

Design for European Council  
Justus Lipsius, Brussels



**In order to imagine Europe, you need to be able to see it...**





## A New Design for the European Council

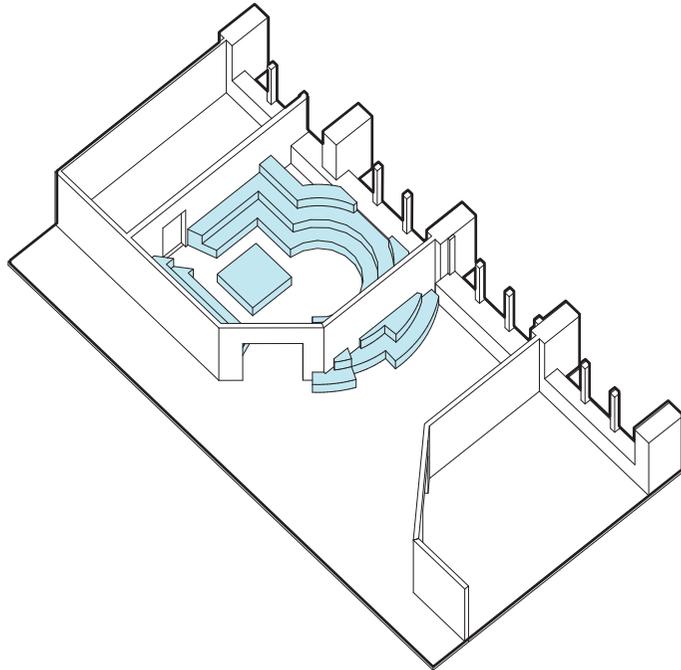
In order to imagine Europe, you need to be able to see it. The European Council is the heart of EU power, but its home in the Justus Lipsius building embodies the problem of an invisible Europe. A Europe perceived as governing technocratically behind closed doors, only emerging to soothe yet another crisis. How can we access the space where decisions are made that affect the lives of more than half a billion people? How to design for a seat of power that nobody knows?

The new presidential chamber introduces furniture that breaks the walls. Inside, leaders are no longer executives at a board meeting as the architecture reshapes the debates into multiple settings: one that can shift from agonistic confrontation to semi-circular consensus-seeking. The architecture of the room is constituted by 28 unique but interlocking pieces, one for each EU-member state.

As another part of the design, a giant blue screen was created in the grand hall of the building. Questioning the impenetrability, and invisibility, of the Council, the blue screen allows its appearance to be changed digitally by anyone.

Today European politics is facing the demand to make itself visible, a future image of Europe needs to be both visible and transparent at the same time.

## I. Presidential Chambers

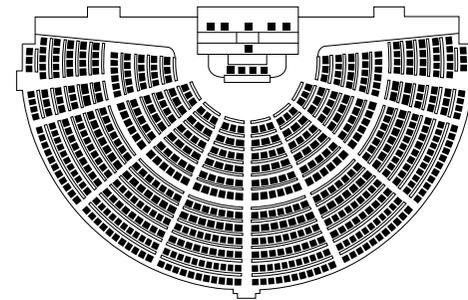
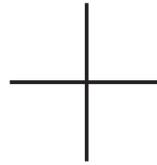
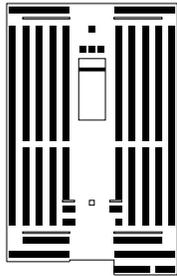


The Presidency of the European Union changes twice a year between EU member states. During this half year, the standing EU President redesigns a number of spaces in the building of the European Council: the Justus Lipsius.

The typical approach to these designs is 'nation branding'. Thus, the type of furniture and exhibitions in the atrium, foyer and presidential chambers in the building changes in nationality twice a year. Accordingly, the interior of the building of the European Council is a consecutive celebration of specific national identities. Paradoxically, this practice of focusing on national identities actually keeps Europe itself out of view. In contrast, this project aims to look at Europe.

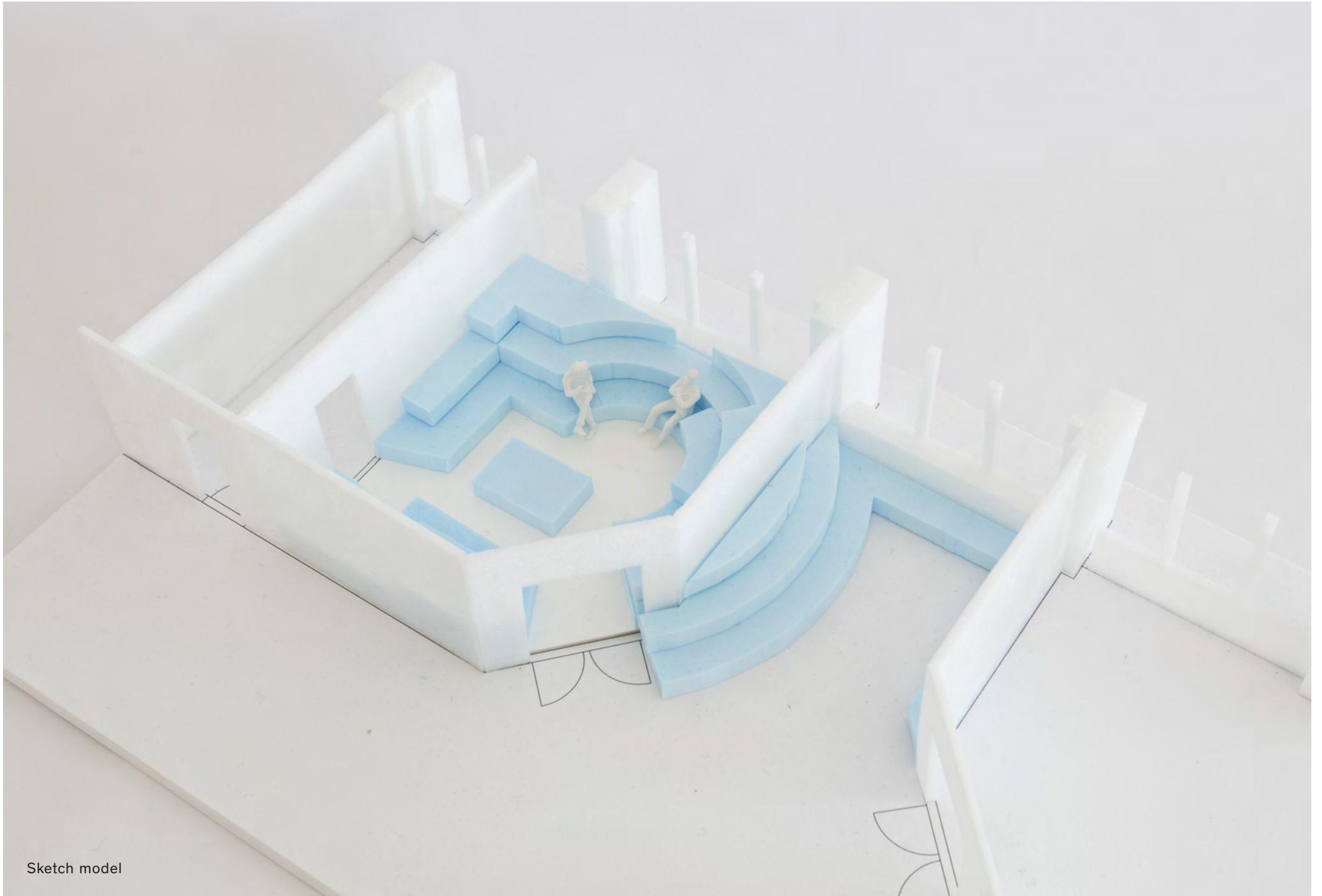
Our design for the Presidential Chambers exists of a single piece of furniture that stretches through different rooms. The exchange of ideas is at the heart of politics. The architecture in which this exchange takes place has a powerful impact on the type of conversation. The new design offers multiple seating arrangements combined into a single space. Government leaders can change positions between group settings or bilateral talks, and can choose sides on opposing benches or have a dialogue in a more informal setting.

The space also provides an exchange in a very literal way. The space is in build out of 28 interlocking unique furniture pieces representing the EU's 28 member states, echoing the motto of the European Union united in diversity. At the end of the 2016 Dutch presidency of the European Union one individual piece will be shipped to every member state. In a subtle way, the design reminds European leaders how unique and very different elements simultaneously can be part of a larger whole.



House of Commons, UK  
opposing benches  
agonistic space

L'Assemblée Nationale, France  
semicircle  
consensus seeking



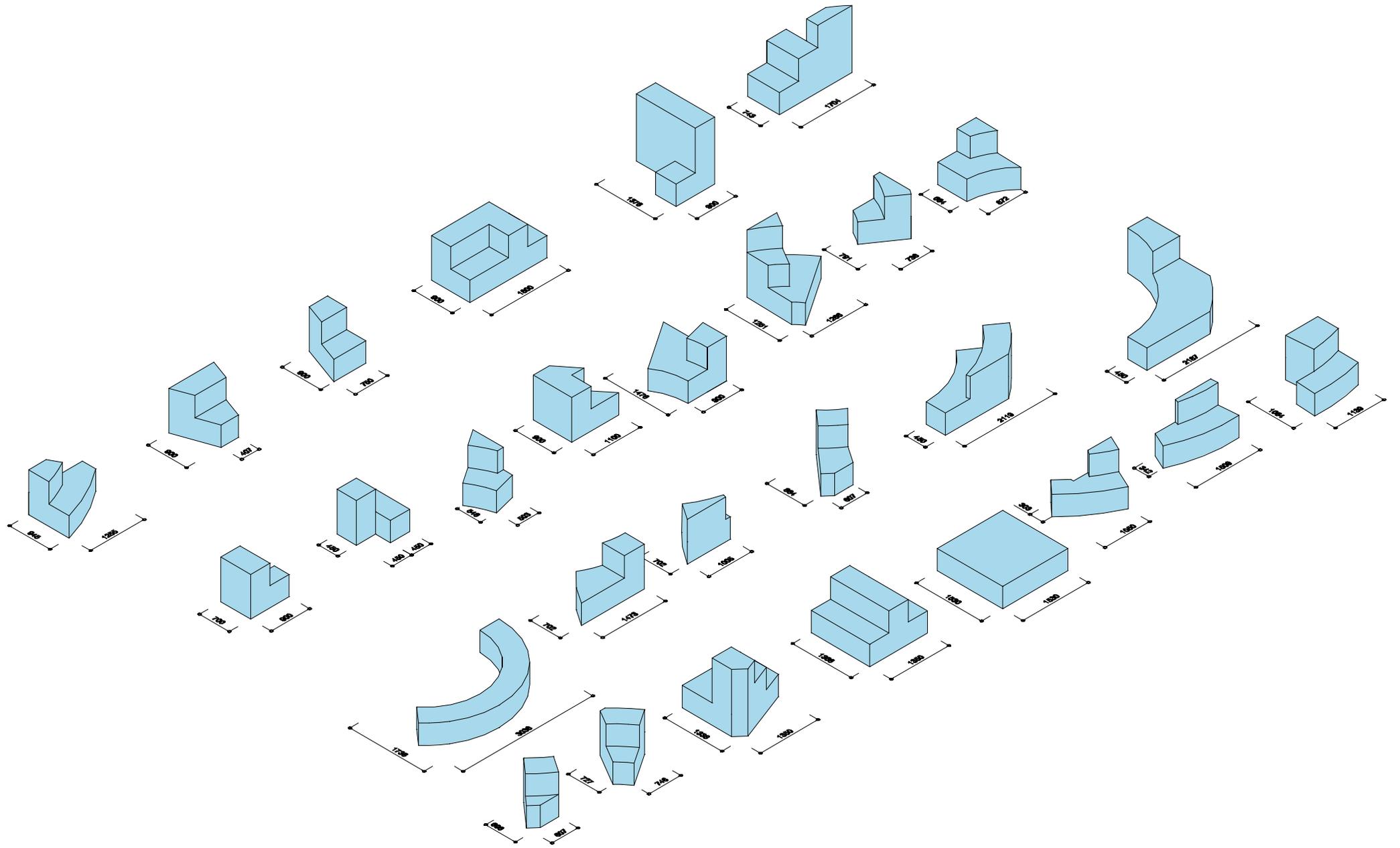
Sketch model



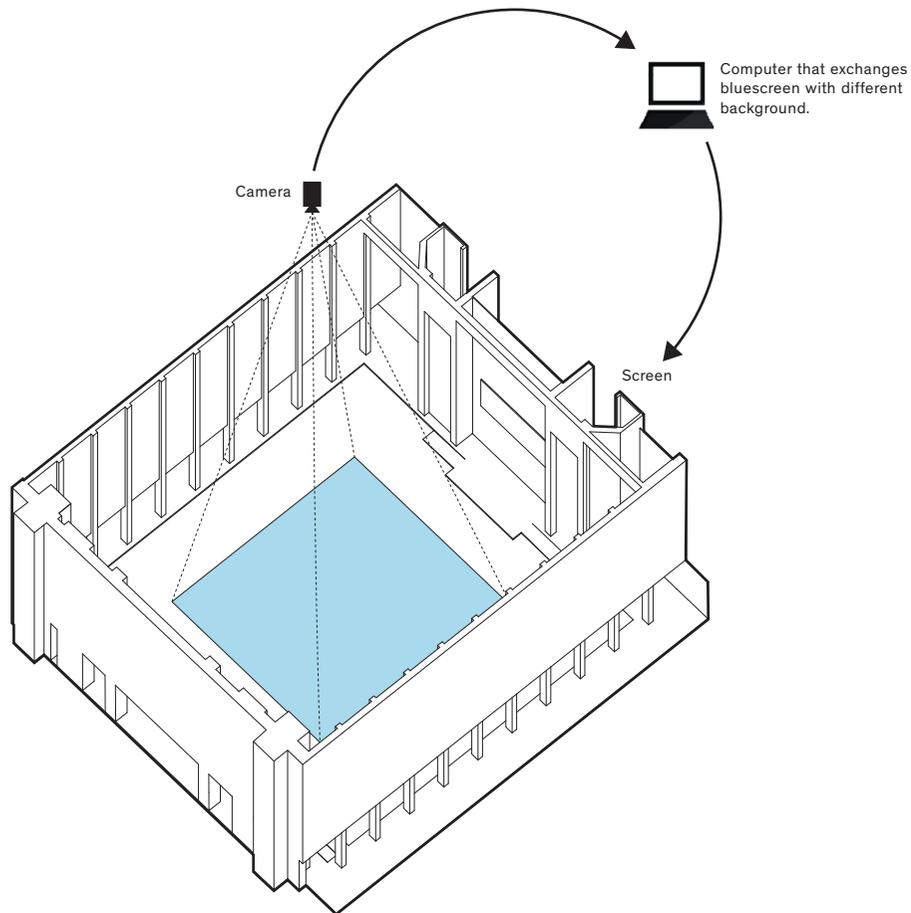








## II. Bluescreen



The building of the European Council is the place where national governments of the 28 member states make decisions that impact the lives of half a billion people. Paradoxically this crucial public building is closed off for the public. The project aims to connect the inner world of the Council with the Europe that lies beyond the walls of the building.

The floor of the grand hall of the building is covered with European-blue artificial grass. On first sight, the 'European blue' -color of the floor turns the atrium into an iconic European square. Through hanging a camera from the roof of the atrium, the blue floor gains depth as a bluescreen, turning the atrium into a canvas for artists. A screen will show - what first seemed only a blue floor - digitally transformed European squares, interactive installations and graphic design. The bluescreen shows the depth and diversity of the European blue, bringing a new imagination to Europe's representation.



 Netherlands Presidency  
of the Council of  
the European Union

**EU**  
2016



 Netherlands Presidency  
of the Council of  
the European Union



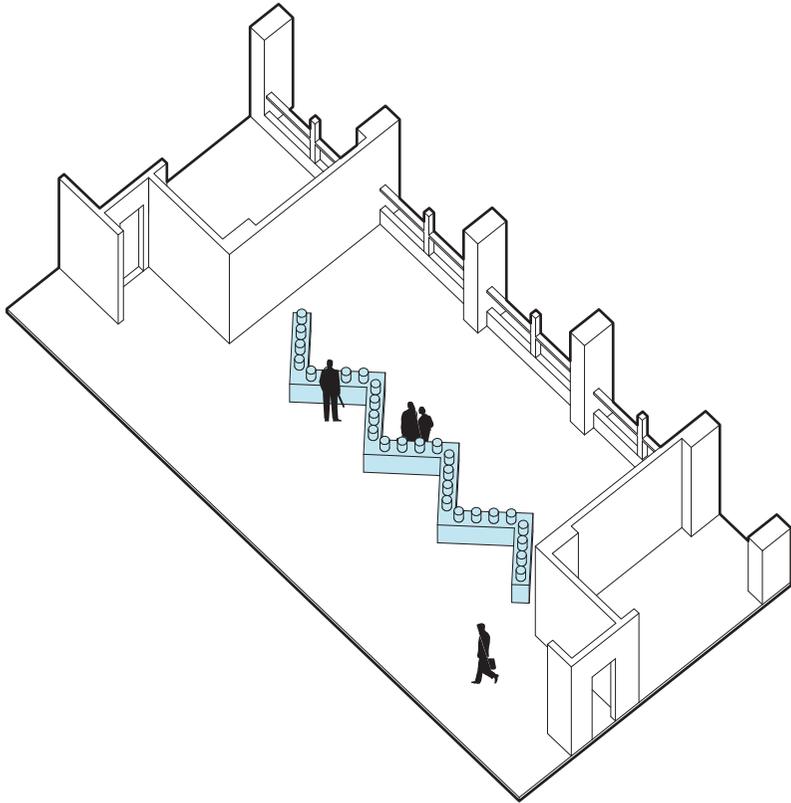


 Netherlands Presidency  
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### III. European Waterbar



XML and Bey designed a supersized water bar as a new meeting place in main lobby of the building. Some of the best ideas pop up when you have a random encounter with a colleague by the water cooler. The bar offers water from 28 water bottles, each filled with water originating from one of the 28 EU member states. The universal element of water combined with the national identity of individual member states contributes to a dialogue about differences between countries and shared identity. Why would you prefer water from your own country? What do you do if the bottle with water from your country is empty?

| REUNIONS DE LUNDI 11-01-2016   |       |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| 30.1 COOP MATIERE PENALE       | 14.30 |
| 30.7 CT ASPECTS CIVILS ET CRIM | 13.00 |

| REUNIONS DE LUNDI 11-01-2016  |       |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| 30.1 EUROPE ORIENT ASIE CENTR | 14.30 |
| 30.2 COMITE BUDGETAIRE        | 14.30 |
| 30.3 REVISION CREDIT BUDGET   | 13.00 |
| 30.7 EXPONER SYNTHESIMULATION | 14.30 |

| REUNIONS DE LUNDI 11-01-2016 |       |
|------------------------------|-------|
| 33.1 BALKANS OCCIDENTAUX     | 14.30 |
| 33.2 CONSEILS FINANCIERS     | 14.30 |
| 33.7 ATT OR LEG EN LIGNE     | 14.30 |
| 33.8 TRANSPORTS MARITIMES    | 14.30 |

| REUNIONS DE LUNDI 11-01-2016   |       |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| 30.1 COOP MATIERE PENALE       | 14.30 |
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Κύπρος

Lātvija

Litva

Lietuvos

Magyarország

Malta

Nederland

Österreich

Monaco

## About XML

XML is an Amsterdam based architecture office operating in the fields of architecture, urbanism and research. XML is committed to designing architecture that both reflects and provokes contemporary ways of life. The office is fuelled by a research-driven approach that turns a careful analysis of a project's core challenges into the driving force of design. By understanding program organization as a key strategy within each project, XML aims to establish new relations between buildings and continuously evolving societies.

The office is involved in projects ranging from the scale of developing a series of scenarios for organizing the Olympics in the Netherlands for the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment to designing store interiors, exhibitions and art installations. Projects include a design for a new UN headquarters in Bonn, an arts pavilion in Hong Kong, a store in the historical center of Amsterdam, and exhibition design for Bureau Europa.

XML has received numerous awards and honors including two first prizes in the pan European architecture prize European. In 2014, the office was a finalist for the Prix de Rome prize, the oldest and largest Dutch state prize for Architects under 40.

The work of XML has been featured in numerous exhibitions and institutes, such as at the Netherlands Architecture Institute, the International Architecture Biennale in Rotterdam, the Dutch House of Representatives in The Hague and in the main exhibition of the 14th International Architecture Biennial in Venice.

XML is led by two partners, Max Cohen de Lara and David Mulder van der Vegt who founded the office in 2008. Along side of their architectural practice they have taught at Delft University of Technology, the Academy of Architecture Amsterdam and at the Dessau Institute of Architecture. Currently, both partners are founders and directors of the two year Master Program 'Designing Democracy' at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam.

## About Jurgen Bey

Born in Soest, the Netherlands in 1965, Jurgen Bey is one of the most renowned Dutch designers. He studied at the Design Academy Eindhoven and has since run studios independently or in collaboration with others, while teaching at the Design Academy Eindhoven in previous years, and currently, at the Royal College of Art in London. Bey's work includes product, furniture, interior and public space design, and is produced by his studio, or by companies such as Droog, Royal Tichelaar Makkum, and Moooi. Bey is known as a critical designer, driven to understand the world and to question it in a unique manner. He has been awarded the 2005 Prins Bernard Cultuurfonds Award, the 2005 Harrie Tillie Award from Stedelijk Museum, Roermond and the Interior Award 2003 from Lensvelt/de Architect, for his meeting room for the Interpolis company.

In 2002 Bey formed Studio Makkink & Bey with Rianne Makkink. Working together and supported by a design team, they analyze content and search for the relation of things and their users. In their words, "town planning, architecture and landscape architecture are indissolubly connected to products and can be in symbiosis; the lamp has influenced architecture and the built home the products for the interior."

Jurgen Bey is currently director of the Sandberg Institute and a member of the board of the Gerrit Rietveld Art Academy in Amsterdam.

## Contact

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## Credits

Concept and Design: XML with Jurgen Bey  
Client: Europe by People, cultural program Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

### *Bluescreen*

Concept and Design: XML in collaboration with Jurgen Bey  
Artworks bluescreen : Alfons Hooikaas, Gabriel Lester, Studio Moniker  
Artificial grass: KSP Kunstgras, Edel Grass, Koninklijke Ten Cate

### *Presidential Chambers*

Concept and Design: XML in collaboration with Jurgen Bey  
Production custom made furniture: Prooff  
Construction company: Maasdam Groep BV

### *Waterbar*

Concept and Design: XML in collaboration with Jurgen Bey  
Construction company: Landstra & De Vries  
Watercoolers and maintenance: Sipwell

**Project for the Justus Lipsius Building on  
the occasion of the Dutch Presidency of the  
Council of the European Union.**

**[www.x-m-l.org](http://www.x-m-l.org)**