**Why did the European institutions settle here?**

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Schuman Metro Station, European Quarter, Brussels

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**Picture 1**

**The roundabout on the rue de la Loi**

Annexed by the City of Brussels in 1853, the territory situated between Brussels’ inner ring and the Cinquantenaire Park became, in the decades that followed, a bourgeois residential neighbourhood with a roundabout at its heart.

**The future European neighbourhood is annexed to the City of Brussels**

The Société civile pour l’agrandissement et l’embellissement de la Capitale de la Belgique, a real estate company founded in 1837 by Ferdinand de Meeüs, lobbied for the City of Brussels to be expanded to the east at the expense of the municipalities of Sint Joost, Schaarbeek and Etterbeek. After the 1853 expansion, a bridge was built above the Maalbeek valley to permit the construction of the new neighbourhood’s main street. At first called “rue de la Société civile”, it was later given the name of the short street of which it was an extension: “rue de la Loi”.

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**Picture 2**

**The Berlaymont convent**

In 1864, the Dames de Berlaymont convent settled at the far end of the rue de la Loi, still rural at that time. It also served as a school for young girls of well-to-do families and possessed a large garden.
The Berlaymont nuns take up residence in the countryside
The religious order of the Dames de Berlaymont was founded in 1627 in the residence of the Berlaymont family, close to the cathedral. The reason why this name still features in history books holds in a single sentence. In 1566, Charles de Berlaymont (1510-1578) whispered to Margaret of Parma, the regent of the Low Countries, in front of a delegation of Brussels noblemen protesting against the Inquisition: ‘Don’t listen Madame, they are nothing but beggars (gueux).’ It is this sentence which earned the uprising against Spanish domination the name of ‘revolt of the Geuzen’. But it is not because of it that the word ‘Berlaymont’ is still pronounced thousands of times each day. If is rather because in 1864 the nuns decided to move from the centre of Brussels to a site alongside the rue de la Loi, with a large garden which a century later was to arouse the interest of the Belgian government.

Picture 3
Minister Larock, Adenauer and Schuman
On January 10, 1958, Konrad Adenauer and Robert Schuman received honorary degrees from the University of Louvain. Sitting on the very left of the photo, pensive, Victor Larock, the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, had to urgently find offices for the first officials of the European Economic Community.

Belgium is tasked with accommodating the first officials
The Treaty of Rome, which created European Economic Community, was prepared at the castle of Val-Duchesse (in the Brussels municipality of Auderghem) under the leadership of the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paul-Henri Spaak. It was supposed to come into effect on the 1st of January 1958, but the Member States had not been able to come to an agreement about the headquarters of the new institution. Alphabetical order made Belgium the first country to assume presidency of its Council. It was thus Victor Larock, Spaak’s successor, who was tasked with providing provisional accommodation to the first officials of the European Economic Community.

Picture 4
The first headquarters of the ‘Common Market’
A building situated on Avenue de la Joyeuse Entrée, between rue de la Loi and Avenue de Cortenbergh, accommodated for several years all the officials of the European Economic Community.

The Belgian government rents a first building
As an emergency measure, the Belgian government initially housed the first Brussels ‘Eurocrats’ in a former ministry located on rue Belliard. As a less precarious solution, it took an option on a building under construction next to the Cinquantenaire Park, property of the Royale Belge, an insurance company that would later be taken over by AXA. The European Economic Community’s Commission moved in during the summer of 1958. The building was demolished in 2006 to make way for the one currently occupied by the European External Action Service, with shops and restaurants on the ground floor — a prelude to a future Piazza Schuman?
The Berlaymont under construction

Initiated in 1963, the construction of the building intended for the European Economic Community was synchronised with that of the first Brussels metro line, linking the Place de Brouckère to the Schuman roundabout, and with that of the car tunnel connecting rue Belliard to the motorway to Liège.

The Belgian government decides to build the Berlaymont

Sensing that no decision regarding a permanent headquaters was imminent, the Belgian government decided to undertake the construction of a building large enough to accommodate all the officials. At the end of 1958, it set its sights on the convent of the Berlaymont nuns and its spacious garden, close to the initial building, in order to build what was to become the ‘Berlaymont’. Initiated in 1963, its building was completed in 1969. In 1991 it was decided that a thorough renovation should be carried out. Since 2004 the offices of all European Commissioners are again located there. The nuns, for their part, were offered land in Argenteuil (Waterloo), where they transferred their school in 1962.

The Justus Lipsius under construction

The construction of the Council of Ministers’ building required the demolition of a vast block of houses. One of the roads razed to the ground bore the name of Justus Lipsius (1547-1606), a professor at the Universities of Louvain and Leiden.

The Berlaymont serves as a magnet for the other European institutions.

Even before its completion, the Berlaymont functioned as a powerful magnet. Without any overall planning, various private investors erected buildings in the hope of being able to lease them to some European institution. In addition, in 1973 the Council of Ministers, initially located near Brussels’ Central Station, expressed the wish to also be housed in a large building, preferably close to the Berlaymont. This led to the construction of the Justus Lipsius, inaugurated in 1995. Over the same period, the European Parliament installed some offices on rue Belliard in the building that currently accommodates the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee. Since 1992 it has been expanding its activities nearby, on the site of the Brussels-Luxembourg train station, with Strasbourg only continuing to host most of the plenary sessions.

The Europa grafted onto the Résidence-Palace

The Résidence-Palace is a luxury residential building dating from the 1930s, equipped with an indoor swimming pool and a theatre. The European Council’s Europa building, completed in 2016, was built in the space separating it from the Justus Lipsius.

The Europa building consecrates Brussels as the capital of the European Union

Meeting in Nice in 2001, the European Council decided that henceforth all its regular meetings would be organized in Brussels. This decision put an end to the myth of a rotating capital and emboldened European leaders to refer to Brussels as ‘the capital of the European Union.’ It also led to the decision to provide the European council of heads of government with a separate building, adjacent to that of the Council of Ministers and
attached to the Résidence-Palace. This became the lantern-shaped Europa building, whose construction commenced in 2011.

**UNDERNEATH**

**The stations of the rue de la Loi**

Inaugurated in 1855, the railway line connecting Brussels and Namur started at the Bruxelles-Luxembourg station, for a long time called the Quartier Léopold station, the name of Belgium’s first king having been given to the whole neighbourhood. Well before the junction between Brussels’ North and South stations, an open air railway line connected the Quartier Léopold station to the North station. A wooden railway station was built in 1879 on the corner of rue de la Loi and boulevard Charlemagne. It was replaced several decades later by a petrol station. The latter disappeared in turn when the convent was demolished and the Berlaymont built. Public transport then reappropriated the site: one of the main entrances to the Schuman train and metro stations is today located on exactly the same spot as the old wooden train station.

**Below**

An initiative of Bruxelles Mobilité/Brussel Mobiliteit, in collaboration with the STIB/MIVB

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