

Speech of Siim Kallas, Vice-President of the European Commission, at ACE conference in 10.04.08

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EVENTATTITUDE / F. DEBATTY

Designing for the future — The market and the quality of life

Architects' Council of Europe Conference

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all to thank you, also on behalf of President Barroso, for inviting the European Commission to be present at the opening session of today's conference.

We very much value your activities, not only because of our presence in Brussels and Luxembourg, but also in consideration of how these can contribute to overall sustainable development in Europe.

I was pleased to read your preparatory reflection papers and to identify there several elements in common with our own vision for the Commission's buildings policy, which, as you certainly know, the College of Commissioners endorsed last September.

We are very sensitive to your objective of linking architecture to the issue of quality of life.

Sadly, the presence of the European Institutions here in Brussels has so far not met this ambition. The European Quarter, which has become also my own headquarter, both professionally and privately, still consists of too many relatively insignificant, grey buildings.

This is all the more regrettable, as Brussels was a leading city in one of the most impressive architectural styles ever launched, namely Art Nouveau.

It seems to me that past architects such as Victor Horta, Paul Hankar or Gustave Strauven, to name a few, managed to successfully combine *quality* with *design* and *sustainability* here in Brussels.

The Rue de la Loi project

I am therefore particularly pleased to inform you of a recent initiative taken in cooperation with the Brussels' Region and City, which I hope will lead to the first tangible result of our new vision.

I am referring to the so-called "Rue de la Loi" project, for which an international call for proposal has been published in the Official Journal last week.

Since last autumn, my collaborators and those of the Brussels Region have been closely cooperating within an ad hoc working group.

The result is the launch of a major urban planning competition, aimed to redesign a large part of the European Quarter.

Within that area, Minister-President Picqué and I have identified a perimeter along the rue de la Loi whereby we have agreed that:

a) the European Commission will be able to adjust up to 400 000 m² office space for its own needs, by freeing space in a few other areas of the European Quarter, and
b) the Brussels Region will develop up to about 110 000 m² of residential areas and about 55 000 m² of shops and other facilities.

It is my objective to subsequently launch a first architectural competition on a specific part of the rue de la Loi, which is of particular interest to the Commission. I hope that, by doing so, we will help in giving a new face to the Commission's presence in Brussels.

I invite any interested person amongst you and your colleagues to submit their proposals: there will be time to do so until May 30.

Afterwards, a maximum of five particularly brilliant candidatures will be selected in order to present a more in-depth re-design of the area concerned.

Both Minister Picqué and myself hope to be able to announce the name of the winner by November this year.

The Commission's buildings policy

I do sincerely hope that this major urban planning competition will lead the best professionals amongst you to submit ideas which are fully in line not only with the philosophy of the *schéma directeur* of the Brussels Region, but also with the Commission's specific policy principles.

Allow me to briefly remind you of them:

1. High quality architectural design, in particular for flagship projects, allowing for a positive and symbolic statement of the Commission's presence in Brussels and Luxembourg. We will be looking for highly efficient buildings and use of international architectural competitions for all major developments.
2. Integration into the urban environment to facilitate an appropriate mix between office, residential and commercial property, whilst taking security and image considerations fully into account.
3. A comfortable, safe and healthy work environment.
4. Better access for disabled persons.
5. Presence of high-quality social infrastructure (such as European Schools, nurseries and after-school child-minding facilities) close to the offices and/or to the main places of residence of staff.
6. Last but not least, reduction of the Commission's carbon footprint, in particular through a building's design integrating sustainable materials and energy efficiency, better links to the public transport networks and greater synergies in terms of building management.

Our ultimate goal is to obtain fewer but more efficient buildings for our staff and ensure the best use of taxpayers' money.

In its recent communication, the Commission has particularly stressed the need to improve the long-term planning of its space needs and the competition on both the Brussels and Luxembourg real estate markets by publishing our needs sufficiently in advance and by promoting a more frequent resort to open calls for tender, rather than to negotiated procedures.

Furthermore, the Commission has tightened co-operation among its most concerned departments, so as to be able to make decisions in the real estate area in an adequately quick but also well-thought manner.

The multi-site approach

Before concluding, allow me to say a few words about our multi-site approach.

Even if we manage to successfully implement the project around rue de la Loi, we already know that it will not be enough to meet all the estimated Commission requirements over the next few years.

As you know, the Commission is the only institution so far to have decentralised certain services outside the European Quarter. We are now present at Beaulieu and in rue de Genève.

The new buildings policy communication confirms this approach and plans to progressively develop a maximum of two or three large sites, each in principle of at least 100 000 m², outside the European Quarter. We are about to launch a specific call for interest for the estimated Commission needs, so as to get an overview of all possible options for such a future site.

All proposals will be welcome and will be analysed against the background of the main principles I have detailed earlier and based on a set of more precise criteria that will be defined, such as the easy accessibility to and from the European Quarter, the potential for the site's development, etc.

Conclusion

To conclude, Ladies and Gentlemen: thank you again for giving me this opportunity to share with you our vision.

The Commission's strategy for the future contains the three elements of social challenge, sustainable development and integration of culture that represent the pillars of your reflections today.

Let's continue sharing these ideas, as your profession can most usefully contribute to combining environment, development and quality of life.

In our future contacts I will always keep in mind the statement made by a colleague of yours (Mr. Frank Lloyd Wright), who once said: "The architect must be a prophet... a prophet in the true sense of the term...and if he can't see at least ten years ahead don't call him an architect".

Thank you.

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