

# The European Quarter today Assessment and prospects

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## 1. **SUMMARY: A HUGE AND INSPIRING PROJECT**

Siting European institutions in the inhabited city is an excellent decision, but one which can lead to conflict. We will need tactful negotiation and creative solutions to make a reality of this particular, highly specialised, mixed use. Real progress has already been made and more is in the pipeline, notably in the public sector; in general we may be optimistic that the situation is set to improve perceptibly.

However, many issues remain unresolved and require urgent consideration. They must be tackled in depth and with real willingness to co-operate within the scope of a **sixth Master Plan – which is in progress and will be ready by July 2007**).

Such a plan must do two things: give real consideration to the views of non-Brussels residents visiting the European capital notably in terms of iconic and high-quality urban fabric but at the same time allow Brussels people – locals and European officials – the opportunity to debate and decide on urban questions. They are, after all, the ones who know the context best and who will be confronted from day to day with the reality created by these decisions.

These decisions must, though, avoid the twin dangers of over-sensitive “pragmatism” and excessively “theoretical considerations” unconnected with reality.

### 1.1. **NEW MAJOR TASKS TO UNDERTAKE IN THIS CONTEXT:**

#### 1.1.1. **Finalise the co-operation agreements among Belgian institutions and between European and Belgian institutions**

It is necessary to allow joint consideration by all parties concerned and work towards implementation (already initiated) of agreed operational procedures.

#### 1.1.2. **Acknowledge geo-strategic considerations and the need for synergy with partner cities forming the network of capitals and sites of major institutions**

They are all faced with the movement of the geographic centre of gravity of the EU towards the East; one possible way to deal with this is to strengthen the “three-centre” capital (Brussels-Luxembourg-Strasbourg), possibly redistributing responsibilities between them.

This would of course have implications for transport (see for example the reference to Eurocaprail, the high-speed rail project linking the three cities, mentioned below).

#### 1.1.3. **Meet the need for external accessibility**

- By firming up network projects e.g. the proposed link between the National Airport and the European Quarter and others envisioned, e.g. the Josaphat site: the Schuman-Josaphat tunnel, Diabolo project, Schuman inter-modal station, and Josaphat Station
- By improving access to high-speed rail services: relieving the bottleneck around Duren in Germany, creating a genuine Eurocaprail (going beyond repairing existing lines), scheduling high-speed trains on all routes to stop at Brussels Luxembourg station: this is perfectly feasible but will meet with technical counter-arguments for which we need to prepare
- By improving the Metro connection between Brussels Midi (South) Station and the European Quarter; and studying the feasibility and cost-benefit implications of both the “Trias” project involving new tunnels between Midi Station and Luxembourg Station and the suggestion by the author of this article to install new track between Trône station and a terminal at Schuman (or failing that, at Chaussée d’Etterbeek) by way of the underground car park under Rue de la Loi
- By planning a coach and car park under the grass in the Parc du Cinquantenaire connected with the main arterial roads, and building a new Metro station - Cinquantenaire - which would also serve the Museum quarter.

#### 1.1.4. **Meet the need for new buildings for European institutions**

- By building the proposed European Summit building at the Residence Palace while bearing in mind the possibility that it may eventually have move to Cinquantenaire for security reasons
- By preparing other sites in the city for crucial extensions (see 4.1.10), e.g. Josaphat express suburban station, modification of local plans etc.
- By preparing to build a sixth European school.

#### 1.1.5. **Meet the need for internal mobility by creating or restoring attractive and user-friendly pedestrian links**

- Between Rue de la Loi (Berlaymont) and Place Jean Rey (Parc Léopold) across Juste Lipse by demolition of the ground floor and three stories above; the building would in any case be rendered inaccessible during European Summits, for security reasons
- Between Chaussée de Wavre and Rue Pascale and Rue Toulouse via the pedestrian mall extended by a pedestrian bridge over Rue Belliard
- Between Rue Montoyer and Parc Léopold via sets of steps on both sides of the mall
- Between Chaussée d’Etterbeek and Boulevard Clovis by making the platforms of Schuman station more user-friendly

- On both sides of Rue de la Loi between Rue du Commerce and Chaussée d'Etterbeek by burying the through route in one deck of the underground car park

#### **1.1.6. Meet the need for internal mobility by improving public transport in the area**

- By creating new dedicated sites for public transport especially Chaussée d'Etterbeek and Rue de Trèves
- By building new cycle paths

#### **1.1.7. Put right the lack of symbolic visibility**

- By creating three striking European pedestrian squares: "Place Schuman" with a focus on policy and politics, "Place de Luxembourg" for citizens and residents, and "Esplanade du Cinquantenaire" for events and festivals. This would mean building the Cortenbergh Tunnel or reversing the "Joyeuse Entrée" underpass, transforming the old Luxembourg Station into Parliament House, the "Europeanisation" of part of the Cinquantenaire complex, and installing a major socio-cultural facility in the North Hall after moving the Aerospace Museum out to Tour et Taxis in the north of the city
- By considering devising special pedestrian routes for demonstrations and events reconciling symbolism, security, and user-friendliness
- By creating "Gates to Europe" on the Petite Ceinture in line with Rue de la Loi, Rue Montoyer and Rue Luxembourg and creating new perspectives by refurbishing Rue de la Loi to make it more user-friendly, returning it to two-way traffic by burying the through route as mentioned above.
- By completely refurbishing the settings of the grand symbolic European buildings, e.g. by covering over motorway underpasses which pass close to them, extending the decking over the underpass in front of the Berlaymont at least as far as the Residence Palace, and covering the Belliard underpass in front of the building housing the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.
- By completely rebuilding the bland facade of the Juste Lipse Council building on Place Jean Rey, and particularly by breaking through to create a view to the Berlaymont (and from the Berlaymont to the Parc Leopold).

#### **1.1.8. Implement a major overhaul of public spaces**

- By introducing measures listed above as a way of putting right the lack of symbolic visibility
- By reconstructing the facades of Chaussée d'Etterbeek and Place Jean Rey (already envisioned) as well as those of the pedestrian mall at the ends of Chaussée de Wavre and Rue Belliard
- By closing the underpass in the Parc du Cinquantenaire (linked with the car park proposal)
- By refurbishment: lighting plan, co-ordination of street furniture, international architectural competitions ...

#### **1.1.9. Recreate a rich mix of uses in the European Quarter**

- By clearly defining the different types of security boundaries in terms of user-friendliness: by optimising pedestrian traffic at three levels, designating ground level for public use, creating footbridges between buildings for European official use, and making underground routes where security is at issue.
- By keeping in mind the possibilities offered by the Parc du Cinquantenaire if European Summits turn out in practice to present problems of reconciling user-friendliness with security.
- By bringing housing, trade, and infrastructure back into the office zone by applying a principle of deliberate "scattering" of these facilities along "city lifelines" linking residential areas to the north and south of the European Quarter and across it: by refurbishing buildings being vacated by the European Commission, re-using empty or brownfield sites, effective enforcement of planning policy requiring a housing quota to be built as part of an office development, and pro-actively seeking out private projects.
- By renovating the large parks and the socio-cultural facilities (museums etc) to and
- By creating a broadly-based multipurpose infrastructure with full translation facilities for European society and culture (major congresses and, perhaps, European Summits, events, exhibitions) in the North Hall of the Cinquantenaire.

#### **1.1.10. Prepare new sites for potential extensions**

At the same time, it makes sense – from a planning and legal standpoint – to prepare one or more potential extension sites for European functions by upgrading their infrastructure (transportation, utilities, etc.); the Josaphat and Delta sites seem to be best suited to serve this purpose.

## **1.2. THE WISH**

The wish is to be allowed to say, after some years, to the European and international citizens visiting, working, or living in the European quarters of Brussels: "You are not only welcome, you are home".

This is a huge undertaking – and an inspiring one.