

ELEMENTS EUROPA



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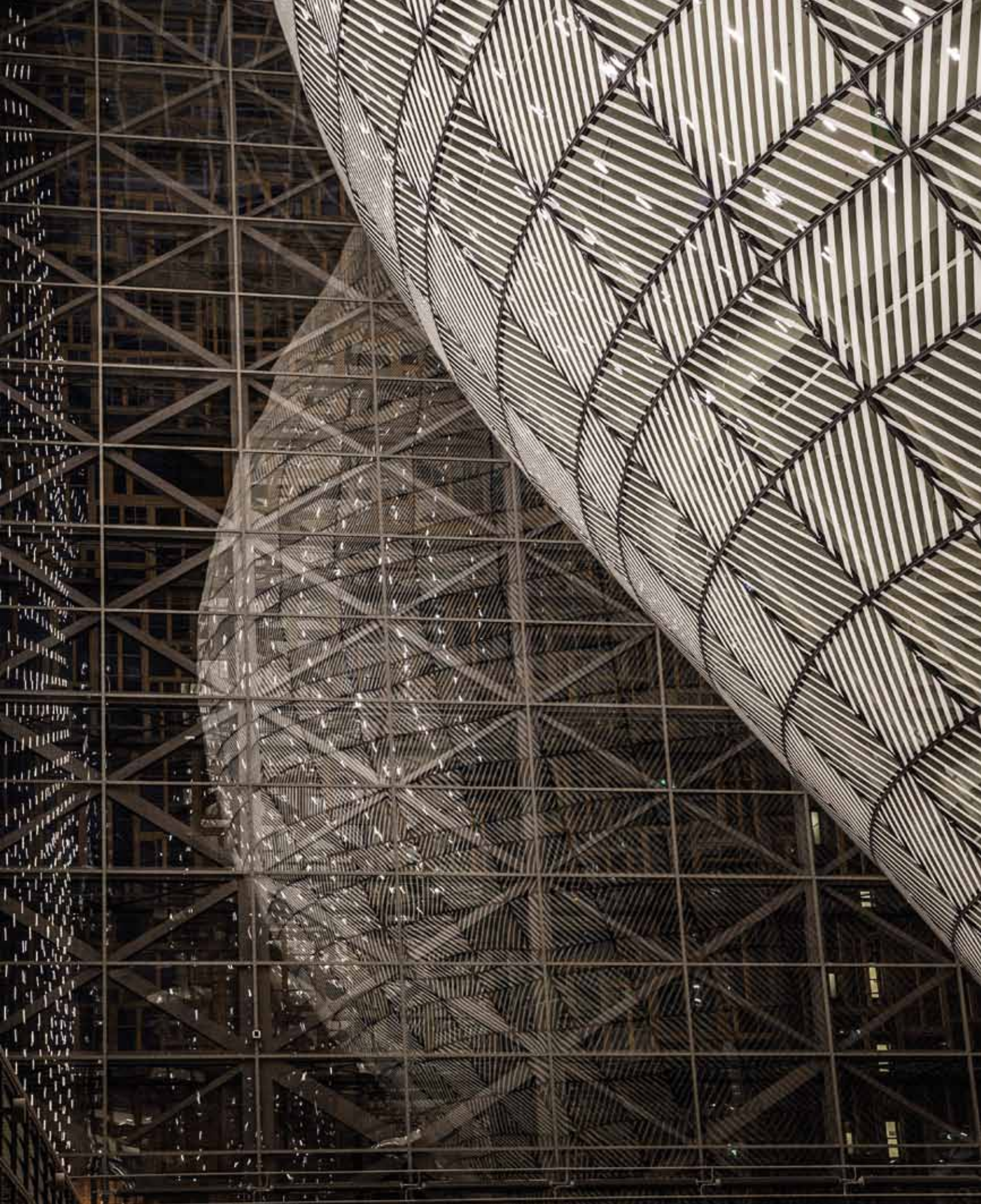
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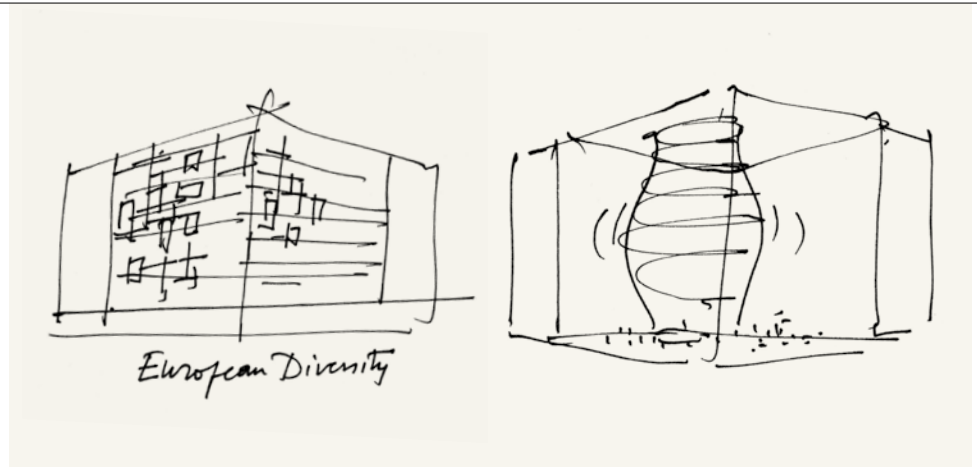
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FLUCTUAT...

On 23 June 2016, with the exception of Greater London, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom in its majority voted in favour of leaving the European Union: the latter will not be the same without Britain. At this stage, it is too early to realise all the consequences this unprecedented situation will have but nothing can stop one from making hypotheses. For once, no one is thinking about bypassing the outcome of the vote (at least for now). Such was not the case after the French and Dutch referenda on the 2005 European Constitution treaty: the Lisbon Treaty was hastily finalised and adopted and it is considered to more or less have had the same effects as the rejected Constitution. Today, it should be noted that alternatives to the EU do exist for such or such Member States and that the EU will have to carry on without such a heavyweight nation as Britain. One of democracy's tacit rules is to acknowledge that those voting against your own convictions are no less informed and motivated than you are. Britain would rather conceive its future apart from EU institutions and, as a matter of fact, this probably is no leap into the unknown. Britain can rely on its own history and feels its destiny as an island is prepared to make new alliances with other nations than those from the continent. Is this an illusion? Time will tell. For Britain to have a more productive economy by cutting its organic bond of solidarity with the European economy or to focus its power on the same resources is not a foregone conclusion. In the globalisation age, what is the real status of a national economy? There probably are various potential answers but the world image people have in England and Wales is not exactly the same as the one people have on the continent. Such is history and dramatic turns of event actually do happen.



The second hypothesis is that, unlike the domino effect feared by many, Europe might as well close ranks. After the collective failure Brexit caused, there could be some sort of a magnet effect and a wish to find reasons for Europe to strengthen its own political project in adhering to the Union's goals. Rather than the rout foretold here and there, let us hope that some extra will, courage and sagacity could help get through the turbulence. This might not be a return of trust yet but at least signs reveal immense expectations. Eventually, the lesson will be heard this time: the European Union cannot rid itself of democracy. This means that the solid legislative, regulatory and administrative foundation it has kept building up for decades to make the integration of new Member States legally viable cannot keep acting as a political programme or leave national leaders on the side. The time has come for Europe to be put back on its feet, to restore a balanced relationship between the various institutions of the triangle formed by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council. After all, this is the best meaning the creation of the new Council of Europe and Council of the European Union head office could receive: give more visibility and representative force to the European executive power. In the distribution of powers, the European Commission has been playing a prominent part for ages. Has the time come for the executive power, i.e. the Council of Europe and Council of the European Union, to endorse its pre-eminence? Let us be bold enough to see the current situation in the most favourable way: the new Council head office comes at the right time.



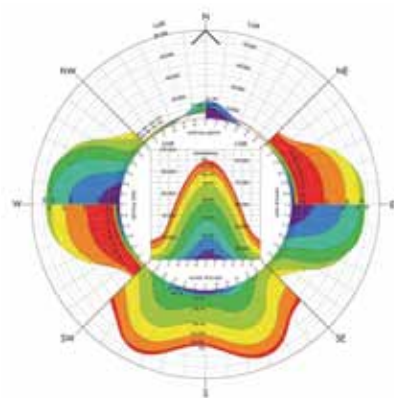
1 BACKLIT EUROPE

The poetic idea emanating from this movement operation within the lines is the hypothesis of an ample, immense and complicated yet eurhythmic being, that of a genius-filled animal, suffering and heaving all sighs and human ambitions.

Charles BAUDELAIRE, "Fusées", XV, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, Bib. de la Pléiade, col. 1, 1975, p. 663.

The Europa building merges the former Residence Palace and the new building erected on Rue de la Loi into one single building. The Europa combines two architectures, the first of which sets up its stone Art Deco facade and the second its monumental fence made up of wood panels. Even better, three architectural types lean against one another or stick together. The new building's patchwork facade is but a foreground behind which the great conference hall light or glass bulb appears or disappears. This new ensemble is a double one in itself, on top of being inserted amidst the facades of the former palace. What can be seen from the street, revealing the Europa's layers? Firstly, the reconstruction of its lighting effects. The patchwork facade sets up its chain of window frames, thus multiplying light reflection effects under the sun or transparency at dusk by the thousands. Behind the *patchwork*, the opalescent lantern remains invisible or transpires, its light at sunset or in wintertime shining by ascending grades, like moonrise. The facades erected behind one another on both sides of the atrium are alternatively animated, according to a contrast and backlighting system artificial lights amplifies and nuances. By daylight, the patchwork stands like a shiny construction, expressing the European Union's best dynamics, a permanent construction work; or as soon as night falls like a translucent curtain letting the background peep through and even sublimating itself before the atrium's brighter lights.

The patchwork only presents the sight of its wooden lace on to the street. Its own structure is sustained by a second steel and glass facade, the latter ensuring strength and safety to inner spaces. Therefore, the facade has density and depth, its glazed elements being opportunities to play with transparency and direct or slanting luminous mirror. The composition's



Natural daylight illumination at Brussels, in LUX.

central element of visibility – the lantern – introduces an architectural problem whose solution depends both on a lighting device and on the perspective effects set on the building's life phases and paces.

The lantern cage is a protection apparatus for its centre and the double diurnal and nocturnal regime of its radiating power. The outer patchwork presents an image of an almost immoderate patch, it expresses the strength of old Europe's typological, constructive and hand-crafted legacies, whereas its strict structural arrangement takes on the task of recycling, invests the poetic dimension of reuse, opens the perspective of an architecture not claiming any affiliation with the sole historic heritage or modern technical prowess, but it hauls up its ecological responsibility like a flag.

The gap between the (external) wood facade and the (internal) glass flanks of the lantern involves an obligation to stir the link between both architectures. Because the respective position of both objects and their double geometry call for many interpretations, their mutual interaction subjecting them to alternations of light/shadow, action/rest, intensity or quietness, obviousness or enigma, involves an almost theatrical planning.

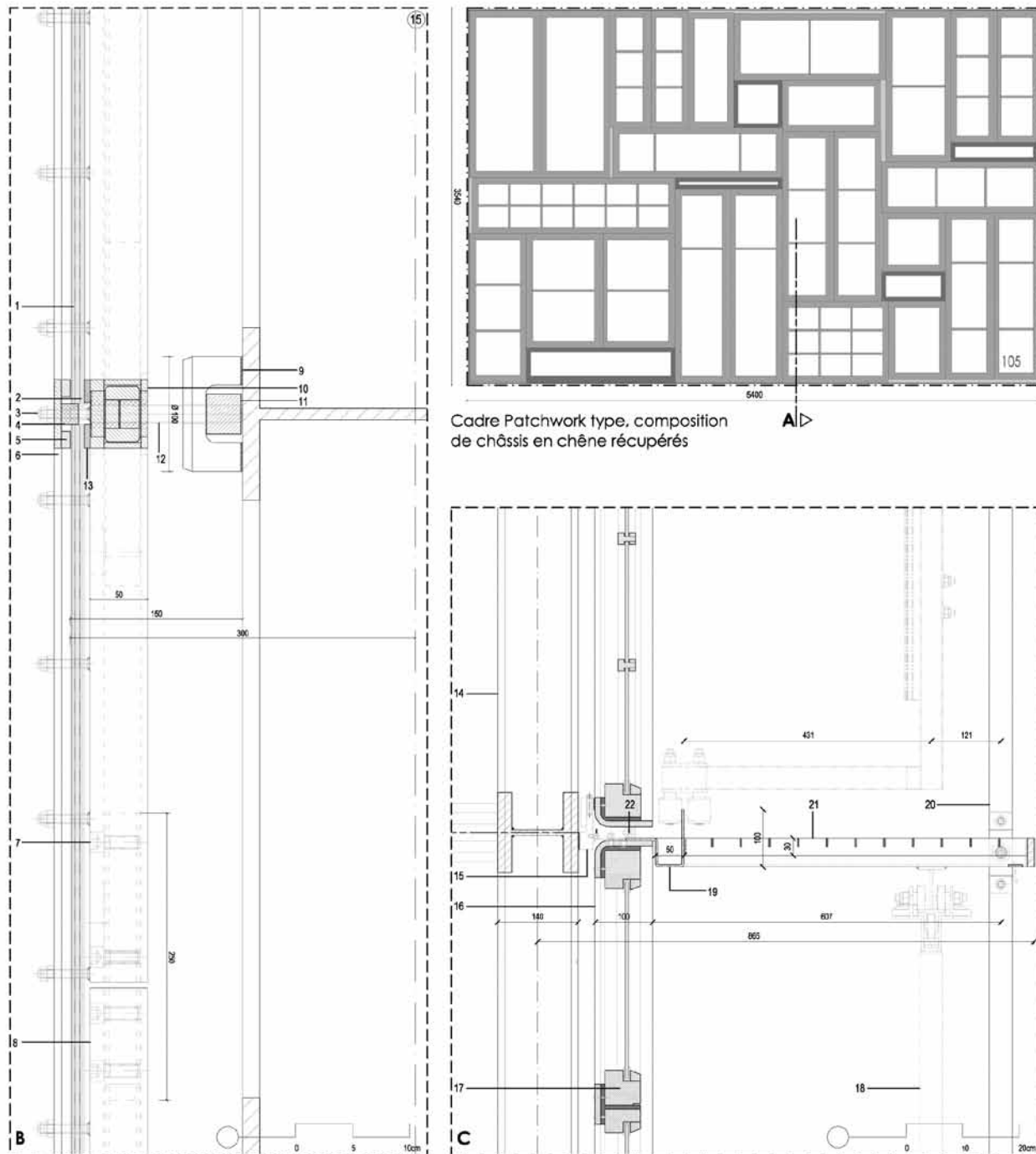
The lantern houses the heart of the European political apparatus as it is destined to host heads of state and government summits as well as councils of ministers. It bears the most direct symbol of the executive power the Lisbon Treaty gave the European Union. Yet, during the day, that symbol is partly hidden behind its wooden screen. The meaning of its architecture does not depend on its end usage only but also on its own architectonic structure: the latter is a double or triple one; it is composite or even eclectic; its aspect when lit up is divided into alternating phases, diurnal and nocturnal; it is ambiguous. Like Europe aiming at federating but whose unity still is only virtual in many aspects. Europe constitutively depends on the States it gathers together; without them, it has no existence. Nevertheless, it has become the nerve centre and target of conflicts of interests and public disputes: it is an unpopular political object as well as a fantasised and desired one. It is little known yet essential. How could the new emblem of the European executive power avoid the risk of such ambivalence? Through the answer its architecture provides public requests with, through unfaltering support to the visible part the institution plays in Brussels and through the games and animations of its multiple elevation plans.

Two or three architectural types internally dividing the building (the Residence Palace still pushes one of its facade faces on Rue de la Loi) involuntarily reflect a sought yet tormented unity. The new Council of Europe head office is to be inaugurated as Britain is breaking away. Europe built itself up through a series of increasingly complex stages; today, it seems to be seeking even greater complexity, even though pulled in the opposite direction towards degrowth and amputation. Will this weaken or strengthen its architectural symbol? Nobody can tell but current events

make one pay more attention to a building's subtlety, which does only head towards unity in the visible sorts of polymorphic assembly. Europa seems to be protesting against the illusion of a Union based on a bogus principle of unanimity or indivisibility. Its architecture is reminiscent of how much unity cannot theoretically exclude the risk of discord or even dislocation. Its iconic value comes from the clarity with which it keeps its opposite geometries together, along with its differentiated materials registers. Its facade wood patchwork is the envelope and heterogeneous set in its heart of glass. Beyond the intricacy of its potential meanings, the message produced is crystal clear: to secure cohesion of its combined forces, architecture wraps itself in the iridescence of potential conflicts and differences. The exteriority now requested by Britain's vote brutally repeats this: the popular vote reminded all that the only existing union is a voluntary and reversible one. In architecture, such a political art, there is no constructing virtue before the fantasies of non-separated mass and stone immobility have been tamed and rejected.

The Europa's architecture is one of its composition and its geometry. Its vertical, curved or straight layers, its interlocked quadrilateral or elliptical plans: its spatial structure formally and functionally resists simplification and uniformity. It takes on the ambivalence of judgements its own polymorphism could be the object of in advance, like the image of the institution it represents. There lies the whole difficulty of the European political and cultural space. Europe legally is omnipresent but, apart from the crisis peaks it undergoes, obstinately absent from political speech and debates. Europe is rich with its cultures but constantly wavering or thwarted in its public manifestations. Establishing a type of architecture adapted to the needs of its enlargement and its political strengthening for this was the first reason for erecting this new head office. But for such a symbol, the architect had to make the usually opposite principles of emblematic representation and strict economy compete against one another: this dialectics inspired Philippe Samyn and guided the project manager through the labyrinth of options. The concern to explain and justify such architecture led to present the public not only with the orientations which ruled over its general conception and specified the erection phases of its main structures (*cf.* the first *Europa* volume, Lanoo/CIVA, 2013), but also with the details of its construction elements all the way to its ultimate completion.

Double facade of the atrium.



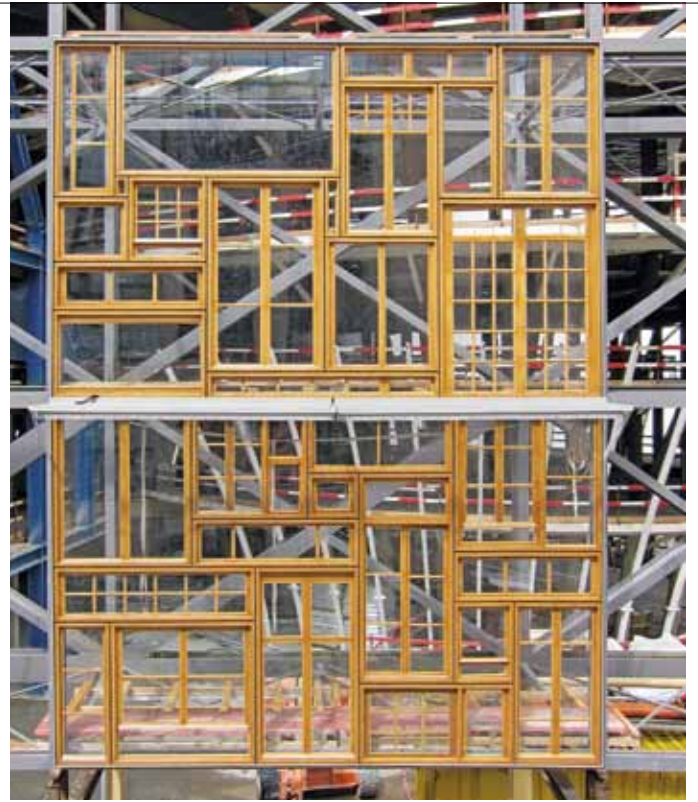
1. Laminated glass extra light (3-mm glass + 1.52-mm PVB + 3-mm glass + 1.52-mm PVB + 3-mm glass)
2. Glass Bracing HDPE 15 x 4
3. DIN 1587 M8 stainless A4 + threaded rod axis-axis 135 mm
4. Closed cell foam
5. Black structural silicone glazing 22 mm
6. Stainless steel flat rod 304 6-mm microbead
7. DIN 912 M12

8. Steel terminal block
9. Moulded steel anchoring S235
10. Laser-welded steel profile S235
11. Welded block after adjustment
12. DIN 913 M16 x 132 x A4
13. Thermalbond CS-DS-V2100 4.8 x 19
14. Support structure for patchwork panels for HEA 140 steel S235

15. Steel anchoring galvanised NCS S-6502-R
16. Stainless frame 316 100 x 75 x 10 Microbead Patchwork support for window frames 5.40 x 3.54
17. Patchwork of salvaged oaken window frames
18. Mobile ladder for maintenance
19. Stainless sheet metal 316 40 x 20
20. Stainless duckboard 316 Microbead
22. Neoprene joint, black

2012.08.30

First presentation in situ of two modules of the patchwork facade. 2013.06.21



2012.08.29

Aerial views of the Cinquantaire and Résidence Palace in *Bruxelles se transforme et se modernise*, 1927. Private collection.



Post cards, ca. 1970. Private collection.

Aerial view of the Europa, Justus Lipsius, Lex (in part), Berlaymont (in part) and Charlemagne (in part) buildings, 2016.



First scale model of the lantern's structure, 2006.

