

Information note from the General Secretariat of the Council on the Council's buildings programme (16 June 2006)

Caption: On 16 June 2006, the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union forwards an information note to the delegations of the Member States on the Council's property programme. This note gives an overview of the surface areas of the various buildings which the Council owns or rents and of current construction or fitting-out projects.

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1. Introduction

The General Secretariat's previous information note on the Council's buildings programme was issued on 23 May 2005 (9143/05 IMM1).

This document, drawn up as part of the budgetary procedure for 2007, updates the previous note.

2. Justus Lipsius

The conversion work in the Justus Lipsius building, which was decided on in 2001 in order to adapt the building to the new requirements arising out of accessions and enable it, provisionally, to host meetings of the European Council, has now largely been completed.

The work completed in 2005, in progress in 2006, and at the planning stage stands as follows:

(a) Delegations' offices

The construction of an additional floor at SG.70 was completed in August 2005. The delegations of the new Member States moved into the offices in September 2005.

(b) Covering of the main entrance courtyard

Work on covering the main entrance courtyard and moving access controls to the rue de la Loi began in April 2005 and is expected to continue until August 2006. This conversion is designed to move the security checks on those entering the Justus Lipsius building away from the heart of the building and to build a multipurpose area in the covered courtyard for use, inter alia, as a working area for the written press during European Council meetings. In response to a request from the press, an addition was made to the initial plan, and mezzanine floors have been built on all sides of the courtyard in order to provide working areas for the filmed press.

(c) Adaptation of individual features

This work includes:

- Moving the security controls at the Etterbeek vehicle entrance to the perimeter; expected completion date: mid-2006.
- Renovation of the Security Centre; expected completion date: mid-2006.
- Construction of additional radio/TV booths in the press area, as a solution to the occasional use (during European Council meetings) of interpretation booths in the meeting rooms) (2007).
- Alterations linked with the removals from the Justus Lipsius building to the Lex building and the relinquishment of several outlying buildings (2007, see section 4).
- Various alterations to meet new requirements regarding security, working conditions, sustainable development and energy efficiency.

(d) Future work

The GSC is considering whether to carry out the following work to adapt the Justus Lipsius building:

- Enlargement of the press conference room to accommodate a further 100 seats.
- Installation of definitive security control booths in front of the building outside the courtyard area.

Detailed studies will have to be conducted and planning permission obtained before this work can start; if

approved, it will not be carried out before 2008.

3. Other office premises in Brussels

In addition to the Justus Lipsius building, the Council rents six outside office buildings:

- Since 1985: Frère-Orban, occupied primarily by translation divisions, the Staff Training Department and libraries.
- Since 2001: Kortenberg 150-158, occupied primarily by ESDP-related departments. In 2005 work started on converting the building to enable the installation of facilities for running the OPCEN; this work will be completed in January 2007.
- Since 2002: one floor of Froissart 133 occupied by temporary offices of the Special Representatives.
- Since 2003: the Espace Rolin, occupied primarily by translation divisions;
- Since 2004: Woluwe Heights, occupied primarily by translation divisions;
- Since the beginning of 2005: Kortenberg 115 (École Royale Militaire); work is under way on converting and fitting out this building, into which ESDP-related departments are scheduled to move in November 2006.

Since the Lex building will be delivered at the end of December 2006 (see section 4 below), in 2007 the Council will relinquish in turn the Rolin building (in March), Woluwe Heights (in June) and the Frère-Orban building (in December).

Lastly, in 2006 consideration will be given to whether it is necessary and desirable for the Council to have a further one-off extension of the Justus Lipsius building pending delivery of the Residence Palace building, scheduled for 2013 (see section 5).

4. Lex

The construction of the Lex building began in March 2003; delivery to the Council is scheduled for the end of 2006.

The building will comprise: two meeting rooms for 2 x 70 delegates (each with 29 interpretation booths), about 1 000 offices and five large multipurpose areas. It is intended to house the translation divisions, which will partly be accommodated in open plan offices.

The construction contract concluded for the building stipulates that it will be delivered to the Council on acceptance, in the form of a long-term lease with an option to purchase. The contract also stipulates that the Council may make advance payments towards the investment cost. The appropriations available in recent years have to date enabled the Council to accumulate advance payments amounting to a little over 45% of the final investment in the project. As a result, the annual ground rent will be substantially less than the amount estimated when the contract was concluded in 2003.

It should be noted that the Council may become the owner of the Lex building by taking up the option to purchase provided for in the contract, for the sum of EUR 1, during the term of the lease.

5. Residence Palace

At its meeting on 25 and 26 March 2004 the European Council agreed to the Belgian Government's proposal to transfer block A of the Residence Palace building to the Council for its meetings once the building had been refurbished.

In accordance with this agreement, the GSC, under the aegis of the International Union of Architects, launched a European architectural design competition in August 2004 to select a design for the renovation and restructuring of the Residence Palace building and the team of architects and engineers to be entrusted with its implementation.

The winning design selected by the board in September 2005 was by the special partnership of Samyn and Partners (BE) – Studio Valle Progettazioni (IT) – Buro Happold (UK).

In September and October 2005 the winning design underwent detailed independent analysis by two teams of quantity surveyors in order to reach a clear definition of the cost, the preliminary studies period and the construction period. In parallel the design was minutely examined by a technical Committee made up of officials of the Belgian Public Buildings Administration (Régie des Bâtiments), the GSC and the Joint Interpreting and Conference Service; the Committee detailed all the adjustments needed in order to bring the design into line with the functional and technical requirements specified by the Council.

At the same time, a working party of representatives of the Belgian State and of the GSC drew up a Memorandum of Understanding between the Belgian State and the European Community setting out the guidelines to be followed by the parties when implementing the design for the renovation and restructuring of block A of the Residence Palace.

The conclusions on all the above aspects were forwarded to the Council's political bodies, which considered the implications in terms of the buildings programme, cost and timetable. On that basis the General Affairs Council decided on 21 November 2005 in favour of continuing with the Residence Palace project in order for the building to become the future seat of the European Council and the Council and entrusted responsibility for implementing the project to the GSC.

Following the Council's agreement, on 25 November 2005 the Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Mr G. Verhofstadt, the Prime Minister, Ms F. Van den Bossche, Minister for the Budget and Mr D. Reynders, Minister for Finance, for the Belgian State, and by Mr P. de Boissieu, Deputy Secretary-General, for the Council of the European Union.

Main points in the Memorandum of Understanding:

- the building will be constructed in accordance with the functional and technical requirements specified by the Council in the competition;
- the Belgian State, through its Public Buildings Administration, will act as contracting authority for the project and, as such, will be responsible for coordinating and supervising the studies and works, obtaining the permits, and the award of the various contracts;
- the overall completion cost was set at EUR 240 million (at 1 January 2004 prices); that cost will be prefunded by the Belgian State;
- on completion, the Belgian State will hand the building over to the Council, which will repay to the Belgian State the cost of renovating and restructuring the building under a long-term lease with a purchase option.

The delivery of the building is scheduled for mid-2013. The interim stages of the project are:

- spring 2006: submission of the sketch design;
- end 2006: submission of preliminary design;
- beginning of 2008: planning and environmental permission granted;
- mid-2008: launch of tendering procedure for works contracts;
- summer 2009: work starts.

As scheduled, the GSC examined the outcome of the sketch-design stage and on 4 May 2006 agreed to the launch of the preliminary design stage. In so doing, however, it urged the Belgian State:

- to take the utmost care to ensure compliance with the agreed budget of EUR 240 million and to ask the designers to continue their studies with an eye to economy;
- at the beginning of the preliminary design stage to clarify in consultation with the GSC, unresolved issues regarding:

- compliance with the security requirements of the building and the railway station under it;
- the functional characteristics of the kitchens and the restaurant areas, in particular as regards flows of customers, services, goods and waste;
- the possibility of applying all quality requirements to the historic part of the building;
- exemptions to be requested from obligations under fire safety regulations.

These issues should be dealt with by September 2006 at the latest.

6. Infopoint

In February 2005 the Council signed a lease for the premises for a Brussels Infopoint situated on the corner of rue Archimède and Rond-Point Schuman. The Infopoint was inaugurated on 30 June 2005 and since then has been operated jointly by the Council and the Commission.

7. Overijse

Since 1975 the Council has rented a central storage depot in Overijse. This currently comprises three storage areas with a total surface area of approximately 5 000 m². At the end of September 2005 storage area 3 was replaced by storage area 4, which had recently been built on the same site. The change enlarged the surface area available without any increase in rent.

8. Crèche building

In April 2004 the Council concluded a contract for the fitting-out and purchase of a building for the crèche on the corner of avenue de la Brabançonne and chaussée de Louvain in Schaerbeek. The contract is of a similar type to that for the Lex building (and the future Residence Palace building): the developer prefinances the investment, which is reimbursed by the Council under a long-term lease (27 years) with a purchase option. However, depending on the funds available, the GSC is now considering purchasing the building with a single payment when the property is handed over.

The future crèche building (including extensions) will accommodate up to 180 children of officials of the GSC and the Member States' Permanent Representations and, space permitting, of officials of other Community institutions.

The work on fitting out the building is due for completion in June 2006 and the crèche should open at the beginning of September 2006. It will be managed by the OIB (Office for Infrastructure and Logistics – Brussels), which currently also manages the Commission's day-care centres for children.

9. Luxembourg

Owing to the work being carried out to extend and renovate the Kirchberg Conference Centre, the Council has been using temporary premises since October 2003 in the exhibition halls of the *Foires Internationales du Luxembourg*.

The return to the Kirchberg Conference Centre is scheduled for 2009. Following discussions between the Luxembourg authorities and the GSC, the renovation plans for the Kirchberg Conference Centre have been tailored to the Council's requirements.

10. New York

In August 2004, the Council's Office for liaison with the United Nations moved to its new premises at 222 East 41st Street. Part of this space – consisting of meeting rooms and offices – has been sub-let by the Council to the Commission.

11. Geneva

In November 2004, the Council's Office for liaison with international organisations in Geneva moved to its new premises at 64 rue du Grand-Pré. The Commission has also rented office space and meeting rooms in the building, which adjoin those occupied by the Council.

12. Summary of surface areas

The table below provides an overview of the surface areas of the various buildings which the Council owns or rents, and of current construction or fitting-out projects.

[...]

13. Budget

The budgetary implications of the building work, rentals and acquisitions described in this note are summarised in the table below:

[...]