

Testimony of Robert Loos on Alsatian's identity

Source: Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (Ina), France

The interviewee makes references to both the First World War and the Second World War ('dernière guerre', 'drôle de guerre', name given to the beginning of the Second World War). Also, he mentions being French for 45 years between the two wars, when it was actually a period of 21 years (1919 to 1940). In the sentence: 'Et enfin, maintenant, à cette dernière guerre, enfin heureusement tout allait bien', 'à' should be understood as 'après'.

'Well, I would say, as an Alsatian, born in 1896, and now it's 1988, that I've gone through every possible stage that an Alsatian could bear. Until I was 22, back from the war, we were Germans. Everything we'd learnt, it had all been for nothing. We had to start again from scratch. And we were French for 45 years, I think. Then no sooner was everything going fine for us Alsations than there was another war. And you saw how it was; the Nazis invaded and everything was wrong. They said to us, 'You're Germans', but we didn't accept that. And most importantly, what we Alsations (...) found most difficult, the moral principles, from the point of view of nationality, was we didn't know which gods we were supposed to worship! What the others said were good was wrong, and vice versa. For the young people in particular there was a moral conflict. We really didn't know where to go. In the end, luckily, after that second war, everything worked out well. But the thing was that for us, for me, well four times I changed nationality, four times I swapped uniforms. I had to fight in Russia in 1915, in Russia, where I was put in a German uniform. And in the last war I wore the French uniform and fought right there, on the Rhine. But nothing came of that; it was the 'phoney war'. And now we have peace, at last. And for me, since I have the chance to say a few things to everyone, we're happy to have finally found our place. And to see both of them – our two neighbours, if I can put it like that, on either side of the Rhine – finally getting along. That we're at peace now, that we can live like everyone else has been able to live... but not us. Twice I've seen our Alsace laid waste.'