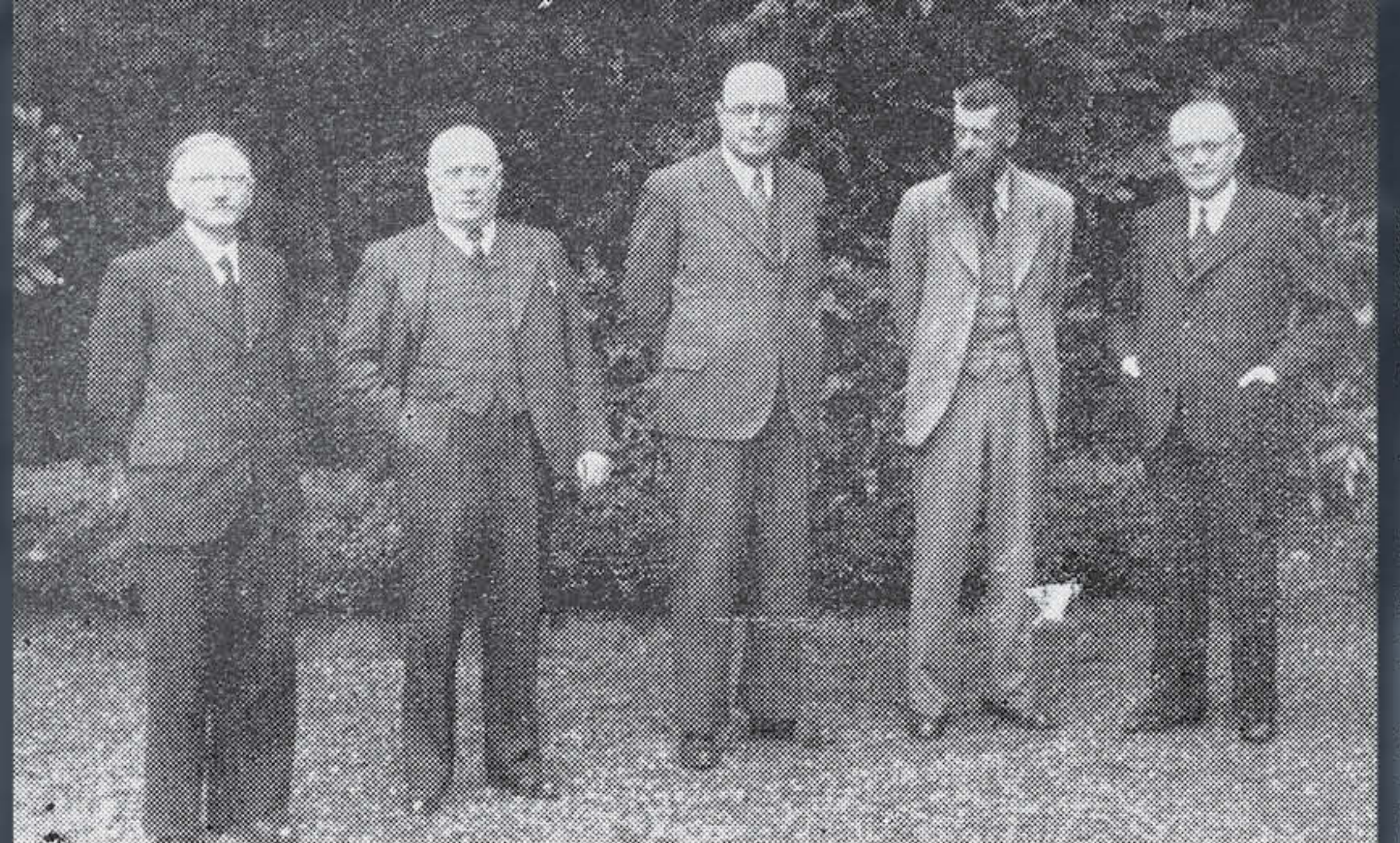
The Chamber of Deputies around 1939

In the interwar period, despite the introduction of universal suffrage in 1919 and social advances, Luxembourg's democracy went through a period of growing tensions. The rise of the Nazis to power in Germany in 1933 stoked fear of German annexationism, while the Grand Duchy withdrew into itself, closing its borders and strengthening immigration control.

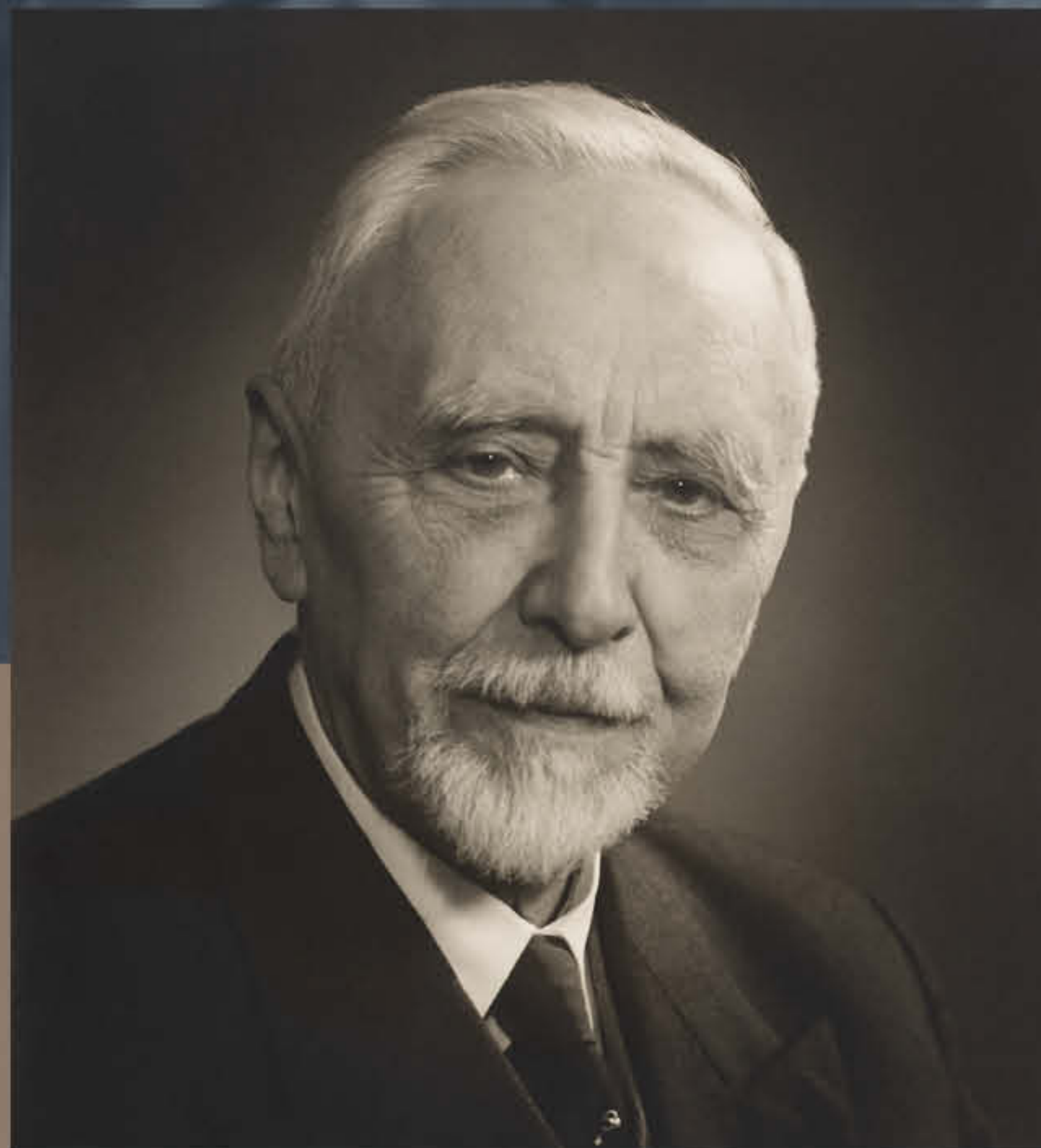
Democracy survived the 1930s, but suffered setbacks. In 1915, the Government obtained extraordinary powers during World War I, but they were not repealed after the end of the conflict. In the 1930s, these powers were renewed and extended to the fiscal, economic and labour domains, even allowing for the postponement of elections in case of war.

The most revealing episode of these tendencies occurred in 1937 with the "muzzle law" proposal, put forward by Prime Minister Joseph Bech. This text banned the communist party, but spared, through diplomatic calculation vis-à-vis Germany, the Nazi party. Although adopted by the Chamber, the bill was ultimately rejected by referendum with 50.7% of votes against it.

THE CHAMBER IN THE FACE OF INVASION



The Government Commission. From left to right: Louis Simmer, Jean Metzdorff, Albert Wehrer, Joseph Carnes and Mathias Putz.



Émile Reuter

“We are certain to reflect the will of all our constituents by proclaiming our firm and unanimous intention to continue to scrupulously fulfil all our international obligations and thus maintain Luxembourg’s right to survive the turmoil as a free and independent country.”

Émile Reuter

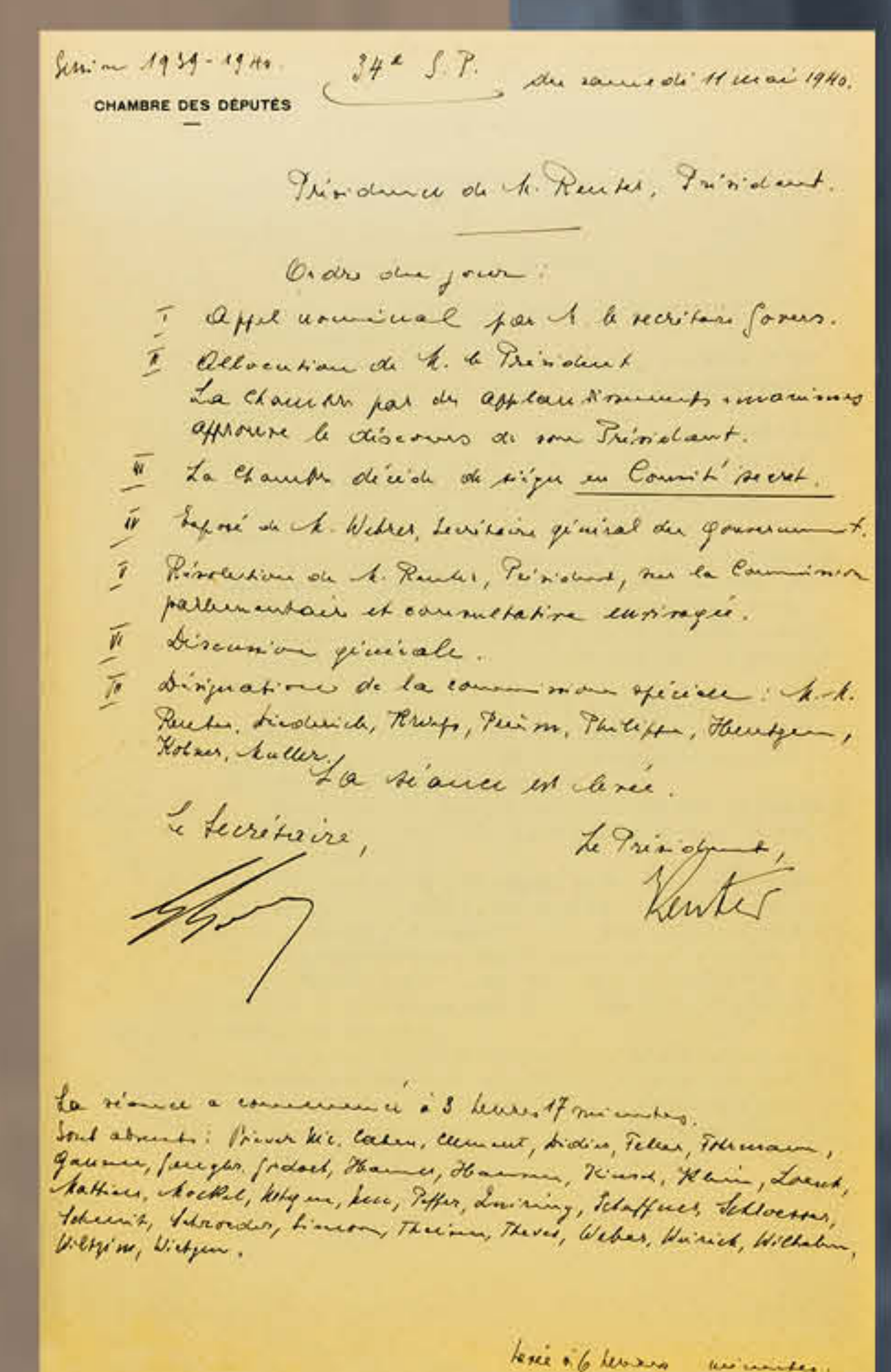


National Archives of Luxembourg, CDR-077, box 7, 308

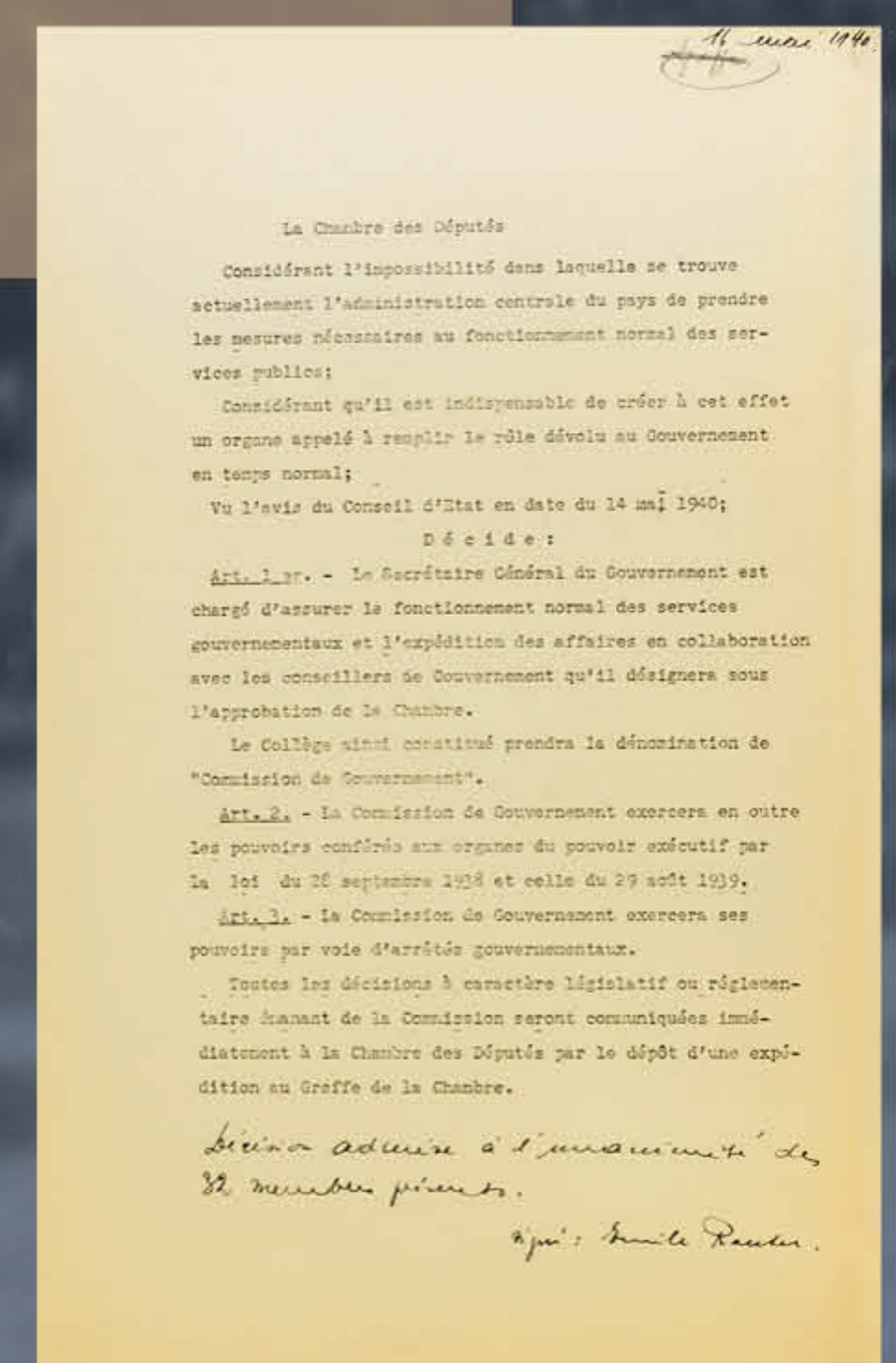
On 10 May 1940, Nazi Germany invaded Luxembourg. The Government and the Grand Duchess chose exile. On 11 May, Émile Reuter, President of the Chamber, reaffirmed the country’s independence before a Parliament where more than half of the deputies were absent.

A few days after the invasion, the Chamber voted to create the Administrative Commission, a de facto government, composed of senior civil servants. By granting it expanded executive powers, the Chamber accepted a loss of its own power.

From 23 May onwards, Chamber sessions were no longer public. A restricted circle of deputies, the Political Commission, managed relations between the Chamber and the Administrative Commission.



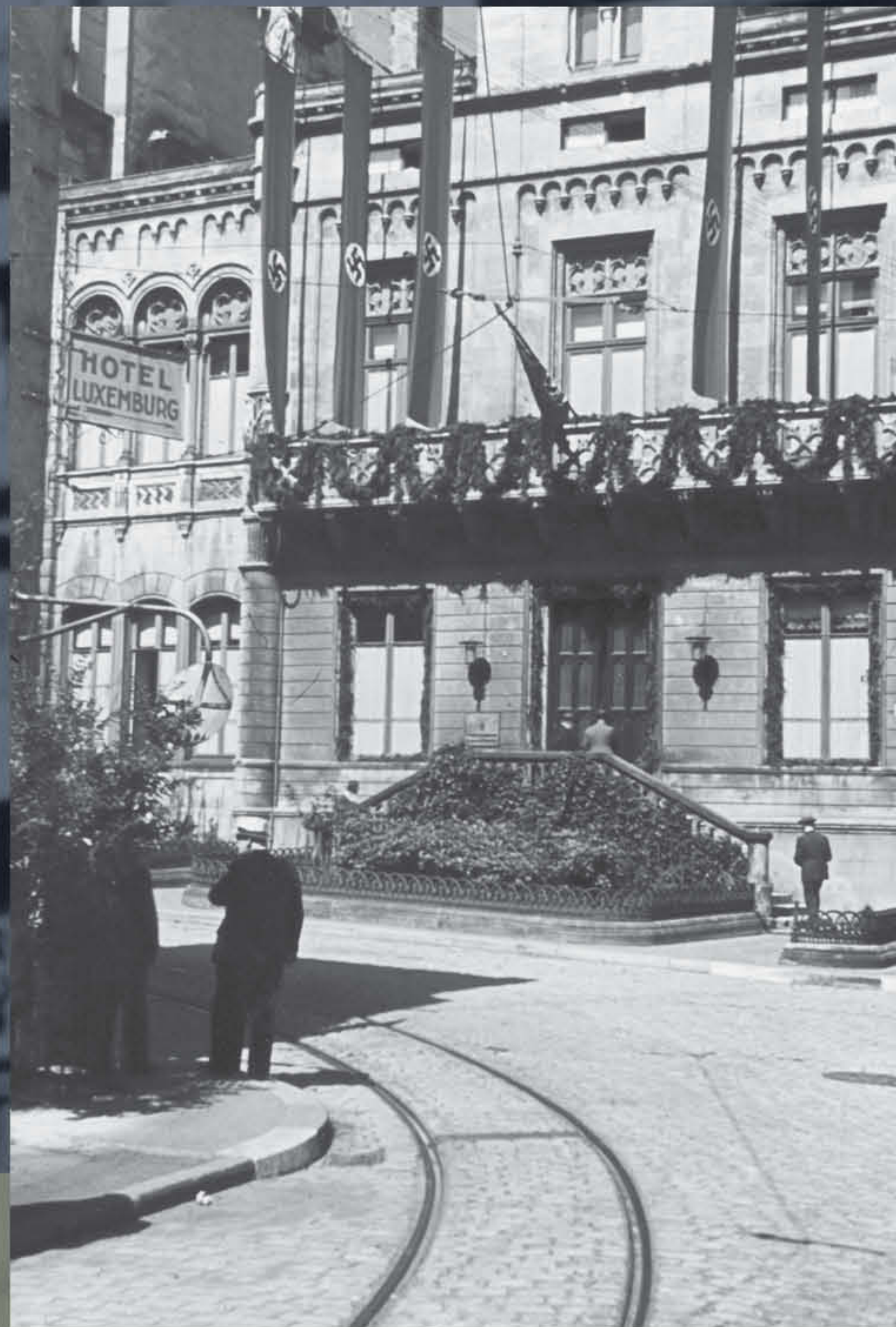
Agenda for the session of 11 May 1940



Decision of the Chamber of Deputies of 16 May concerning the establishment of the Government Commission

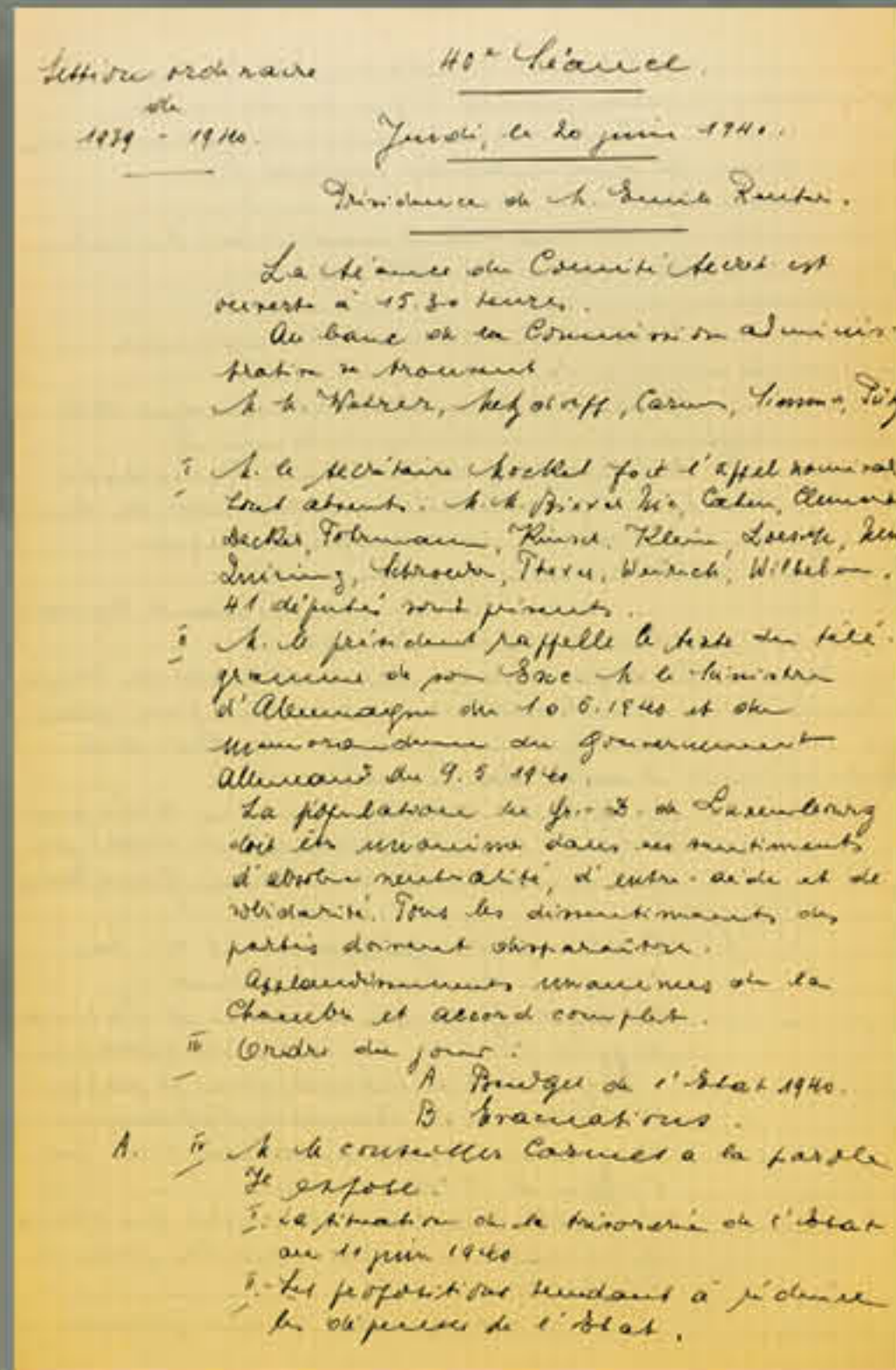
Archives of the Chamber of Deputies, A-CID-204-1939-0-034

TOWARDS THE END OF THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

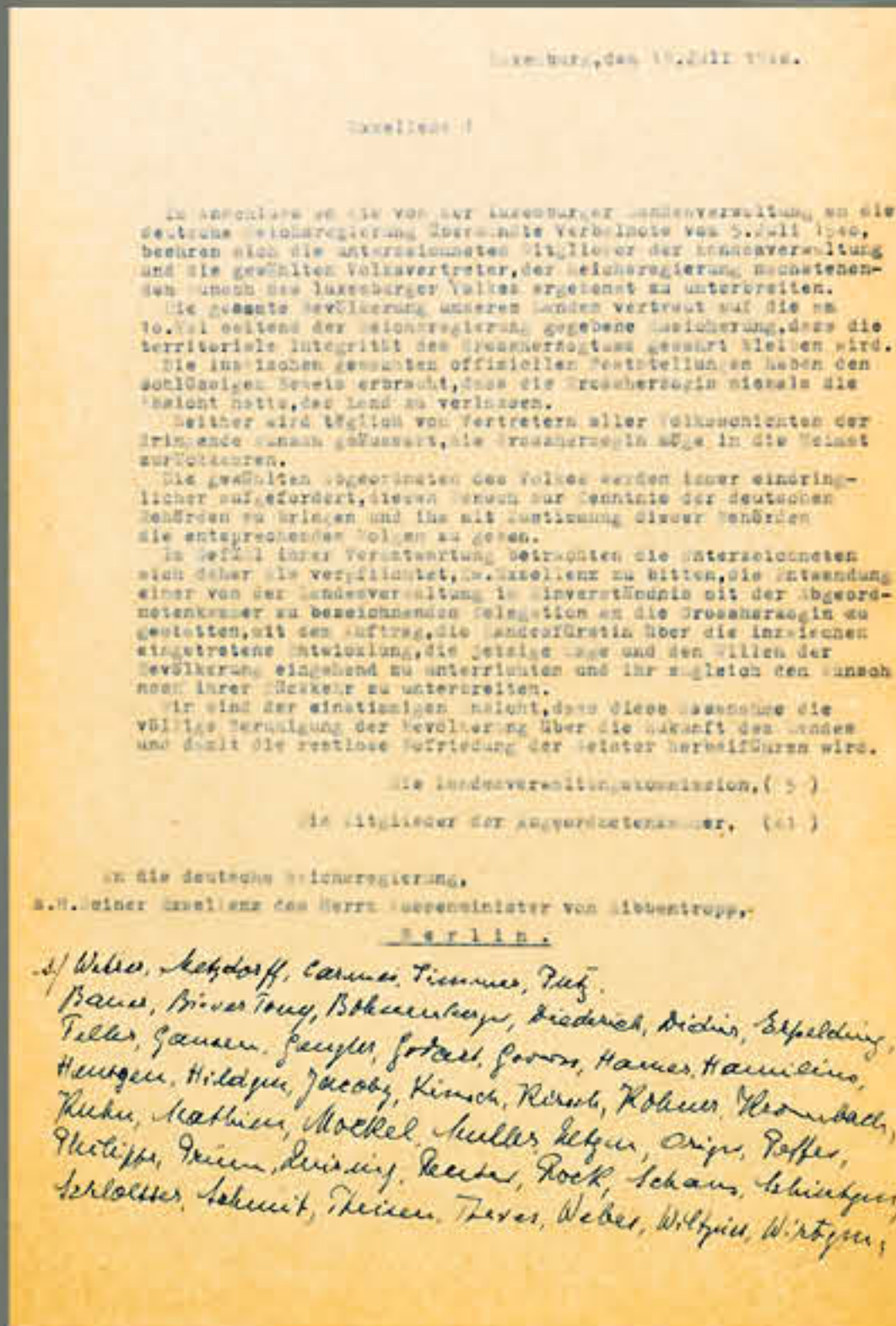


L'Hôtel de la Chambre sous l'occupation, date inconnue

Archives nationales du Luxembourg, CDRR-0177, boîte 7-42



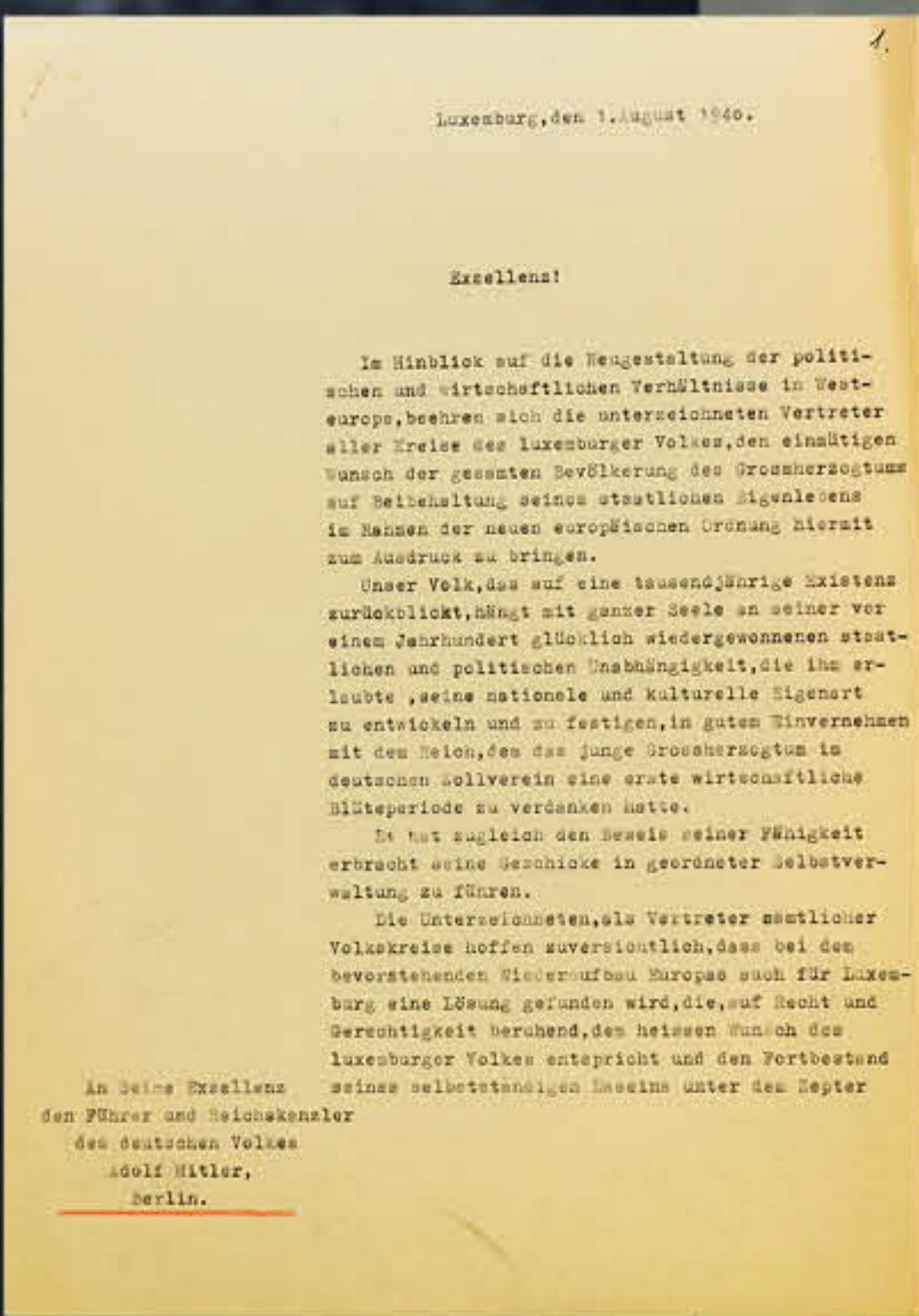
First page of the minutes of the parliamentary session of 20 June 1940



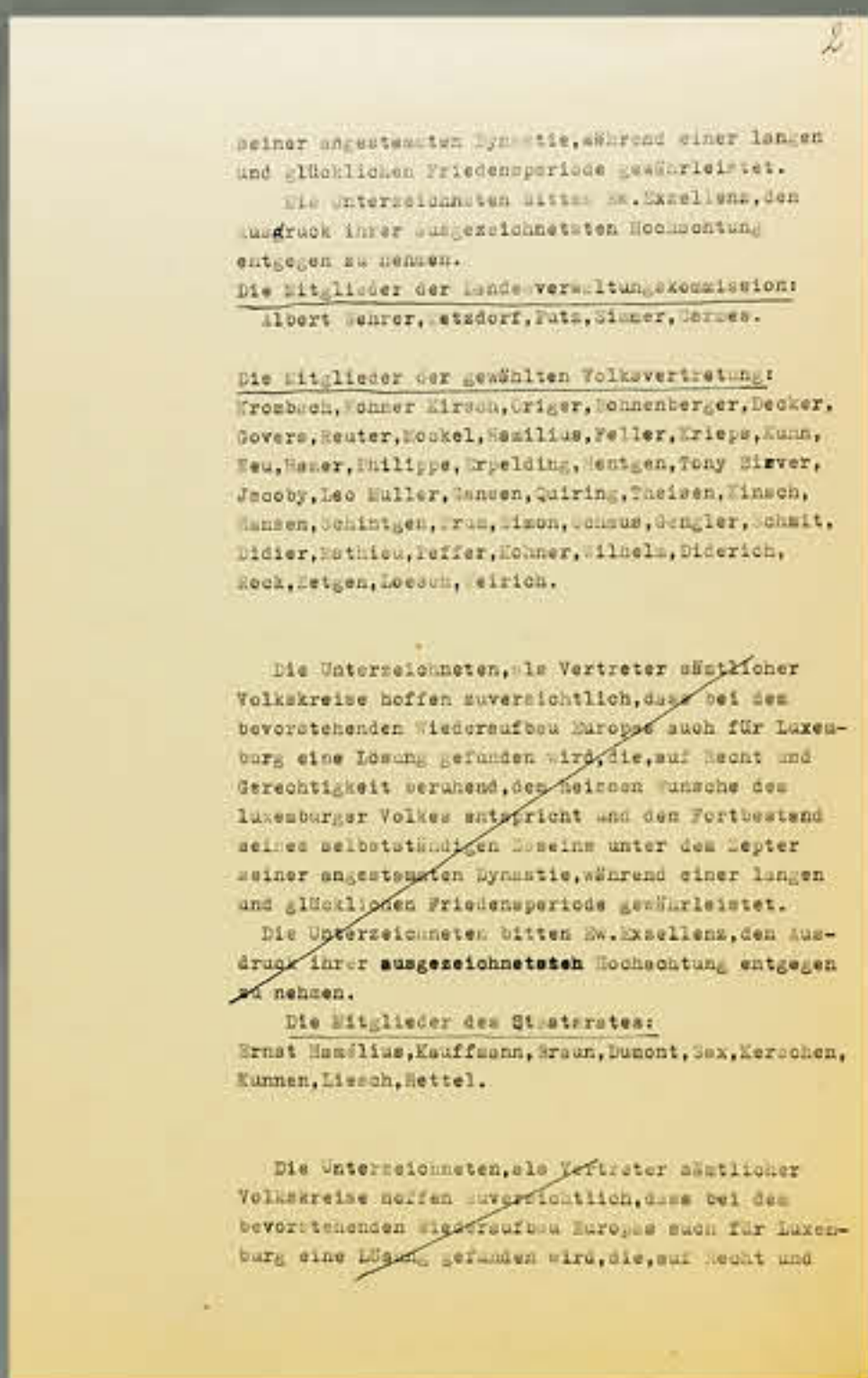
Letter from Members of Parliament to Joachim von Ribbentrop, Foreign Minister under the Third Reich

Archives of the Chamber of Deputies, A-CHD-204-P-939-0-040

Archives of the Chamber of Deputies, A-CHD-204-P-939-0-044



The first two pages of a draft letter to Adolf Hitler, early August 1940



Archives of the Chamber of Deputies, A-CHD-204-P-939-0-046

On 22 June 1940, the Franco-German armistice put an end to hopes of a French victory. In Luxembourg, the deputies questioned what strategy to follow. On 18 July, they requested in a letter to the German Government the return of the Grand Duchess and guarantees concerning territorial integrity. The letter went unanswered. A final attempt was launched by the Luxembourg authorities at the beginning of August. In a manifesto, also signed by a majority of deputies, they requested independence “within the framework of the new European order”. The letter, confiscated by the Gestapo, was never sent.

At this point, the end of the parliamentary system was already sealed. The German civil administration was established in Luxembourg, headed by Gauleiter Gustav Simon. On 24 August 1940, political parties were banned. On 23 October, the Chamber of Deputies and the Council of State were abolished.

Das Zeitalter der Demokratie ist zu Ende!

Luxemburg, 23. August. Der Chef der Zivilverwaltung, Gauleiter Gustav SIMON, hat unter dem heutigen folgenden

AUFRUF

erlassen:

Luxemburgische Jugend!

Das Zeitalter der Demokratie hat sein Ende erreicht. Der Parlamentarismus ist im Begriffe unterzugehen. Damit aber erfüllt sich zugleich das Schicksal der Parteien und Interessengruppen.

LUXEMBURG IST KEINE WELT FÜR SICH.

Auch hier hat für alle Parteien die letzte Stunde geschlagen. Sie sind überflüssig geworden. Sie stellen ein Hemmnis dar für den Fortschritt der Entwicklung. IHRE WEITERE EXISTENZ GEFÄHRDET DAS WOHL LUXEMBURGS.

Sie haben in den vergangenen Jahren die Neutralität umschieden, zu der Luxemburg Deutschland gegenüber verpflichtet war. Sie haben in den Versammlungen und Zeitungen gegen Deutschland und den Nationalsozialismus in unverantwortlicher Weise gehandelt. Sie haben sich in bewusste Abhängigkeit zu England und Frankreich — den Feinden der Menschheit — begaben. Sie haben dadurch die Beziehungen zwischen Deutschland und Luxemburg systematisch vergiftet.

DIE PARTeien SIND DABEI SCHULDIG AN DEM LEID UND DER NOT VIELER FAMILIEN LUXEMBURGS.

Im Interesse der gesamten Bevölkerung Luxemburgs spreche ich daher mit dem heutigen Tage:

ein Verbot für alle Parteien

im Lande Luxemburgs aus. An Stelle des Haders der Parteien wird und muß treten der Gedanke der

Volksgemeinschaft

aller Schichten. Die von mir eingesetzten politischen Kommissare werden in engerer Führungsnähe mit der Bevölkerung dafür sorgen, daß Klassenhaß und Parteilichkeit in Luxemburg niemals wieder auftreten.

Luxemburger aller Stände.

Mit der Auflösung des Parteiensystems ist auch für Eure Heimat ein Zeitalter beendet, unter das, was in ihm politische Vergangenheit wurde, ist ein Stroh geblasen. Diese Vergangenheit soll tot sein und darf nie wieder zu neuem Leben erweckt werden.

Ein neues Zeitalter beginnt. Auf seiner Fahne steht die Parole:

Schaffende aller Stände vereinigt Euch!

Luxemburg, den 23. August 1940.

Der Chef der Zivilverwaltung: Gustav SIMON, Gauleiter.

Verordnung über die Auflösung der politischen Parteien in Luxemburg

Luxemburg, 23. August. Auf Grund der ihm Chef der Zivilverwaltung in Luxemburg erteilten Ermächtigung wird für diesen Bereich verordnet:

§ 1
Alle im Bereich des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in Luxemburg bestehenden luxemburgischen politischen Parteien und deren Nebenorganisationen werden aufgelöst. Das Vermögen der aufgelösten Parteien wird eingezogen.

§ 2
Die Volksdeutsche Bewegung gilt nicht als Partei im Sinne dieser Verordnung.

§ 3
Wer es unternimmt, den organisatorischen Zusammenhalt einer der aufgelösten Parteien aufrecht zu erhalten, Ersatzorganisationen oder eine neue politische Partei zu bilden, wird mit Gefängnis, in schweren Fällen mit Zuchthaus bestraft.

§ 4
Diese Verordnung tritt am Tage nach der Verkündung in Kraft.

Luxemburg, den 23. August 1940.

Der Chef der Zivilverwaltung in Luxemburg: Gustav SIMON, Gauleiter.

Decree on the prohibition of political parties published in the press

Luxemburger Wort, 24 August 1940. Digitized by the National Library of Luxembourg

THE CHAMBER BUILDING UNDER THE OCCUPATION



Chamber building with "Hitler siegt" banner, 1943

© Photothèque de la Ville de Luxembourg, Batty Fischer, No. 1943/2/4407



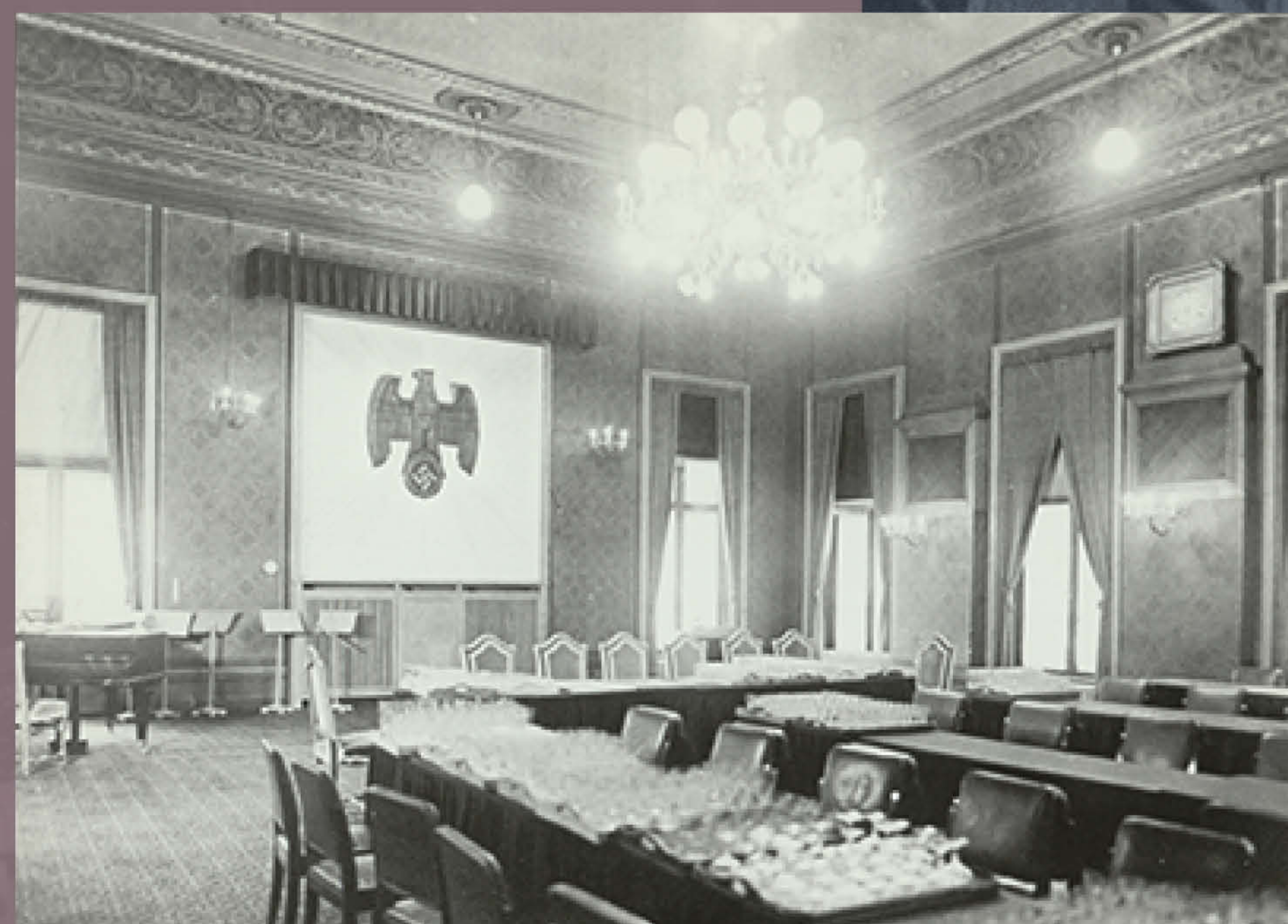
An office room of the Chamber building during the occupation

National Archives of Luxembourg, CD88-076, box 1, 001-203-1



An office room of the Chamber building during the occupation

National Archives of Luxembourg, CD88-076, box 1, 001-203-2

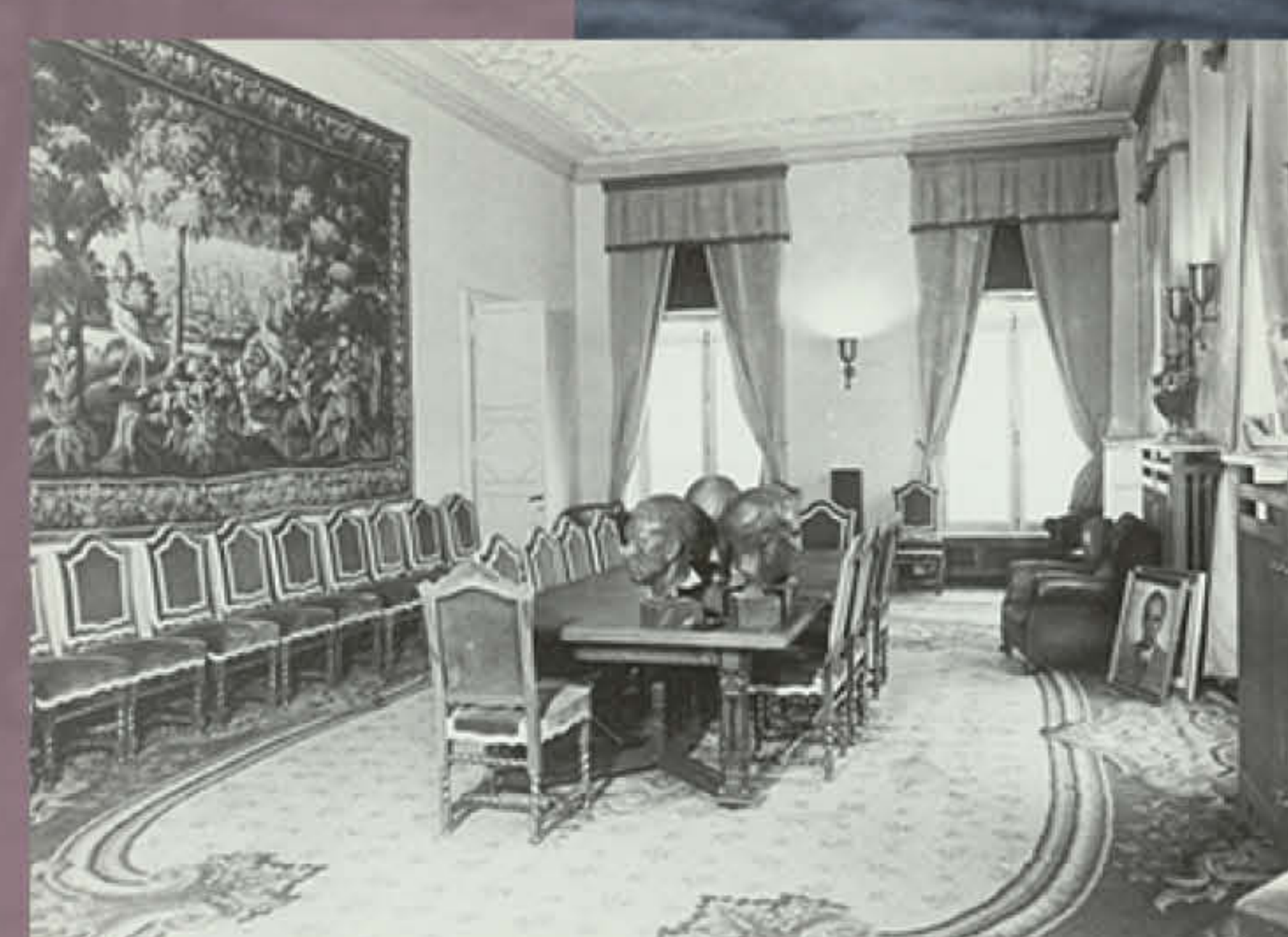


The plenary hall during the occupation

National Archives of Luxembourg, CD88-076, box 1, 001-203-3

Under the occupation, the Chamber building – the venue for parliamentary sessions – became the headquarters of the Reich's propaganda service in Luxembourg. Very little is still known about the events within its premises. Part of the former parliamentary administration remained in the building, whilst the secretariat relocated. In November 1940, a propaganda conference was hosted there, intended to present the Nazi cultural programme.

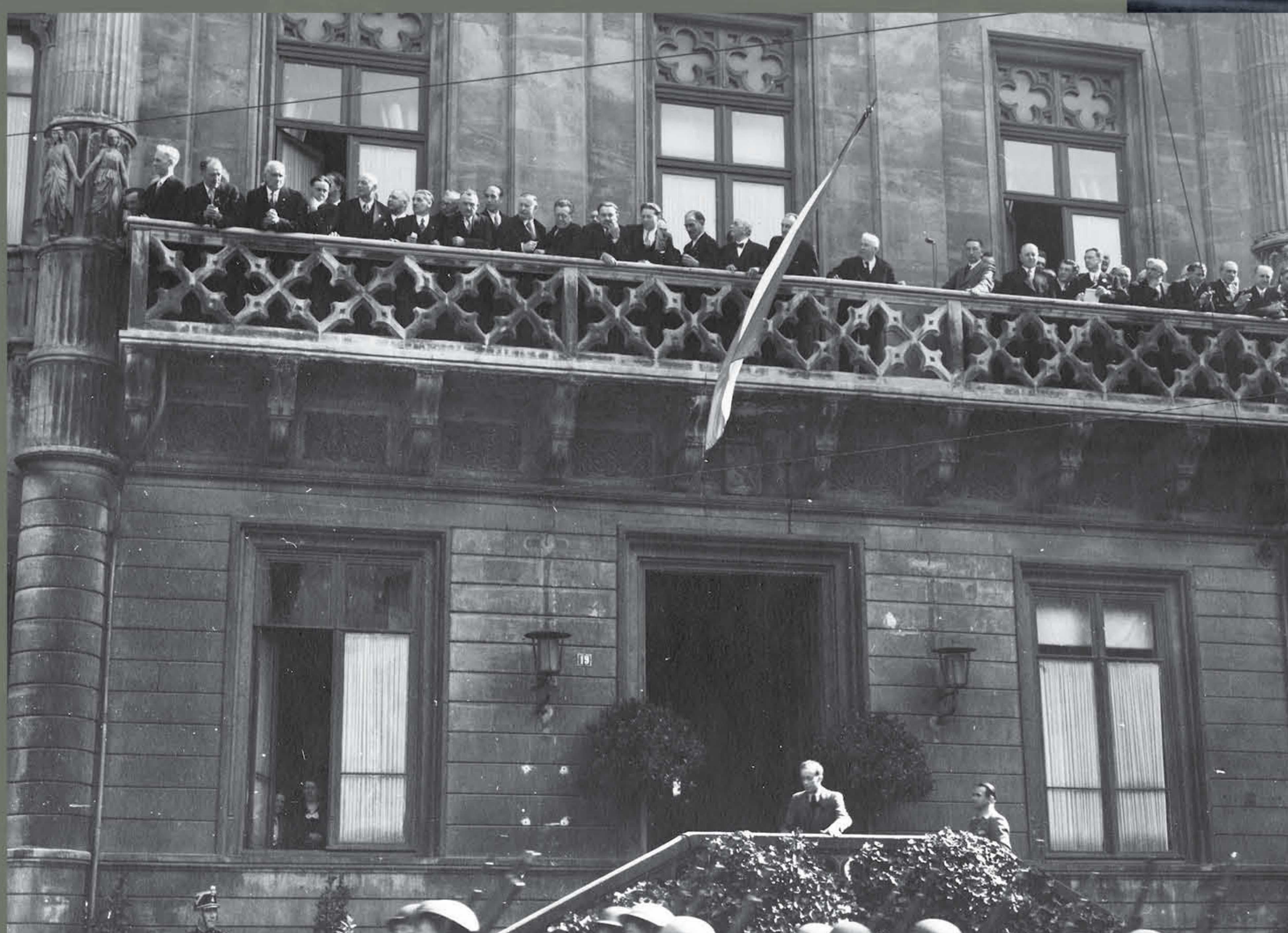
It is not known when exactly the photographs of the interior of the Chamber Hotel reproduced on this poster were taken, but it was probably after the German occupants had fled.



The anteroom of the plenary hall during the occupation

National Archives of Luxembourg, CD88-076, box 1, 001-203-4

THE RETURN TO DEMOCRACY IN 1945



Members of Parliament on the balcony of the Chamber building, 14 April 1945, during the parade in honour of Grand Duchess Charlotte

The liberation of Luxembourg on 10 September 1944 was not synonymous with an immediate return to the democratic system.

The Chamber of Deputies met for the first time on 6 December 1944 in its pre-invasion configuration, but the session was immediately adjourned, as Parliament did not have enough members present.

Luxembourg society was stirred by strong tensions. The Unio'n, the federation of resistance movements, demanded participation in executive power. In March 1945, the Government, under pressure, created a consultative assembly composed of deputies and resistance members.

Political life gradually returned, political parties resumed their work. The legislative elections of 21 October 1945 marked the definitive return to parliamentary democracy.

[illegible]

Results of the parliamentary elections of 21 October 1945



South wing of the former Leubus Abbey (Lubiąż), which served as a camp for forcibly resettled persons during the war

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THE VARIOUS PATHS OF THE DEPUTIES

Luxemburger Wort, 16 September 1944, digitized by the National Library of Luxembourg



Jean Origer

- > Born in 1877 in Esch-sur-Alzette.
- > Canon of Luxembourg Cathedral, director of the daily newspaper *Luxemburger Wort*, deputy and President of the Right Party.
- > Arrested on 6 September 1940, deported to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, died on 17 September 1942 at Dachau camp.

d'Groua, 27 April 1940, digitized by the National Library of Luxembourg



Albert Philippe

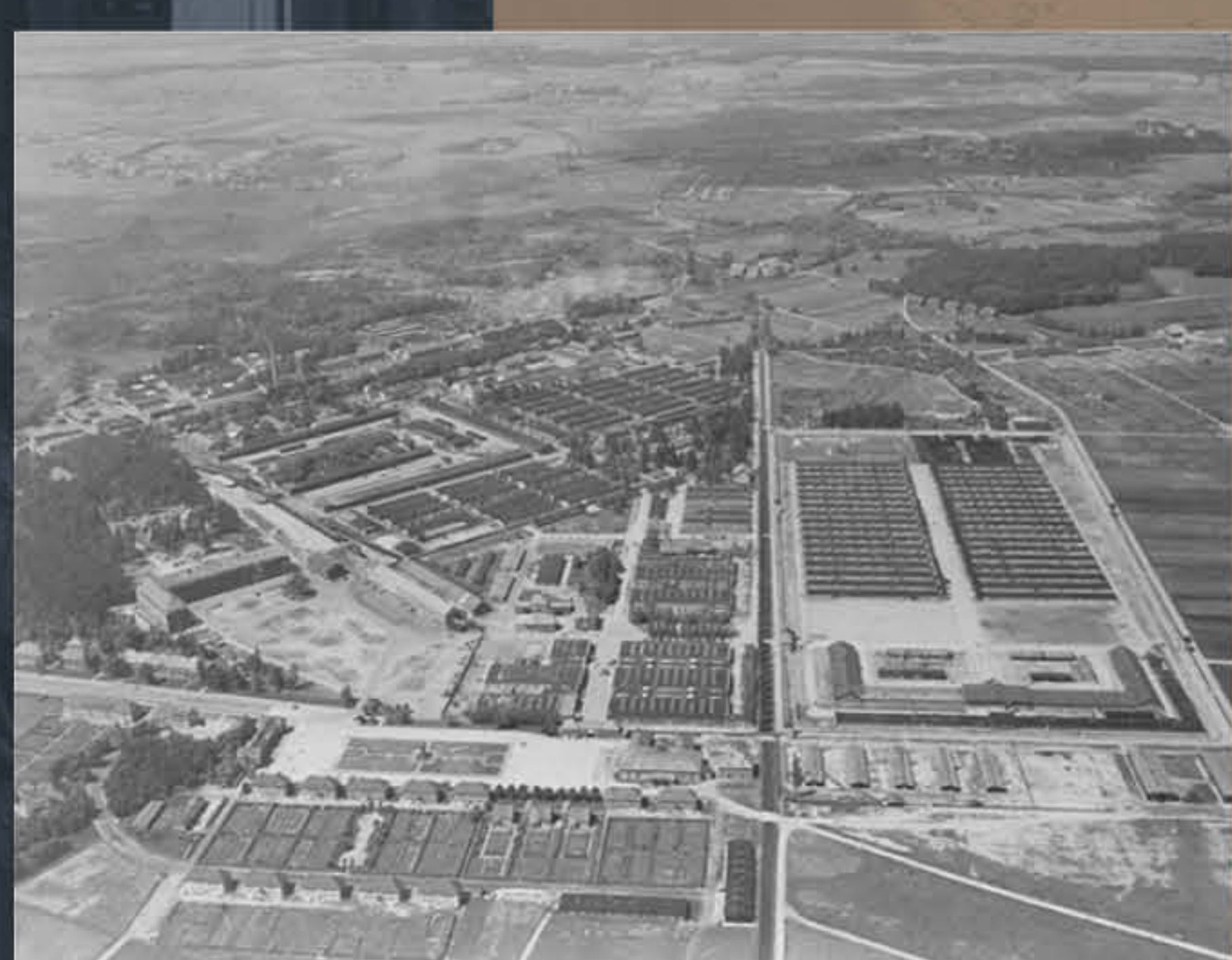
- > Lawyer and alderman in Luxembourg, deputy of the Right Party.
- > Opposed the Nazification of the lawyers in Luxembourg and had his professional licence withdrawn in May 1941.
- > Deported to Hinzert camp, released on 4 November 1941.
- > Committed suicide on 17 December 1941.

Jean-Pierre Wiltzius, date unknown, Private collection



Jean-Pierre Wiltzius

- > Wine grower in Schwebbsange, alderman in Wellenstein, deputy of the Right Party.
- > Deported to Leubus on 19 September 1942 in the context of the forced resettlements.
- > Died in Würzburg on 8 January 1944 at the age of 62 after a brief illness.



An aerial view of the Dachau concentration camp, 27 May 1945

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, archive of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, accessible at <http://collection.usmhmm.org/awatch/collection/poi5002>

The reasons for some deputies no longer sitting in the Chamber in 1945 were not necessarily linked to the war. There were notably natural deaths. But there were also deputies who were victims of repression by the Nazi regime: deportation, forced resettlement, violent death in one of the concentration camps. Other deputies were accused of unpatriotic behaviour and targeted by the purge after the war. Among these, three were sentenced to prison terms.

Escher Topograph, 30 April 1945, digitized by the National Library of Luxembourg



Léon Weirich

- > Born on 20 March 1878 in Weiler-la-Tour.
- > Miner and deputy of the Workers' Party.
- > Deported to Dachau on 5 December 1941, where he died.