

Satirical Depictions of the European Union

A Semiotic Analysis of Political Cartoons on the 2004 Enlargement and 2009-2012 Eurozone Debt Crisis

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Abstract

This study examines the visual representations of the European Union (EU) in political cartoons on the 2004 enlargement and the 2009-2012 Eurozone debt crisis, and the interactions between these depictions and Europe's socio-political order. Carried out on fourteen political cartoons (out of a 300-cartoon corpus), the visual analysis is based on the theories of traditional semiotics, social semiotics, and metaphor. The analysis results show that the cartoonists' depictions of the EU bear a strong resemblance to the popular discourse. The EU is often depicted as a disunited political entity, whose orientation and action are decided by pragmatism and national egoism of its individual member states. The EU's power structure and national / regional stereotypes are also emphasised in the political cartoons. These satirical representations form a dissenting voice against the EU, but can also contribute to the naturalisation of Europe's socio-political order. This complex process depends on both the viewers' interpretation and the whole media "ecosystem" surrounding the cartoons.

Keywords: *political cartoon, metaphor, stereotype, semiotics, social semiotics, European Union, EU enlargement, debt crisis, European public sphere.*

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I. Introduction

1. Background

[Europe] is a magnificent land molded by suffering and history. I relive those pilgrimages I once made with all the men of the West... All those flowers and stones, those hills and those landscapes where men's time and the world's time have mingled old trees and monuments! My memory has fused together such superimposed images to make a single face, which is the face of my true native land.¹

Albert Camus

Over the past few decades, the power of images in public culture has been increasingly recognised by scholars of the humanities, social sciences, and political science. W. J. T. Mitchell (2004) calls this recognition “the pictorial turn” in the history of philosophy, which was initiated by Charles Peirce’s semiotics and the Frankfurt School’s studies of visual media, among other approaches.² The visual power is also acknowledged in the field of European studies. Zdzislaw Mach maintains that the symbolic images of the Self and the Other of a group are constructed “in the process of mutual identification in social relations.”³ This explains why historians have used the pictorial representations of Europe as compelling evidence in the study of European identity, alongside the verbal discourse.⁴ Throughout this paper and other related studies, “the images of Europe/ the EU” is used as a loaded concept: it refers to not only Europe’s visible-physical images, but also Europe’s images in people’s mind.⁵

Since European identity is an elastic and contested notion, it is hard to find a single image of Europe or “an institutionalized European icon” that can powerfully evoke a sense of solidarity among Europe’s peoples.⁶ Even so, Europe and its essence are still present in recurring motifs and iconographies in visual materials throughout history. They can be the EU symbols that are intended to inculcate the so-called European identity. They can also be the images formed and used outside the EU institutions, thus incorporating

¹ Albert Camus, "Letters to a German Friend," in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 24.

² W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 11, 12.

³ Zdzisław Mach, *Symbols, Conflict, and Identity: Essays in Political Anthropology* (State University of New York Press, 1993), 42, 43.

⁴ Michael Wintle, *The Image of Europe* (Cambridge, 2009), 1-21.

⁵ Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie, "Visual Battlefield Europe? Some Preliminary Observation," in *United in Diversity: Images and Counter-Images of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie (StudienVerlag, 2010), 9.

⁶ "Visual Battlefield Europe? Some Preliminary Observation," in *United in Diversity: Images and Counter-Images of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie (StudienVerlag, 2010), 7.

negative episodes like genocide, mass exploitation, and racism, which official European discourses tend to exclude. For this reason, they open up heated and important debates on which episodes should be included in European collective memory, which should remain in national realms, and which shows us the real Europe.⁷ Finding the answers to these questions is a central task for those who are on the construction of a European identity, one of the deciding factors in the success of the European integration project.

More than thirty years ago, Michael P. McCarthy wrote that “perhaps the least explored art form for serious historical analysis is the political cartoon.”⁸ The political cartoon⁹ used to be deemed an illegitimate historical source because it merely reflected the artists’ point of view and allegedly distorted the reality. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that photographs and other ostensibly truthful discourses tell us the “real” reality, according to post-modern philosophical thoughts.¹⁰ McCarthy maintains that “like that ad man, a cartoonist may not need to distort issues, but the medium does tempt him to *simplify complex questions*. The political cartoon can often resemble the hard sell television commercial which *seduces the viewer* through stereotypes and *appeals to emotion*” (emphasis added).¹¹ It is these three characteristics of the political cartoon that make it so popular and highly accessible that even the illiterate can understand, as in McCarthy’s exaggerated remark.¹² Furthermore, as they are loaded with plenty of stereotypes, myths, and metaphors, political cartoons reflect the ambiguity of the public perception, memory and history. The role of political cartoons as a legitimate historical source has been discussed,¹³ and applied more widely in studies about events that offer a spatial room for heated political debates like the September 11 attacks, the Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy, and American presidential elections.

Because of their provocative and opinionated nature, political cartoons are arguably an obvious manifestation of “visual battlefield Europe,” a phrase coined by Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie.¹⁴ Through condensed messages, they not only reveal a great deal about Europe’s fundamental issues in an appealing and entertaining way, but also contribute to the popular discourse’s counterarguments against the EU’s propaganda. Nevertheless, research on the discursive constructions of Europe and European identity has not given political cartoons deserving serious attention.

⁷ “Visual Battlefield Europe? Some Preliminary Observation,” 6-12.

⁸ Michael P. McCarthy, “Political Cartoons in the History Classroom,” *The History Teacher* 11, no. 1 (1977): 29.

⁹ Throughout this paper, the terms *cartoon*, *political cartoon*, and *editorial cartoon* will refer to an amusing drawing that serves as a commentary on current events.

¹⁰ See Mary Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum, 2006), 164-77.

¹¹ McCarthy, “Political Cartoons in the History Classroom,” 32.

¹² “Political Cartoons in the History Classroom,” 30.

¹³ Thomas Milton Kemnitz, “The Cartoon as a Historical Source,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 1 (1973). McCarthy, “Political Cartoons in the History Classroom.” Fatma Müge Göçek, “Political Cartoons as a Site of Representation and Resistance in the Middle East,” in *Political Cartoons in the Middle East*, ed. Fatma Müge Göçek (Markus Wiener Publishers, 1998).

¹⁴ Drechsel and Leggewie, “Visual Battlefield Europe? Some Preliminary Observation.”

2. Research questions and philosophical foundations

Using the qualitative method of semiotic analysis conducted on fourteen European political cartoons (out of a 300-cartoon corpus), this study seeks to find out: (1) *How do political cartoonists depict the EU in its two important events: the 2004 EU Enlargement and the 2009-2012 Eurozone debt crisis?* (2) *What is the interplay between the cartoons' constructions of Europe and Europe's socio-political order?* By answering these questions, I also want to contribute to the discussion on political cartoons' visual representations in European studies as well as in modern historical research.

This study is grounded on the *anti-foundationalist* ontological position, which contends that “the world is socially or discursively constructed.”¹⁵ Corresponding to this ontology, the study takes the *interpretist* epistemological position, which aims to find out the meanings or the constructions of social phenomena rather than their ultimate causes and consequences.¹⁶ Analysing the cartoons based on the theories of semiotics and metaphor accordingly, I am aware that my subjective points of view may be present in the research, and that the study does not aim to make a broad generalisation about the research topic. Nevertheless, I enhance the study's reliability and replicability by examining a large number of cartoons (more than three hundred), and compensate for its subjectivity by acknowledging multiple interpretations of an image if possible.

3. Delimitations

Due to the limited scope of the paper and the limited availability of published political cartoons, the studied cartoons cover only two events in the EU's history: the 2004 EU accession of ten countries, and the 2009-2012 Eurozone sovereign debt crisis. These prominent events have been provoking a lot of heated discussions, both verbally and visually, on the European integration project: the 2004 EU Enlargement is said to heal the divided Europe while posing huge challenges for both the “old” and the “new” Europeans, whereas the 2009-2012 debt crisis has raised contradictory predictions about the future of Europe. Moreover, the study only examines European cartoons, which are cartoons drawn by artists from EU countries, EU candidate or potential candidate countries, plus European Free Trade Association's member countries, and/ or published in European media. This delimitation allows the study to focus more on Europe/ the EU's self-images, rather than outsiders' views on Europe.

Up to this point, readers may question the fact that the study is conflating the concepts of Europe, the EU, and the Eurozone. This conflation stems from the myth of “Europe

¹⁵ David Marsh and Paul Furlong, "A Skin Not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science," in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 18.

¹⁶ "A Skin Not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science," in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 22-31.

as a teleological progress.”¹⁷ As one of Europe’s dominant myths, *Europe as teleology* implies that the EU was born out of the wish to “solve the historical conflict between Germany and France over coal and steel, then developed into the European common market through integration, and later into the European Union through identity.”¹⁸ In other words, according to this myth, European integration, in the forms of any unions - whether economic, political, or fiscal, is the ultimate goal to be achieved. Thus, the discourse on the EU and the Eurozone can be subsumed under the discourse on Europe in general, at least for the era we are living in. According to Anssi Paasi, “the dominant image of ‘Europe’ is currently based very much on the European Union that is the institutional Europe. It is defined through institutional structures that are constitutive of European economic and cultural integration.”¹⁹

Since my language limitation does not allow me to approach non-English materials, this study is only grounded on theories and data written in or translated into English. In addition, as I study the cartoons as independent artworks, I focus more on their visual elements and the way they construct the EU than the connections between the cartoons and their surrounding media environment. Because of this, I choose social semiotics, which “is primarily concerned with textual structures,” over cultural studies, which “focuses on the institutional contexts of visual production and different context of viewing,”²⁰ as the research method.

The paper has been organised in the following way: Chapter II gives an overview of Europe’s visual representations in the twentieth century and up until now, and a summary of previous research on political cartoons’ depictions of Europe. Chapter III begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research (semiotics and metaphor), then describing the research’s methods and sources. Chapter IV deals with the contexts of the analysed cartoons, which are the 2004 EU Enlargement and the 2009-2012 Eurozone debt crisis. Chapters V and VI offer a thematic analysis of the cartoon corpus and answer the research questions. The last chapter sums up the findings and proposes ideas for further research.

II. State of the Art

1. The images of the Europe in the Twentieth century: A historical approach

Europe’s pictorial discourses, as a manifestation of its myths and collective memory, are created and influenced by people’s perceptions of things and events happening in their

¹⁷ Bo Stråth, "Methodological and Substantive Remarks on Myth, Memory and History in the Construction of a European Community," *German Law Journal* 6, no. 2 (2005): 267.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Anssi Paasi, "Europe as a Social Process and Discourse," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 8, no. 1 (2001): 11.

²⁰ Giorgia Aiello, "Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics," *Journal of Visual Literacy* 26, no. 2 (2006): 99.

banal everyday life, by grand narratives of their communities, and can also be imposed from above by political leaders in order to legitimise their authority. Since these factors are contextual, it is important to place Europe's pictorial discourses in their historical context. This explains why the historical approach is dominant in the study of Europe's visual representations, symbols, and mythology, among other approaches like political science and anthropology. Gerhard Paul and Michael Wintle discuss the images of Europe based on the continent's momentous events like the two World Wars, the Cold War, and the EU's birth and development. Meanwhile, some contributors to the volume "United in Visual Diversity: Images and Counter-images of Europe" lay emphasis on certain motifs such as the family photos of the European Council, Fortress Europe, Europe's maps, and Europa and the Bull.²¹ In this sub-chapter, I will recapitulate the widely-recognised images of twentieth century Europe from the historical point of view. Then, in the next sub-chapter, I will present an overview of Europe's contemporary visual representations, around which a lot of academic discussions are revolving.

According to Gerhard Paul, Europe in the dawn of the twentieth century continued to portray itself as "the bulwark of civilization." This Eurocentric self-image crystallised in the era of colonialism and racism.²² From the advent of the First World War to the end of the Cold War, by contrast, Europe was constructed as "an area threatened from within" by Prussian militarism, the Nazis, and communism.²³ These grand narratives are visualised by certain motifs in European visual documents such as refugee treks, cattle wagons, ramps, and railway tracks, which signify the deportation of the Jews during the Second World War; barbed wire fences, watchtowers, and the Berlin Wall, which signify the Communist and Nazis dictatorships; and military cemeteries and ruined landscapes, which imply the wounds of Europe caused by the two World Wars.²⁴ After the Cold War and since the collapse of the communist system, Europe has been depicted as "an area threatened by the outer-European Other", including America as a world power, immigrants from the south, Islamic warriors,²⁵ American cultural imperialism, Japanese technology,²⁶ and Chinese global expansion.²⁷

²¹ Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie, eds., *United in Visual Diversity: Images and Counter-Images of Europe* (StudienVerlag, 2010).

²² Gerhard Paul, "Images of Europe in the 20th Century. Pictorial Discourses - Canon of Images - Visual Sites of Memory," in *United in Visual Diversity: Images and Counter-Images of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie (StudienVerlag, 2010), 36.

²³ "Images of Europe in the 20th Century. Pictorial Discourses - Canon of Images - Visual Sites of Memory," in *United in Visual Diversity: Images and Counter-Images of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie (StudienVerlag, 2010), 37, 38.

²⁴ "Images of Europe in the 20th Century. Pictorial Discourses - Canon of Images - Visual Sites of Memory," 46-49.

²⁵ "Images of Europe in the 20th Century. Pictorial Discourses - Canon of Images - Visual Sites of Memory," 38, 39.

²⁶ Cris Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration* (Routledge, 2000), 52.

²⁷ Frank Pieke, "Chinese Globalization and Migration to Europe," (UC San Diego: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, 2004).

Michael Wintle also follows Europe's historical eras in the twentieth century, formulating a similar overview of its pictorial discourses. Nevertheless, he adds emphasis on the ambivalence of Europe's imagery. For instance, during the Second World War, "two principal visions of Europe were projected: one by the Nazis and their ideological allies, and the other by those horrified and once again disillusioned at what their continent was becoming."²⁸ Among them, the Nazis' vision of "The New Europe as a German domain" is one of those episodes like "religious war, pogroms, genocide, slavery and mass exploitation" that have often been left out of Europe's cultural heritage.²⁹ In the post-war period, Europe was portrayed as a corpse and a guilty, war-shattered continent that was dependent on America, before reasserting itself in the 1950s and 1960s with lots of optimism and confidence.³⁰ While its negative images are constructed by various actors from both top-down and bottom-up, Europe's positive images from the 1950s onwards are mainly imposed from above. During the Euro-assertion and integration period, the EU and its predecessors have created plenty of positive European imagery like the sailing boat, the flag with the star circle, the dove of peace, and used them mainly for propaganda purposes.³¹ At the same time, these images are also modified and used subversively by the free press, modern artists, political cartoonists, and even by EU institutions as self-mockery.³² Last but not least, the positive imagery of the EU has been used extensively in the political discourses of the "new" European countries in their accession period, expressing their optimism and enthusiasm when joining the EU.³³

Among those positive visual representations of Europe, official European or EU symbols created by EU institutions like the EU flag and the euro sign appear most extensively. Chris Shore criticises the EU's cultural policies, including the use of symbols to inculcate European identity; he claims that they are based on an "ethnocentric and elitist" view of Europe's cultural heritage, which excludes people with an immigrant background and intensifies Europe's boundaries with its "Third World Others."³⁴ More euro-enthusiastic scholars believe that symbols can play a meaningful but under-appreciated role in the construction of European identity. According to Hartmut Kaelble, European symbols have become more publicly visible since the 1980s and now part of everyday European life.³⁵ Inspired by Michael Billig's conception of banal

²⁸ Wintle, *The Image of Europe*, 425.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *The Image of Europe*, 428, 29.

³¹ *The Image of Europe*, 432-42. Paul, "Images of Europe in the 20th Century. Pictorial Discourses - Canon of Images - Visual Sites of Memory," 40.

³² Wintle, *The Image of Europe*, 437, 53-59.

³³ See Mitja Velikonja, *Eurosis - a Critique of the New Eurocentrism*, (Peace Institute, 2005), <http://mediawatch.mirovni-institut.si/eng/eurosis.pdf>.

³⁴ Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration*, 62, 63.

³⁵ Hartmut Kaelble, "European Symbols, 1945-2000: Concept, Meaning and Historical Change," in *Figures D'Europe: Images and Myths of Europe*, ed. Luisa Passerini (P.I.E. - Peter Lang, 2003), 59.

nationalism, Laura Cram maintains that people's everyday encounter with European symbols can influence their European identity in an unconscious way.³⁶

2. Iconography of Contemporary Europe

Perhaps it is more advantageous to look at Europe historically, since a long time span allows us to have a grand overview of the continent. This explains why studies in Europe's historical visual discourse can identify certain prevailing trends of depiction corresponding to Europe's momentous events or ideologies. On the contrary, studies in contemporary Europe's imagery are richly diverse since the present is always at the crossroads of various viewpoints and approaches. Studying the images of Europe in German textbooks for civic/ political education, Anja Besand concludes that the depictions of the EU in German teaching materials tend to resemble those in the EU's promotional booklets with such repetitive motifs as abstract diagrams of the EU's structure and mechanism, official EU symbols (the circle of twelve stars, the EU flag), the buildings of EU institutions in Brussels, politicians/ conferences/ summits, and smiling multicultural children with flags and balloons. Nevertheless, there are also some rare depictions that are more interesting and thought-provoking, for example, the EU is represented by some men measuring and putting seals on cucumbers.³⁷

Outside the EU institutions' context, the EU is portrayed quite lively from peripheral perspectives. Silvia Nadjivan concludes from her study on Corax's cartoons³⁸ that Europe is generally portrayed as powerful and rich in contrast to Serbia's "poverty, isolation, backwardness and traditionalism or patriarchy," and is visually represented by a flag or an arrow that is positioned on or points to the left side of the picture.³⁹ According to Petra Mayrhofer, the popular metaphor of "Fortress Europe" is visualised by certain motifs such as the fortress itself, the security fence, and the immense wall, which are all used in the context of non-European refugees' immigration. She also claims that the use of this metaphor is still continuing despite the process of EU enlargement.⁴⁰ Additionally, the concept of Europe is also constructed indirectly through the images of the Other. Francesca Falk's study shows that in European media, the motif of boat people arriving at Europe's borders appears very frequently although most immigrants come to Europe by air or by land; these immigrants are often received by people wearing protective masks and gloves for fear of infection.⁴¹

³⁶ Laura Cram, "Does the Eu Need a Navel? Implicit and Explicit Identification with the European Union*," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 50, no. 1 (2012).

³⁷ Anja Besand, "Crooked Cucumbers, Milk Cows and Mysterious Bulls. Pictures of Europe in German Textbooks for Civic/Political Education," in *United in Visual Diversity: Images and Counter-Images of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie (StudienVerlag, 2010).

³⁸ Pregrag Koraksic Corax is a renowned Serbian political cartoonist.

³⁹ Silvia Nadjivan, "A View from the "Outside:" Corax's Cartoons on the Eu Integration Process in Serbia," in *United in Visual Diversity: Images and Counter-Images of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie (StudienVerlag, 2010), 153, 54.

⁴⁰ Petra Mayrhofer, "'Fortress Europe?': Iconographical Aspects of European Borders," *ibid.*

⁴¹ Francesca Falk, "Europe - a View from the Margins. Boat People and the Memory of Images," *ibid.*

3. Europe in political cartoons

Despite their entertaining and informative values and recognised legitimacy as a historical source, political cartoons have still been an unpopular subject in European studies. Most studies on Europe-related political cartoons are confined to the national level or focus on certain cases,⁴² and only a handful of cartoon studies on twentieth century Europe as a whole can be found. Michael Wintle devotes a small part of his comprehensive book “The Image of Europe” to the political cartoon, calling it a form of “biting criticism from outside official circles” although sometimes adopted by the EU institutions themselves.⁴³ In the independent press’ political cartoons, Europe, according to Wintle, is often personified as a passive and naïve young woman with or without a bull. It can also be symbolised by either a traditional icon like a bull or an improvised icon like an octopus. These icons are often accompanied by the EU’s official symbols like the blue colour and the circle of twelve stars.⁴⁴ Interestingly, humorous cartoons are also used by the EU institutions in their posters and brochures as a form of self-parody. This suggests the EU’s intention to invigorate its “potentially dull” messages, bring itself closer to its citizens, and promote its self-image as “a confident political force.”⁴⁵

Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius’s study on the depictions of Eastern Europe in *Punch* magazine⁴⁶ in the Cold War reveals that Eastern Europeans were constantly represented as unruly and submissive children on a playground, who were controlled or bullied by the great powers, symbolised as parents or schoolmasters. She claims that *Punch* cartoons contributed to the naturalisation and normalisation of the division of power, “maintaining the social and political order” in the Cold War period.⁴⁷ She also emphasises that “the playground rhetoric still lingers on in the enlargement era, reappearing in the tabloid press, as well as in pronouncements of major political players, espousing ‘newness’, ‘smallness’, and the disloyalty of the new entrants.”⁴⁸

⁴² See Judith Wechsler, *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in 19th Century Paris* (The University of Chicago Press, 1982). Lena Voigt, "Beyond the Nation States? Caricatures of Europe in the Satirical Press in 1848/49," in *United in Visual Diversity: Images and Counter-Images of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie (StudienVerlag, 2010). Nadjivan, "A View from the "Outside:" Corax's Cartoons on the Eu Integration Process in Serbia." Marion G. Müller and Esra Özcan, "The Political Iconography of Muhammad Cartoons: Understanding Cultural Conflict and Political Action," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 40, no. 2 (2007). Marion G. Müller, Esra Özcan, and Ognyan Seizov, "Dangerous Depictions: A Visual Case Study of Contemporary Cartoon Controversies," *Popular Communication* 7, no. 1 (2009).

⁴³ Wintle, *The Image of Europe*, 456.

⁴⁴ *The Image of Europe*, 456-59.

⁴⁵ *The Image of Europe*, 454, 55, 57.

⁴⁶ *Punch* is a renowned British magazine of humour and satire running between 1841 and 2002. It helped coin the term “cartoon” as a satirical illustration. See *Punch*, "About," <http://punch.photoshelter.com/about/>. Retrieved on 18th May 2012.

⁴⁷ Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "On Small Nations and Bullied Children: Mr. Punch Draws Eastern Europe," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 84, no. 2 (2006). See also "1956 in the Cartoonist's Gaze," *Third Text* 20, no. 2 (2006).

⁴⁸ "On Small Nations and Bullied Children: Mr. Punch Draws Eastern Europe," 305. See also Nadjivan, "A View from the "Outside:" Corax's Cartoons on the Eu Integration Process in Serbia."

Conducting on a large corpus of political cartoons mostly by artists from around Europe, my study aims to offer a broader and more up-to-date look at political cartoons in European context. Instead of focusing on certain cartoonists or newspapers, it seeks to find out a common voice of European cartoonists, and compare it with popular discourse on the same matters. In terms of methodology, while the existing literature focuses on cartooning techniques and the iconographical aspect of Europe's visual representations, this study is intended to complement them by utilising social semiotics. Social semiotics proves useful for pointing out the power structures underlying visual signification. Additionally, I also want to figure out whether the contemporary portrayal of Europe in cartoons has any resemblance with the continent's traditional images, and whether these depictions are exerting any influences on Europe's division of power as in the case Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius has examined.

III. Theory, methods, sources

1. Traditional semiotics and social semiotics

Semiotics has been defined by Saussure as “the science of the life of signs in society,” which implies that “everything in a culture can be seen as a form of communication, organized in ways akin to verbal language, to be understood in terms of a common set of fundamental rules or principles.”⁴⁹ This broad definition allows semiotics to be deployed in various disciplines from sociology to film studies, and to be approached from different angles.⁵⁰ In this sub-chapter, I will present some central concepts of visual semiotics which can be useful devices for analysing the cartoon corpus, and answering the research questions.

Traditional or structuralist semiotics is rooted in linguistics. One of its founding fathers, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) claims that *sign* is the fundamental linguistic unit, which consists of two parts: the *signifier* and the *signified*. The *signifier* is the *form* (the word, sound, image, etc.), and the *signified* is the *concept* evoked in our mind when we sense the *form*.⁵¹ Saussure emphasises the connection between the signifier and the signified, and the relationship between signs. One of his most important doctrines is the arbitrariness of signs, by which he means that the meanings of signs are unfixed and socially-constructed.⁵² Nevertheless, he is neither interested in the construction process of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, and among signs, nor in the

⁴⁹ Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, *Social Semiotics* (Polity, 1988), 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (SAGE Publications, 1997), 31.

⁵² Aiello, "Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics," 93.

diachronic change of this relationship. In other words, “structuralist analysis is always synchronic,” i.e. it only studies the whole linguistic structure at a specific moment.⁵³

Roland Barthes develops Saussure’s theory by looking at *sign* in a diachronic manner, i.e. he studies “how meanings change across cultural and historical contexts.”⁵⁴ He applies this linguistic approach to visual and communication studies, proposing that an image’s meaning has two layers: *denotation* and *connotation*. *Denotation* is the literal meaning of the image, while *connotation* the symbolic or ideological meaning.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Barthes not only looks at “object sign” (visual lexicon) as “discontinuous and individual dictionary entries” but also is interested in the interconnection of object signs, which he calls “syntax”.⁵⁶ He maintains that connotation comes about through “the cultural associations which cling to the represented people, places and things”⁵⁷ or through certain “connotators” like the syntax, the pose, the photographic techniques and aestheticism, and the accompanied text.⁵⁸

Whereas traditional semiotics regards “sign” as the basic unit, social semiotics considers “semiotic resource” the fundamental concept, and studies the visual syntax in a more systematic manner. Theo van Leeuwen defines semiotic resources as

the actions, materials and artefacts we use for communicative purposes, whether produced physiologically - for example, with our vocal apparatus, the muscles we use to make facial expressions and gestures - or technologically - for example, with pen and ink, or computer hardware and software - together with the ways in which these resources can be organized.⁵⁹

By using the term “resource”, social semioticians, as functionalists, want to avoid “the impression that ‘what a sign stands for’ is somehow pre-given, and not affected by its use.”⁶⁰ The use of a semiotic resource is composed by the users from its past uses and potential uses in order to satisfy the users’ needs and interests. Such uses are either free or regulated by a specific social context.⁶¹ Moreover, the notion of semiotic resource also “accounts for change and power imbalance in the visual signification process, as defined by its two ends: representation (or, encoding) and interpretation (decoding). Only certain social actors - such as the producers of mass images and visual grammars... - have the

⁵³ Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 36, 37.

⁵⁴ Aiello, "Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics," 94.

⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 37.

⁵⁶ Theo Van Leeuwen, "Semiotics and Iconography," in *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, ed. Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt (London: Sage, 2001), 98.

⁵⁷ "Semiotics and Iconography," in *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, ed. Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt (London: Sage, 2001), 97.

⁵⁸ Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 20-26.

⁵⁹ Theo van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics* (Routledge, 2005), 285.

⁶⁰ *Introducing Social Semiotics* (Routledge, 2005), 3.

⁶¹ *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 4.

power to establish as well as break the rules of visual representation.”⁶² Combining Saussure’s synchronic approach and Barthes’s diachronic approach to meanings, social semiotics underscores “semiotic change” or “semiotic innovation”, which is “the discovery and development of new semiotic resources and new ways of using existing semiotic resources.”⁶³ It seeks to find out the social reasons for the change, the way a sign resists to the change, and the principles of semiotic innovation, which claim that semiotic change is brought about through *metaphor* and *connotation*.⁶⁴

There are lots of concepts and ideas within the field of social semiotics, but basically, a social semiotic analysis of an image tends to focus on its three different layers of meaning: *Representational meaning*: the “participants” (people, places or things) that are literally depicted in the image; *Interactive meaning*: the implicit relationship between the viewers and the characters in the image; *Compositional meaning*: the placement of the image’s visual elements that integrates them into “a meaningful whole.”⁶⁵

Although social semiotics is predominantly about “the *how* of communication,” one should not forget that it also concerns the *what*, or in other words, “discourse”.⁶⁶ Theo van Leeuwen, based on the work of Michel Foucault, defines “discourses” (note the plural) as “socially constructed knowledges of some aspect of reality.”⁶⁷ In accordance with this social constructivist point of view, “social semioticians see all semiotic action as social action, as embedded in larger economic and cultural practices and power relations.”⁶⁸

Since this study is concerned with political cartoons’ depictions of the EU, the question of visual truth, which social semioticians call “visual modality”, should be addressed. Consistent with post-modernist philosophy, social semiotics rejects the notion of objective or absolute truth. Theo van Leeuwen contends that there are no fixed standards of judging an image’s modality value. For example, in judgements of a photograph’s modality, one may take into account its colours, articulation of detail, light and shadow, etc., which reveal how accurately it reproduces its subjects. Yet in the case of political cartoons, their modality should not be rejected although they “tend to have reduced articulation of detail, background, depth, and light and shade, and no articulation of colour and tonal gradation.”⁶⁹ Leeuwen suggests that the modality value of a given

⁶² Aiello, "Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics," 90, 91.

⁶³ Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 26.

⁶⁴ *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 26, 27.

⁶⁵ Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2006), 176. Carey Jewitt and Rumiko Oyama, "Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach," in *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, ed. Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt (London: Sage, 2001), 141-53.

⁶⁶ Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 93.

⁶⁷ *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 94.

⁶⁸ Aiello, "Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics," 99.

⁶⁹ Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 167.

image “depends on the kind of visual truth which is *preferred* in the given *context*’ (emphasis added).⁷⁰ In order to be deemed truthful, an image does not always have to technically resemble the reality (naturalistic modality); rather, it can simply represent “the deeper ‘essence’ of what it depicts” (abstract modality).⁷¹

2. Metaphor

Metaphor used to and perhaps still is considered by many people a linguistic device to express ideas more beautifully and poetically. Nevertheless, since the early 1980s, linguists have increasingly studied metaphor as a part of our conceptual system.⁷² According to Lakoff and Johnson, two eminent cognitive theorists, “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”⁷³ From this point of departure, they argue that the construction and use of metaphor are based on cultural and socio-political contexts. Some metaphor can be conventional, traditional, and accepted by a whole community (*conventional metaphor*), while some are impromptu, more creative and have to be placed in a certain context in order to be understood (*new metaphor*). Metaphor can also be used to highlight or hide certain aspects of reality, thus having the power to create reality and acting as “a guide for future action.”⁷⁴

Similarly, although it is often treated as an aesthetic device, visual metaphor can be approached as a cognitive concept. Kennedy et al. (1993) suggest that a visual depiction is considered a metaphor if “its use is intended to occasion a metaphorical thought.”⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Refaie argues that it is hard to define a metaphorical thought, since thoughts and the expressions of thoughts are read differently by individual readers/viewers, depending on the communication context. The boundary between a literal and a metaphorical thought is also blurred because if a conventional metaphor is frequently used in a community, that community tends to consider it a literal expression.⁷⁶ For example, the sentence “Ferdinand de Saussure is one of the founding *fathers* of structuralist semiotics” sounds undoubtedly a simple literal expression in English, but in fact, it implies the metaphorical thought “ideas are people.”⁷⁷ Unsurprisingly, the nature of metaphor is also implicitly addressed by social semioticians, who underline the process of sign-making, claiming that “all signs are motivated by interests and based on social

⁷⁰ *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 168.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* Leeuwen also suggests two more kinds of visual truth, technological modality and sensory modality, but they are more relevant to images used in contexts where science, technology and pleasure matter, such as blueprints, maps, ads.

⁷² Elisabeth El Refaie, “Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons,” *Visual Communication* 2, no. 1 (2003): 76.

⁷³ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3.

⁷⁴ *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 10-13, 156-58.

⁷⁵ Refaie, “Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons,” 80.

⁷⁶ “Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons.”

⁷⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 47.

convention,” thus being metaphorical by nature.⁷⁸ For this reason, one should pay more attention to the process of “naturalizing” or “literalizing” a visual metaphor.⁷⁹

Refaie also comes to some important conclusions about the differences between the verbal and the visual metaphor, which in my opinion can be complemented by semiotic research. To name but a few, (1) the visual metaphor “is restricted when it is used to portray ‘plural’, so that groups of people are often reduced to one stereotypical image which purportedly represents the essence of this group”, (2) personification, which allows the artists to depict complex issues in a simpler way, is in many cases “impossible to express in words,” (3) many visual metaphors are implied by the context, thus “open to a wide range of possible interpretations, which depend on the attitudes and the level of knowledge of the reader.”⁸⁰

3. Methods

Data processing

I observe carefully the whole corpus of more than three hundred political cartoons to find out recurring motifs and their overtones. Such a large corpus of cartoons allows me to get a comprehensive overview and make valid generalisations, although they are richly diverse and cannot be addressed fully in this paper. By observing the cartoons, I identify some main themes or issues that the cartoonists want to communicate (see Table 1). To speak from the semiotic viewpoint, these themes correspond to the images’ connotations. It should be noted that this categorisation is just relative because some images present more than one themes, and certain themes may overlap. For example, the theme “The labyrinth of EU norms” can be subsumed under the theme “Europe’s borders” if one considers EU norms a barrier to EU accession. Nevertheless, they are still discussed separately since in the cartoons, they are signified by clearly different semiotic resources. The EU borders are often symbolised by the door, the wall, the embankment, and the borderlines on maps. Meanwhile, the EU norms and standards are often represented by the measurements or quality of certain things. For instance, when entering the EU, one has to wear new clothes or spend the euro instead of other currencies.

Data analysis

I single out up to three cartoons from each theme for detailed semiotic analysis. The selected cartoons should be rich in semiotic resources, thus opening up interesting interpretations. The analysis is based on the key concepts and theses of semiotics such as the semiotic resources’ denotative and connotative meanings, the images’ representational, interactive and compositional meanings. Special attention is also paid to the discursive aspect of the visual signification process: the cartoons’ depictions of the

⁷⁸ Refaie, "Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons," 82.

⁷⁹ "Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons," 81-83.

⁸⁰ "Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons," 91.

EU are usually linked to their contexts, and compared with other existing discourses on the same matters.

Event	Theme	Explanation
The 2004 Eastern Enlargement	Europe's new borders	Cartoons about new concepts of Europe's borders
	The labyrinth of EU norms	Cartoons about the conditions that candidate countries have to meet in order to join the EU
	Behind the scenes	Cartoons about the hidden negative aspects of European integration
	The EU dream	Cartoons about Eastern European countries' (over)enthusiasm for joining the EU
The 2009-2012 Eurozone debt crisis	A multi-speed Europe	Cartoons about the power asymmetry among European countries
	EU the Saviour	Cartoons about the EU's role in helping troubled economies
	Democracy and unity	Cartoons about the disagreement among Eurozone members over the solutions to the debt crisis
	The end of Europe	Cartoons about the alarming situation of the Eurozone in general

Table 1. Thematic categorisation of the observed political cartoons

4. Sources

Due to the limited availability of published political cartoons, the studied cartoons were collected from sources with slightly different nature. The cartoons on the Eurozone debt crisis are from the section “[Cartoon of the day](#)” of the news website Presseurop.eu within the period from February 2010⁸¹ to February 2012; the cartoons on the 2004 EU Enlargement are from the exhibition “The Ten ‘New’ Europeans” and the international cartoon competition “New Europe - New Borders”, whose further information will be provided as follows:

- “*The Ten ‘New’ Europeans*” exhibition catalogue⁸²: “The Ten ‘New’ Europeans” (or “Zehn ‘Neue’ für Europa”) is a caricature exhibition that was curated by two German art historians Dieter Burkamp and Gisela Burkamp and took place in many venues in Germany and some other European countries like Belgium and

⁸¹ Presseurop.eu started to publish cartoons on the debt crisis in the early months of 2010, when some European countries' volatile financial situation, which unfolded in late 2009, was escalating.

⁸² Dieter Burkamp, ed. *The Ten "New" Europeans* (Kerber Verlag, 2004).

the Czech Republic, in order to celebrate the Eastern enlargement of the EU. The exhibition presented political cartoons by artists from the ten new EU countries. Gunter Verheugen, former European Commissioner for Enlargement, comments that many of these cartoons reflect the pride and hope of the new EU members, but at the same time, underline their fear and uncertainty of being in a new economic and political environment.⁸³ The catalogue contains around ninety cartoons by fifty four artists participating in the exhibition.

- *Catalogue from the international cartoon competition "New Europe - New Borders"*⁸⁴: The competition was organised by Humor Kompaniet, a Sweden-based non-profit association of artists who self-claim to be "united in satirical and mocking judgement of the modern world." Although on the back cover of the competition catalogue, they write that "this book takes no stand... It just entertains, provokes, reflects, vents and puts a finger on realities of Europe," in my opinion, it is obvious that Humor Kompaniet already took a critical stand when they chose the theme "New Europe - New Borders" and selected the winners of the competition. The book contains one hundred and seventy works of over one hundred artists from thirty countries. These works were also presented in an exhibition of the same name in Stockholm in 2004.
- *Presseurope.eu*: Established in 2009 and financially supported by the European Commission, "Presseurop.eu is a Paris-based news website publishing a daily selection of articles chosen from more than 200 international news titles, then translated into ten languages (English, German, French, Spanish, Romanian, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Polish and Czech)." Presseurop affirms that "its multilingual team enjoys complete editorial independence."⁸⁵ Most of the cartoons from Presseurop.eu are originally published in European newspapers. When collecting cartoons, however, I also include a few non-European ones, because once they are republished on Presseurop and reach European readers, they are "Europeanised" to some extent.

The main difference between the two types of sources (news website vs. catalogue) is that the news website's cartoons were, in most of the cases, created to offer immediate and direct comments on single events within the Eurozone debt crisis. It means that the cartoonists do not have a long enough time span to step back, contemplate and give really well-thought and comprehensive visual remarks. Meanwhile, by publishing their works only at the final point in the EU enlargement process, the "visual historians" of the 2004 Enlargement had the opportunity to observe the whole route of Central Eastern

⁸³ Günter Verheugen, "Without Any Objection," in *The Ten "New" Europeans*, ed. Dieter Burkamp (Kerber Verlag, 2004), 9, 10.

⁸⁴ HumorKompaniet, ed. *New Europe - New Borders* (Författarhuset, 2005).

⁸⁵ Presseurop.eu, "About," <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/about>. Retrieved on 28th February 2012.

European countries' EU accession: being a candidate, negotiating, and becoming an EU member. Thus, those cartoons can be considered the personal conclusions of the "new" Europeans' experience, perception and expectation.

The two types of sources share a common feature that they both contain works created by artists all over Europe, and presented at the transnational level, thus offering a comprehensive variety of viewpoints. Furthermore, all of the studied cartoons are created or presented as independent art works, instead of illustrations for the verbal texts, thus they can be treated like pieces of commentary that reflect mainly the artists' opinions. Since the works have been selected by professional editors and curators, their quality is somehow ensured. Nevertheless, the editors and curators' motivation and intention underlying the publications of these works are not totally clear from what they state in their websites and publications.

IV. Context of the analysed cartoons

1. The 2004 EU enlargement

On 1 May 2004 ten new countries⁸⁶ joined the EU. "This historic enlargement of the EU from 15 to 25 members is the culmination of a long accession process leading to the reunification of a Europe that had been divided for half a century by the Iron Curtain and the Cold War."⁸⁷ To join the EU, the ten candidate countries had to be recognised as European States (Article 49 of the EU Treaty) and to comply with the principles of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (Article 6 of the EU Treaty). They also had to fulfil the economic and political conditions known as the Copenhagen criteria.⁸⁸ The objectives of European unification are claimed to include: peace and political stability, greater prosperity, environment protection, democracy "based on the principles of dignity, equality, solidarity and justice", strong Europe's role internationally, and cultural enrichment.⁸⁹

2. The 2009-2012 Eurozone debt crisis

Launched on 1st January 1999 as a virtual currency and on 1st January 2002 as banknotes and coins, the euro (€) is the single currency of seventeen out of twenty seven EU member countries, known as the Eurozone.⁹⁰ It is considered "the most tangible proof of

⁸⁶ The ten new EU countries include three former Soviet republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), four former satellites of the USSR (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia), a former Yugoslav republic (Slovenia) and two Mediterranean islands (Cyprus and Malta).

⁸⁷ European Commission, "The 2004 Enlargement: The Challenge of a 25-Member Eu," http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/enlargement/2004_and_2007_enlargement/e50017_en.htm. Retrieved on 10 April 2012.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ The Eurozone currently consists of Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland, Greece, Slovenia, Cyprus, Malta, Slovakia, and Estonia. With the exception of Denmark and the United Kingdom that have an opt-out from participation in the Eurozone, the remainder EU countries are set to replace their national currencies with the euro once they meet the

European integration” and “the second most important international currency after the US dollar. “⁹¹The euro is managed by the so-called Eurosystem, which is composed of the independent European Central Bank (ECB) and the Eurozone member states’ national central banks. In order to adopt the euro, EU member states must meet the “convergence criteria” set by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, including “low and stable inflation, exchange rate stability and sound public finances.”⁹²

In the early years of the euro, weaker EU member countries like Italy, Spain and Greece were allowed to adopt the euro despite their failure to meet the convergence criteria. Thanks to the optimism and [over]enthusiasm of stronger EU economies, both the public and the private sectors of these periphery countries witnessed a sudden boost in credit with low interest rates from their stronger counterparts. Nevertheless, their lack of economic competitiveness and other structural issues remained unchanged, but were not fully addressed by all parties involved. These problems started to be exposed in the 2007-2008 global financial collapse, when periphery Eurozone economies, just like many others around the world, were plunged into recession and saw their government borrowing exploded.⁹³ By 2010, a sovereign debt crisis was spreading throughout less solvent Eurozone countries like Greece, Ireland, and Portugal before shifting its centre to Italy and Spain in 2011.⁹⁴

Since 2010, the European Commission, European Central Bank and IMF, which are collectively called “the troika”, have provided Greece, Ireland and Portugal with several bail-out packages under the condition that these countries implement austerity measures like tax hikes and spending cuts. This is such a dilemma for them because these austerity measures cause social unrests, and make the weak economies shrink further, but without doing so, a default is inevitable and going to be disastrous for both the troubled economies and other Eurozone members.⁹⁵ Consequently, the Eurozone countries are deeply divided over how to solve it although the fear of Greek’s default is commonly shared.

V. ANALYSIS

1. CARTOONS ON THE 2004 EU ENLARGEMENT

convergence criteria. See “The Euro,” http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/euro/index_en.htm. Retrieved on 10th May 2012.

⁹¹ “The Euro/Monetary Union,” http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/money/euro/index_en.htm, retrieved on 10th May 2012.

⁹² “The Euro”.

⁹³ Christopher Alessi, “The Eurozone in Crisis,” The Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/eu/eurozone-crisis/p22055>. Retrieved on 10th May 2012.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Roxanne Horesh and Sam Bollier, “Q&A: Eurozone Debt Crisis,” Al Jazeera, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2011/12/201112681226496176.html>. Retrieved on 10th May 2012.

1.1. EUROPE'S NEW BORDERS

While the 2004 EU Enlargement is widely perceived as a significant event that bridged the divided Europe and created a new European community with fewer barriers among member states, there are a number of people who are critical and pessimistic enough to visualise its gloomy side. The 2004 EU Enlargement and the Schengen Agreement are said to imply “exclusion and anxiety,” and in fact, the EU, for fear of increased illegal immigration and crime from the East, has invested heavily in establishing more border control between “the new East Central European member countries and the rest of Eastern Europe.”⁹⁶ The idea of Europe’s new borders is also shared by the organiser and participants of the cartoon competition “New Europe - New Borders” and its subsequent exhibition in Stockholm in 2004. While some cartoons depict the new European map with borderlines being eliminated or replaced by the new lines, and some highlight the persistence of national (cultural/ identity) borders, in most cartoons, the economic border seems to be the most dominant. Although it is used to convey different ideas, the repetitive image of the poor, especially beggars and bin scavengers, emphasises the economic nature of the European integration project. In the cartoonist’s gaze, if one is poor, he or she is outside the EU territory.

In most of the cartoons that explicitly employ the idea of Europe’s new borders, the borders are often signified by a wall or a closed door. On one side of the wall, or outside the door, is either a “new” European or a non-European while on the other side is the “old” European. Although these characters are depicted diversely in different cartoons, they hold some common stereotypes: the well-off “old” European is rich, modern, arrogant, and unwelcoming; the “new” European wearing his or her ethnic dress is ridiculously overexcited to join the EU; the non-European, who may be black, has dark hair, or has a Muslim look, is poor and “strange”. The door is either too small to get in or has an unreachable doorbell. Similarly, the wall is enormous and impassable. It should be noted that these stereotypes are not only created by Western European artists, but also by Eastern European artists themselves.

⁹⁶ Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, "East Goes West or West Goes East? Reflections on the Eu Enlargement to Eastern Europe," in *Unity in Diversity: Europe and the European Union: Enlargement and Constitutional Treaty*, ed. Michael Herslund and Ramona Samson (Copenhagen Business School Press, 2005), 53.

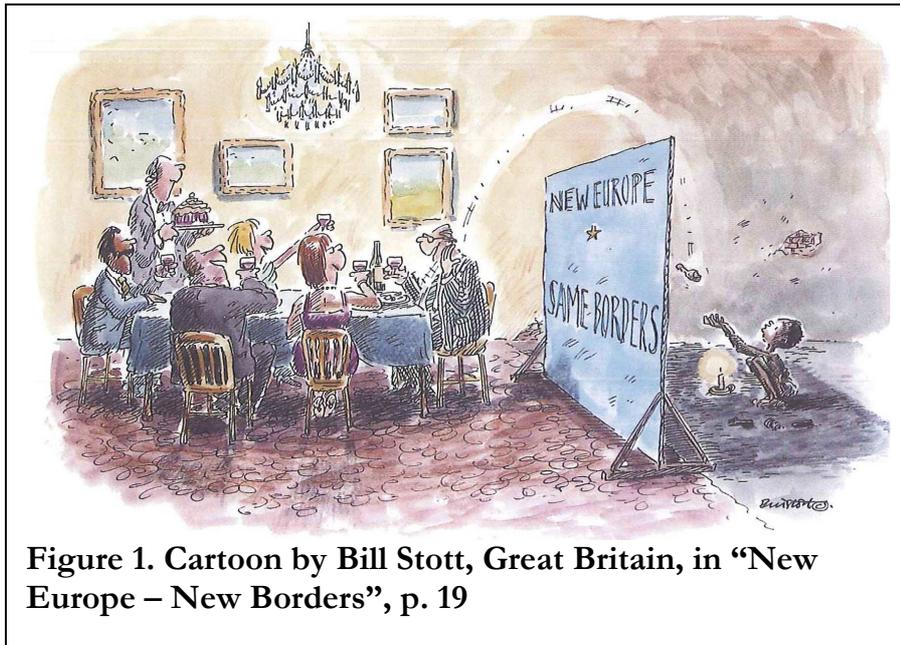


Figure 1. Cartoon by Bill Stott, Great Britain, in “New Europe – New Borders”, p. 19

Figure 1 describes an extremely impenetrable border between Europeans and non-Europeans. Unlike most other cartoons that use the metaphor of the closed door and the wall, the physical border depicted in this cartoon is only a small screen which looks easy to cross. On the left side of the screen where a nice feast is taking place, a group of rich people are giving a toast and smiling to one another. On the other side, a naked black boy, surrounded by darkness, is squatting next to a candle, passively catching a chicken drumstick thrown from the table of the wealthy. Obviously, it is not only the living conditions but also the social status that separate these two characters: one is rich and civilised, while the other is extremely poor and primitive (in fact, civilisation is signified by electricity, and primitiveness is symbolised by the candle). The cartoon is reminiscent of colonial times, when the colonised people were looked down on as barbarians. Certain social semiotic devices like distancing, framing and narrative structure are used to signify the economic and social status border.

Distancing: The stereotypes are underlined by the distance between the viewer and the characters in the cartoons, as Theo van Leeuwen writes that “showing people from a distance (in a ‘long shot’) can also decrease their individuality and make them more into types, because from a distance we will be less able to discern their individual features.”⁹⁷

Narrative structure: The narrative structure of an image is represented by a vector, which is an imagined line connecting the characters and expressing an action or a reaction.⁹⁸ In Figure 1, the “eye-contact” vectors connect the rich people, while the only thing that

⁹⁷ Leeuwen, "Semiotics and Iconography," 96. See also Kress and Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 124., where the authors provide descriptions of the very close shot, the close shot, the medium close shot, the medium shot, the medium long shot, the long shot, the very long shot.

⁹⁸ Jewitt and Oyama, "Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach," 141-43.

communicates with the black boy is the chicken drumstick. This depiction implies the black boy's exclusion from the rich group.

Saliency: Saliency is the ability of an image's elements to attract the viewer's attention. It is realised by "placement in the foreground or background, relative size, contrast in tonal value (or colour), differences in sharpness, etc."⁹⁹ In the analysed cartoon, the rich group is more salient than the black boy, because they occupy more space, and are depicted with brighter colours and more details.

Framing: Framing is the disconnection or connection of the elements of an image. Framing devices can be lines, empty space, colour, shape, and so on.¹⁰⁰ The black boy in Figure 1 is disconnected from the other people by the screen, the eye-contact vectors, the saliency of the wealthy group, and the colour contrast (the space occupied by the rich group is bright and colourful, while the black boy's space is dark).

Without the text "New Europe - Same Borders" and the EU star on the screen, the artist's illustration of the white man throwing the chicken drumstick to the black boy without looking back would probably be seen as a highly offensive and racist depiction. It can also be read as a general criticism of the social injustice, or the gap between the wealthy postindustrial world of the white people and the poor "third world" symbolised by the black boy. The text acts as an "ad hoc pointer" that "alerts the reader towards a connotative interpretation,"¹⁰¹ in this case, the artist's criticism against the European group or the EU. By saying "same borders", the artist means that the economic or social status border has always been present at any stage of European integration, separating the EU members and the non-EU. The artist points his finger at the nature of the EU project: it does not have such a noble aim as solidarity, but is merely a project of pragmatism. Notably, the presence of a man with darker skin in the EU group implies that Europeans are no longer perceived merely as a racial group. Instead, it is only wealth that matters. Furthermore, the little screen and the black boy sitting behind it, waiting for left-over food, imply the outer challenges that the EU has to face. It cannot just erect a wall or a fortress to keep out poorer non-Europeans. Instead, the only thing the EU can do is to ignore them, or to do some little charity gestures if possible.

1.2. THE LABYRINTH OF EU NORMS

The EU's accession conditions for the Central and Eastern European candidate countries, including a stable democracy, a competitive market economy, and the capacity to implement EU laws and policies, have been criticised for being ambiguous and unfair. It was pointed out that EU membership "depends not only on technical progress in

⁹⁹ Kress and Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 177.

¹⁰⁰ Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 7.

¹⁰¹ Francisco Yus, "Visual Metaphor Versus Verbal Metaphor: A Unified Account," in *Multimodal Metaphor*, ed. Charles J. Forceville and Eduardo Urios-Aparisi (2009), 155.

negotiations, but also on when the current member-states are politically ready for enlargement,” and while the “new” or “potential” Europeans always have to reach the moving target of EU conditionality in order to qualify for an EU membership, the current member-states themselves fail to meet these requirements.¹⁰² Political cartoonists approach this problem in different manners. They mock the Central and Eastern European countries’ efforts to satisfy EU norms, show their disappointment once joining the Union, and criticise the EU’s so-called standards.



Figure 2. Cartoon by Zbigniew Juika, Poland, in “The Ten ‘New’ Europeans”, p. 54

The awkwardness of enforcing EU standards is exemplified by the cartoon shown here as Figure 2. Made for fun in winter times, the snowman is often an improvised creation, and rarely subjected to any official aesthetic or technical standards. Nevertheless, Figure 2 shows three people measuring a snowman, probably in order to see if it fits with EU requirements. Interestingly, these people’s faces are almost

hidden. Holding a “paper” with the EU symbol, the man on the far left of the cartoon seems to hide himself under the coat and the hat; he also looks very distant and has no face expression. Next to him, a man whose face is almost hidden behind the ruler is directly doing the measurement. With a notebook and pencil in his hands, the man on the far right, who seems to be documenting the task, almost turns his back against the viewer, thus his face is hardly seen. Since the imaginary contact between the viewer and the characters¹⁰³ is *intentionally* absent, the viewer can barely identify oneself with any of them. These “mysterious” men and their actions evoke quite a few questions: Who are they? Why do they have to measure the snowman? Why do they look so serious and emotionless? What are they thinking? The doubtful feelings aroused from viewing this cartoon can be attributed to the ambiguity and rigidity of EU’s norms and the tasks of evaluating EU candidates’ qualifications, while the mysterious men represent the EU’s anonymous bureaucracy. The act of measuring a snowman can also be interpreted as the deep infiltration of the EU into social life: the European integration project involves everyone, every activity, even the most banal ones. This aspect is expressed in many other cartoons by certain recurring semiotic resources such as a man having the EU star circle

¹⁰² Heather Grabbe, “European Union Conditionality and the Acquis Communautaire,” *International Political Science Review* 23, no. 3 (2002): 249.

¹⁰³ See Jewitt and Oyama, “Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach,” 145.

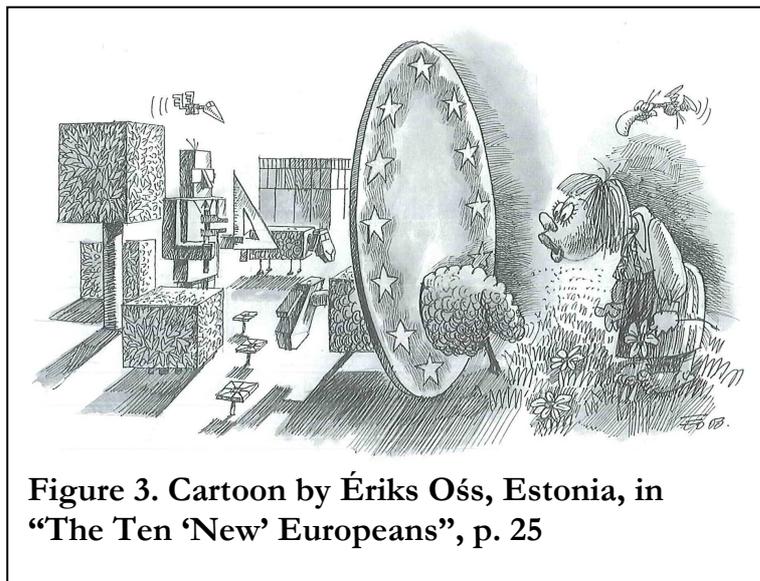


Figure 3. Cartoon by Ériks Ośš, Estonia, in “The Ten ‘New’ Europeans”, p. 25

tattooed on his back, a man finding the EU stars under a manhole cover, and the EU stars being painted on a rubbish bin.

Unlike Figure 2, Figure 3 highlights the stereotypes of the EU and the “non-EU”. It depicts the transition of objects from a non-European zone to a European one, whose border is formed by a round screen with twelve stars.

The artist uses rough sketches to describe the natural and primitive but human-friendly look of things in the non-European zone. Meanwhile, in the European zone, both things and animals have a mechanical appearance signified by geometric shapes. The sheep, when moving from the non-European zone to the European one, has its upper body transformed to a robot-like sheep at the surprise of the girl and the bird from the non-European zone. Since the geometric shapes symbolise technological advance and modernity, the cartoon implies the popular stereotypes of Europe (or Western Europe, or the EU?) as progressive and prosperous, in contrast to the backwardness of the non-Europeans (or Eastern Europe?).¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, it is still questionable whether the West’s modernity is desirable or not. It is obvious that the things described in the non-European zone look very natural and normal, while the “robotic” EU world is inhumane, strange and soulless. Perhaps the cartoonist also wants to imply the equally common negative stereotype of the West as merciless, egotist and cold. By showing the non-European zone from a shorter distance to the viewer than the European one, the artist probably wants to make the viewer identify his or herself with the non-Europeans.¹⁰⁵ According to Törnquist-Plewa, the aforementioned stereotypes are “nourished by continual unequal power relations between the centre, i.e. Western Europe, and the marginalised East and Central Europe,” and by Eastern Europeans’ “bitterness and inferiority complexes.”¹⁰⁶

1.3. BEHIND-THE-SCENES

¹⁰⁴ The stereotypical dichotomy between Western and Eastern Europe has existed since the Middle Ages. See Törnquist-Plewa, “East Goes West or West Goes East? Reflections on the Eu Enlargement to Eastern Europe.”

¹⁰⁵ See Jewitt and Oyama, “Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach,” 146.

¹⁰⁶ Törnquist-Plewa, “East Goes West or West Goes East? Reflections on the Eu Enlargement to Eastern Europe,” 50, 51.

Despite certain challenges that the “new” Europeans have to face when joining the EU, the EU membership is still very promising in the sense that it is expected to facilitate regional cooperation for stronger economy, cultural enrichment, democratisation and

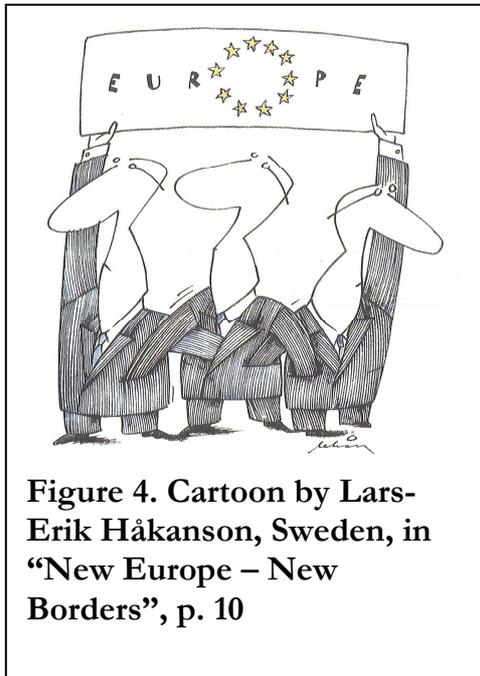


Figure 4. Cartoon by Lars-Erik Håkanson, Sweden, in “New Europe – New Borders”, p. 10

other benefits. Nevertheless, some cartoonists look at what is under cover of the European integration project. Through their works, they claim that European integration simply means EU members taking money from one another, and that the real motivation behind the idea of a united Europe is to increase the economic profit. In order to accumulate wealth, the EU is even willing to sacrifice its noble values like solidarity, equality, and benevolence.

Figure 4 describes three men in formal suits raising a banner with the EU circle of stars while reaching their hands out into one another’s pockets. Interestingly, they do not look at either the banner or the pockets, and seem to avoid eye contact with one another and with the viewer. The banner is

placed at the highest position, which implies the ambitious and positive vision of the EU, but the men who hold it have an unengaged and indifferent expression on their faces. The colour scheme of the cartoon is divided into two distinct parts. The upper part, which contains the men’s faces and the banner, is almost bright, thus more salient, whereas the lower part, which includes their bodies and their acts of picking one another’s pockets, is dark and less salient. At first glance, the viewer may notice the upper part only, which drives him or her to think about the ideals and visions of the EU; but then he or she will see the act of pickpocket, which is less noticeable. By this depiction, the artist wants to show that the EU project may seem very positive at first glance, but is actually a pragmatic issue of all parties involved. Nevertheless, this uncomfortable truth is not admitted openly, which is symbolised by the intentional eye-contact avoidance of the three men, whose formal suits probably represent their job as politicians or bureaucrats, and whose similar appearance implies their so-called equality and unity.

More provokingly, in Figure 5, the image of a cow and her dung is used to criticise the EU. The EU’s territory is clearly marked within a square piece of land with blue grass and golden stars, while the EU itself is represented by a well-nurtured dairy cow with Europe’s map on her body. The composition of this cartoon bears a close resemblance to the one of Figure 4, since it is also divided into two contrasting parts. The part containing the cow and grass field is extremely salient. Almost taking up the whole image, it lies in the very centre and has a well-blended bright colour combination. By this depiction, the cartoonist may want to underline the *popular image* of the EU as a prosperous land.

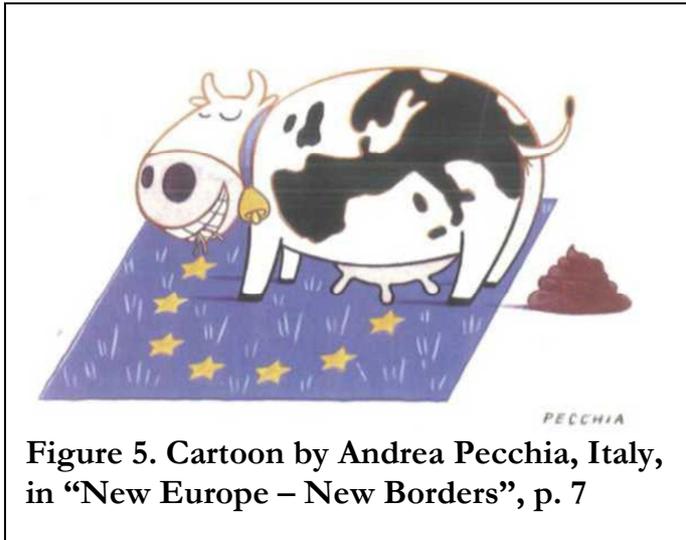


Figure 5. Cartoon by Andrea Pecchia, Italy, in “New Europe – New Borders”, p. 7

Meanwhile, less noticeable is the cow’s dung, which is placed at the right-hand margin. This left-right positioning is common in cartoons about the EU, where the EU or Western Europe is often placed on the left, and any non-European things are placed on the right. This placement reflects the fact that the East-West division, despite its geographical inaccuracy, is still prevailing in discourses about Europe, and is understood as a

political, economic and cultural demarcation. Scholars call this phenomenon “symbolic geography” and “mental mapping,” which are “socially constructed and thus easy to instrumentalize, or even manipulate.”¹⁰⁷

Although the EU in this cartoon is signified by a beautiful cow with full udders, it leaves the viewers with a negative impression. With closed eyes and a satisfied grin on her face, the EU cow expresses an egocentric and pragmatic attitude when eating European grass, being milked in European land, but eliminating waste outside in order to keep her land impeccable. The cartoon’s message is highly metaphorical. It is hard to tell exactly what the cow dung is intended to represent. Perhaps it symbolises the problems that the EU is incapable of dealing with and wants to get rid of. For example, Europe allegedly makes use of cheap labour from poorer countries while at the same time, trying to keep immigrants out of its borders or in isolated ghettos,¹⁰⁸ subsidising its agriculture, thus hurting farmers in developing countries,¹⁰⁹ and dumping its hazardous waste overseas.¹¹⁰

1.4. THE EU DREAM

Despite a certain level of scepticism towards Western Europe, it is said that Eastern Europeans, in the Cold War period, often considered the West “a symbol of prosperity and freedom, a dream and an unreachable goal,”¹¹¹ “a magic formula, a moral concept.”¹¹² After the collapse of the Communist system in Central and Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991, and over the course of the 2004 EU Enlargement, this

¹⁰⁷ Nadjivan, "A View from the "Outside:" Corax's Cartoons on the Eu Integration Process in Serbia," 143, 44.

¹⁰⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Europe - an Unfinished Adventure* (Polity Press, 2004), 19-22.

¹⁰⁹ *Europe - an Unfinished Adventure* (Polity Press, 2004), 33.

¹¹⁰ Elisabeth Rosenthal, "Smuggling Europe's Waste to Poorer Countries," *The New York Times*, 26th September 2009.

¹¹¹ Törnquist-Plewa, "East Goes West or West Goes East? Reflections on the Eu Enlargement to Eastern Europe," 44.

¹¹² Sonja Puntsher Riekmann, "The Myth of European Unity," in *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 64.

idolisation continued to be affirmed by Eastern Europe's EU enthusiasts, who spread the idea of Europeanism across every aspect of social life. At the same time, they also talked of these significant events as their countries' "return to Europe"¹¹³ and abandonment of the socialist past's obsolescence and backwardness.¹¹⁴



Figure 6. Cartoon by Anton Kotreba, Slovakia, in "The Ten 'New' Europeans", p. 88

One of the recurring motifs in political cartoons about the 2004 EU Enlargement is a man enthusiastically running or walking towards the West, i.e. the left side of the image. A good example of this motif, Figure 6 depicts a worker happily walking into the EU zone, which is separated from the non-EU zone by a road sign with the EU symbols of twelve golden stars on a blue

background. The EU sign is the most salient element because it is placed at the highest position in the centre part of the image, and because its blue colour does not seem to blend with the overall colour scheme. By creating this composition, the cartoonist may want to imply the popular perception of the EU as being good, ideal, and important, for social semiotics holds that in an image, what is placed on the top is presented as the Ideal, and what is placed at the bottom is put forward as real and down to earth.¹¹⁵

The cartoon represents Eastern Europeans' motivation for and attitude towards EU accession. To begin with, it is noticeable that the EU zone looks the same as the non-EU zone: its grass is not greener, and without the two characters, both would be equally dull. To interpret alternatively, what is promising in the EU zone is probably placed outside the image, thus unforeseeable by both the viewers and the cartoon's characters. This depiction implies that to Eastern Europeans, the idea of European unification as well as the EU's values seems ambiguous. The eyeline vector, or the direction of the gaze of the man on the right, expresses the cartoon's narrative: more and more Eastern Europeans have been moving to the EU, leaving behind their communist past, which is signified by the hammers, sickles, and red stars (the communist symbols) abandoned on the ground. Although being ill-informed about the EU, the euro-enthusiast, represented by a blue-collar worker walking into the EU zone, is still optimistic. Perhaps his life change is more about what to leave behind than what to expect in the future. Smiling and going forward

¹¹³ Törnquist-Plewa, "East Goes West or West Goes East? Reflections on the Eu Enlargement to Eastern Europe," 44.

¹¹⁴ Velikonja, *Eurosis - a Critique of the New Eurocentrism*. 8.

¹¹⁵ Kress and Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 186.

with a shovel carried on the shoulder, he seems more than willing to work in/for the EU. Meanwhile, the euro-sceptic, represented by the perplexed man on the right, is facing a difficult choice: Should he drop his hammer and sickle like many others and follow the EU path? What is positive about the EU that has attracted so many people? What will be waiting for him if he joins the EU?

The portrayal of the two Eastern Europeans in the cartoon prompts the viewers to think about Central Eastern European countries' status when accessing the EU. In communist symbolism, the crossed hammer and sickle represents the solidarity between workers and peasants. Used in flags, medals, and logos of many communist/ socialist/ leftist groups worldwide, the emblem embodies the ideal of those who bring it. Nevertheless, in Kotreba's cartoon, the hammers and sickles are shown separately as mere simple hand tools, thus are no different from the shovel. By this satirical depiction, the cartoon conveys not only the decline of communist ideology in Eastern Europe but also the region's stereotypical backwardness and under-preparedness, which are signified by the blue-collar workers, who can only bring to "Europe" their physical labour (the shovel and the hammer-and-sickle set seem to be just two sides of the same coin) and idealised view of the new life.

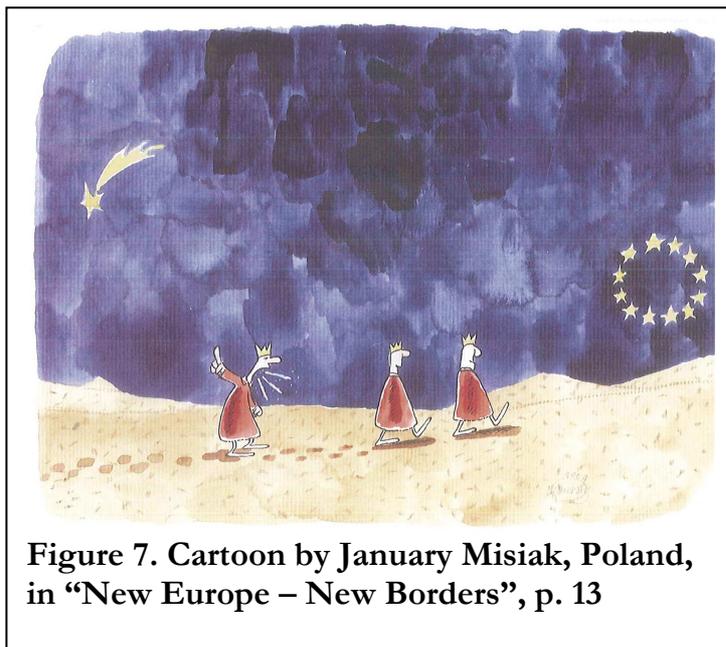


Figure 7. Cartoon by January Misiak, Poland, in "New Europe – New Borders", p. 13

Biblical motifs are also of wide use in political cartoons to convey the EU dream of Eastern Europe. Figure 7 is an allegory of Eastern Europeans' attitudes towards the EU, based on a tale in Christian Scripture about the three kings (or magi) making a journey to Bethlehem to present their gifts to the newborn Jesus Christ. On the way, they saw a divine star leading them to the place where the child was.¹¹⁶ In

the cartoon, two of the three kings follow the EU's twelve stars instead of the divine star, while the other king is trying to call them back to the "right" direction. By placing the EU stars at the same level with the divine star, the artist probably implies that the EU is as significant and powerful as Christianity. In other words, Eastern European countries now have the EU as an alternative "saviour", which is so alluring that it can hypnotise the two kings who represent the EU enthusiasts. They are so obsessed by the EU that they do not bother about the third king, who points to the other alternative symbolised by the

¹¹⁶ Matthew 2: 9-11. Holy Bible, New International Version, (Biblica, Inc.), <http://www.biblegateway.com>.

Bethlehem star. The artist expresses their hypnosis by portraying them as being silent and turning their backs to the viewer, thus preventing the viewer from seeing their face expressions. The other king, who symbolises the EU sceptics, seems more active but hopeless when trying to persuade his fellows to follow the traditional force of Christianity. Looking at the cartoon, one may visualise the movement towards the EU stars, while the divine star is anti-movement. According to Michael Wintle, the three Magi was a popular motif in Europe's visual representations in the Middle Ages. Since about 1450, they have even been portrayed in paintings as the representatives of the three continents: Africa, Asia and Europe with certain symbolic ethnic characteristics. By this depiction, European artists were able to "define" their continent in relation to the others, and at the same time, emphasised "the universality of the Christian Church, which reached the world over, and in which all were welcome from all parts and all peoples. The basic message was one of equality: all were equal before God and before God's Church."¹¹⁷ If this interpretation is applied to Misiak's cartoon, it can be said that the EU and its ideals, just like Christianity, are represented as universal and welcoming to everyone. It is hard to tell from the picture which direction the artist is in favour of, because the characters are shown from a very long shot, which suggests an impersonal attitude. ¹¹⁸ By presenting the EU and Christianity as two contradictory alternatives, the cartoonist wants to underline them as a dilemma that the new EU members have to face.

Figure 8 also uses the biblical tale to depict Eastern Europeans' enthusiasm towards the

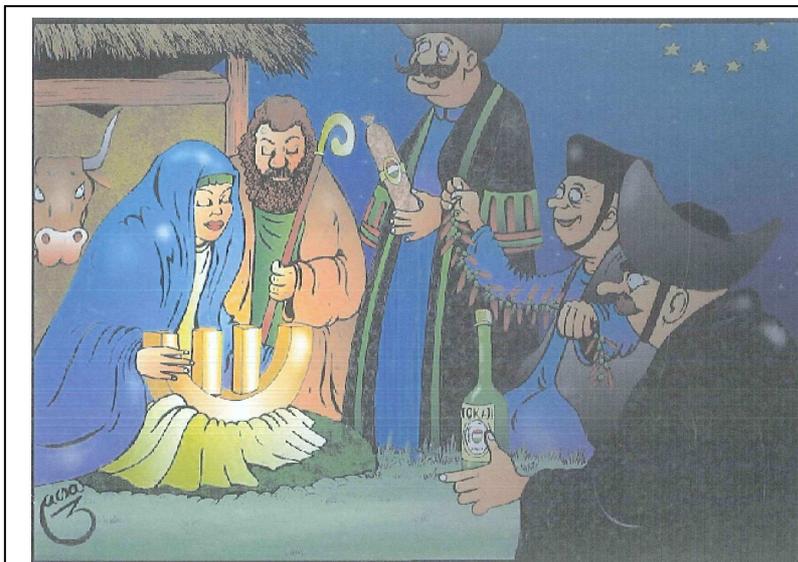


Figure 8. Cartoon by Gergely Bacsa, Hungary, in "The Ten 'New' Europeans", p. 103

EU but in a more critical manner. According to the tale, when Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem, Magi from the East visited and brought gold, frankincense and myrrh as gifts to him. ¹¹⁹ In this cartoon, however, in the manger is a golden euro symbol instead of baby Jesus. It is embraced by Maria and surrounded by the Magi who are presenting their gifts, which look like Hungarian specialties: a bottle of Tokaji wine, a string of Hungarian paprika, and a gyulai kolbasz - Hungarian traditional sausage (the artist is Hungarian). On the upper right side of the

specialties: a bottle of Tokaji wine, a string of Hungarian paprika, and a gyulai kolbasz - Hungarian traditional sausage (the artist is Hungarian). On the upper right side of the

¹¹⁷Wintle, *The Image of Europe*191-94.

¹¹⁸ Jewitt and Oyama, "Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach," 146.

cartoon, the EU stars are sparkling, reminding the viewer about the overall topic of the picture. Unlike Figure 7 that presents the EU and Jesus Christ as parallel, Figure 8 completely replaces baby Jesus with the euro symbol. This depiction may lead the viewer to think of the Biblical story about Jews worshipping the golden calf, thus provoking God's anger.¹²⁰ As the golden calf is a symbol of false God in the Bible, the cartoonist implies that the EU is also a false God, and the Hungarians who worship the EU betray and sacrifice their own traditions, which are represented by the Magi's gifts. Furthermore, it should be noted that the euro symbol does not represent the whole EU, and Hungary and some other Eastern European countries have always been using their own currencies. Nevertheless, the euro symbol is still a repetitive motif in EU accession cartoons: the cartoonist probably wants to underline the adoption of the euro as an essential phase of European integration that every EU country wants to reach.

The high frequency of biblical motifs in cartoons about the EU's 2004 Enlargement is interesting because of its ambivalence. On the one hand, it emphasises the importance of Christianity in European or Eastern European culture. On the other hand, Christian signs and symbols are given new meanings when used as semiotic resources. They represent the new members' ambivalent, anxious and even Euro-sceptic attitudes towards the EU. Barbara Törnquist-Plewa contends that Eastern Europeans' distrust towards the West is partly rooted in the dominance of Christianity in their culture. Western secular liberal values, promoted by the EU, like the tolerance of homosexuality, multiculturalism, the right to abortion, are not widely embraced or even refused in Eastern Europe.¹²¹ They are perceived by Eastern European conservatives as "the decadence of the West", "a degeneration of Western moral culture" and "a destructive process."¹²² The ambivalence in this visual representation reflects exactly the debate on religious issues in Europe, and the ambivalent attitude of the "new" Europeans.

2. CARTOONS ON THE 2009-2012 EUROZONE DEBT CRISIS

2.1. A MULTI-SPEED EUROPE

As one of the most powerful EU institutions, the European Council is in charge of most negotiations around the Eurozone's crisis management and governance reform.¹²³ The bargaining power in the European Council is determined by three sources of power:

¹¹⁹ Matthew 2: 11. *Holy Bible, New International Version*.

¹²⁰ Exodus 32. *Ibid*.

¹²¹ Törnquist-Plewa, "East Goes West or West Goes East? Reflections on the Eu Enlargement to Eastern Europe," 49.

¹²² Mattias Nowak, "Contemporary Polish Conservatism and the Decadence of the West," in *Negotiating Europe: Foundations, Dynamics, Challenges*, ed. Anamaria Dutceac Segesten and Andreas Önnersfors (Lund: The Centre for European Studies at Lund University, 2007).

¹²³ Daniela Schwarzer, "Germany's New Role in Europe," *World Politics Review*, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/11403/germanys-new-role-in-europe>. Retrieved on 15th May 2012.

from member states, from the institutional context of European Council negotiations, and from individual attributes of the heads of government.¹²⁴ The first source of power, which is composed of the member state's "aggregate structural power" and its "issue-specific power", is the most fundamental.¹²⁵ This explains why Germany and France are considered the leaders of the Eurozone and the locomotive of the debt crisis. As the two strongest economies in the EU, they make the biggest contributions, 27.06 percent and 20.31 percent respectively, to the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF).¹²⁶ The power asymmetry between the Franco-German locomotive and the Eurozone's troubled economies has been a major inspiration for political cartoonists over the course of the sovereign debt crisis. Germany, represented by the Chancellor Angela Merkel, is also a popular subject because of its dominant role in the Eurozone and continuing reluctance to bail out Greece. Interestingly, there are two main ways to present this power asymmetry based on which side is victimised. While some cartoonists portray Germany and France, or sometimes European taxpayers, as victims who have to work hard to shoulder the burden of the "lazy" and "happy" Southern Europe, others show their sympathy towards the troubled countries that are on the verge of collapse but at the same time have to carry out harsh austerity measures imposed by the creditors.

The cartoon "[At home with the Euros](#)" by Jeff Danziger¹²⁷ depicts a living room and a kitchen with seven people, each of who represents their European home country. The Irish, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and Greek are sitting comfortably in front of a television probably to watch a football match together, while the German and the French have to cook for them in the kitchen. The cartoonist possibly wants to describe the relation between these two groups as the master-servant relation. The five people in the master group are not portrayed with lots of individual traits. Without the texts indicating their countries of origin, the viewer would not be able to tell who is who. In other words, these people are collectively depicted (or stereotyped?) as relaxing, lazy and demanding. On the contrary, the servant group is composed of only two people with individual characteristics in both appearance and attitude: the angry German woman looks very much like the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and the upset French man is undoubtedly the then French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Merkel is portrayed with a rolling pin in her hand. In European folklore, a housewife with a rolling pin is considered potentially dangerous to men because she may use it as a weapon and give them a lesson. Through this depiction, perhaps the cartoonist not only wants to show his sympathy with the two servant-donors of the Eurozone, but also seeks to underline the flaws of the EU

¹²⁴ Jonas Tallberg, "Bargaining Power in the European Council*," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 46, no. 3 (2008): 687.

¹²⁵ "Bargaining Power in the European Council*," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 46, no. 3 (2008): 688, 89.

¹²⁶ "European Financial Stability Facility ", EFSF, http://www.efsf.europa.eu/attachments/faq_en.pdf. Retrieved on 17th May 2012.

¹²⁷ Jeff Danziger, *At Home with the Euros*, 2010. The NY Times Syndicate.

<http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/picture/256661-home-euros>, retrieved on 17th August 2012.

system, which are power imbalance and potential conflicts. The frustrated attitude of the Merkel-Sarkozy duo in this cartoon implies that their patience can end at any time, and the grim future of the relationship between these two groups is foreseeable. In addition, only Merkel is interacting with the master group, which is represented by the eye contact vector between them. Meanwhile, Sarkozy seems to stay out of the interaction, closing his eyes and drinking probably alcohol from a bottle. This depiction criticises the so-called partnership of France and Germany: Germany has a more powerful position, a stronger voice in the Eurozone crisis while frustrated France lets Germany to do all jobs, choosing to be passive.¹²⁸

Meanwhile, in the cartoon "[Angela Dominatrix](#)" by Peter Schrank,¹²⁹ the same power balance is reversed. Instead of emphasising on the economic aspect of the crisis, i.e. on who has carry the financial burden, the cartoonist wants to underline the dominant position of Germany in the Eurozone, and the way Germany imposes "fiscal disciplines" on its debtors. Once again, the individual traits of the main character, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, are noticeable, whereas the other characters are only portrayed as anonymous people. In this picture, it is the people from troubled countries that are victimised. Being tied and tortured by Merkel, they are looking back at her teaching the ECB man about "discipline" when he is probably about to lend them the money. Nevertheless, the cartoon's title, "Angela Dominatrix", add a twist to the story. It implies that the violence that Merkel gives Southern European countries is not necessarily a harmful one. Instead, both parties gain "pleasure" or "benefit" from it, i.e. the troubled economies accept harsh fiscal measures in exchange for aids from Germany. In popular culture, a dominatrix is often portrayed with leather outfit. Nevertheless, the cartoon depicts Merkel in the traditional German female dress, which does not seem to fit with the cruel settings and but effective in emphasising her role as a representative of her nation. Merkel is also very salient in this picture, as she is placed in the centre, with colourful clothes and larger comparative size. Strangely, the ECB man looks smaller than her although he is closer to the viewer. Looking like a giant, Merkel is also the only one who has a voice in the room, which is signified by the text balloon. The contrast colour between the dark wall and the space where three poor prisoners are kept seems to relate to the idea of justice. As a representative of justice, Merkel wants to bring the three men into the light of justice by punishing them.

2.2. EU THE SAVIOUR

Besides its representation as the collection of individual states, the EU is also portrayed as a single entity but excluding the troubled economies. In other words, the EU is

¹²⁸ "Angela's New Partner," *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/node/21555566>.
<http://www.economist.com/node/21555566>, retrieved on 19th May 2012.

¹²⁹ Peter Schrank, *Angela Dominatrix*, 2011. *The Sunday Business Post*.
<http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/cartoon/1228521-angela-dominatrix>, retrieved on 19th May 2012.

represented by its supranational institutions through which it operates. In the eyes of the cartoonists, the EU can be a benevolent mother who takes care of her troublesome children (but is mistreated or exploited by them), a cruel thoughtless creditor that ignores or asks for harsh austerity from the debtor, or a blind dog (the EU) leading a blind man (Greece). Either way, the role of the EU as a saviour is highlighted as problematic.

The portrayal of the EU as a woman is the continuation of the traditional Europe's symbols like Princess Europa (and the Bull), and Queen Europa. Nevertheless, while the female Europe in the Middle Ages is depicted with certain iconographies in parallel with other continents in order to highlight her superiority,¹³⁰ Europa in the political cartoon "[And then there were three](#)" by Wolfgang Horsch¹³¹ is lonesome in facing her own problems. The cartoon depicts Mother EU holding the two babies Ireland and Greece in her arms for breast feeding, while another baby, Portugal, is being kicked to her place. Her skinny body and pendulous breasts imply the hardship she has to bear when raising her annoying children. The posture of Mother EU and her children is unusual: it does not show the children's relaxation and the mother's happiness like most pictures on mothering. The babies are also portrayed as annoying instead of the popular depictions as lovely or fragile. Mother EU is victimised: she is obliged to bear the responsibility of nurturing the hungry children. The image of the abandoned baby Portugal implies that the responsibility or burden is transferred from an unknown place to Mother EU. If Mother EU is victimised, who is to blame, who is really responsible for keeping the children? Furthermore, by using the metaphors "the EU as mother" and "the troubled economies as children", the cartoonist perhaps wants to underline the EU's importance and the peripheral countries' powerlessness, passivity and dependence: without the mother EU, they cannot survive. The sudden appearance of baby Portugal, who is placed on the right side of the cartoon, implies a narrative of the EU's fate. She already has two children, now one more (Portugal) is coming, so who will be the next? The cartoon's caption, "And There Were Three", confirm the paradox that Mother EU has to face: she has only two breasts, but three children. It implies the EU's incapability in solving its problems.

By contrast, in the cartoon "[Drowning Forbidden](#)" by Petar Pismestrovic,¹³² Greece is victimised whereas the EU, represented by European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, is portrayed as pitiless and unhelpful. The cartoon's narrative is expressed by an eyeline vector directing from Barroso to the seemingly anonymous Greek. While Barroso plays the active role as the doer of the actions (cheering, looking, talking), the Greek is

¹³⁰ Wintle, *The Image of Europe*.

¹³¹ Wolfgang Horsch, *And Then There Were Three*, 2011. Süddeutsche Zeitung.

<http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/picture/572241-and-then-there-were-three>, retrieved on 17th August 2012.

¹³² Petar Pismestrovic, *Drowning Forbidden*, 2010. Kleine Zeitung.

<http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/picture/227492-drowning-forbidden>, retrieved on 17th August 2012.

represented as passive because he does not have any reactions like looking or talking back. His eyes are closed; his arms and nose form a vector upwards, directing at nowhere, which implies his desperate situation. The semiotic resource of “framing” can be seen clearly in this cartoon: Barroso, the embankment, and the EU symbol form a single unit, which is separated from the unit of Greece, the water, and the financial crisis iron ball. This disconnection between the two units illustrates a distorted reality, in which the EU remains intact from the crisis, and Greece seems detached from the EU. Similar to many other cartoons about the EU, the EU is placed on the top of the image, which suggests its ideal and power. Meanwhile, the Greek is placed at eye level; this point of view indicates the equal relation between the viewer and the Greek, who are both “inferior” to Barroso or the EU. This explains why the viewer may feel an imaginary contact with and sympathy for the Greek although there is no eye contact between them. Additionally, the unit of the Greek, water and the crisis iron ball is more salient than the other because of its bigger size, eye-level position, and colour contrast between black and white. This salience, together with the small bird from afar and Barroso from above, implies that the Greek and his crisis are very close to the viewer.

2.3. DEMOCRACY AND UNITY

The EU governance has been criticised for being undemocratic due to the limited capacity of parties at the European level to control the EU’s governing bodies, and to represent the will of EU citizens.¹³³ Nevertheless, political cartoons approach the EU’s democratic issues from a different angle, and at the same time, highlight its structural defect, unmasking the myth of European unity. Certain motifs have been used to describe the EU’s disunity, such as Europeans pointing their fingers in different directions, and European leaders only speak with one voice when they say “Help!” or sing the European anthem. The cartoonist of “[The democratic model](#)”¹³⁴ addresses the European disunity by mocking an official EU symbol: he modifies the EU flag with the circle of twelve yellow stars on a blue background. Official sources interpret the meaning of the European flag as follows: the circle of twelve stars represents unity, solidarity and perfection of the people of Europe, the blue colour is the colour of the sky and also traditionally the symbolic colour of the European continent.¹³⁵

¹³³ Peter Mair and Jacques Thomassen, "Political Representation and Government in the European Union," *Journal of European Public Policy* 17, no. 1 (2010).

¹³⁴ Bas van der Schot, *The Democratic Model*, 2011. NRC Handelsblad. <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/cartoon/1144311-democratic-model>, retrieved on 17th August 2012.

¹³⁵ Council of Europe, "European Flag - Questions and Answers," http://www.coe.int/T/E/Com/Files/Events/2005-12-drapeau/questions_reponses.asp, retrieved on 13th March 2012.; "The European Flag," http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/flag/index_en.htm, retrieved on 31st May 2012. See also "The Flag of the European Union," Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2011/10/5/c0e88f08-81df-47ff-9d03-38d4a06e12d7/publishable_en.pdf, retrieved on 31st May 2012.; and Wintle, *The Image of Europe*, 439.

Created to comment on the EU's asking for aid from emerging economies, the cartoon is divided into two distinctive zones that represent the EU and its potential donors respectively, each of which has its own characteristics. Reading the semiotic resources on the EU side, one may tell: The EU is composed of many different nation-states, which are equal in making collective decisions (there are twelve arms with the star, and they all have similar appearances and placements); the EU is in danger (Europeans are sinking, only their arms can be seen from the water); despite danger, they still have not come up with a single solution (the arms and stars are placed arbitrarily instead of in a circle, and the hands are giving different signals; the arm and the hand are often considered the symbol of democracy and individual opinions because in meetings and other kinds of public gathering, people use their arms and hands to express their agreement, disagreement and other attitudes towards certain ideas or actions.) In this cartoon, the EU's democracy and governing system are portrayed as problematic for it prevents the member states from having a united voice, which is essential in solving the crisis.

On the other side of the cartoon, the leaders of emerging economies are portrayed in sharp contrast with the EU. Each of these countries is represented by a single leader (China -President Hu Jintao; Saudi Arabia - Minister of Finance Ibrahim Abdulaziz Al-Assaf; Russia - President Dmitry Medvedev), which implies its unity and decisiveness. These leaders look very relaxing with their calm faces and hands putting in pockets. This gesture signifies their indifference to the Eurozone crisis. By this depiction, perhaps the cartoonist wants to emphasise the fact that only the Eurozone member-states can save themselves, and it is crucial that they be united in solving the problem. In fact, since China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia are considered egocentric and powerful countries, their pledge to help Europe (via the International Monetary Fund) has raised doubts about what the EU is going to trade off for external assistance.¹³⁶

2.4. THE END OF EUROPE

One of the most popular depictions of the EU in the debt crisis is simply a personified Europe on the brink of disaster. Europe can be a man running towards a steep cliff, a sick woman floating in a rough sea, a fish out of water, etc. This is perhaps the only depiction that does not underline the division and power asymmetry of Europe, and that portrays Europe almost as a purely single entity. In the cartoon "[Oh what is that sound?](#)"¹³⁷ by Wolfgang Horsch, Europe is represented by its traditional mythical symbol "Europa and the Bull"¹³⁸ except that it is modified.

¹³⁶ See Stephen Castle, "Russia Offers up to \$20 Billion to Help Shore up Euro," *The New York Times*, 15th December 2011. "China and Europe: Who's the Pinch-Fist?," *Global Times*, 28th October 2011.

¹³⁷ Wolfgang Horsch, *Oh What Is That Sound?*, 2011. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/cartoon/1185081-oh-what-sound>, retrieved on 17th August 2012.

¹³⁸ The myth of Europa and the Bull was a central topic for hundreds of visual depictions in ancient times. In Greek mythology, Europa was a semi-goddess abducted by Zeus who metamorphosed into a beautiful white bull. The Bull brought her from Phoenicia (which is Lebanon today) to Crete Island, which became the centre of the "Europa" region. Her brothers, while in search of her, founded Carthage, Thebes, and

Since the myth of Europa and the Bull explains the origin of Europe, it was increasingly politicised in the twentieth century, a century with lots of chaos and identity conflicts.¹³⁹ The image of Europa and the Bull in Horsch's cartoon is the continuation of this politicisation. Accompanied Princess Europa is still the Bull and her optimistic vision, which is signified by the rock "Growth." Europa is still as naive as she was when abducted by Zeus: she does not know that the "Recession" rocks are about to pour into her. Nevertheless, by putting Europa next to the Bull instead of on his back, the cartoonist completely erases her mythical image as magnificent and extraordinary. The picture also reminds the viewers of the Sisyphus story. In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was a king punished by being "compelled for eternity to roll to the top of a steep hill a stone that always rolled down again."¹⁴⁰ By this depiction and other cartoons of the same theme, perhaps the cartoonists do not aim to criticise anything. They just want to emphasise Europe's gloomy prospect and the pessimism that is shared by many Europeans.

VI. DISCUSSION

1. DEPICTIONS OF THE EU IN THE ANALYSED CARTOONS

It can be seen clearly from the analysed political cartoons that the EU symbols like the star circle and the euro, as semiotic resources, are used frequently in a number of ways. Although these new functions deviate them from their original positive meanings defined by the EU institutions, they do not change the fact that these newly top-down invented symbols have gained a dominant position in the visual definitions of Europe.

A lot of metaphorical expressions about the EU can be found in the analysed political cartoons, for instance, Figure 1 "the EU is a wealthy club", Figure 3 "the EU is the land of robots", Figure 7 and Figure 8 "the EU is a new saviour", Danziger's cartoon¹⁴¹ "the EU is a problematic family", Horsch's cartoon¹⁴² "the EU is a mother". It is not very straightforward to tell if these metaphors are new or conventional. The metaphor "the EU is a wealthy club" may be considered quite conventional because it is well-known and understood by both Europeans and non-Europeans. Meanwhile, the other metaphors need to be put in certain contexts in order to be comprehended, and the viewer should have some knowledge to interpret them. As previously quoted, Refaie contends that if a community frequently use a conventional metaphor, they will tend to consider it a literal

some places around the Mediterranean and Black Seas. See Wintle, *The Image of Europe*, 104, 05. Lila Leontidou, "The Boundaries of Europe: Deconstructing Three Regional Narratives," *Identities* 11, no. 4 (2004): 596, 97.

¹³⁹ Wintle, *The Image of Europe*, 135-37.

¹⁴⁰ Microsoft® Encarta® 2009 [DVD], "Sisyphus," (Redmond: WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008).

¹⁴¹ Danziger, *At Home with the Euros*.

¹⁴² Horsch, *And Then There Were Three*.

expression.¹⁴³ Obviously, certain metaphorical depictions of the EU are used very frequently in political cartoons, such as “the EU is a new saviour”, “the EU is a promised land”, and “the EU is a verge”, so shall we come to the conclusion that these metaphors are gaining grounds in the visual battleground of Europe?

The studied political cartoons, despite their use of different metaphors and semiotic resources, share similar contents and perspectives with verbal discourses. However simple they may look, the cartoons offer condensed and ambivalent messages that cover a plenty of issues of Europe. For example, cartoons on the 2004 EU enlargement highlight the East-West dichotomy and stereotypes, the distrust and scepticism of Eastern Europe towards the West, the reluctance of the EU in accepting new members, and discuss the important questions of what Europe is, and how to define its borders. Meanwhile, cartoons on the Eurozone debt crisis focus on the division and power asymmetry among EU member states as well as the dominant roles of politicians and EU institutions. Last but not least, they evoke the images of Europe in history that relates to classical mythology, folklore, Christian Scripture, communism, and so on.

Since political cartoons are critical by nature, it is not surprising that they offer a pessimistic view on the EU, even when they were created to comment on a generally positive event like the 2004 Eastern Enlargement. Cartoons can be designed to communicate opinions or humour,¹⁴⁴ but most of the analysed cartoons show more dark and bitter feelings than humorous ones. They portray the EU from three perspectives: The EU as the sum of individual European states, the EU as a political institution, and the EU as a single entity.

As the sum of individual states, the EU is represented with the following issues: (1) The inferiority complex and ambivalent attitude of Eastern European countries when accessing the EU (uncritical enthusiasm vs. distrust and scepticism) (2) The foreseeable cultural/ value clash between the EU and its new Eastern European member states (liberal values vs. Christian values) (3) The power imbalance among Eurozone member states, which goes hand in hand with their stereotypes (4) The lack of unity among Eurozone member states, which is caused by national egoism, and contributes to the failure in solving the debt crisis.

As a political institution, the EU is criticised for its cumbersome bureaucracy, which lacks capacity to assist the troubled member states and solve problems. Represented by anonymous bureaucrats, the EU seems to be cold, distant, and even mysterious. Among these negative depictions, there is a hint of positive attitude towards the EU: sometimes it is still considered a saviour, after all. The representations of the EU in political cartoons confirm Anja Besand’s claim that Europe is widely perceived by its citizens as

¹⁴³ Refaie, "Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons."

¹⁴⁴ Kemnitz, "The Cartoon as a Historical Source," 82.

“distant politicians in Brussels”, “the bureaucratic monster”, “an exclusive club”, and “a cow to be milked.”¹⁴⁵

As a single entity, the EU is foremost depicted with a Eurocentric set of values: advanced, civilised, and detached from the “uncivilised” world. This Eurocentric attitude is not only expressed through the image of the EU itself, but also through the depictions of the non-European Other. Secondly, the European values reflected in the analysed cartoons are mainly of economic matters; other relevant aspects like freedom and democracy are overlooked. Thirdly, the EU can also be portrayed as invisible and subtle like a dream, a vision, an unattainable target, or an unforeseeable future. Finally, the naive image of the EU is dominant in the Eurozone debt crisis: it underestimates imminent dangers and has no long-term visions.

Obviously, these contemporary depictions of the EU in political cartoons have many things in common with Europe’s popular representations in the twentieth century. At the same time, they also excavate the “forgotten” episodes in Europe’s history, and confront them with current affairs. For example, cartoons on multi-speed Europe may remind the viewer of the Nazis’ vision of Europe as a German domain. Figure 1 brings the viewer back to the colonial period, while Figure 6 questions Europe’s divorce with communism.

By using hilarious and eye-catching visual devices, the political cartoons are able to provoke emotions from the viewers, a function that the verbal discourse has limited capacity to do. The most common emotions include: Scepticism, pessimism: the EU is not benevolent after all (exclusion, coldness, egotism, weak institution, potential collapse); Confusion: the labyrinth of norms, the hidden bureaucracy; Desperation and fear: many cartoonists express “people’s fear of possibly being forced to give up their individuality”¹⁴⁶ in order to meet EU standards. Despite this fear, they are still desperate to join the EU, but in exchange for anxiety and pessimism instead.

2. THE POLITICAL CARTOONS’ INTERACTION WITH EUROPE’S SOCIO - POLITICAL ORDER

While working on this study, I came across a Facebook status update (11th July 2012) of the Belgium-based European Cartoon Center informing readers of an article entitled “Plagiarism and similarities in cartooning”, which is supposed to appear in the September issue of their magazine *Scherper*. Although I never have a chance to read the article, its title makes me think about the remarkable similarity in the way cartoonists portray Europe. I have tried to compile a diverse collection of cartoons to analyse, but besides them, there are some motifs that are used from time to time. If I were in the position of

¹⁴⁵ Besand, "Crooked Cucumbers, Milk Cows and Mysterious Bulls. Pictures of Europe in German Textbooks for Civic/Political Education," 115.

¹⁴⁶ Gisela Burkamp, "With Star and Bull: The Visual Messages of the Caricaturists from the Ten New Member States," in *The Ten "New" Europeans*, ed. Dieter Burkamp (Kerber Verlag, 2004).

an ordinary viewer, I would be bored or annoyed to encounter within one month around ten cartoons portraying Europe as a man running towards a cliff. I may ask: "Why do you cartoonists keep drawing this? I know it already!" Putting aside the question of plagiarism and artistic creativity which is outside the scope of this paper, I would like to examine the possible reasons why cartoonists can be so united in their portrayal of Europe, and how this unity may influence Europe's socio-political order.

In his third letter in the essay series "Letters to a German friend" (1944), Albert Camus writes that "our Europe is not yours."¹⁴⁷ I myself also believe that each of us has our own experience, perception and vision of Europe. Nevertheless, not everyone's idea can make its way to the public. Theo van Leeuwen contends that connotations "often communicate well-established dominant ideas."¹⁴⁸ In my opinion, the themes identified and analysed in this paper are among the dominant discourses on the EU. Most cartoonists choose to focus on these discourses in order to confirm them as "natural facts" or question them. Cartoonists can be creative when creating or selecting certain semiotic resources to convey the dominant discourses, but it is uncommon to see them express a truly revolutionary idea about the subject. This lack of innovation can be partly explained by van Leeuwen's contention that "semiotic change often meet with resistance... because people with a vested interest in past ways of doing things see their traditional values threatened and try to hold back change."¹⁴⁹

As previously mentioned, Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius concludes that Punch cartoons contributed to the naturalisation and normalisation of the power division in the Cold War period, and even in the EU enlargement era.¹⁵⁰ In the case of the analysed cartoons in this paper, it is true that their subversive depictions of the EU unintentionally help naturalise the socio-political order in Europe, especially the aforementioned stereotypes of EU countries, and the East-West or South-North dichotomy. The more repetitively these dominant representations are propagated, the more they are perceived as the "truth" or the "universal law", according to Roland Barthes.¹⁵¹ This naturalisation effect of visual representation is also confirmed by cognitive theorists in their discussions on metaphor.¹⁵² Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the cartoons' critical portrayal of the EU also forms a counter voice against the EU's propaganda messages, and challenge the myth of European unity. In my opinion, these two trajectories depend on the whole visual signification process, which is "defined by its two ends: representation (or,

¹⁴⁷ Camus, "Letters to a German Friend."

¹⁴⁸ Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 39.

¹⁴⁹ *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 27.

¹⁵⁰ Murawska-Muthesius, "On Small Nations and Bullied Children: Mr. Punch Draws Eastern Europe."

¹⁵¹ Aiello, "Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics," 96.

¹⁵² See Refaie, "Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons." and Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

encoding) and interpretation (decoding)."¹⁵³ This process can take place at the cognitive/personal level or in a larger context of the European public sphere.

In terms of the decoding process at the cognitive level, Refaie and Horschelmann's 2010 reception study shows that "reading cartoons seems to require a whole range of literacies, including a broad knowledge of past and current events, a familiarity with genre conventions and visual 'grammar', and experience of thinking analytically about real world events and circumstances."¹⁵⁴ Discussing the "mythic signification" of a *Paris-Match's* cover that pictures a black soldier saluting the French flag, Roland Barthes suggests three ways of reading the photograph. First, the *journalist-viewer* or the *producer of myths* would see the photo as merely a form that he/she could use to communicate the myth of French imperialism. Second, the *mythologist-viewer* or *critical viewer* would be able to "distinguish the meaning and the form, and consequently the distortion which the one imposes on the other." Third, the *uncritical viewer* would see the mythic signification as natural.¹⁵⁵ Obviously, it is too complicated to separate out these viewer groups in reality: one cannot say which group outnumbers the others, among millions viewers of political cartoons. Also, the size of each viewer group is not the only factor that determines the possible influence of political cartoons on Europe's current socio-political order.

To have a bird-eye view of the visual signification process is not less complicated. According to social semioticians, this process has certain rules that most people have to conform like personal authority, tradition, role models.¹⁵⁶ For example, under the rule of tradition, an artist when painting a communist poster is very likely to use the red colour, because most artists have always done it, and red has long been one of the signifiers of communism. Only certain social actors have the power to establish and break these rules, at least in public spaces. Which rule is applied, and who has the power over it depend on different contexts.¹⁵⁷ For instance, in an authoritarian state, it is the dictatorship that controls the media's messages, while journalists have very limited power. Meanwhile, the freedom and democratization of speech in Europe give cartoonists and the media the authority/power to create and distribute new meanings of the EU symbols and other existing semiotic resources. This means they also have the power "to intervene and possibly change the ideological currents that characterize the public domain."¹⁵⁸

Let's go back to the question of why cartoonists are so united in the way they depict the EU, or broadly speaking, why the producers of images favour certain depictions over the

¹⁵³ Aiello, "Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics," 90, 91.

¹⁵⁴ Elisabeth El Refaie and Kathrin Horschelmann, "Young People's Readings of a Political Cartoon and the Concept of Multimodal Literacy," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 31, no. 2 (2010): 205.

¹⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Vintage, 2000 (1957)).

¹⁵⁶ Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 53-57.

¹⁵⁷ Jewitt and Oyama, "Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach," 134-35.

¹⁵⁸ Aiello, "Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics," 99.

others. This is not only because of their perceptions, creativity, and incentive to follow or go against traditions, but also a matter of benefit or interest. Sometimes, the producer of an image or a piece of news has a clear pragmatic intention: to attract the audience's attention, to make profit, to gain political influence, and so on.¹⁵⁹ To sum up, for social semioticians, "semiotic resources are not merely means of communicative exchange, but have been produced in the course of cultural histories, stemming from specific interests and purposes," and their "possible meanings" are activated by both the producers and viewers of images.¹⁶⁰ Since it encompasses both freedom and constraint, this complicated process, in my opinion, may be one of the reasons why discourses are plural *and* finite.¹⁶¹

Discussing the breaking of semiotic rules, Jewitt and Oyama, while affirming the importance of power, also add that sometimes, when "society needs something new," "novel modes of production and interpretation will stand more of a chance of being added to the culture's treasury of visual resources."¹⁶² In fact, the Eurozone debt crisis has contributed to the erosion of the East-West dichotomy. In the past year, as Croatia progressed towards EU membership, cartoonists have depicted this accession very differently from the one in 2004. The EU is portrayed more frequently as a trap or a threat, instead of an arrogant exclusive club. For example, in the cartoon "[Good advice](#)" by Nicolas Vadot, when exiting the EU room with blood, sweat and tears, Greece tells Croatia who is about to enter that "I hope for you that underneath your nice suit, you patched everything together... Otherwise in ten years, you'll suffer!"¹⁶³

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The European public sphere is Europe's "transnational arena of communication where social, political, institutional, cultural and economic actors voice their opinions and ideas which are then discussed, distributed and negotiated with reference to different (crucial) events."¹⁶⁴ Since the European public sphere is the space where the EU meets its citizens, its emergence and development are essential for democracy in the EU.¹⁶⁵ It has been pointed out that a European public sphere is emerging, despite the fact that many political discussions are still taking place within the national borders.¹⁶⁶ According to Hartmut Kaelble, there are five indicators of a rising European public sphere: "The debate on European issues, from European civilization to European unity; The growing

¹⁵⁹ Bo Stråth and Ruth Wodak, "Europe – Discourse – Politics – Media – History: Constructing 'Crises'?", in *The European Public Sphere and the Media: Europe in Crisis*, ed. Anna Triandafyllidou, Ruth Wodak, and Michał Krzyżanowski (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 30.

¹⁶⁰ Aiello, "Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics," 91. Jewitt and Oyama, "Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach," 135.

¹⁶¹ See Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 97.

¹⁶² Jewitt and Oyama, "Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach," 135.

¹⁶³ Nicolas Vadot, *Good Advice*, 2011. Le Vif/L'Express.

<http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/cartoon/748221-good-advice>, retrieved on 17th August 2012.

¹⁶⁴ Anna Triandafyllidou, Ruth Wodak, and Michał Krzyżanowski, eds., *The European Public Sphere and the Media: Europe in Crisis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.

¹⁶⁵ *The European Public Sphere and the Media: Europe in Crisis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

¹⁶⁶ *The European Public Sphere and the Media: Europe in Crisis*, 3.

public sphere of experts at the European level; The formation of a European civil society, including interest groups, trade union, and civic organizations; The growing importance of European themes in European Parliament and national election campaigns; and The growing importance of European topics in the national media.”¹⁶⁷

Obviously, political cartoons are an integral part of the European public sphere because they contribute to the debate on European issues from both national and European perspective. They are often used to illustrate the journals’ editorial, or sometimes, used as an independent editorial statement, or even reflect opinions opposing to the editorials.¹⁶⁸ In the case of the analysed cartoons, they are created and/or distributed at the transnational level, and presented as independent artworks. Their meanings are not exclusively attached to certain verbal texts, newspapers or national contexts, but run parallel to one another. This mobilization reflects the increasing liveliness of European media today, especially with the help of the Internet and other modern information technologies. In this virtual European public sphere, any media items can be detached from their sources, circulated and confront with one another. For example, the analysed cartoons on the debt crisis are originally from some national newspapers, but then “relocated” to the pan-European news website PressEurop.eu; their captions are translated to ten European languages in order to reach millions of readers from those European countries. Moreover, in most cases, political cartoons do not need much translation between languages, thus are easy and inexpensive to be transferred and understood.

The contributors to the volume “The European Public Sphere and the Media: Europe in Crisis” claim that “moments/events of crisis are crucial for the ethically based negotiation of Europe and/or the nation(-state).”¹⁶⁹ Crisis can be broadly understood as an event with iconic status, which marks a turning point in history, thus provoking debates.¹⁷⁰ Hence, in the EU context, not only the 2009-2012 Eurozone debt crisis but also other important events like the enlargements, the birth of the euro, and the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty can be considered crises. Discussing the connection between the crisis, the media, and the public sphere, Strath and Wodak write that:

The situations of crisis are reflected and reinforced by the media in the public sphere. Crises are thus openly experienced and debated in democratic societies. Crises emerge through the communication of feelings of a complex situation with increased openness and uncertainty about the future. In such communication, complex processes are reduced to certain images; many other accompanying, often contradictory, processes and positionings are simply not mentioned

¹⁶⁷ Kaelble, "European Symbols, 1945-2000: Concept, Meaning and Historical Change," 56, 57.

¹⁶⁸ Kemnitz, "The Cartoon as a Historical Source," 89.

¹⁶⁹ Triandafyllidou, Wodak, and Krzyżanowski, *The European Public Sphere and the Media: Europe in Crisis*, 6.

¹⁷⁰ See Stråth and Wodak, "Europe – Discourse – Politics – Media – History: Constructing ‘Crises’?," 16.

anymore or they are swept under the carpet. History, thus, is reduced to static events captured by images and agenda-setting by journalistic news production. In this way, several fields in society relate to each other and are linked in complex ways, and sometimes serve differing (also economic) interests.¹⁷¹

Since the cartoonists and the media in general are more interested in commenting on crises, each crisis is surrounded by massive in-depth coverage. The public perceptions of Europe can be strongly influenced by the media during this time, when “various contentious and overlapping discourses on Europe create (mis)understandings of Europe or parallel and conflicting understandings.”¹⁷² This results in the emergence, erosion or transformation of European values.¹⁷³

Spohn claims that the “long-term, historical-structural and geopolitical legacies and memories, are constructed and reconstructed or modified, by short-term collective experiences and memories.”¹⁷⁴ The cartoons’ constructions of Europe vividly illustrate the intertwining of Europe’s images of the past, present and future. Together with other media, the cartoons are not simply pieces of information. They can be translated into future “political orientation and action”¹⁷⁵ because in the end, any political projects, including European integration, cannot be successful if ignoring ideas and opinions at the grass-roots level.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study shows that the political cartoonists’ constructions of the EU in the 2004 enlargement and the 2009-2012 debt crisis bear a strong resemblance to the popular discourse. Although the image of the EU has changed between these two events (from a set of standards, a rich club, a dream/vision in 2004 to a threat, a trap, a failure, a grim future in the 2009-2012 period), the EU is always depicted as a disunited political entity, whose orientation and action are decided by pragmatism and national egoism of its individual member states. The EU’s power structure and national / regional stereotypes can also be seen clearly from the political cartoons. Using both cliché and creative visual devices, cartoonists, through their works, aim to confirm or question the power structure, whether it is the East-West or North-South dichotomies. Whatever intentions they may have, their depictions of the EU may contribute to the naturalisation of Europe’s socio-political order, but also can be translated into future political actions that demand change. This complex process not only depends on the viewers’ interpretation, but also on the whole media “ecosystem” surrounding the cartoons.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 17.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Willfried Spohn, "National Identities and Collective Memory in an Enlarged Europe," in *Collective Memory and European Identity: The Effects of Integration and Enlargement*, ed. Klaus Eder and Willfried Spohn (Ashgate, 2005), 7.

¹⁷⁵ Stråth and Wodak, "Europe – Discourse – Politics – Media – History: Constructing ‘Crises’?," 18.

The study is also an evidence of political cartoons' usefulness as research data in European studies, despite their declining popularity and limited recognition. They prove to be the meeting point of various public discourses on Europe, where European political mythology and identity are revealed and contested. In terms of methodology, the study demonstrates how traditional semiotics and social semiotics can be combined in visual analysis, instead of being treated as separate methods. Nevertheless, since visual semiotics does not prove very helpful in investigating the interrelations of different media, further research on European political cartoons can be done using cultural studies' theory,¹⁷⁶ which allows more focus on the cartoons' interplay with the media's production and distribution processes, and the influence of social factors on the viewer's reading.

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¹⁷⁶ See Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2009). Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (SAGE Publications, 1997).

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