

Refurbishment of the 'Résidence Palace' for use by the European Council (Brussels, 27 September 2005)

Caption: On 27 September 2005, the Council issues a press release in which it presents the plan submitted by the winners of the competition to redevelop the 'Résidence Palace' building in Brussels with a view to its being used for the European Council meetings that are currently held at the Justus Lipsius Building, seat of the Council of the European Union.

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Since 2002, meetings of the European Council (attended by the Heads of State or Government of the Member States of the European Union and the President of the Commission) have been held in Brussels, generally twice during each six-month Presidency. They are currently held at the Justus Lipsius Building, the headquarters of the Council of the European Union, which is adjacent to the ‘Résidence Palace’.

In March 2004, to meet the demands resulting from, among other things, the recent enlargement, the European Council agreed to the Belgian Government’s proposal that **block A of the ‘Résidence Palace’** be used for European Council meetings once it had been refurbished.

Designed by architect Michel Polak, the ‘Résidence Palace’ was built between 1922 and 1927 and was very innovative and prestigious in its day. The aim of the project is to preserve the listed parts of block A of the ‘Résidence Palace’ — listed in 2002 — while fitting out the space needed to accommodate meetings and other support services with the requisite facilities.

Consequently, a two-stage European architectural competition was launched (an ideas competition, followed by a projects competition) for the renovation of block A of the ‘Résidence Palace’, so that it could be used by both the European Council and the Council of Ministers 3.

The competition was organised by the Council’s General Secretariat with the assistance of Belgian civil servants, based on a schedule of requirements, technical specifications and a compulsory cost target. The rules of the competition were drawn up in cooperation with the International Union of Architects and in accordance with UNESCO’s ‘Standard regulations for international competitions in architecture and town planning’.

The competition was launched in August 2004 and divided into three stages:

- January 2005: of the 48 teams that had applied, representing more than 150 European architecture and engineering firms, 25 teams were selected to take part in the competition.
- May 2005: seven of the 22 projects actually submitted were selected, and their designers were invited to take part in the second stage of the competition.
- Between 31 August and 2 September 2005: judging of the second stage of the competition (projects competition) took place, and the prize-winners were selected.

At every stage, a Technical Committee made up of representatives of the *Régie des Bâtiments de l’État belge* (Belgian Public Buildings Administration), the International Union of Architects and officials from the Council’s General Secretariat carried out a preliminary technical evaluation of the proposals.

Subsequently, the international panel of judges, consisting of six members appointed by the Member States, five appointed by the Belgian national, regional and local authorities, and one representative of the Council’s General Secretariat, scrutinised and then ranked the projects, awarding the first prize to the team of architects and engineers **Samyn & Partners (Belgium), Studio Valle Progettazioni (Italy) and Buro Happold (United Kingdom)**.

Some general features of the project:

- The historical part of the ‘Résidence Palace’, which dates from 1925, is to be preserved and refurbished, and some of the offices added in the 1960s and the basements will be demolished.
- The offices for delegations and the secretariat are to be installed in the historical part — this is to be extended by a transitional area.

- The conference rooms and reception rooms will be installed in a new elliptical building built on the site of the current car park.
- Foundations common to the two parts mentioned above will house the semi-public areas (entrance hall, restaurant).
- A glass facade at the northern and eastern ends of the site will envelop the new elliptical building, creating an atrium.
- Direct and secure links with the Justus Lipsius Building will be created so as to make it easier for both people and equipment to move between the buildings.
- Given the building's intended use, the project complies with the strictest anti-terrorist protection requirements.

On the basis of an agreement to be concluded between the Council and the Belgian Government, the latter, which owns the building, will act as project manager and sign the study contract with the prize-winning team.

As project manager, the Belgian Government will manage and coordinate the architectural and engineering studies, deal with planning permission and environmental permits, issue public invitations to tender, award contracts and conclude contracts with the architects, engineers and contractors; it will monitor the building work and be responsible for accepting work done, drawing up statements of advance payments to be made and final statements of account on completion.

The Belgian Government is prepared to hand over to the Council, for a token one euro, the land and the existing building (block A of the 'Résidence Palace'). Consequently, for the Council, the main project costs will relate to the studies and the work needed to renovate and restructure the building, estimated at some EUR 200 million.

It is currently estimated that, in the light, in particular, of the complex nature of the formalities that have still to be completed and the size of the site, the work could be completed by 2012.

The exhibition of the projects submitted is open for public viewing from Monday to Friday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the 'Résidence Palace', until 14 October.

For further information, please contact Mrs Marques, Press Officer (02 285 87 16), or Mr Marro, Head of the Press Office (02 285 64 23).

The panel of judges' assessment report (second stage of the competition) may be consulted on the website <http://ue.eu.int> (12078/05).

1. This press release was issued by the Press Office.
2. Block A of the 'Résidence Palace' is the L-shaped building next to the Justus Lipsius building on the rue de la Loi. The Residence Palace complex also includes blocks C and E; blocks B and D were demolished in 1988 so that the Justus Lipsius Building might be constructed. The current gross floor area of block A is of the order of 35 000 m² of superstructure, and, in accordance with the town-planning rules currently in force, this may be increased to 45 000 m² as a result of renovation, demolition and reconstruction.
3. Official Journal 2004/S151-130351.