

Robe Helps Shape the Future of Europe Conference



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The inaugural Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) event – a European Union initiative to reform its policies and institutions – took place in May at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, at the very heart of EU politics and legislation! The elegant hemicycle debating chamber sits inside the striking Louise Weiss Building designed by Parisian-based Architecture-Studio and opened in 1999. It includes a 60-metre-high tower which is left looking deliberately unfinished and was inspired by Roman amphitheatres and the mythical Tower of Babel.

The event included a welcome speech by French President Emmanuel Macron and contributions by other high-ranking politicians and EU officials. As **CoFoE was** aimed primarily at a younger audience of under 40s', production company Nimblerr asked lighting designer Dimi Theuwissen of Belgium-based creative practice ID2Q to energise the distinctive hemicycle ensuring it looked dynamic and different on camera for this special broadcast.



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Dimi decided to change up the look and mood completely with a fresh approach, lighting the room architecture in the background, and in doing so, bringing its presence right into the foreground and camera shots. Helping him to achieve this unique aesthetic were over 200 Robe moving lights – Spiders, Tetra2s and LEDBeam 150s.

CoFoE was livestreamed and joined by 300 gen-public via zoom together with various ministers, dignitaries, and VIPs, all of whom appeared on seven large LED screens strategically deployed in a circular around 300 degrees of the hemicycle. Erasmus students from all EU member states were present in a socially distanced live audience, sitting in pre-designated states.

Two musical interludes intersected the 90-minute broadcast with short performances by French violinist Renaud Capuçon and the Brussels-based Karski Quartet ... so all these elements informed Dimi's proposed lighting design to take the hemicycle into a new visual dimension!

He had previously worked with Nimblerr – a subsidiary of DB Video – and currently the European Parliament's AV co-ordinator – on other similar parliamentary events and presidential debates, for which he also took a radical and more theatrical departure with lighting which everyone loved.

Reinforcing where the event was being staged by default meant the space itself was fundamental to the whole production design of the event. Normally lit by functional but stark fluorescent working light, Dimi proposed that the wall and ceiling areas were illuminated with lighting that could be controlled and changed.

"First and foremost, this was a broadcast / livestream, so it had to be lively and 'pop' on TV and as well as needing all the basics like great key lighting and skin tones for the speakers and performers, for me it was important to bring the building into play and involve it as a player integral to the whole vibe of the event," he explained, rather than letting it fade sadly into the background.

One hundred and thirty-six Robe Spider LED wash beams were placed around the two elliptical planes of the hemicycle's perimeter wall, each fixture indirectly highlighting the individual glass panels of the wall.



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He chose Spiiders for their narrow beam optics so he could play with and highlight the different texturing of the brighter and darker segments of the wall, and for their great colour mixing and rendering as well as the fact that they could also mimic the standard florescent tones and look when needed.

He used subtle pan and tilt cues to shift the lighting treatment on the walls ... which looked fantastic on camera, adding a huge amount of depth and dimensionality to the picture.

An arc of LED PARs was mounted on microphone stands to get them in exact positions along the top of the wall panels.

The seven LED screens masked off the back area of the hemicycle seating – but the lit perimeter wall was clearly visible in the back of shots, so for some audience back lighting Dimi selected 40 x Robe LEDBeam 150s which looked atmospheric, intimate, and helped fill the gaps left by the socially detached seating plan. The LEDBeam 150s effectively became part of the live audience!

These fixtures were chosen because Dimi wanted a small, powerful fixture with a good zoom and great colour mixing, so the LEDBeam 150 ticked all the boxes.

The 42 x Tetra2 moving LED bars were rigged to the vertical ends of the LED screens – each of the screens was positioned to coincide with the paths of the hemicycle aisles which had to be kept clear for fire regulations.

“I particularly wanted the tilt option on these lights in these positions,” commented Dimi, as they enabled him to create cool and dramatic lens flare effects especially for the long shot swoops coming in from the crane camera.

The major challenges of getting this event looking vibrant and contemporary were not so much aesthetic and creative, but more logistical in terms of the often-complex operational structures, systems, and protocols in place for working in the European parliament.

Dimi has been using Robe products in his work for some time and loves the brand for its substantial product range, reliability and because Robe is widely available throughout Benelux and France and therefore easy to source large quantities through cross rental networking.



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CoFoE's lighting was programmed by Stijn Vanholzaets from The Creative Factory (TCF) using a grandMA2 console, which left Dimi free to concentrate on all the focussing and getting all the general looks wanted by director Yannick Gies from Nimblerr, who worked closely with Xavier Nijssen, project director for the European Parliament.

David Smeets and Christophe Hellinckx from TCF took care of the technical production management, and the video design and operation was under the control of TCF's Patrick Bellens, Anthony Depré and Jan Lermineaux.

Lighting equipment was supplied by leading Belgian rental specialist Splendid and video by Dimitri Beyaert for DB Video, with the production also utilising elements of the European Parliament's 'house' AV equipment.

Dimi admitted that some aspects of the results were the complete opposite of what he had initially been told they wanted in the first lighting briefings, but everyone trusted his expertise to produce some magic even using unorthodox methodology for the European Parliament!

They were all delighted with the results!



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