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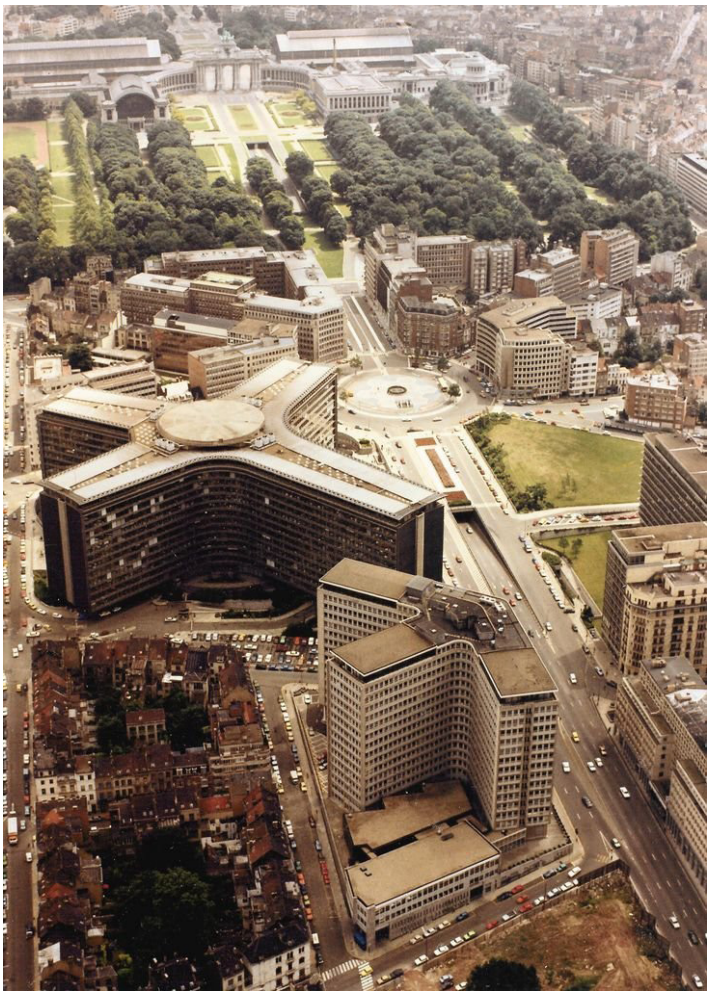

Examining the architectural iconography of the Berlaymont in the context of the European identity-making process

History thesis

April 15, 2021

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"Brussels is such an abstract place, it is not to Brussels that one is going to feel in debt; no one will feel a relation of reciprocity, of obligation, of responsibility toward Brussels."

Social theorist Jean Baudrillard's perception of Brussels
in an interview with Monica Sassatelli 2002

Preface

Visits to Brussels, one of the world's great cosmopolitan cities, where my girlfriend is professionally involved with the EU institutions, are always accompanied by ambiguous feelings of awe and consternation. Arriving at Brussels Central Station, walking up the hill along the Parc de Bruxelles and crossing the Avenue des Arts, one has the feeling of entering not only a new quarter, but a completely different city. Whereas a moment ago you were walking past richly decorated art-deco façades, you are now being greeted by anonymous, bare walls. Walking down the Rue de la Loi, one would not suspect that behind these façades the most powerful political institutions of Europe hide themselves from those they are supposed to represent: The European citizens. Arriving at the Berlaymont, the epicentre of the EU quarter, the oscillation between the two mentioned emotional states even intensifies, seeing this proud manifestation of the European project embedded into an urban fabric consisting of tiny, two- to three-storey apartment buildings. One might wonder: Was it intentional, was it accidental? Does someone genuinely feel a certain sense of belonging towards the European Union at this place? Therefore, in this thesis I intend to embark on a quest for European identity in the EU quarter of Brussels.

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PART 00 INTRODUCTION

Research question

Since its creation in the 1950s, one of the European Union's (EU) greatest aspiration has been the search for a common European identity as its slogan "United in diversity" (Curti Gialdino, 2005) euphemistically conveys. Officially adopted in May 2000, after it had been chosen by a media jury from more than 2000 proposals, the motto is one of many European symbols dedicated to disseminate this unifying message (Curti Gialdino, 2005). Architecturally, this pursuit culminated already six decades ago in the de-facto capital of the EU, when in 1959, the Belgium capital, Brussels, not only became the administrative, but also the architectural focal point of Europe. After the completion of the European Economic Community (ECC) Commission's building (*Berlaymont*) in 1968, it developed into the first architectural manifestation of the then still young ECC laying the groundwork for one of the first symbols of the EU's united diversity (Hein, 2004: 140-142).

When comparing the different numbers of Google search results on European government buildings, the term *Berlaymont* in Brussels delivers an approximate of one million results, while other representational buildings like 10 Downing Street in London or the Élysée Palace in Paris return 13 or even 38 million search results. Even the Federal Chancellery of Germany generates more than double the search results of the *Berlaymont* (see Fig. 01). Although this statistical footnote is probably not the most reliable instrument for measuring how the EU quarter is publicly perceived, it hints at the missing presence of the building in the conscience of European citizens. With this in mind, one can ask how the architecture of the European institutions in Brussels is actually perceived through the eyes of those who are the actual subject of the European Union's ambition to unite: Its citizens. How does the architecture of the *Berlaymont* and the surrounding EU quarter contribute to the emergence of an European identity?

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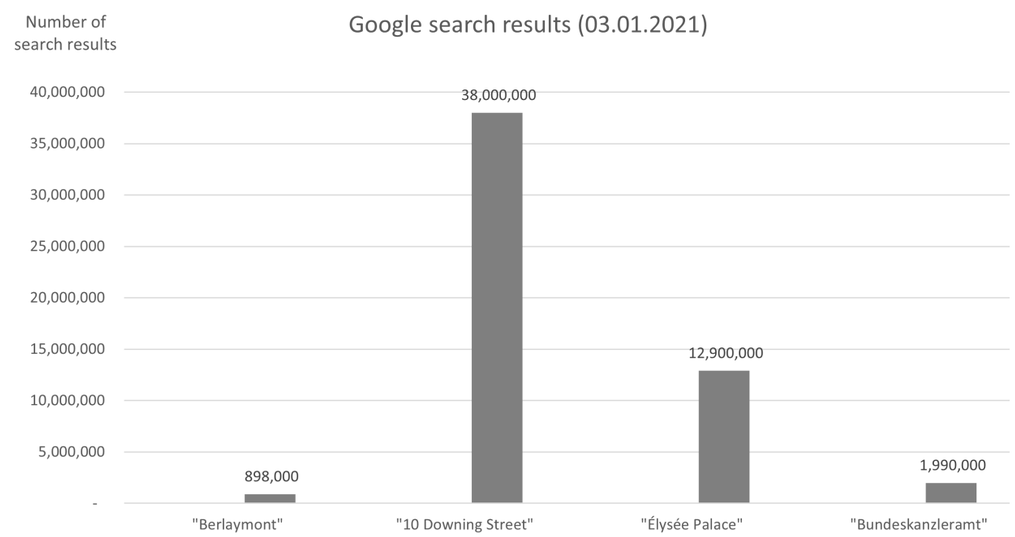

Fig. 01 Results from a Google search on the 03.01.2021 for four different government buildings in Europe (Stoschek, 2021)

State-of-the-art

The research field of European identity has become widely acknowledged and popular among scientist from different disciplines as it is a rather new and still evolving phenomenon (Wilken, 2015). During the 20th century, most of the research about European identity creation built on the theory of opposing identities, meaning that the allegiance towards one political system automatically excludes the option of belonging to another, different system. Nevertheless, this theory neglected the fact that the relatively new introduced supra-national sphere of the EU offered indeed the possibility to acquire another, non-national identity. Therefore, political scientist Michael Bruter criticizes the theory of opposing identities for not taking the phenomenon of the EU into consideration in his 2005 book *Citizens of Europe – The emergence of a mass identity*. Instead, he proposes the theory of complimentary identities, an adapted alternative which takes the possibility of acquiring multiple identities into account. Through Bruter's extensive research on the topic of European identity, his theory of complementary identities prevailed in the field of European studies and also found its application in the most recent Eurobarometer surveys. This is why my examination on the matter of European identity will mainly be informed by Bruter's work.

The majority of literature about the issue of European identity and its architectural embodiments asserts that the European quarter in Brussels fails to contribute positively to the reinforcement of an European collective identity. For example, Carola Hein's urban planning study on the EU quarter demonstrates that the *Berlaymont* has simply never been perceived as an architectural symbol of the EU (2004: 143). Interestingly, most of the research about the EU quarter stems from the field of urban studies omitting deeper analysis about how the quarter and especially the *Berlaymont* building is seen through the eyes of the European citizens. In the following text, I will try to contribute to this research gap in examining the historic development of the EU quarters' architecture and its influence on an evolving European identity. I will reline this examination with reactions and impressions of the public in newspaper articles and on social media in order to bridge the gap between the perception of the spectators – residents of Brussels and European citizens in general – and the actors of the EU-space, meaning EU civil servants who are actively involved in the decision-making process of the EU. EU-space, sometimes also called Eurosphere or Brussels bubble, is a term coined by ethnographer Paweł Lewicki to underline the boundary between the public and political sphere whose differences become especially explicit in the case of the EU quarter in Brussels (Lewicki, 2017: 25).

I will put the main focus of my text on the architecture, imposed symbols and visual depictions of the *Berlaymont* – a building which serves now for more than 50 years as a cornerstone of the EU quarter. Had this architectural manifestation of the EU an impact on shaping European identity since it was inaugurated in 1968 – and if so, how significant was its influence?

My research will be informed by Paul Jones' methodology applied in his book *The Sociology of Architecture: Constructing Identities* where he makes use of several case studies of representational architecture in Europe to elaborate on key elements of these buildings and their impact on European identity. Using the examples of the Reichstag building in Berlin and the Palace of Westminster in London, he investigates which role is ascribed to architecture in filling the cultural vacuum of post-national identities such as the EU. He argues that the attempt of the EU to codify a unifying identity finds itself in the dilemma of creating a common ground which "is not so universal as to be meaningless and not so particularistic to be exclusionary" (Jones, 2011: 144). Jones concludes that the most effective way for the EU to escape this ambiguous position is to create architecture where its meaning is left open to a certain extent in order to leave room for interpretation (Jones, 2011: 149).

On the basis of this theory, I will examine the architecture of the *Berlaymont* and its surroundings in order to find out whether it fulfils this criterion of creating a common ground. Eventually, I will try to understand if and how the iconography of the representational architecture of the EU stimulates its citizens to identify with the political system it represents.

■

Structure and methodology

In the first part of my thesis, I will explore the term European identity. For this, I will make use of Michael Bruter's theory of complimentary identities as a theoretical framework in order to answer the question of what comprises European identity. Subsequently, I will elaborate on the EU's aspiration to unite in diversity in the context of the European integration process. Primary literature such as official reports and other documents published by the EU will help me gain insights into the official political directives of the EU in this matter. The results of the most recent Eurobarometer surveys will further substantiate my interpretation of the term European identity with facts and figures. As a transition to the next part of my thesis, I will focus on the cultural policies and the symbols of the EU such as the Euro banknotes and their impact on the shaping of European identity.

In the second part of my thesis, I'll introduce the architecture of the European quarter and especially the *Berlaymont* building as the case study of my paper, putting it into an historical and contemporary context. Informed by these two chapters, I will put the focus of my text on the architecture, imposed symbols and visual depictions of the *Berlaymont*. In this chapter, I will try to link the history of the *Berlaymont* with an examination of tweets on Twitter and comments in newspapers, dealing with its public perception. In what sense does this perception relate to the concept of European identity? Which European values are conveyed through the presence of this building and do they contribute to forming a sense of European identity in the people's mind?

To explore how the building features in the public eye, I will try to shed light onto the perspective of those people who are not actively involved in the decision-making of the European integration process and aren't part of the EU-space, for example journalists but also European and Brussels citizens. This approach will naturally make my argumentation vulnerable to justified criticism about missing contextualization as this one-sided view is unable to give the full picture of the buildings' perception. Nevertheless, I will pursue this approach as I believe the research question requires framing the examination of the building from the perspective of the public eye. Furthermore, I have chosen this approach as the access to inside knowledge – interviews with EU civil servants and admittance to EU institution buildings – is limited for me as an architecture student without any contacts inside the EU-space. Even for researchers like Paweł Lewicki who were able to get hold of interviews with officials from EU institutions, it proved challenging to critically examine the EU-space as not many interviewees allowed critical questions on this topic – an initial hint on how the boundaries between the public and political sphere in Brussels have become more and more entrenched during the EU's time of existence (Lewicki, 2017: 49).

In order to grasp contours of the people's perception on the building, I will thoroughly examine its history and architectural features through both, my personal exploration and accessible literature, available images and newspaper articles. Furthermore, I will analyse the media coverage of the EU quarter and specifically of the *Berlaymont* through the social media platform Twitter. To further contextualize the personal, but short and sometimes not reflected impressions represented in the tweets, I will make use of autoethnographer Lewicki's notes on his experiences in the EU quarter. In his book *Modernity, Nationality and Lifestyle among Eurocrats in Brussels*, Lewicki connects his subjective, personal observations of the EU-space with a more objective and scientific approach on the matter of milieu studies of the EU-quarter.
I will substantiate these personal perceptions with Lewicki's accounts of his experiences, which are more differentiated and detailed. I will analyse tweets from journalists and political figures of the EU to see how the building is represented and perceived and to find out about how people discuss about the building on social media. In order to evaluate whether the *Berlaymont* building manages to contribute to the creation of an European identity, I will use the theoretical framework used by Delanty and Jones in their examination of the Reichstag in Berlin and the Millennium Dome in London, consisting of the three evaluation criteria "transparency, accessibility and […] a reflexive approach to collective identity" (Delanty and Jones, 2002: 457).

In conclusion, I will reflect on my own impressions that occurred during the research and in that way also contribute to the understanding about how the EU quarter influences public perception in the process of the emergence of a collective European identity.

■

PART 01 DEFINING EUROPEAN IDENTITY

Identity complementarity vs. opposing identities

Politicians are well aware of the striking correlation between political power and the acceptance rate of the citizens: The more you can bind people to a certain idea, the more they will be enthusiastic about it and eventually identify with it (Betancourt and Ponce, 2014: 6 f.). According to sociologist Max Weber, the legitimacy of a state is primarily maintained through the process of citizens choosing to identify with it. Without the identification with a political system, there can't exist a durable acceptance of political power (Bruter, 2005: 2).
This is especially true for national identities, but what if this process takes place at the supra-national level of the EU? Considering the fact that the European project of uniting in diversity is relatively new, starting with the Declaration on the European Identity in 1973, the EU institutions have a special interest in the construction of European identity as the driving force for political legitimacy and consolidating the power of the EU (Kølvraa, 2018: 1406). On the grounds of the ongoing European integration process, discussions in the field of sociology and anthropology revolve around the questions such as whether a national identity can be replaced by a European identity and if it is possible to feel a strong sense of belonging towards more than one political system (Bruter, 2005: 5 ff.).

Until far into the 20th century, there was a widespread consensus in social sciences that an individual can only express feelings of belonging towards one given political system at a time as Hungarian poet and liberal revolutionary Sándor Petőfi already expressed it in his 1871 posthumously published and translated poems *Poésies magyares* (Bruter, 2005: 15-16). Out of the assumption that an individual's allegiance is bind towards one state, the theory of opposing identities arose during the 20th century among political scientists, stating that different identities are in fact incompatible and opposing. US-American politologist Ronald F. Inglehart's work, including the design of the Eurobarometer, is to a large extent based on the theory of opposing identities. Other political scientists such as Ronald L. Jepperson (2002) adopted this theory as well and concluded that an emerging European identity is in fact an elitist phenomenon arguing that European identity in a broader sense is just a synonym for a cosmopolitan attitude to life (Bruter, 2005: 15). The restrictive character of the theory of opposing identities can be depicted as multiple circles of different sizes which don't interfere

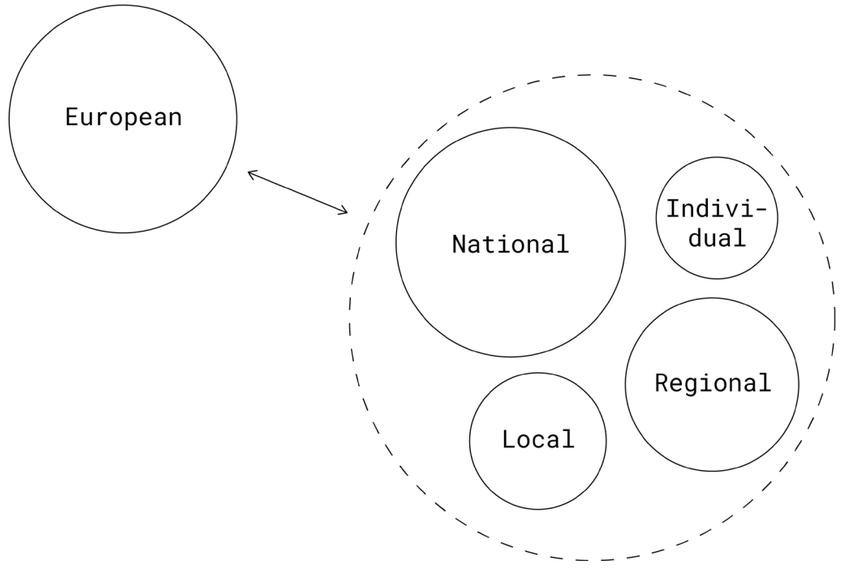

Fig. 02 Interpretation of the theory of opposing identities (Stoschek, 2021)

with each other, as it can be seen in Fig. 02. An individual can only be present at one sphere at a time which is why one has to decide which circle to occupy and thus, which identity to adopt. Nevertheless, there is an even more significant threshold between the sum of national identities and a common European identity: The EU and its member states are still two rather independent political systems which leave a gap between the national and the supra-national level. This impression is also acknowledged by the Eurobarometer surveys, which confirm that the percentage of people who identify with both, the political system of their home country and the one of the EU ,has risen since the introduction of the Eurobarometer in 1973. However, this percentage still remains a clear minority (Green, 2015: 2). Partially, this impression reinforces Jepperson's statement of European identity being solely an elitist phenomenon to which only a few have access to. Jepperson's conclusion also underlines the personal experience of Lewicki who describes the EU-space as "a space of the white, European middle class" (Lewicki, 2015: 66).

Approaches to this theory found their application, inter alia, in the first designs of the questionnaire for the Eurobarometer, a series of public opinion surveys related to topics of the European Union which are conducted and published bi-annually (Curti Gialdino, 2005). On relying on the model of identity opposition, Inglehart asked the participants whether they feel

a stronger sense of belonging towards their home country or towards the European Union (Bruter, 2005: 19). This categorical and confrontational framing of the questionnaire is no longer applied today as the most recent publications of the Eurobarometer suggest. The survey now simply asks about the citizens particular "emotions and political engagements towards the EU" (Dewint, 2019) and takes the question of the relation between national and supra-national identity completely out of the equation. Although the design for the Eurobarometer is now much more refined, it neglects to add to the field of European identity studies a sociological study with an empirical survey as its basis. Arguably a crucial tool to actually be able to measure European identity, the Eurobarometer can help define the term identity which often becomes all too quickly a prisoner of language.

In response to the lack of attention paid to the research of multiple identities, Michael Bruter confronts the theory of opposing identities with his theory of complementary identities in his 2005 book *Citizens of Europe? The emergence of a mass European identity*. This theory is based on the assumption that an individual can indeed have multiple allegiances towards political systems of different scales. In states where organisational structures such as federalism and decentralization are prevalent, citizens are asked to develop a certain affiliation towards the different hierarchical levels of the political system they are part of. Considering the fact that these multiple identities all take place on different levels and appear in different scales, eventually, they won't oppose but complement each other (Bruter, 2005: 16).

The principle of this theory can be best explained with a simple, concentric model where the circles we have seen in Fig. 02 are now arranged like growth rings of a tree (cf. Fig. 03). The further away the circle is from the person, the less will he or she identify with the particular system. Similar to the development of a tree, an individual will acquire further identity rings during her or his life. Still, this doesn't necessarily have to happen following the depicted hierarchy, some circles can be skipped or acquired in another order. Also, the radius of the circles, meaning how much one identifies with the respective political sphere, can alter from person to person and fluctuate over time. A person is able to have a strong sense of belonging towards the European project, but might feel just slightly connected to what is happening

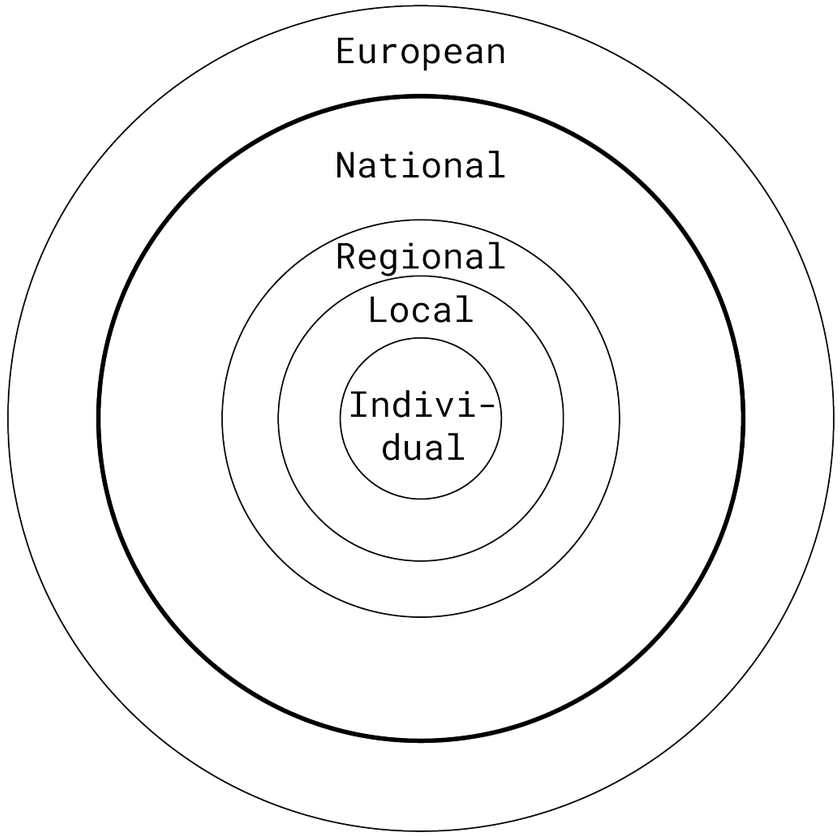

Fig. 03 Relative strength of territorial identity circles: the example of strong and weak European identities (Bruter, 2005; modified by Stoschek, 2021)

on a local level in her or his hometown. Though, what both theories have in common is the significant threshold when entering the sphere of the European identity.

Through the extensive research work of Michael Bruter, the theory of complimentary identities has prevailed over the opposition of identities in the meantime. It has now become a broadly acknowledged theory in the field of social sciences, finding application in the most recent survey designs of the Eurobarometer (Dewint, 2019). My further elaboration on the matter of European identity will therefore be informed by Bruter's work. After delving into the scientific approach to European Identity, the next chapter will deal with its definition in the context of the EU's self-imposed aspiration to unite in diversity.

■

"The Nine wish to ensure that the cherished values of their legal, political and moral order are respected, and to preserve the rich variety of their national cultures. Sharing as they do the same attitudes to life, based on a determination to build a society which measures up to the needs of the individual, they are determined to defend the principles of representative democracy, of the rule of law, of social justice […] and of respect for human rights. All of these are fundamental elements of the European Identity."

The Nine Foreign Affairs Ministers of the EC on 14 December 1973 in Copenhagen

The ambiguous nature of European identity

According to Bo Stråth from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, identity is a "problematic and fluid concept" (Stråth, 2002: 387). Its actual literal meaning - to be equal, even identical – differs significantly from the purpose of identity-creation which is to evoke a sense of community and belonging especially under duress. One can encounter a huge gap between the actual meaning and its eventual implementation as well as its interpretation: On the way of achieving a common identity, large parts of its actual significance is often lost.

This is why the concept of a common European identity is fairly more than an abstraction of an ideological idea for the purpose of strengthening the bounds between the member states and the relation to the rest of the world (Stråth, 2002: 387). As long as the ultimate realisation of the literal meaning of identity is not the standard of action, the concept of identity can form an important cornerstone for the EU's aspiration of uniting in diversity which is why the EU and its predecessor organisations had an ever-long-lasting interest in codifying an official European identity (Jones, 2011: 460). In 1973, when the nine member-states of the then European Community (EC) acknowledged the enormous potential of a common European identity, they agreed to put it on the official political agenda of the EC and drew up a document with the promising title *Declaration on the European Identity*.

Considering the situation in which the EC found itself in the mid-seventies, it becomes clear why the EC began to set out the search for an united Europe: In the midst of the Cold War and an accompanying remorseless arms race, stuck between the tensions of the two political heavyweights of the United States and the Soviet Union, the EC had to gain political weight in order to make its voice heard and build a stronger negotiation base. The Nine of Europe, how the nine member states of the EC called themselves, intended at that time to "play an active role in world affairs" (EC, 1973: 1). Therefore, the EC declared it as their ultimate goal "to ensure the survival of the [European] civilization which they have in common" and to preserve the peaceful unity that had now endured for more than 28 years since the end of the Second World War (EC, 1973: 2). This

objective was challenged when an unexpected crisis arose between West European states and the United States after the Bretton Woods Agreement [1] collapsed in 1971 and created an economic vacuum (Stråth, 2002: 388). Once the reliable basis for a long-lasting economic upswing in the Western bloc since the end of the Second World War, the US-dollar became highly overvalued due to enormous and unexpected expenditures, such as the Vietnam war. This forced the EC-member states to tie their currencies together and to jointly float the US-dollar. Together with the slowly ending post-war reconstruction boom and the drastic increase of the oil price lead, these factors inevitably led to the abandonment of the Bretton Woods fixed exchange rate system (Broz and Frieden, 2011: 588). After a system of floating exchange rates has been introduced, the EC felt compelled to fill the new economic vacuum. With the Declaration on the European Identity, the nine foreign ministers of the EC therefore not only underscored the importance of having a convincing definition of European identity that would boost their public image to the outside world, but clearly brought forward the superordinate aim of positioning the EC on the international stage of world economics (EC, 1973: 1).

Apart from having the clear intention to occupy a place in the foreign policy of world affairs, the *Declaration on the European Identity* is therefore – instead of actively intensifying the European integration process – rather an attempt to passively preserve what is already there: The rich variety of national cultures. According to the document, solely the envisioned diversity will give Europe its "originality and […] own dynamism" (EC, 1973: 2) through which an European identity will naturally evolve over time. In the EC's first attempt of defining European identity on the basis of fundamental, shared values, this term is initially just a formally declared mean to justify solidifying Europe's external appearance to the rest of the world.

■

1 The time period between the late 1940s and the early 1970s is called Bretton Woods Era. The conference of Bretton Woods, held in July 1944, regulated the capitalist's world monetary order including the ones from the United States, Canada, Western European countries, Australia and Japan. From now on, currencies of these states were pegged to the value of the US-Dollar, which in turn was fixed to gold. The deterioration of the gold coverage due to enormous expenditures such as the Vietnam war culminated in the overvaluation of the US-Dollar and eventually in a reform of the international monetary system in 1971. Western European countries lost their faith in the US-Dollar and adopted a system of floating exchange rates (Broz and Frieden, 2011: 588).

"The European Council considers it essential that the Community should respond to the expectations of the people of Europe by adopting measures to strengthen and promote its identity and its image both for its citizens and for the rest of the world."

The European Council on the 25 and 26 June 1984 at Fontainebleau

EUROPEAN SYMBOLISM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EUROPEAN IDENTITY

A second and more active endeavour to construct a European identity from within was undertaken in the early 1980s (Wilken, 2015: 126). During the 1970s and the 1980s, the process of European integration found itself in one of the most challenging phases since the formation of the EC – better known as the phase of "eurosclerosis [2]" (Boeri and Garibaldi, 2009: 411). Prevailing in this crisis were major disagreements about the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) among the EC member states and Margaret Thatcher's demand for a reduced UK contribution to the EU budget. To overcome this economic crisis, the European Council saw it as a necessity to raise the acceptance rates of the Single European Market and the Monetary Union (Boeri and Garibaldi, 2009: 412). When the heads of the EC member states came together on the 25 June 1984 at the Palace of Fontainebleau, south of Paris, for a meeting of the European Council, not only were measures taken that encompassed the economic scope of the crisis, but also the highly neglected revitalisation of the European integration process has been put into the focus again (EC, 1985). To that end, an *ad hoc* committee was introduced. Consisting of one representative from each of the then ten member states and chaired by Italian politician Pietro Adonnino, the committee was commissioned to develop proposals for measures for a "Citizens' Europe" (EC, 1985) during the next twelve months following the Council meeting in June 1984. In their final report, they presented a set of common EU symbols and other cultural policy measures to boost the public awareness of the EU and to give the EC "a new political, cultural and social dimension" (EC, 1985).

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2 Eurosclerosis is a term coined by German influential economist Herbert Giersch between 1970 and 1980 to describe an era of economic and political stagnation in the EC. It mainly arose due to high unemployment rates in the EC member states and a slow economic growth in comparison to the U.S. The phase of eurosclerosis came to an halt when the Single European Act was introduced promoting the economic force of the single market of the EC (Awesti, 2009: 1-2).

Fig. 04 Euro banknotes from the Europa series, in use since 2013 (Deutsche Bundesbank, 2019: 9)

After receiving the approval of the European Council, a number of these initiatives had been taken into effect over the coming years: EU passports were issued (1981), the EU got an anthem (1985), a flag (1985) and a motto (2000). To celebrate the history and heritage of Europe, remembrance days such as the Europe day on the 5th of May and European Years as well as Decades (1985) dedicated to a certain subject to open a debate about it were initiated (Wilken, 2015: 128). These symbolic measures mentioned in the first part of the so-called *Adonnino report* were complemented by rather administrative projects which, nonetheless, also had an immediate and especially long-lasting effect on the life of the EU citizens: The second part of the report focused particularly on the implementation of a "Europe sans frontiéres", meaning the freedom of movement of people and goods and administrative formalities such as the recognition of professional qualifications (EC, 1985: 9 ff.).

To explain the report's impact on the common architectural and cultural heritage of the EU, it is also necessary to mention the introduction of the European Capital of Culture. This is the first time in the history of the then EC that matters of architecture and its European heritage in the context of the European integration process were addressed. In this context, it is especially interesting to examine a more recent example of codifying a European Identity: The design of the Euro banknotes that refers implicitly to the architectural patrimony of the EU (Fig. 04). One can not only find a Romanesque bridge on the backside of the 5-euro-note but also a post-modern, glassy piece of architecture on the front side of the 500-euro-note (Delanty. and Jones, 2002: 461). These depictions are fictional reflections of prevalent European architectural styles but, at the same time, can be designated as non-representational since they show imaginary, non-existing buildings and structures [3] (Bruter, 2005: 90). This abstracted and universalistic approach reveals the EU's ambition to not concentrate on single national identities by depicting national monuments but to overcome national differences and eventually aim at creating "post-cultural designs" which tend to be "symbols of unity rather than community and diversity" (Delanty. and Jones, 2002: 461).

The discussed initiatives are evidence for the EU's clear intention to give identity to their political system and, by extension, gain legitimacy (Bruter, 2005: 91). The success of this new symbolic approach towards European identity construction shaping has been confirmed by Michael Bruter's 2009 published panel study experiment *Time Bomb? The Dynamic Effect of News and Symbols on the Political Identity of European Citizens* which proved the effectiveness of symbols in creating a common identity. The 2.5-year study [4] with almost 1200 respondents from six of the then twelve member states of the EU hypothesised that the exposure of EU citizens to symbols of European integration stimulates the individual's

3 In 2011, artist Robin Stam recreated each of the seven imaginary banknote bridges designated to a certain European building epoch in the Dutch city of Spijkenisse, bringing them a bit more to life than originally intended (Watkins, 2015).

4 The study was carried out before the EU enlargement in 2004. At this time, the EU consisted of 15 members states from which six countries (United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and Sweden) took part in the panel experiment. Every two weeks, 200 participants from each of the six countries were sent a newsletter containing both positive and negative news about the EU and Europe, as well as symbols and other placebo news and photos. The effect of the exposure to news and symbols of the EU was then examined with a questionnaire (Bruter, 2009: 1508-1509).

construction of a European identity – primarily its civic component (Bruter, 2009: 1504). According to Bruter, European identity can be divided into two components: The cultural and civic component. The cultural part affects mainly the citizen's sense of belonging towards its community and the associated shared values and common cultural heritage. A civic European identity, on the other hand, relates to the identification with a political system and the accompanying rights and duties (Bruter, 2009: 1500). After evaluating the conducted survey, Bruter draws the conclusion that there is a significant effect of newly introduced symbolic measures on European identity. In addition to this, the impact of symbols becomes immediately visible and even accelerates over time (Bruter, 2009: 1519).

The next chapter will examine whether the symbolisms of the EU's self-imposed cultural policies are reflected in the design of the European Commission's headquarter building *Berlaymont* - a building which has been erected in 1968 but has undergone large-scale renovation works in the 1990s – long after the Declaration on European Identity in 1973 has been published.

■

"It's like in Warsaw here, everyone is in a hurry, not noticing their fellow men and women or any other people in their surroundings, impersonal space, grey office buildings, loads of cars. […] Buildings in this street are a total mixture of establishments from the sixties and seventies. Regardless of their age, most of them with a coffee with-milk-colour or grey facades. There are also 19th century old and narrow houses, typical for the Brussels bourgeois, and face-lifted office buildings from the sixties to the eighties with lots of smooth glass, shiny metal and stone frontages. This space does not invite one to contemplate it, nor to enjoy it, it's a space that you pass in hurry"

Ethnographer Paweł Lewicki on his experience
when visiting the EU quarter in Brussels for the first time

PART 02 THE SYMBOLIC FUNCTION OF THE *BERLAYMONT*

The *Berlaymont*: Symbol of European identity?

In this chapter, which is the main part of the thesis, I aim to investigate whether the "new European political refrains of openness, diversity and transparency" (Jones, 2011: 168) are recognisable and readable in the architectural embodiments of the EU quarter and especially in the architecture of the *Berlaymont* building in Brussels. As seen in the example of the design of the Euro banknotes, the EU needs to cope, once again, with the ambiguous position defined by avoiding catering to too many clichéd stereotypes while avoiding presenting its institutional architecture as too universal and thereby architecturally vague and anonymous (Jones, 2011: 144).

In his 1980 book *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture*, Charles Jencks, US-American architecture theoretician, argues that in order to symbolize diversity, a building needs to give room for interpretation. Jencks claims that the answer on who interprets and defines a building's conveyed message should always be the viewer and must not already be determined from the start. The perception of a building will develop over its time of existence, eventually resulting in representing plural identities (Jones, 2011: 149). The examination of the building and the surrounding EU quarter will therefore be based upon the guiding principles of openness, diversity and transparency which simultaneously give space for various ways of observing the architecture of the building.

The hypothesis of this chapter is that the *Berlaymont* building, although imagined as a modern, open accessible and future-orientated building by its planners, Lucien de Vestel and Jean Gilson, has simply never been able to fulfil the exuberating expectations and the relentlessly high requirements the building had to face even before its start of construction. Furthermore, I assume that the building itself has been overshadowed from the start by many unfavourable side events such as the preceding top-down development of the EU quarter into a monofunctional office district or the tedious renovation works of the *Berlaymont* in the 1990s. The media coverage of these accompanying negative news has potentially deteriorated the building's perception in the public eye, leading to an unfavourable, even harmful framing and eventually letting it become the tragic symbol of the EU's fluctuating and strenuous quest for its European identity.

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The arrival of the EU institutions in Brussels

The story of the EU quarter in Brussels dates back to the post-war period in the late fifties when the then three European institutions - the European Economic Community, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) – together with its six member states were on the search for a location for their common headquarter (Hein, 2004: 67). It was a delicate and politicised operation as some head of states favoured a decentralized approach while others pleaded for the concept of a single district, following examples such as the city of Brasília (Sterken, 2015: 105).

Among the shortlisted cities to host these institutions, the city of Brussels had been chosen due to its central geographical location within Europe, its metropolitan character and the fact that Belgium displayed a compromise solution where both parts, the Latin and the Germanic zone of the EU, were equally represented (Sterken, 2015: 105). The 1954 newly elected national government in Belgium, therefore, cleared the path for prescribing Brussels a concept for modernizing the city in an urbanistic as well as in an economic context. The idea of becoming Europe's political focal point - albeit of temporary nature as the final decision was postponed time and again by the responsible committee of experts - appealed to Brussels decision-makers and encouraged them in their intention to subject Brussels and its city fabric to enormous changes. With the possibility of becoming the EU's permanent capital and the approaching World's Fair 1958 in mind, Brussels initiated multiple major projects such as a new urban highway network (Hein, 2004: 138).

For the competition of the future capital of Europe [5], the city of Brussels – next to the other two applicants Luxembourg and Strasbourg - submitted a proposal showcasing how the Quartier Léopold, south-east from the city centre, could be transformed into an office district capable of hosting international events and proper accommodation for the EU institutions. Initially planned to announce the winner of the competition in 1958, after the Treaty of Rome ratified the ECSC and the Euratom, major disagreements among the member states led to another postponement of three years (Sterken, 2015: 106). On the meeting of the European Communities' Council in January 1958, the members were unable to reach an unanimous decision which inevitably led to accepting the decentralized approach of appointing Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg as the three equal seats of the European institutions (Hein, 2004: 138). However, since both institutions, the ECSC and the Euratom, already took up their work and occupied office spaces in the designated Quartier Léopold, an unofficial agreement was reached to establish both institutions for a time period of two years temporarily in Brussels (Sterken, 2015: 106). With the institutions continuing to grow and starting to take roots, this temporary decision became successively a permanent one making Brussels the de-facto capital of the EU, albeit not having any political legitimacy *hitherto* (Sterken, 2015: 107).

Thus, history showed that the decision process for the headquarter city of the EU was a rather untransparent and informal top-down process marked by major disagreements and political power games among the member states. As this quest for a common European capital was characterized by a very small intersecting set, it can possibly be best described as the quest for the lowest common denominator, a quest determined not for what is best for all but what is the lesser evil for a few. Although the committee's report unambiguously suggested to choose Brussels as the EU's headquarter city, the final decision hadn't been based on the grounds of this report, but on the member states' consideration of which city will account for the least loss of power (Hein, 2004: 138). At this point it is almost unnecessary to mention that the people's will hadn't been considered and was, in fact, completely neglected. The proclaimed competition in 1958, a concept initially established to gain acceptance and legitimacy among the stakeholders but also among the population, had been thrown over the board in favour of an unofficial decision which had been introduced through the back door. This process is symptomatic for the EU's founding phase during its first years of existence and has overshadowed the creation of the EU quarter and the *Berlaymont* even before ground had been broken.

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5 In 1958, a competition was held by a committee of experts from the ECC to facilitate the member states' task to unanimously decide on a single European capital. After a final decision on this matter was already postponed in 1952, the ECC saw itself under time pressure which is why it became clear that the new institutions hat to be integrated into an existing urban infrastructure. This led to discarding the possibility of creating a completely new European district and reduced the field of applicants to the three centrally located cities of Luxembourg, Strasbourg and Brussels. (Hein, 2004: 67-68).

The creation of a new city district: The EU quarter

The arrival of the EU institutions not only had a substantial impact on Brussel's city fabric, but also brought about a massive transformation of the distribution of functions within. While the area around the Quartier Léopold was a rather overlooked upper-class residential area with just a few private office buildings till the late 1950s, the establishment of the EU institutions in this area led to the sudden concentration of administration space and the subsequent transformation into a monofunctional office district (Sterken, 2015: 103). While there was only about 0,12 Million m² of office space in 1958, no less than three million m² were added in the following two decades. At the end of the 20th century, the city of Brussels had more than six million m² of office space, most of it built in the Quartier Léopold (Dessouroux, 2011).

The consequences of this urban renewal were profound: Many neighbourhoods lost their unique, over decades and even centuries accumulated identity due to the fact that flats, shops and workshops had to give way to more profitable office space (Sterken, 2015: 103). The loss of the once pulsing life in this quarter is today a unintended defining element to distinguish between the EU quarter and its neighbouring districts: The dimensions of the EU quarter are not defined by official boundaries but depict solely a perceived space [6] marked by the accumulation of office spaces and the absence of a mixed, lively urban structure (Lewicki, 2015: 42, 45). Although one can indeed find certain spots in the EU quarter where

6 For coining the term EU-space, Lewicki refers to Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space* in which he distinguishes between three different ways of how space can be defined: Perceived, conceived and lived space. Perceived space refers to the individuals "sensual exploration and experience" of space while conceived space constitutes through unspoken rules and ways of behaviours. Lived space, in contrary, is created through the everyday experienced behaviour of people (Lewicki, 2017: 24).

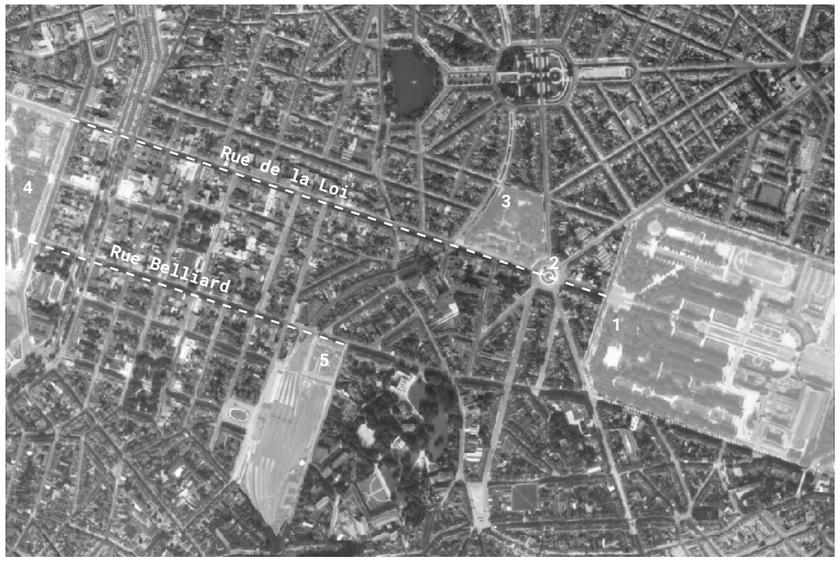

Fig. 05 Aerial photograph of Quartier Léopold in 1953. Starting from the Parc du Cinquantenaire [1] in the east of the quarter, the Rue de la Loi stretches across the Rond Point Schumann [2] past the site of the former *Berlaymont* monastery [3] to the Parc Royal [4]. Another important axis, Rue Belliard, runs parallel to the Rue de la Loi from Parc Royal to the former Gare de Bruxelles-Luxembourg [5] (BruCiel, 2020).

Fig. 06 Aerial photograph of Quartier Léopold in 2014. Today, the EU quarter constitutes of the following important architectural cornerstones: the *Berlaymont*, seat of the EC [6], the Charlemagne, complementary building of the EC [7], the Europe building, seat of the European Council [8] and the Espace Léopold, home to the EU parliament [9] with the adjoining Place Lux [10] (BruCiel, 2020).

Fig. 07 Euratom building in the Rue Belliard 51-55 (Sterken, 2015: 106)

Fig. 08 Joyeuse building in the Rue de la Loi, provisional home to the European Commission (Sterken, 2015: 106)

life is buzzing, like Place Lux [7] near the EU parliament building or the bars and restaurants around the Schumann roundabout right next to the *Berlaymont*, these spaces are created and lived by people from within the EU-space: Established EU civil servants, aspiring and ambitious young trainees working in the institutions and other representatives from NGO's and the industry dominate these places and contribute their share to the emergence of the Brussels bubble which emphasizes once again the already exclusive and detached character of the EU quarter (Lewicki, 2017: 42, 45).

While in the early 1950s, the original urban morphology of the Quartier Léopold was mainly composed of two to three storey apartment buildings, the newly created offices erected by private investment companies and intended to maximize profits, pushed the height restriction of 55 metres. This limitation was imposed by the city government to avoid obstructing the visual axis towards the Parc du Cinquantenaire along the Rue de la Loi, the main street of the Quartier Léopold. The impact on the city's morphology was dramatic: In 1953, the Quartier Léopold was smoothly integrated into the urban fabric (Fig. 05) while the edges of the EU quarter in 2014 are now clearly visible and show a huge leap in scale compared to the surrounding structures (Fig. 06). The results of this urban intervention were enormous: 10-storey tall faceless office buildings which fill up an entire city block such as the Euratom building in the Rue Belliard 51-55 (Fig. 07) or the Joyeuse building (Fig. 08), provisional home to the European Commission (Hein, 2004: 140; Sterken, 2015: 112) were erected. The destruction of the initial morphology of the Quartier Léopold was, therefore, inevitable and demonstrated the EU's preference for a rather efficient and cost-effective approach over paying attention to aesthetic qualities in creating an urban emblem - as a manifestation of European symbolism (Hein, 2014: 268).

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7 Place Lux, a square filled with restaurants and bars at the end of Rue du Luxembourg and right next to the EU parliament building, is known especially among younger members of the Brussels bubble as a place where the boundaries between business and private life become blurred. Here, meeting new contacts and finding a new job is just as possible as finding a new love affair (Lewicki, 2017: 49-53).

The heart of the EU quarter: The *Berlaymont* building

After the EU institutions moved to Brussels, the administrative body faced unexpected growth and, consequently, the necessity for office space rapidly increased. The rented premises in Rue de la Loi and Rue Joyeuse quickly became too small which led to the decision to bring together all ECC institutions in a single, prominent building. Still, the temporary and thus not yet legitimized presence of the ECC posed a major challenge to overcoming the shortage of office space. Acquiring or erecting buildings in the name of the ECC was not possible without a political consensus of the member states. To solidify the ECC's presence in Brussels and to turn it literally into a concrete reality, the Belgian government offered to step in as a future tenant renting out a new building to the ECC (Sterken, 2015: 107). The scheme of brokering office buildings from the private sector to the Belgian government, which in turn leases them to the ECC, had already been applied in this form for the Euratom and the Joyeuse building and demonstrates time and again the complex and sometimes non-transparent rental practices of the ECC in the EU quarter of Brussels. The EC's proximity to the private real-estate sector is in this case unmistakable. Commissioned and financed by the Belgian authorities and built by the construction company Francois et Fils, the transfer of decision-making power over the ECC's institution buildings to national governments and private entrepreneurs is symptomatic for the ECC's disinterest in creating a coherent urban imaginary during the late 1950s. The responsibility for questions surrounding the building's location and further design principles was now handed over to national decision-makers who were mainly concerned about the economic and functional feasibility of the project. In a possible event that the European institutions were established in another city, Brussels authorities intended to prepare the building to house other, local administrations. Brussels therefore demanded a high level of economic feasibility to minimize the risk of a loss-making venture, eventually resulting in the necessity for maximizing the amount of projected office units (Hein, 2014: 269; Sterken, 2015: 107).

Other EU institution buildings that followed suffered a similar fate: The Charlemagne, the 1965 extension of the *Berlaymont* (Fig. 09), was built by a private real-estate developer as the city of Brussels no longer wished to invest in facilities for the then ECC as long as the

Fig. 09 The *Berlaymont* building and the Charlemagne right behind it as of 1970 (Ministère Des Travaux Publics, 1970)

question of the seat remained open (Sterken, 2015: 111). The building for the then European Council of Ministers, the Justus-Lipsius building, was a result of miscommunication between various stakeholders, among them the ECC, the city of Brussels, private developers and planners. This impression of an absence of transparent and democratic decision-making even intensified when the temporary seat of the European Parliament in Brussels had to be disguised as an international conference centre to avoid the claim from other member states that the EU institution buildings are mainly concentrated in Brussels rather than equally distributed over all three EU headquarter cities (Hein, 2014: 273).

Furthermore, the *Berlaymont* building not only kickstarted the development of the Quartier Léopold into a privatized business district, but also altered directions of the city's initial plans

Fig. 10 Rue de la Loi with the former *Berlaymont* monastery (before 1920) (BruCiel, 2020)

on expanding its urban network system: As the importance of the EU quarter increased, the originally planned subway line running from north to south and connecting the city centre with the working-class neighbourhoods was replaced in favour for a south-west line. This linked the EU quarter with the rather wealthy residential area of Brussels leaving a certain mark on how the future priorities of the city of Brussels would look like (Hein, 2014: 270). In its development strategy, the city of Brussels put its focus on the "symbolic and economic distinctive status of EU civil servants" within the EU institutions by directing the infrastructure of the city "towards expats and EU civil servants" (Lewicki, 2017: 74).

Eventually, the new ECC headquarter's building was erected between 1963 and 1969 at the edge of the Quartier Léopold on the site of a former nineteenth century monastery, called *Berlaymont*, giving the future building its name (Fig. 10). Although the project site covered almost an entire city block with an approximate area of almost three hectare (EC, 2004), the building's envelope couldn't exceed the height limitation of 50 metres. This left doubt as to the project's ambition to accommodate 5000 EU officials, a number which was already outdated before constructions even started (Sterken, 2015: 108). The architects Lucien de Vestel, Jean Gilson and André and Jean Polak - well-known figures in Brussel's architecture scene who later designed other key buildings in the EU quarter – were faced with this challenge and came up with a building design encompassing a central circulation core from which four unequal wings span out (cf. Fig. 11), drawing its inspiration from the

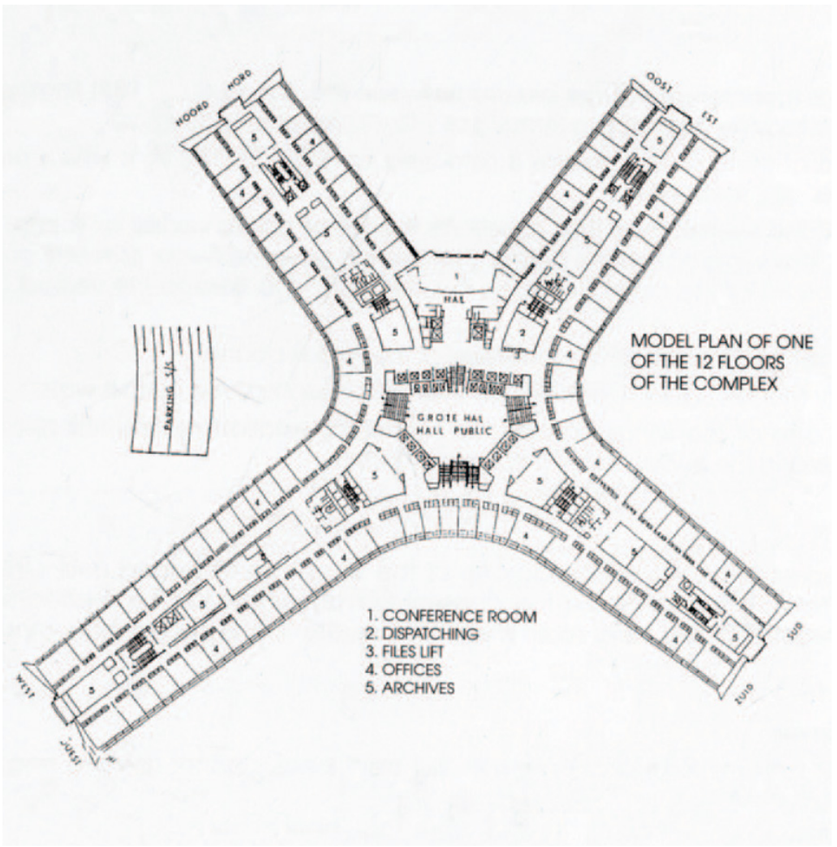

Fig. 11 Typical floor plan of the *Berlaymont*. The centre point of the cross-shaped building displays the circulation core from which the four unequal wings extend. The offices are aligned along the façade while service rooms are included in the load-bearing core of the building (Sterken, 2015).

just recently finished UNESCO headquarters in Paris (Hein, 2014: 269 ff.).

The suspended building with its innovative structure consisting of pre-flexed steel beams allowed for an open and accessible esplanade on the ground floor which tries to integrate its surrounding structures (Fig. 12). Due to the height restriction, the architects were furthermore forced to move large parts of the building's programme into the basement eventually resulting in four underground levels with a surface area which almost equals the area of the twelve above ground floors (cf. Fig. 13) (EC, 2004). As the main structure was made out of steel, the construction company had to pay increased attention to the fire

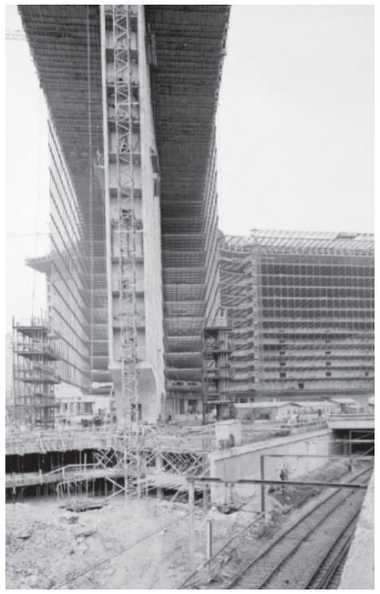

Fig. 12 (left) View onto the esplanade under the suspended *Berlaymont* building in 1970. The architect's intention to create a light and accessible building becomes clear. (Ministère Des Travaux Publics, 1970)

Fig. 13 (right) Construction site of the *Berlaymont* building 1968. The innovative and technologically advanced load-bearing structure with its preflexed steel beams and its central concrete core together with the nearby running subway line become visible (Sterken, 2015).

resistance of the building. Considering this, they wrapped the steel beams with asbestos which was a very common technique at that time, but would eventually lead to tedious and extensive renovation works three decades later (Sterken, 2015: 111). When in 1991, the detection of asbestos forced the European Commission to move out and scatter over 57 locations in Brussels, the *Berlaymont* building was close to being demolished as renovation costs rocketed and even exceeded the initial construction costs (cf. Fig. 14). Nonetheless, the newly established Brussels-Capital region urged to renovate the building as it had become "a symbol for Europe and the city" (Hein, 2004: 155). Although this matter attracted several internationally renowned architects such as Norman Foster, to come up with a design for a new headquarters building, the Brussels-Capital region objected and once again missed out the chance of having a public debate about what constitutes a representational EU institutional building (Hein, 2004: 156).

Fig. 14 "Breaking: Boris Johnson has left the *Berlaymont* building just twenty seven years after he wrote that it was about to be demolished." Tom Peck, columnist at *The Independent* digs out an article from The Telegraph from 1991, written by Boris Johnson, then EC correspondent in Brussels, about the *Berlaymont* building being close to be blown up (Peck, 2020).

Notwithstanding, it was the first time in the still young history of the ECC that an institution building raised any public awareness, albeit mostly of a negative nature. It was criticised by Brussels' citizens for its colossal appearance and its windowless front sides of the four wings facing the streets (Hein, 2004: 143). The suspended, technologically innovative structure together with its distinctive, but simultaneously not very well-adapted outer appearance definitely marks a turning point towards a rather optimistic development of the architectural manifestations of the ECC's presence in Brussels. Nevertheless, this process was based on mostly economic intentions of national governments and private stakeholders, framed by lofty expectations, too high requirements and accompanied by questionable subsequent decisions such as the relocation of the originally planned north-south subway line. The idea of combining all EU institutions in a single building had to be rejected as the imminent scarcity of office space became obvious already in 1964 (Sterken, 2015: 110). This is why the Commission's final assessment of the planning and construction process was accordingly perceived devastating as a note to the former vice-president of the ECC, Lionello Levi Sandri, reveals:

"In a nutshell, we can say

that if the ECC had been the project manager,

the design of the building would have been quite different."

Note to the former Vice president of the ECC, Lionello Levi Sandri, 1964

Today, the presence of the EU institutions and the ambition to be the main headquarter is ultimately cemented in Brussel's urban fabric although the city is officially still just one out of the three EU seats next to Luxembourg and Strasbourg. A myriad of EU facilities and other office buildings are scattered all over the Quartier Léopold without any sense of scale or respect for the existing morphology of the district. 15-storey structures with glazed, shiny facades such as the Charlemagne are positioned right next to old, two to three storey buildings from the first half of the 20th century (Fig. 15). The *Berlaymont* building depicts the tragic focal point of this urbanistic mismatch. Conceived as a state-of-the-art building from the modernist era with the potential to fill the symbolic vacuum the ECC was craving for since they published the *Declaration on European Identity* in 1973, the edifice rather symbolisies the absence of a consequent and sustainable building strategy than presenting an optimistic prospect of the EU's architectural future (Hein, 2014: 274).

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Fig. 15 The *Berlaymont* building after the renovation in the early 2000s. Right next to it, the old existing buildings from before 1950 (European Commission, 2004).

The *Berlaymont* as featured in the public eye

In common parlance, the *Berlaymont* is often mocked as the "Berlaymonster" or "Berlaymonstre" of Brussels, referring to the bureaucratic and exuberating gigantism of the EU and its equally enormous architectural appearance in the form of the EC headquarter building (Banks, 2004). This term is not only well-known among insiders of the EU institutions, but made its way out of the EU-bubble into the pop-cultural sphere of Twitter: A pro-European Twitter account named Berlaymonster (Fig. 16) points in an amusing way at the blunders in which the EU puts its foot every now and then (Kimberley, 2021). Newspapers such as the Belgian *La Libre* speak of the EC headquarter building as "l'antre du «Berlaymonstre»" (Buxant, 2005), meaning the cave of the Berlaymonster. After the renovation of the *Berlaymont* was finished in 2004, German newspaper *Die Welt* added another nickname for the *Berlaymont*, calling it "Raumschiff Brüssel" (Ridderbusch, 2004), spaceship Brussels, referring to its new futuristic but considerably detached outer appearance. Thus, the existence and dissemination of such nicknames hints at the notoriously negative and partially tragic perception of the *Berlaymont* in the public eye.

In 2004, when the *Berlaymont* was officially reopened again by EC president José Barroso after thirteen years of renovation works, the EC headquarters building's outer appearance had altered significantly: The old concrete façade elements were removed completely and replaced by a glazed façade with sun shading elements. In the interior, the building became "more spacious, accessible and light" (Ridderbusch, 2004) – the main difference according to EU officials who still knew the old *Berlaymont* building.

Accordingly, the new self-imposed motto for the *Berlaymont* seemed to be transparency and accessibility, following Paul Jones' criteria for symbolic and representational architecture (Jones, 2011: 168). In his notes on his visit of the *Berlaymont*, ethnographer Lewicki agrees that the spacious and light reception hall creates a certain feeling of "transparency and openness", but admits that in the context of the missing life and the high security standards, this space reminds him more of an airport - a space which is "conceived rather than lived" (Lewicki, 2017: 57-58)

Fig. 16 The Twitter account Berlaymonster, depicted as a furry, friendly-looking monster. (Kimberley, 2021)

In her newspaper article following the opening of the renovated *Berlaymont*, Ridderbusch' impression of the building matches the one from Lewicki. She acknowledges that the motifs for the renovation just apply for the new face of the building, but doesn't change the core values of the *Berlaymont* (Ridderbusch, 2004). Indeed, while the *Berlaymont* in its state from 1969 at least had the ambition to offer accessible public spaces with its suspended structure and its integrated ground floor esplanade (cf. Fig. 12), its 2004 renovated version only confronts the public ground with even more gates, doors and other hindrances. The 2004 report on the *Description of the Berlaymont*, published by the EC, reveals: The new building comes with an "VIP entrance with protected vehicular access", anti-protest gates and an outsourced press area which is "mainly made up of a new building" (EC, 2004).

While these specifications already intensify the impression of exclusivity and the deliberate absence of the public, the symbolic arrangement of the Commission's executive storey does the rest to manifest this perception: The EU cabinet floors, starting on the ninth floor and including the executive floor on the thirteenth storey of the *Berlaymont*, are not

Fig. 17 "Looks like Brexit talks have made the top floor tonight." The lights on the 13th floor of the *Berlaymont* are still lit. Nick Gutteridge, Brussels correspondent for The Sun, interprets this as a sign that EU officials of the EC are still working on the Brexit deal (Gutteridge, 2020).

only visually distinguishable from the floors below by wood-panelled walls and a more open, spacious office landscape, but also come with their own restaurant and can only be accessed with a so-called cabinet's badge (Lewicki, 2017: 58-59).
These specifications depict how the architecture of a building can symbolize and manifest a given hierarchy – in this case it conveys the image of the Commission executive being aloof and detached not only of the people they represent, but of their own employees. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning here that with the arrival of the new EC president Ursula von der Leyen, the executive floor has lost some of its aloof reputation - the new president has not only set up her own apartment on this floor, but also provides the public with a little more insight with self-published pictures and videos from this floor on twitter, thus ensuring more transparency in dealing with the public perception - unlike previous presidents who rather lived in a hotel and hid in anonymity (Quatremer, 2020).

Interestingly, the fact that the Commission's executive storey covers the entire uppermost floor of the building led to the phenomenon of European citizens supervising their elected representatives by checking if the lights are still lit on the thirteenth floor, a sign that the executives of the EC are apparently still working (Fig. 17). The difference between this

Fig. 18 "The EU Commission building in Brussels tonight" The EC displays the message "Europe loves Scotland" on the façade of the *Berlaymont* and Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the Scottish National Party, is obviously happy about that (Sturgeon, 2020)

almost desperately looking attempt to monitor the own elected representatives and the case of the Reichstag in Berlin where architect Norman Foster sees the walkable and public accessible cupola as a way of reinforcing "the democratic ideal of the public as masters, politicians as servants" (Jones, 2011: 156), cannot be more striking: While the Reichstag dome is an intended architectural feature to give the citizens the possibility to stand above their elected leaders observing the work of the politicians, the mentioned phenomenon of the *Berlaymont* is an incidental situation in which citizens are only enabled to gain a slight glimpse of their representatives when looking up to them – by night and from a distance.

Communication between the EU and its citizens has always been a difficult matter characterized by a missing common platform for exchange and exuberating, untransparent reports and legal texts. Therefore, the EC soon discovered the effectiveness of having a visual language to communicate their messages. The silhouette of the *Berlaymont* is used as the official logo of the EC (EC, 2017) and the façade of the building serves as a communicator to convey important messages of the EU (Meikle, 2020). This can, for example, not only be observed at grand matters such as the Brexit (Fig. 18), but also when it is about to express support for re-occurring

Fig. 19 "EU-Commission on #InternationalDayAgainstHomophobia" Stefan Leifert, correspondent for the German news channel ZDF, shares a picture of the *Berlaymont* façade lighted in rainbow colors to support the international day against homophobia (Leifert, 2020)

events such as the International Day against Homophobia (Fig. 19). But due to the "absence of participatory opportunities" (Hein, 2014: 274), it is not surprising that the *Berlaymont* building itself also became the addressee of several activist campaigns where protestors of notable NGO's such as Greenpeace used the windowless facades of the building's wings as a canvas for their political messages – obviously without the permission of the EC (Fig. 20) (Le Soir, 2020). The important function of the EC headquarters' façade as a communication tool becomes even more significant when news outlets use the *Berlaymont* as a background for their EU media coverage. Still, it is not only the outer part of the building that is used to convey messages. Inside, too, news such as the revelation that tropical wood from illegal logging was used for stairs attracts attention and contributes to the perception of the building - in this case, it reflects rather badly on the *Berlaymont* and the commission as Greenpeace declared the building a "forest crime scene" (Banks, 2004b) (Fig. 21). But no matter the evaluation and interpretation of such media coverage, according to Bruter's examination, this will, nevertheless, amplify and accelerate the effect of news and symbols on European identity (Bruter, 2009: 1519 ff.).

Fig. 20 Greenpeace campaign with a huge protest banner mounted onto the façade of the EU Commission building and an accompanying demonstration on the Schumann roundabout (Le Soir, 2020).

Fig. 21 Greenpeace claims that the wood used for stairs in the *Berlaymont* building comes from a company which is known for illegal logging in Indonesia (Greenpeace, 2004).

The symbolic impression of exclusivity is characteristic for the ambiguous mindset of the EU after the finished renovation works of the *Berlaymont* in 2004. The EU officially acknowledges the importance of symbols on the European integration process as it can be read in the *Declaration on European Identity,* but simultaneously eschews integrating these ambitions in their own architectural manifestations neglecting the impact of architecture on the public's perception of the EU and European identity.

However, through the ongoing negative media coverage and other critical voices among European citizens about the perception of the *Berlaymont* and other buildings in the EU quarter, the EC felt compelled to shift its focus towards a responsible acting as the promoter of a positive symbolic image (Hein, 2014: 275). Siim Kallas, then vice president of the EC in 2009, therefore published a report with the title *The Commission's buildings policy in Brussels* in which the EC's newly acquired architectural ambition becomes clearly visible:

> *The aim is to give the European quarter a strong, positive symbolic image as the capital of Europe by making the buildings more beautiful and more efficient and by integrating them more into their immediate surroundings in the heart of convivial areas of housing, shops, green spaces or whatever.*
>
> The EC on the Commission's building policy in Brussels, 2009

Fig. 22 The oak-framed facade shows the reunion of old and new (Olbrechts, 2016)

Since the report has been published in 2009, the EU quarter was complemented by one major addition, the EU council headquarters, also known as the Europa building. Its most distinctive feature, the façade consisting of re-used window frames from across Europe, is a crystal-clear statement about "expressing European diversity of cultures" (Zeitoun, 2017) (Fig. 22). Together with the introduction of the *New European Bauhaus* [1], the EU underscores to an ever greater extent its ambition to shift architecture back into the focus of societal development and to strengthen its role in the task of creating a common European identity. One may be eager to see what the EU holds in store for its further symbolic architectural design within its own architectural manifestations

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8 The *New European Bauhaus* is a new agenda introduced by the EU in October 2020 to further promote aspects like sustainability, inclusivity and aesthetics in the building sector. Starting in 2021, the EU wants to call on architects and designers to come up with ideas for a future Europe which "stimulate the necessary societal discourse on new building methods and design forms" (von der Leyen, 2020).

PART 03 CONCLUSION

The tragic symbol of the EU's strenuous quest for a European identity

In its now more than 70 years of existence, the EU's quest for European identity has been one of fluctuation and strenuousness, coined by nearly unrecoverable relapses and followed by all the more surprising turnarounds. Since their establishment in Brussels, the EU institutions and the *Berlaymont* in particular had to cope from the beginning with uncertain circumstances, be it the unresolved question of the EU's main capital or the missing responsibilities and contrasting priorities in the planning and construction process. The EU quarter developed over its time of existence into a "space of the white, European middle class" where the boundaries between the political and the private blurred, but the borders between the political and the public sphere increasingly solidified (Lewicki, 2017: 65-66).

Although the *Berlaymont* was conceived as a state-of-the-art building with ground-breaking technology, the negligent and arrogant disregard of the buildings integration into its urban surroundings led to an insufficient acceptance rate within Brussels' population. Simultaneously, it conveyed an image characterized by remoteness and detachment of an EU that already suffered from the reputation of being arrogant and aloof.

However, the EU recognized early enough that excessive bureaucracy is rather counterproductive in order to create a common European identity. The 1971 *Declaration on European Identity* therefore set the guiding principles on how the EU wants to further promote a symbolic approach to identity-creation. Cultural activities such as the European Capital of Culture or the design for the Euro banknotes in 2001 all take the same line of reinforcing the interest in the EU by establishing relatable, identity-forming policies. Nevertheless, this approach didn't enter the sphere of the EU's own institution buildings. Until the report of Siim Kallas in 2009, architecture and urban design was a rather neglected field - the EU obviously disregarded the strong impact of its own architectural manifestations on the emergence of a European identity.

In the age of live-broadcasting and social media, the *Berlaymont* building becomes an unintended resonance body, an incidental conveyer of messages in a desperate attempt to overcome the EU's lack of transparency and accessibility. However, in this process, the *Berlaymont* encounters further mutual misunderstandings, only nurturing the already existing claims of exclusivity and detachment. Eventually, in the public eye, the *Berlaymont* is perceived as an architectural epitome of the EU's never-ending critique of being "too distant from its citizens and not fully democratic" (Hein, 2014: 274). The fundament of democracy, the right to political participation, is not reflected in this building which frantically aspires to be a symbol for European identity.

■

Index of abbreviations

EU	European Union (successor of the European Community in 2009)
ECC	European Economic Community (renamed to European Community in 1993)
EC	European Community (predecessor of the European Union)
ERC	European Research Council
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)
Euratom	European Atomic Energy Community

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