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Visualising the EU: the Central and East European Enlargement Experience

ANCA PUSCA

Abstract: Starting with an analysis of the recent launch of EUtube, this article poses a number of different questions about the EU's visibility, particularly from a Central and East European perspective. Arguing against the more commonly held belief that the EU's visibility is on the decline, the article showcases a number of alternative examples of visibility whereby other actors, coming from the publicity world, critically engage with problems surrounding the EU such as discrimination, the work-visa regime, the EU Constitution and the CAP reforms. Focusing on the Polish Plumber campaign in France and Poland as well as the Bucegi and Ursus beer campaigns in post-enlargement Romania, the article argues that such campaigns could and should play an important role in expanding the visual horizon of the EU and opening the door to other 'legitimate' authors of 'text' and 'images' pertaining to the EU.

Key words: European Union, visibility/visuality, aesthetics, publicity, enlargement, Central and Eastern Europe, everyday life

INTRODUCTION

Concerns over the EU's visibility and its perceived decline abound both in the academic literature – coupled with concerns over the democratic deficit – and within different EU institutions which are clearly struggling to build a new image for themselves that will attract younger audiences as well as more technically engaged audiences to its specific policies and larger agenda. With the rise of YouTube, Facebook, and the popularity of the blogosphere, the EU has followed the footsteps of the more recent US presidential campaigns and claimed its own space on YouTube: EUtube. Launched on June 29, 2007, EUtube was envisioned not only as a technically advanced communication tool, but also as a way of narrowing down the so-called democratic deficit by appealing to a much younger audience, the average age of YouTube users being under twenty (Darby, 2007).

The effort is certainly to be commended, although EUtube has failed to make the EU feel 'loved' (Darby, 2007; Riding, 2007), partially because of the choice of videos and partially because it came to be seen as nothing but a new propaganda tool in

the hands of the EU. The most popular video on EUtube was, not surprisingly, a celebration of love in European movies, which quickly became confused with a celebration of the promiscuity often associated with 'European lovers'. The clip drew over four million visitors in the first few weeks, leaving the EU environmental clips the scraps of hardly a few dozen visitors. While this can certainly seem disappointing, from the point of view of the EU, it does point out that the visuality promoted by sites such as YouTube, as opposed to EUtube, is governed not only by a desire to share and communicate but, more importantly, by a lack of hierarchy, whereby everyone can post their own videos and have a say. This is precisely what has made YouTube so popular, allowing it to enter the everyday imaginary and focus not only on the 'important messages' that need to be heard, but also on informal and personalised stories that often carry little or no policy significance on face value.

The more important question to be asked, though, is not why EUtube has failed to be as successful as initially envisioned – at least until now – but why the EU feels that it lacks visibility. This inevitably begs not only for a definition of visibility but also for the kinds of elements that enter into the realm of visibility: are we talking about videos, images, and brochures that engage the reader/viewer with a series of different issues concerning the EU, or are we also to include informal conversations, jokes, graffiti, cartoons or ads that also focus on the EU? Clearly, the EU judges its own visibility in relation to the first list and not the second, thus working with a definition of visibility that is inevitably connected to a particular kind of communication: that in which there is only one official source – the EU and its institutions – and several approved outlets – the EU information offices, NGOs working to promote the EU or governmental campaigns seeking support for particular EU policies.

This article will seek to argue that the EU is, in fact, much more visible than it considers itself to be, and, in order to realize that, it needs to expand its visual horizon beyond official sources and approved outlets towards more informal discourses as reflected, for example, in the publicity world. In fact, perhaps the most interesting debates on the EU are taking place in the informal realm through localised discourses. These discourses become visualised through a number of different means, often inscribed into the built environment through the presence of posters, graffiti or ads. While these forms of visuality may not always appear as clear forms of communication (in that arguments are not always made in an order that inevitably leads to a policy proposal), they do play an important role in gathering the opinions – even if they are sometimes unsophisticated – of the European everyday 'audience'. Unlike the Eurobarometers, these opinions are not constrained by set questions, goals or proposed suggestions. Instead, they seek to channel both frustrations and celebrations through simple slogans, messages or images.

When it comes to the visibility of the EU in the new accession countries of Central and Eastern Europe, one should not be fooled by the apparent lack of signifi-

cant EU visual presence. The few flags around official buildings, the discreet signs on buildings that receive financial support from the EU and the random store and stall names such as Euro Market or Euro Hotdog might easily fool one into thinking that the EU is only present in government buildings and at the borders.¹ The visibility of the EU, however, need not be restricted to official communications, buildings, brochures or audio-visual policy, including digital communication devices such as EUTube or the EU website. In fact, many have argued that the EU is often visualised and imagined differently within different contexts, from border communities (Armbruster, Rollo, & Meinhof, 2003; Komska, 2004) to government offices (Drulak & Konigova, 2007) and popular culture (Kopp, 2007).

Most of the research conducted within these different contexts confirms that symbolic EU images such as EU buildings, flags, euro coins and official communicates trigger few major reactions in people (Armbruster et al., 2003; Drulak & Konigova, 2007). Instead, metaphors as well as family discourses, as captured in interviews, stories or films, are much more efficient in communicating people's conceptualisation and visualisation of the EU. When it comes to the new accession countries, elements of popular culture have been amongst the few avenues to address head on important issues such as discrimination between new and old members as well as the struggle to deal with economic and political reform.

Treating publicity as an important element of popular culture and of the EU's visibility, this article will look at two main case studies: the Polish plumber campaign in France and Poland and the Romanian beer publicity campaign focusing on the issue of enlargement and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). By arguing that these case studies represent two different forms of visibility, a *celebratory* as well as a *negative and critical* visibility, the article will seek to address the difference between pre-accession and post-accession attitudes towards the EU within the new member states as well as the extent to which such publicity campaigns manage to capture important elements of the continuous negotiation between the EU and its member states. Both publicity campaigns use humour to deal with important issues of discrimination and reform, providing a different kind of visibility platform that the EU has until now failed to recognise as a potential ally.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND 'RESEARCH DESIGN':

The practice of deciphering signs of 'popular culture' as an academic discourse has been quite controversial, particularly outside fields such as cultural studies or sociology (Morris, 2005, 2007; Williamson, 1978). The field of international relations has only relatively recently turned its attention towards such practices through the so-called 'aesthetic turn' in IR pioneered by people such as Roland Bleiker (Bleiker, 2001a, 2001b), Christine Sylvester (Sylvester, 2001, 2005), Cynthia Weber (Weber,

2006) and Michael Shapiro (Shapiro, 2006). Their initial interpretations of the connections between art, aesthetics and politics have now been expanded to look at the interconnection between film, photography, museum exhibits and other forms of privileged visibility in informing about the HIV crisis, the war in Iraq, the war on terror, refugee camps, hunger or violence towards women. Using concepts such as Kant's sublime, Benjamin's flaneur, Beaudelaire's aura, Virillio's integral accident or Ranciere's political aesthetics, they have opened a new realm of interpretation that privileges the visible and different techniques of visibility over the seemingly factual or the purely textual discourse.

The image, in its different forms, provides a background against which world events are not only represented and interpreted, but also lived and experienced. Film, photography and publicity become legitimate mechanisms for interrogating government policies, important world events and personal struggles with the 'everyday life' ramifications of those events across the globe as well. The 'aesthetic turn in IR' seems, however, to have had little impact on EU studies in general, partially because most publications within the 'aesthetic turn' have chosen to focus on the intersection between visibility and security (particularly US security after September 11) and visibility and crisis (such as the HIV crisis or crisis areas such as Northern Ireland, the Middle East, or the Paris banlieues). Perhaps it is time that this changed. This article does not suggest that it offers a model interpretation of the EU's visibility as inspired by the 'aesthetic turn in IR'. It does, however, offer a potential interpretation that seeks to place the EU's visibility outside of the expected realm of its institutions and what some may call its 'propaganda machine'.

There are two relationships that need to be further discussed before approaching our case studies: one is the relationship between aesthetics and visibility, and the other is the relationship between aesthetics/visibility and politics. While the idea of the visual is for the most part implied throughout the work of those who consider themselves a part of the 'aesthetic turn in IR', the latter is generally implicated in particular acts of seeing that involve a specific goal or target: e.g. seeing an art or photography exhibit, seeing a film, or seeing a poster or a cartoon. The non-specific act of seeing, perhaps the most common one in our everyday activities, – such as seeing the street as we head to and from work while noticing the new announcements of publicity panels – discretely lies somewhere at the intersection between the 'aesthetic turn' and studies on 'everyday life' in IR. It is here, at this intersection, that this article would like to position itself, both in its particular way of exploring the issue of visibility and the larger question of aesthetics and in its particular way of describing the relationship between a particular visual subject, the EU, and politics.

This implies a certain understanding of visibility as related to everyday routines such as watching TV or walking down the street, as opposed to unique 'aesthetic'

events such as attending an art or photography exhibit or a film showing. The 'aesthetic' in this context should thus be seen as connected to a certain sense of 'normality', as opposed to 'exceptional' situations. This is particularly important, since the claims made by the two case studies rely upon a 'relaxed' approach to the EU and its policies, one in which humour co-exists with more serious concerns over increasing discrimination between old and new member states and the impact of EU reforms such as the agricultural reforms in Romania.

Adopting the original Greek definition of aesthetics as feeling and perception with regard to the surrounding reality, the focus on visuality is justified in light of the prioritising of the visual in today's world: from television to film to the internet and the printed press, images are everywhere, not just as representations of surrounding reality, but as an intrinsic part of it. As Slavoj Žižek well put it, the hyper-real has now blended into the real (Žižek, 2005). With the visual and the image now an intrinsic part of our everyday life, questions arise about the difference between what remains at some level represented and the so-called material world: has the represented blended into the material world to the point where no difference exists anymore? An important litmus test is perhaps the ability of images to trigger a similar (or even more intense) emotionality to that which is triggered by real-life experiences (Jaguaribe, 2005).

If the relationship between aesthetics and visuality has been established mainly in terms of questions of representation, visual technologies and their impact on everyday life, the relationship between aesthetics and politics has been more closely examined in light of ideological uses of aesthetics (Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Brecht, & Lukacs, 1977), propaganda and film making (Elsaesser, 1987; Kracauer, 1965), and more recently, in light of post 9/11 security, modern terrorism and modern wars, media portrayals of wars, gender and security. The visual is thus once again directly implicated in this relationship as the key ingredient in the process of exposure, opinion formation and the establishment of specific visual terrains under which a particular (political) situation is to be examined. Along with the visual, however, the material and the built environment is also directly implicated in the relation between aesthetics and politics: the material of photographs, posters, monuments, street names, paintings, exhibits or strategic buildings all help shape both the way in which we remember history as well as the way in which we manipulate it.

The work of Susan Buck-Morss (Buck-Morss, 2000) and her muse Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 1968, 1978, 1982) is strategic in establishing the nature of this relationship, especially in the field of international relations. What Walter Benjamin teaches us is that nothing is too insignificant in the process of uncovering how people face history: from the ripple of a dress to how fast people walk to the subjects of early photography and the evolution in the types of leisurely activities that people undertake. History unfolds in the everyday, on the corner of a deserted street as

well as in the building of a new arcade, in the decay of an industry and the emergence of a new fashion, in the object and, more importantly for the purpose of this article, in the image, and thus, in the visual. The EU is not just a visual subject: it represents a particular unfolding of history and a set of reactions to that unfolding. Thus, one should not confuse the visibility of the EU with the visibility of its symbols, from institutions to flags to coins to the texts of treaties and charters. The visibility of the EU should instead be examined in terms of the reactions to its unfolding, historical as well as physical and territorial.

The two case studies that this article will explore represent two such reactions to the opening of the previous EU borders to include ten new Central and East European countries: 1) a negative reaction of fear and discrimination and 2) a positive reaction of celebration combined with a critical reaction towards the necessary reform process or post-accession political conditionality when it comes to agricultural policy. Both are expressed visually in two different sets of campaigns: the first is the 'Polish plumber' campaign that started off as a political campaign for the 'No' vote of the French Right against the proposed EU Constitution and was later picked up by the Polish Tourism Board as a way to humour French xenophobia as well as to reestablish a more positive image for their country; the second is the creative Ursus and Bucegi beer campaigns in Romania that take issue with both the celebration of Romania's entry into the EU as well as with its failure to relate to some of the requirements of the newly imposed agricultural policy. The two case studies are presented not as models of a different kind of EU visibility, but rather as two more prominent examples of the kind of images and issues that could also be seen as integral to the way in which the EU's visibility is created, negotiated and disciplined.²

THE POLISH PLUMBER AND THE EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION DEBATE

In the spring of 2005, on the eve of the European Constitution debates in France, an unlikely figure took center stage: the 'Polish plumber', a metaphor originally proposed by Philippe de Villier, the leader of the right nationalist group *Mouvement pour la France*, and later adopted with a positive twist by Frits Bolkestein – the former president of Shell Chimie France and also a European Commissioner – as well as by Pasqual Lemy – the French head of the WTO and of the Swiss Socialist Party (Maryniak, 2006). The figure of the 'Polish plumber' suddenly came to represent the core of the European Constitution debate and the larger fear that the Constitution would warrant an increase in the number of migrant workers from the new eastern members of the EU and, with it, a further loss in jobs for domestic workers (Rudakowska, 2006). The surprising success of the 'No' vote in France drew further attention to the increase in feelings of 'xenophobia' and 'nationalism' and sent a clear message to

the rest of the EU that France was not quite ready to give up on its 'French plumbers' – the few that were left.

The metaphor of the 'Polish plumber' thus came to signify a divided Europe, one side of which was ready to defend itself against an incoming wave of 'Polish plumbers' that, under the Bolkestein directive, would be free to set up their own businesses in France, and the other side of which was calling out for a solidarity among plumbers under the evocative banner of 'Plumbers of the world, unite'. It was the 'Polish' in the 'Polish plumber' metaphor, however, that helped feed the increasing fear of incoming legal migrants in France, putting both the Polish immigrants in France as well as the Polish nation as a whole on the spot. The response did not fail to arrive, with a surprising twist that shifted the debate clearly in favor of Poland: the Polish Tourism Board decided to turn the metaphor into an attractive image of the Polish plumber as the main theme for its 'visit Poland' campaign.² With the help of a hunky, blond model, Piotr Adamski, the Board created thousands of posters featuring Piotr in overalls and no shirt sporting not just his own good looks, but also the beautiful scenery of Poland and a slogan that read 'Come visit me in Poland! I'm not leaving.' With a wink and a smile, Piotr drew hundreds of new French tourists into Poland, increasing the old numbers exponentially while mocking the 'no' camp and the right for its derogative use of his image (Sciolino, 2005).

The success of the Polish Tourism Board campaign propelled Piotr to celebrity status, drawing a number of invitations for official visits to France and to attend a number of shows such as *On a tout essaye*. Suddenly Piotr himself, and not just his image on a poster, became an important spokesperson for Poland, embodying the spirit of the 'Polish plumber' he was not. Piotr's performances during his official visit to France and his presence on French Television shows became as important as an official government visit, with Piotr representing both the plight of the Polish plumber abroad and, more importantly, the pride of the Polish nation and its people in general. In an interview, Piotr speaks of the difficulty of having to play the role of someone he was not, in an official capacity as opposed to that of a model that poses and only speaks through the slogans on the bottom of the page. The expectation that Piotr truly represented the 'Polish plumbers' and that he was one of them seemed to have fooled everyone except for the Polish plumbers themselves, who rejected the glamorous depiction as simply unrealistic. Mr. Zieba, an actual Polish plumber living in France, says: 'Mr. Adamski is carrying the wrong cutter for the plastic and metal pipe he is holding' (Sciolino, 2005).

The positive twist in the 'Polish plumber' campaign managed to deflate an otherwise potentially threatening situation in France, but the extent to which it managed to address the larger problem of discrimination and xenophobia, present not only in France, but all throughout the European Union, Poland included, is unclear. In a manner not much different from EU propaganda in general – and I do not use the

term 'propaganda' here derogatively – the campaign glossed over important issues by aesthetically changing the tired, dirty image of a real plumber into an appealing figure of a plumber whose hands looked freshly creamed and powdered. There is no question that the campaign was indeed successful in its goal of drawing more visitors to Poland and sending out a clear message that 'we are not going to invade you'. Instead, we are going to welcome you to 'invade us, be our guests'. What is, however, unclear is the extent to which such practices of diffusion serve to really address the problem at hand as opposed to simply delaying its resolution.

The more important question at hand, though, for the purpose of this article, is how an unlikely image such as that of the Polish plumber could become such an important point of visibility for the EU and the debates surrounding the transformation of the EU – such as the Constitutional debate. When looking to find signs of the EU, one hardly thinks to look at campaigns such as these, yet perhaps they speak more about what the EU stands for and the struggles that it faces than any potential brochure. The question that inevitably arises is 'Can one treat Piotr as a sign, an image evocative of the EU and how people think about the EU, or not?'. Is the 'Polish plumber' an essential part of the EU's visibility – at least for the year of 2005 – or not? The answer this article is trying to propose is 'Yes'. The justification is based on the role that new practices of representation have taken in the political arena as well as on the increasingly important role that the visual plays in shaping political opinions and guiding specific policies.

The question is which visual is to be included in the political arena. Is the 'Polish plumber' poster with Piotr's picture part of that visual or not? In her article about the Polish plumber and the image game, Irena Maryniak argues that 'these days, representation is more about marketing and "the market" than about ideology or identity' (Maryniak, 2006). From the publicity world to the film industry, marketing is certainly a big concern. Yet one cannot so easily dismiss the role of ideology or identity, particularly in light of the Polish plumber campaign. The choice made by the Polish Tourism Board to choose this particular imagery was not incidental and certainly not only an instance of utilising an image and an issue that had already gotten quite a bit of publicity. It was also a question of defending one's identity and nation and defeating a potentially wrong turn in how the EU thinks about itself. Representation, at least in this particular case, remains very much about identity if not also about ideology. It creates and sustains new ways of thinking about Europe and the EU, perhaps helping to create what Armbruster called a potential 'imagined Europe' a la Benedict Anderson (Armbruster et al., 2003).

What does this potential 'imagined Europe' look like then, and what kinds of images help create it? A long and strenuous inventory of the most popular images, publicity posters, pictures and films from across the EU and a careful weighing of the implications of each of them might be one way to go. However, this would un-

doubtedly lead to recommendations and attempts to rectify particular 'wrong' or 'negative' images through the forced popularisation of 'positive' ones. The answer might perhaps be a little more evasive in arguing that there are any number of images and instances that stand out and that they gain their momentum in local contexts as well as during particular periods of time and then disappear with only a whiff and a small trail of articles, speeches, and arguments. In an interview with *L'Express*, Adam Michnik, the famous leader of the Polish Solidarity movement, nicely captured the spirit of this imagined Europe in Poland: 'Each Pole has his/her own European dream: for the peasant, it is the agricultural subsidies from Bruxelles; for the worker, it is the promise of foreign investments; for the student, it is the guarantee of studying and living abroad. All of these are fantastic opportunities that our generation never had!' (Demetz & Przewozny, 2005)

'Imagined Europe' is thus imagined in different ways, from the young Poles who seem to think of themselves as more European than Polish (Horabik, 2004) to the French right and Phillippe de Villier, whose Europe needs to be more protective of certain established boundaries and the wellbeing of its initial creators. Does this latter imagined Europe risk usurping the first or vice versa? Do increasing signals of discrimination across the EU, from the 'Polish plumber' French right campaign to the 'Romanians go home' campaign in Italy to the anti-Roma sentiments across the EU, threaten to mark the death of enlargement, as Rachman ponders (Rachman, 2006), or are they natural reminders of a process that demands struggle and debate, even when the latter turns into offensive visual campaigns, graffiti signs on walls or regrettable xenophobic calls?

This patchy Europe of both good and bad is more real than any attempt to beautify or idealise it, to depict it as a fighter for harmony, justice, human rights and nature protection for all. The EUtube campaign has certainly not understood the spirit of YouTube or the kind of practices that make it so popular: most clips are submitted by individuals, not institutions; they are aimed not at publicising a person or a product, but rather at sharing bits and pieces of people's lives – from the interior of their home, to their funny cat or dog, to their comic skits or their first attempts at making a movie. YouTube clips of the now famous French show *On a Tout Essayé*⁵ which sport the famous Piotr in his plumber outfit alongside French comedian Florence Foresti trying in turn to advertise her own French hometown, Monfion sur L'Orge, while dressed in sexy plumber overalls capture the spirit of YouTube much better than any EUtube documentary.

Attempts to further publicise the EU through its audio-visual policy are not ways of imagining Europe, for the collective imagination does not seek to market itself the way a publicity campaign would. Instead, it simply emerges and bubbles up naturally all around us. The EU does not need to be made more visible – it already is visible. However, it needs to recognise these different forms of visibility, whether

negative or not, as an important part of its image. Denying them or attempting to paint over them with glossy brochures or televised or digitised campaigns is something that will inevitably fail.

SPORTING THE EU: THE BUCEGI AND URSUS BEER CAMPAIGNS IN POST-ACCESSION ROMANIA

The 'canvas' of Romania's cities is perhaps painted mainly by the new publicity gurus: young, ambitious and creative entrepreneurs who are not afraid of exploiting their talents for profit-seeking. They do not hold back from using their talents and new-found power to creatively and critically engage with a number of important questions surrounding Romania's economic and political transformation either. The creative style of Romanian publicity companies has been recognised in a number of prestigious award shows, including the New York Festivals, where three of the most powerful publicity companies in Romania won two gold and two silver medals between them (Badicioiu, 2007). This high level of creativity is also supported by incredible profits, with publicity companies topping the charts of the most profitable companies in Romania. In the year 2004, the top thirty eight publicity companies in Romania totaled profits of over 215.5 million euros, and the numbers have probably risen significantly since then (Barbu, 2005). Their new found power has allowed these companies to become avenues for critical engagement with politics, whereby commercials become nothing but an excuse to engage with particular government policies.

One of the themes that has dominated the publicity scene in 2007 was – not surprisingly, given Romania's entrance into the European Union in January of that year – the question of EU enlargement. Given that Romania's accession to the EU in January of 2007 has been a long awaited moment, particularly as most Romanians have maintained a much more positive view of the EU and the benefits that will follow this accession than all of their neighbours who had already joined the EU, the moment of entry was viewed both by producers and by the publicity companies as a dual possibility of boosting their sales while riding the wave of enthusiasm as well as of tactfully and subtly addressing a number of different concerns surrounding the accession. The Ursus and Bucegi beer companies thus hired two publicity giants to develop their New Year campaigns along the lines of the much awaited event.

Silviu Nedelschi, the head of Copy Publicis – the company which directed the Ursus campaign –, explains their choice for focusing on the accession moment by pointing to its historical symbolism as well as to the need to rejoice in something that the country had been working towards for the past seventeen years. The Ursus publicity spot does indeed reflect precisely this effort by depicting hundreds of people pulling on a thick cord which brings Western Europe closer to Romania's borders,

enchancing people with images of the Eiffel Tower, the leaning Tower of Pisa or the Big Ben. The message is two-fold: 'Ursus beer flexes its muscles and brings the Eiffel Tower closer' and 'Celebrate Romania's success with Ursus.' (Stanciu, 2007) Ana Militaru, a journalist and ad analyst, reflects on this campaign by arguing that the images reflected in it are often nonsensical and unclear. A publicity spot on TV shows several fishermen walking down a beach. They suddenly discover a rope, start pulling on the rope and then get unexpected help from hundreds of different people who are rushing through the main square of Brasov on their way to help the fishermen, some of them running past the Sphinx in the process. The rope seems to bring closer a whole different continent on which lie, one next to the other, the marvels, monuments and riches of Western Europe. Ana Militaru wonders why it is Romania that is pulling the EU over towards itself and not the other way around. She also wonders who had thrown the rope to the Romanians, and more importantly, why? (Militaru, 2007a, 2007b).

The skepticism that Militaru exhibits is very telling of yet another attitude that has been present in Romania since the country first began to court the EU in order to convince it to open its gates and accept its 'poor brothers' in the East. The enthusiasm and eagerness of Romanians to enter the promised land of the EU and their willingness to once again sacrifice themselves and pull on a symbolic rope has been met by many, like Militaru, with a sense of hurt pride and even bitterness. Playing on the mixture of enthusiasm and bitterness, the publicity companies manage to maintain perhaps a seemingly overly positive attitude in their commercials while at the same time hinting at the effort and, to a certain extent, the unequal treatment of Romania when it came to EU enlargement: the rope helps bring the EU closer, but the fact that the EU appears as a whole other continent in the commercial points clearly to the differences that are both real and mostly feared by the EU, which has managed to always keep its distance while still pushing for enlargement.

The majority of Romanians remain highly enthusiastic when it comes to having joined the EU, and what Militaru sees as nonsensical connections are perhaps nothing but fragmented yet powerful appeals to the Romanian consciousness. Thus, the image of the fishermen might easily symbolise simplicity and a certain level of naiveté that is, however, coupled with a hard life and an attitude that embraces challenges – such as the challenge of pulling the rope. The rush of hundreds of other people to help symbolises unity and a certain sense of solidarity when it comes to fighting for a common goal (this could also be perceived as highly ironic, however, since the level of social solidarity in Romania has most certainly been on a sharp decline since 1989), while the images of Brasov Square could symbolise the stages through which one had to go in order to even be thrown a rope (Brasov Square was the place where some of the first anti-communist demonstrations took place during the Ceausescu regime). The Sphinx perhaps represents strength and determination.

More pragmatically, both Brasov Square and the Sphinx might represent a random play on beautiful images of Romania that most people, locals as well as visitors, will be able to recognise, since the Sphinx and Brasov are perhaps some of the most popular tourist attractions. In its billboard and newspaper advertising versions, the publicity company has chosen to celebrate the success of the EU accession in the form of a mock coronation, with Ursus beer presented as the king of Romanian beers but also as wearing the European Union flag. This carries, of course, an interesting connotation, given that Romania still has a king in exile, one that some politicians argue should come back.

The Bucegi campaign, although also centered around the moment of the EU accession, struck a series of different cords. As Alexandra Tinjala, General Manager of Sister – the publicity company that developed the campaign – explains: ‘Our public has a very healthy way of looking at this accession, a very Romanian, positive way of accepting a series of realities that are not exactly “rosy”, and that is why I am not sure whether we necessarily chose this particular approach or whether it chose us.’ (Stanciu, 2007) What Tinjala seems to be arguing is that their publicity spots were nothing but an accurate reflection of scenes and images that one might regularly encounter in every day attitudes towards the EU. Staying close to the image of the simple Romanian, oftentimes the Romanian peasant, the spots supposedly exploit the true image of Romania, with both the good and the bad. In fact, the Bucegi slogan has long been – even during the times of communism – ‘together for better or for worse’. And yet the slogan has now been slightly changed: they have added ‘from now on, for the better’ as well as ‘Of all the moments in life, this time, Bucegi prefers the happy ones.’

Why, this time, the happy ones? Perhaps this is a direct reference to commercials and publicity spots that Bucegi ran during communism, the probably most notable one of which depicted an electricity blackout – something that occurred on a regular basis before 1989 – during an important televised soccer game. The viewer could only be consoled for the impossibility of watching his favorite team with a glass of Bucegi. The new accession oriented spots focus instead on how the Romanian peasant, for example, will deal with the new EU regulations with regard to farm animals. One of the spots focuses on a son’s visit to his parents, who live in the countryside. What follows is a meal conversation over a glass of Bucegi as to how the parents are going to deal with having to allocate enough square meters per chicken to meet the new EU regulations, given that their yard is not large enough to support them all. The spot makes fun of what are perceived to be ridiculous farm regulations, as these are thought to have been instituted by people who have obviously never lived on a traditional farm and have in mind only the large commercial farm model. While joking around however, the publicity spot does touch on an important issue that will affect the farmers and those still living on village and subsistence farms,

who make up almost 40% of Romania's total population. If implemented, the new EU agricultural regulations will forever change the face of Romanian villages and Romanian traditions by challenging many commonsense rules and habits that have until now been passed on from generation to generation and that will from now on have to be controlled by agencies and people whom the peasants have little or no control over.

To use Milan Kundera's metaphor, this is another instance of the 'unbearable lightness of being', whereby difficult issues are tackled with a shrug and a glass of beer, for in the end, there is really nothing to be done about them. Thus, the peasant and his family in the Bucegi publicity spots continue to enjoy the sunny afternoon, the fresh air, the background noise of farm animals and the chicken wandering about, and, of course, his glass of cold beer. Ana Militaru, though, suggests that this nonchalant attitude is due to the inability of the average Romanian to make up his/her mind about what he/she thinks about the EU. Thus, he or she adopts either a defeatist attitude of 'que sera sera' or one of 'it was meant to be'. (Militaru, 2007b) Militaru goes on to argue that in fact, the attempts of publicity companies to go beyond their advertising role and seek to push Romanians to consider topics such as EU environmental policies or the EU Common Agricultural Policy threaten the strength of the publicity campaign and create a false image of the Romanian peasant as being concerned with recycling or with the environment in general. Whether this is indeed the case or not, what is interesting, however, is this willingness to risk an entire publicity spot in order to engage with important topics such as the EU enlargement.

This tendency to use advertising as an important outlet for thinking about politics has also been noted by Jeremy Morris in his examination of Russian commercials, where the focus tends to be more on elements of cultural nostalgia for the past and on reiteration of a lost sense of national unity and solidarity. Unlike the Romanian commercials, however, the Russian spots clearly reflected nationalist tendencies influenced by the very position that publicity companies hold within the Russian economy – still very much connected to and regulated by the state while also managing to act as 'a site of renegotiation between economic interests and cultural values in their broadest sense.' (Morris, 2005, 2007) These engagements, along with earlier examinations of the symbolism of commercials such as the one conducted by Judith Williamson (Williamson, 1978), clearly point not only to a connection between politics, ideology and advertising, but to a definite move on the side of publicity companies to engage more or less directly with politics and state policies.

CONCLUSION

The EU's visibility, depending on how one looks at it, is not necessarily on the decline, but rather on the increase, as new visual technologies – such as the publicity

world – find it more and more appealing to expand the scope of their statements from purely pleasing messages to clearly political ones. The three different publicity campaigns discussed above – the Polish Tourism Board campaign and the Bugeci and Ursus Beer campaigns – are meant to showcase not only the increasing interest that the publicity world – both publicly and privately owned – has taken towards subjects such as the EU, but also the ability of the campaigns to address serious concerns, such as discrimination and the economic pains of reform, with a wink and a smile. The much larger appeal of political ads to different communities both at home and abroad – as was the case with the Polish Tourism Board campaign – ensures not only that these concerns are openly recognised and addressed but also that they are addressed from the perspective of the everyday individual as opposed to that of the policymaker. Imbued with fun and empathy, these campaigns give a more approachable aura to the EU by making it a part of people’s everyday routine through their presence on street posters and evening TV.

In light of this, one may suggest that perhaps what the EU needs is not a more visible ‘brand’, but rather a more normalised image in which one could talk about the Common Agricultural Policy, the work visa regimes or the Constitutional Debate and their effect on different local communities without an immediate policy appeal that would work through a specific hierarchy. The question of the EU’s visibility does not hinge on how well the EU ‘markets’ itself, but rather on the extent to which the EU is able to acknowledge already existing forms of visibility – whether celebratory or critical – and incorporate them not only as alternative EU publicity campaigns, but also as important reflections of how people relate to the EU. EUTube could thus encourage EU citizens – and perhaps even citizens of countries outside of the EU – to create videos around the theme of the EU and post them online or to record local engagements with the EU – whether it be through inscriptions in the built environment or through different conversations. It could even feature different publicity campaigns, such as the ones discussed above, as examples of engagement with the EU. By acknowledging other ‘authors’ as legitimate, the EU could indeed create a space where conversation is encouraged and criticism allowed. Even if the ‘image’ of the EU is not always pretty, it is better that it be openly laid out and discussed than hidden behind videos about climate change (but this is not to imply that climate change is not a very important concern).

This acknowledgement has direct implications for how we are to go about studying the EU and what are the approved ‘methodologies’ for doing so. The acceptance of ‘aesthetic’ and visibility concerns as intrinsic to the EU’s concerns about its democratic deficit or audience forces us to consider otherwise questionable case studies, such as the Polish Plumber campaigns or the Bucegi and Ursus beer campaigns in Romania. While the study of ‘aesthetics’ has a long philosophical tradition, its application to specific empirical examples has been pioneered, at least in the so-

cial sciences, by the 'aesthetic turn in IR'. The 'turn' offers not only a methodological alternative, but also a theoretical anchor through which the 'everyday' empirical gains a renewed significance. In this sense, this article has hopefully also served to both show how the 'aesthetic turn in IR' – as a methodological and theoretical approach – can be used to address concerns over the EU's visibility as well as concerns over how visual representations of the EU can serve, in turn, to elaborate on the implications of the 'turn' itself.

ENDNOTES

¹ In fact, many would argue that the EU is much more visible in the new Central and East European accession countries than in their Western counterparts, partially because of the acquis demands and the reform process that goes along with them.

² The language adopted in these two case studies showcases in itself a different type of methodological and theoretical engagement with the EU that engages the everyday not only in its subject but also in its form, making it accessible for the everyday individual as well.

³ Although some may regard the Polish Tourism Board's twist as a one-off happening, as opposed to a possible model or case study, it serves to show the significant impact that an 'image turn' can have on one of the EU's biggest challenges: immigration and xenophobia.

⁴ Original citation: 'Chaque Polonais a son propre rêve européen: pour le paysan, ce sont les subventions de Bruxelles; pour l'ouvrier, c'est la promesse d'investissements étrangers; pour l'étudiant, la garantie d'étudier et de vivre au-delà de nos frontières. Fantastiques perspectives qui étaient interdites à notre génération!' (translated by the author).

⁵ To watch parts of the show on YouTube, go to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bt5i8Aqkn-o.

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