Picturing the EU – Political Cartoons of the European Union in the International Print

(Work in progress. Comments welcome.)

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Abstract

Debates on the nature of the European Union (EU) in international relations almost belong to the folklore of European Studies, yet they seem to pose more questions than give definitive answers. Discourse analysis has paid plenty of attention to the EU documentation and public speeches of its representatives, however there has been only little interest in the visual discourse of and on the EU identity that is being communicated in the media. Constructivist attempts focusing on European identity analysis, including the foreign policy dimension, rely almost exclusively on textual and verbal discourse. But discourse as such is not limited to textual and verbal acts; graphics and visuals, including political cartoons constitute its integral component.

The aim of this paper is, based on a sample of political cartoons from *The Economist*, to analyse the visual discourse construction of European Union’s identity as an actor of international relations. The analysis will proceed in three steps: first, European Union symbols, personifications and stereotypes connected to them will be interpreted and linked together in construction of an EU identity; second, symbols, personification and their stereotypes of other actors – i.e. collective Other - will be interpreted; in the third step, the two identities will be compared within a framework of Self/Other conceptual pair.

Key words:
European Union, identity, political cartoons, actorness, poststructuralist discourse analysis, iconic turn
Introduction

Several times this year, European Union (EU) has made it to the front cover of The Economist, mostly in connection with the ongoing Eurocrisis. The euro, however, is not the only worry that causes concern among economists, politicians and businessmen around the world. On closer inspection, the European Union project seems troubled not only by its inability to lull the markets but also in other policy areas extending into the international: failure to respond adequately to the Arab Spring (civil war in Libya, protester mass casualties in Syria) and to deal with the hundreds of refugees from the region sailing to Europe in search of a safe harbour. Meanwhile, East of EU’s postmodern Eden, Lukashenko hunts down the opposition and Ukraine and Turkey slowly turn their backs on Europe while the European Union does what it does best: sends demarchés, condemns the human rights abuses, denounces the situation in the name of the international community, in other words plays its role of a paper tiger.

Europe’s performance in international relations has been a matter of debate since the 1970s (see Duchene 1973, Bull 1982, Hill 1993, Bretherton - Vogler 1999, Larsen 2002, Manners 2002, 2006, Sjursen 2004, 2006, Treacher 2004, Hettne and Söderbaum 2005, Aggestam 2008, Zielonka 2008, see also the Journal of European Public Policy 13(2) 2006 special issue dedicated to Normative Power Europe; compare with realist critique by Hyde-Price 2006, 2008). The forty-year long discussion still does not offer any definitive answers to the puzzle of EU’s actorness or its international identity and the only consensus reached is that the EU represents a different kind of actor. One who’s actorness and identity is constantly constituted, constructed and contested only to be once again re-constructed and reified.
According to Berger and Luckman, it is the ability and capacity of language to typify, stabilize and accumulate meanings and experiences, and to transmit them to future generations (1967: 37-39). In the introduction to his book on discourse analysis of texts for social research, Norman Fairclough writes that ‘language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language’ (Fairclough 2003: 2, see also Foucault 1969 [2008] or Der Derian - Shapiro 1989). Language, and discourse associated with it, is then, according to many, the key to uncover the features of social reality and the power relations contained within.

But social and political sciences have another, rather pragmatic, reason why study texts: the researcher generally has only a ‘very limited possibility of direct observation of the subject under scrutiny’, whether its governmental negotiations, international conflicts or actions of an international relations (IR) actor, ‘and is thus to a great degree dependent on analysis of texts and speeches’ from/about these events (Beneš 2008: 92). Principal part of discourse analysis is therefore dedicated to the study of governmental documents, security strategies, historical books or newspaper articles, with an aim to clarify the constitutive processes of national identity building (Wodak - de Cilia – Reisigl - Liebhart 1999 [2009], Mole (ed.) 2007), unveil the power structures or discriminating practices against minorities (Blackledge 2005) or deconstruct discourses of danger and their influence on foreign policy (Campbell 1992 [1998], Hansen 2006).

Although language and discourse make up cornerstone of discourse analysis, it would be a mistake to reduce this approach only to the study of verbal practices. In agreement with Vit Beneš, it is more appropriate to understand ‘discourse analysis as a study of human meaning-making practices that, besides verbal communication, include the visual media (films, posters, billboards) or any other human activity that falls into the broad category of non-verbal communication’ (Beneš 2008: 92) including political cartoons as a specific form of political opinion. Certainly, language and text are an important source of information on our society, but official documents, speeches, books (even fiction) or newspapers do not, so to speak, tell the whole story...

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine political cartoons and their role in construction of European Union’s identity as an actor of international relations.

The theoretical part introduces Political Science and International Relations to political cartoons – a part of the media landscape that has thus far evaded comprehensive exploration. I will argue the importance of political cartoons as meaning-making practices for the research of social reality construction in international relations, followed by an explanation of the role of visual discourse and cartoons in identity constructions within the framework of post-structuralist discourse analysis.

Practical part is dedicated to the visual discourse analysis of European Union’s identity as an actor of international relations as portrayed by the international weekly – The Economist. The analysis itself will proceed in three steps: first, using symbols, personifications and stereotypes of the European Union (as portrayed in the cartoons), I will interpret the meanings associated with them within the context of the Western civilization and international relations. Second, a similar interpretation of symbols,
stereotypes and personifications and their meanings will be done on a collective Other. In the third step, I will compare the two results within the framework of a Self/Other conceptual pair. The aim is to find out whether the identity of the collective Other (whose actorness is not in doubt) represents a counterpole to European Union’s identity as an IR actor. If so, it would mean that The Economist’s cartoon discourse deliberately helps construct the identity of the European Union as a different kind of international relations actor, confirming a wider academic trend.

The Iconic turn still does not turn the tide in International Relations (but tries to)

Images, signs and symbols constitute an important part of our everyday social and political life. From the hunter-gatherers tribes to post-modern societies, from hieroglyphs to 3D TV, images, signs and symbols, pictures, tags and icons play an indispensable role in human communication. They surround us all-day everyday, in every moment of our lives: from a morning newspaper read (photos and cartoons, videos in online and tablet versions), to a walk in the city (posters and billboards), to running an errand at an office (state symbols and logos) to the evening news. Technological progress, globalization and the ‘media boom’ brought TV and internet to every home in the Western world and advertising is a phenomenon we’ll never get rid of. In short, today’s society lives the visual culture, and therefore we need to move beyond text and include more the visual meaning-making practices in the social and political research.

Interest in the role of images in social science dates back to the 1920s intellectual Walter Benjamin and the 1970s literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes, who devoted the last years of his life to the study of effects of photography on the readers (Barthes 1980, Meek 2010, Bernhardt, Hadj-Abdou, Liebhart, Pribersky 2009). Study of images, paintings and posters found response above all in humanities, in stark contrast to political science that turned linguistic instead.

Still, political scientists view images with mistrust. As Martin Warnke, a scholar of the fine arts, notes (a little ironically): ‘clerlay, the only remaining agreement in political sciences is only on the fact, that visual forms of political manifestation are something suspicious, irrational, sensual and born out of impulses; they are uncontrollable and therefore have nothing to do in the craft of the political, because sensual experience is not truthful’ (Warnke in Bernhardt et. al. 2009: 15, my emphasis). Irationality, subjectivity or truthfulness of visual forms are not necessarily in conflict with all political theories and methods.

Constructivism, post-positivism and post-structuralism offer a qualitative interpretative approach to social reality and are actually very well suited for research of visual representations of irrational actors and sensual phenomena. For example discourse analysis ‘does not approach text [and image] as a depiction of reality that should be assessed for its ‘objectivity’ and ‘truthfulness’’ (Beneš 2008: 93). Analogous to texts or language, images, films, cartoons or photography are an integral part of our socio-political reality, and thus it is not possible to determine their ‘objectivity’ or ‘truthfulness’, the same way we cannot determine the ‘truthfulness’ of a reality the photograph is constructing. Discourse analysis does not evaluate the

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1 A generalized international relations actor, one whose actorness or IR identity is not problematic, based on visualisations of actors interacting with the EU in the same data set.
truthfulness a text/image, instead it examines ‘how people through text, or a collection of texts, construct the meanings and make sense of objects and activities of the social world’ (Benes 2008: 93 my emphasis). Despite all this, and despite the fact that images, photographs and posters often portray eminently political themes such as: Eugéne Delacroix’s painting Liberty Leading the People, photographs from the Auschwitz concentration camp, posters of the communist revolutionary movement or footage from 9/11; the iconic turn happened primarily outside the political science discipline. Presently, people studying images come mostly from the departments of history of fine arts, cultural studies, sociology, media or psychology.

Political cartoons – part of the media construction of social reality

Questions of identity and meaning, symbolism, media, ideas and norms represent important overlaps between the realms of ‘the cultural’ and ‘the political’. Closer convergence between the two started off in the 2000s, in the academic environment of the Vienna school of discourse analysis, but also within the Copenhagen school of securitization, whose alumni view security as an indispensable part of social construction of reality (Williams 2003, Hansen 2011). For example, authors of the book Europa-Bilder argue that ‘it is not the discourses themselves that construct collective identities, but it is above all images that create very powerful collective imaginations’ Öhner – Pribersky – Schmale - Uhl 2005: 7). Consequently, the same way post-structuralist discourse analysis helps us study the meanings ‘beyond’ words, it can help us study meanings and imaginations ‘beyond’ pictures. In case of this contribution – cartoons of the European Union in international politics.

So what is the significance of political cartoons for the International Relations research? How can the post-structuralist discourse analysis be useful in the study of social reality and identity construction based on cartoons?

Media discourse offers a rich source of data for research on meaning formation from (inter-)national identity to military intervention in international conflicts (Renfordt 2010). Leaving aside the official sources on identity, politics or security threats, we can think of the free media as a ‘forum within which institutions, groups and individuals struggle over the definition and construction of social reality’ (Greenberg 2002: 181). Free media focus their attention on events that are at the centre of the collective, and at the same time ‘[do] not replicate the system logics […], but strive instead for autonomy in terms of selecting, re-interpreting and evaluating political news’ (Trenz - Conrad - Rosén 2007: 1). To this end, we analyse especially those parts of the news coverage that present an opinion such as editorials, commentaries, columns, discussions or more recently even blogs.

2 The title actually is a a double meaning play on words: in German Bild mean images, in English the word is phonetically close to the word builder – construction worker.


4 Critical discourse analysis of official EU documents (Kratochvil 2009) or newspaper opinion articles (Kratochvil – Cibulková - Beník 2011) is often preferred to study EU international relations performance.
But while verbal/textual discourse is relatively well documented, visual opinions are analysed only seldom and/or in exceptional cases such as the Muhammad cartoon crisis. At the same time, it can be argued that political cartoon is just another form of visual opinion and it too contributes to the construction of events, threats or identities the same way editorials do, or maybe even in greater measure. I am of the opinion that in the present-day fast commercial society, political cartoons are more easily ‘digested’ by the public than a page-long expert opinion, simply because they can be ‘consumed’ within seconds.

Political cartoons play a vital role in the public discourse balancing at the edge of political fact and maniacal absurdity. Because although it might not seem so, primary role of the cartoon is not to be funny, but to comment on an significant issue or draw attention to a socio-political problem. We could say that cartoonists reflect on the society, they are the watchdogs of political power, the voice of dissent in otherwise politically correct discourse. Their ‘art of outrage’ is also a ‘barometer of political freedom’ (Sandbrook 2010: 26), government officials and other high-profile bureaucrats often being the target of satire (Morris 1992).

Political cartoons offer newsreaders condensed claims or mini-narratives about putative ‘problem’ conditions and draw upon, and reinforce, taken-for-granted meanings of the world. By doing so, political cartoons provide metalanguage for discourse about the social order by constructing idealizations of the world, positioning readers within a discursive context of ‘meaning making’ and offering readers a tool for deliberating on present conditions. Cartoons ‘frame’ phenomena by situating the ‘problem’ in question within the context of everyday life and, in this way, exploit ‘universal values’ as means of persuading readers to identify with an image and its intended message (Greenberg 2002: 182).

However, discourse, whether verbal or visual, does not only speak of the existence or absence of a subject. It also carries along a normative evaluation of the subject or an event, it tells of its nature, character and relationships – it puts the subject or an event into wider context. As Bahaa-Eddin Mazid writes, cartoons, especially political cartoons, are a legitimate object of critical discourse analysis, because they ‘continue to reflect cultural attitudes and values, and record and perpetuate many commonly held beliefs’ (Mazid 2008: 434), in other words, cartoons are a period chronicle of opinions about a political event. Using humour, satire and exaggeration combined with commonly understood metaphors, symbols, stereotypes or narratives, cartoons participate in construction of social reality around us by drawing attention to actors or events, by reifying their meanings and putting them into a wider socio-political context.

Political cartoons can also be a powerful public opinion stirrer. Cartoons of Osama bin Laden after 9/11, but mainly the Muhammad cartoon controversy sparked protests in the Middle East and Muslim communities all around the world. Actually, it was the ‘explosiveness’ of the Muhammad cartoon crisis and the world’s reaction to them that drew attention to the study of images and cartoons in Political science, International Relations and Security Studies (viz. Diamond 2002, Campbell -

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5 During the protest Danish embassies were assaulted and torched, cartoonists were threatened and put on a death-list, with Kurt Westergaard being the most prominent target. He drew the cartoon of Muhammad with a bomb in his turban.
Shapiro 2007, Mazid 2008, Müller, Özcan, Seizov 2009, Klausen 2009, Hansen 2011). Misunderstanding of the original context of publication of the Muhammad cartoons in *Jyllands-Posten* is thought to be the primary reason for the Muhammad cartoon crisis in the first place (Hansen 2011).

All this leads to a conclusion that political cartoons should not be only objects of political analysis, but rather its subjects due to their capacity to form opinions and meanings. Caricature gives the artists freedom to express views that might be too harsh, radical or just too politically incorrect to make it to the columns, and thus would be left out of the ordinary textual analysis. Furthermore, political cartoons, through the metaphors hidden in the drawing, are able to communicate shrewd, complex multi-layered narratives about people and events that words can express only with great difficulty (Gilmartin and Brunn 1998: 563 in Mazid 2008: 437).

**From image to identity**

‘The relationship between identity and foreign policy is at the center of poststructuralism’s research agenda: foreign policies rely upon representations of identity, but it is also through the formulation of foreign policy that identities are produced and reproduced’ (Hansen 2006: 1). Outside the governmental documents, post-structuralists also pay attention to popular discourse including fiction and the media. Because they are not just passive troubadours of governmental discourse, but the media themselves take active part, through comments and opinions, in formation of the international identity of a given subject. ‘The viewpoints expressed in opinion discourses are important when considering the role that news coverage plays in the process of social problems construction because, unlike hard news reporting, opinion discourse blends normative prescriptions and factual beliefs’ (van Dijk 1998 in Greenberg 2002: 182). In other words, opinion media offer the readers stories and narratives not only of how things are but also how they could be. And what else then is a political cartoon than an opinion expressed in a drawing? An opinion that partakes in the creation of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991)?

To be able to consider the relevance of political cartoons in construction of European Union’s identity as an actor of international relations, it is appropriate to highlight the features of political cartoons that are directly involved with identity: above all the utilization of symbols, personification, metaphors and stereotypes connected to an actor, and/or exaggeration of dichotomies between two actors, that could be grasped within a conceptual pair of Self/Other.

**Personification, symbols and stereotypes**

As Alexander Wendt writes in the introduction to his article: ‘to say that states are ‘actors’ or ‘persons’ is to attribute to them properties we associate first with human beings – rationality, identities, interests, beliefs, and so on’ (2004: 289). Political cartoon is based on direct personification and stereotypization of actors, wheter it’s in the form of America’s Uncle Sam or a bear in case of Russia. Using symbolic and stereotypical visualisations a cartoon constructs and by repetition anchors meanings of the ‘world’ around us, our social reality including the identity of its actors. How
and by whom is the European Union personified? Which stereotypes are preferred in visualisation of the EU in international press? What are the meanings of these stereotypes in the Western socio-political context?

On the one hand, *symbols* such as flags, monuments or ritual objects serve the purpose of *identification* of the actor under scrutiny. Thus we can easily identify the United States of America by the pattern of ‘stars and stripes’ or a university’s dean by his ceremonial sceptre. However symbols need not only by lifeless objects. They can be persons, such as the Queen of England, or animals (real or mythological) such as eagle, tigre or a dragon.

On the other hand, symbols convey a variety of meanings. Because symbols are not *just* any objects. ‘Symbols used by political systems are always chosen with the hope that they transmit certain *values* and *meanings* that are consistent with the ‘idea’ of the community’ (Bruter 2005: 28 my emphasis). Thus in a given community, repeated association of cartoon actors with symbolic meanings reaffirms and reifies a particular constructed reality.

For a cartoon to be persuasive, it must address a timely topic and communicate it using simple, common knowledge – for example *stereotypes* (Greenberg 2002: 188). ‘Cartoons ‘frame’ phenomena by situating the ‘problem’ in question within the context of everyday life and, in this way, exploit ‘universal values’ as means of persuading readers to identify with an image and its intended message’ (Greenberg 2002: 182). Thus, a meaning the cartoon conveys is best understood by people living under shared specific social, historical, political, economic and cultural conditions – i.e. a community or a civilization and its context (Greenberg 2002: 183; Mazid 2008, Hansen 2011, Campbell 2004). David Campbell concurs that (photographic) ‘images never exist in isolation. Not only are they made available with an intertextual setting – where title, caption and text [surrounding] the particular content of the photograph – they are read within an historical, political and social context (2004: 62-63).’

Meaning, a message, a cartoon expresses is closely tied to a time period and its context. We can understand context as being organized in layers: the immediate context of image (the surrounding text and actual political event, for example a new law), general context such as current political situation (for example an economic crisis) and the wide cultural-social context itself (for example the Western civilization). Since humour, and consequently metaphors as well as meanings, are culturally coded, cartoons and their brisk wit, reveal to a given audience the problematic moments of our present, criticising governments and making moral judgements along the way.

But, cartoon humor is not without purpose and it’s primary role is not to entertain, but to scrutinize and criticize. Even the harshest condemnations and the gravest situations are published – pictures so outrageous and politically so out of line that

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6 Here we can differentiate between official and unofficial symbols. While official symbols such as the flag or a coat-of-arms are chosen by a state or an institution, unofficial symbols, such as tattoos of hearts and anchors are recognized by the public even without their formal legalization.

7 Lene Hansen goes even further: she recognizes four levels of intertextual embedding: ‘the images themselves, the immediate intertext, the dominant policy discourses in the country/locale in question, and the linguistic texts that attribute meaning to the image or a group of thereof (either by securitizing an issue or by holding that this is not a matter of security)’ (2011: 55).

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they would never have appeared in any serious columns (and never would have made it into a text-based discourse analysis). Thus with humour, even politically incorrect opinions get published and become the voice of dissent.

Cartoons regularly make use of exaggeration, play on words, beautification or demonization of people and events. They’re racist, sexist and contribute to the promotion of all kinds of stereotypes (Templin 1999 in Mazid 2008: 435). By using specific symbols and common stereotypes intelligible to the designated audience, an image reifies a specific social reality time and time again: ‘thus, political cartoons not only grasp the way in which visual discourse conveys social experience, but cartoons also help constitute the subjectivities and identities of social subjects, their relations, and the field in which they exist’ (Purvis and Hunt 1993 in Greenberg 2002: 185 my emphasis). Cartoon, and its punchline, determine author’s preferred meaning. By communicating a specific message to a specific audience, cartoons help constitute a specific social reality including identities for its actors.

The Others

Second characteristic of political cartoons that I want to focus on is the metaphorical representation of actors (personified or real) and their relationship to others. Post-structuralist textual discourse analysis teaches us that internationa identity of actors is apart from self-construction constituted also on the basis of differentiation and exclusion – i.e. constructions of the Self as counterparts to the Other(s) – a Self/Other nexus (Neumann 1996, 2006, Campbell 1992, Diez 2004, 2005, Hansen 2006, Self/Other in EU context: Manners and Whitman 1998, 2003; articles on identity construction through cartoons Kösebalaban 2007, Curticapean 2008). No identity, individual or collective, exists in a vacuum. Identity, my ‘Self’, is always part of a conceptual pair Self/Other, We/Them. This dialectic couple allows individuals and groups ‘recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another’ (Hegel 1977: 112 in Neumann 1996: 141). Thus, articulation of an identity is almost always a process of continuous production and reproduction of my ‘self’ and, at the same time, exclusion of and differentiation from the ‘other(s)’.

In regard to discursive identity construction, Lene Hansen speaks of twin processes of linking and differentiation - simultaneous positive as well as negative identity creation. Positive identity construction takes place through linking of individual characteristics into a comprehensive whole a comprehensive Self, whereas negative identity building is based on radical differentiation from the Other. Analytically, we can separate these processes and based on them model conceptual pairs of mutually exclusive identities with opposite characteristics: man/woman, black/white etc. (Hansen 2006: 19-21) see figure 1.
Political cartoons make use of and exaggerate various personal or group characteristics, they stereotypically personify characters of people and whole collectives. Cartoons make use of a plethora of social and sexist, racial and religious prejudices, symbols, exaggerations bordering on offence, contrasts and much more only to highlight the abysmal difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’, East and West, centre and periphery, civilization and barbarism.

Cartoons, to a large degree, build on emotional basis. They try to pull the reader into the problematique, to appeal to him through use of symbols and stereotypes, to associate him/her with ‘our’ cause as opposed to ‘theirs’. By visualising the Other, as either a threat or a wretch, our ‘self’ acquires clearer contours. Post-structuralist discourse analysis is focused precisely on uncovering such constitutive and exclusive practices contained within speech and text, and as I argued above, in images and visual representations.

The same way editorial and opinions react to actual political situation, political cartoons too are inspired by real-life political events. Cartoons mediate and report events around us. With the aid of symbols, stereotypes and metaphors, personifications and humour bordering on public outrage, on the one hand interpret events, but on the other hand help construct and reify identities of portrayed actors and the social realities of a given community. ‘Conceptualization of identity as discursive, political, relational and social’ implies that ‘foreign policy discourse [too] always articulates a Self and a series of Others’ (Hansen 2006: 6).

So, while in cartoons, the United States are often embodied in the figure of Uncle Sam or the incumbent president (Morris 1992), symbolized by the ‘stars and stripes’...
and the apple pie, while Russia is often personified (in text and in image) by a massive brown bear, a series of questions arise: with whom or with what is the European Union identified? What can visual representations of Russia, China or the US tell us about the identity of the EU as an IR actor? And finally is the European Self so radically different from others or a collective Other, as to suggest a different kind of international actor..?

In the next part, the methodology of political cartoons visual discourse research will be explained, followed by the analysis itself and the findings about European Union’s identity as an actor as portrayed by The Economist.

Methodological framework

Because the research questions are phrased rather generally: how is the European Union identity as an international actor represented by the visual discourse of political cartoons in international press? And is Europe’s identity constructed as radically different from the Others? Under such circumstances, meanings in a wider socio-political context will be of interest – i.e. not the connotations of Europe’s image in a concrete situation, but rather the ‘bigger picture’. A qualitative interpretative approach, namely post-structuralist discourse analysis will be the guiding method.

The analysis itself will proceed in three steps: first step consists of identification an interpretation of visual symbolic representations and personifications complemented by their stereotypical meanings for the Western audience. By linking the meanings in a process of positive identity formation, identity of the European Union as an IR actor will be revealed. Second step involves the same process of interpretation and linking, albeit executed on a collective Other composed of other more ‘regular’ actors of international relations – visualisations of nation states featured in the cartoon sample. In the third step, the two positive identity constructions will be compared against each other within the framework of a conceptual pair of Self/Other (see figure 1.). The overarching aim is to consider the position of the EU, often constructed as a sui generis actor, among other relevant international players and thus to see if the visual ‘cartoon discourse’ helps construct European Union’s identity as ‘a different kind of actor’.

The Cartoon Sample

For the purpose of the analysis, I chose to collect a sample of political cartoons from a foreign policy/economic weekly – The Economist. There are several reasons why: first, The Economist is a weekly long-term focused on foreign policy, international relations and global economy – it is a good source of information on current international relations events. Second, although its headquarters are in the United Kingdom, The Economist covers the events from a global perspective – it is not biased towards any one particular actor. Its liberal orientation is not of particular concern for our study either. However, a bias that is taken into account is its Western perspective (and a Western set of meanings). Third, the volume of political cartoons dealing with European Union’s foreign policy is not sufficient – national print almost completely ignores any EU foreign policy agenda.
*The Economist* is published worldwide in circulation of 1.3 up to 1.5 million copies every week (Eurotopics 2011, *The Economist*). Its regular opinion column + cartoon *Charlemagne* is of advantage in research focused on Europe. Writing/drawing under a pseudonym allows the author to express his opinions without fear of personal consequences.

The research sample consists of political cartoons collected between 5th January 2008 and 14th of May 2011, making up the total of 173 issues covering topics such as the global economic crisis, Russian occupation of Gruzia, ratification of the Lisbon treaty and the new EU foreign policy representatives and the ‘African Spring’ freedom revolutions. The data collection was not restricted only to *Charlemagne*, but extended to encompass other regular and irregular sections including the front page.

Guided by the immediate context – significance of the picture and/or the surrounding text for foreign policy – 120 political cartoons and digital manipulations were chosen for this study. The chosen cartoons visualise the EU as an actor of international relations, they touch upon ‘domestic’ EU events relevant for European foreign policy (election of the President of the European Council or the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy or events related to Eurozone’s performance on the global market). Conversely, cartoons dealing with intra-European affairs, such as the Common Agricultural Policy financing or ‘squabble’ over power positions among the member states, were left out.

**Symbols, personifications and stereotypes**

A symbol is a sign or any other ‘physical element’ used – for example – to represent a political or social collectivity. This symbol can be an emblem, a flag, a name, an allegory, an anthem, or any other element that could be used to attach a physically apprehensible ‘signifier’ to a Nation, a State, or any other human collectivity’ (Bruter 2005: 75). Because a political cartoon does not have the room to describe ‘who is who’, it identifies ist actors by symbols and established personifications connected to the actor. In a sense, ‘symbols make it easier for citizens to identify with the political community regardless of their levels of knowledge of the community and of their capacity for abstraction’ (Bruter 2005: 76-77, my emphasis).

Oficial symbols of the European Union, used here to identify the EU as an actor are: the flag – consisting of a circle of twelve five-pointed golden stars on a blue field symbolizing European unity; European anthem *Ode to Joy* – lyrics by F. Schiller, composition L. van Beethowen; Europe Day – celebrated on May 9th and a motto ‘unity in diversity’. The most familiar symbol to-date remains the European flag. It needs to be added that according to public opinion survey European Union is also symbolized by the common currency. Recognition of € placed second in the Eurobarometer survey (Standard Eurobarometer 73). Are these symbols also used in the visual discourse?

It is curious that while majority of literature on European identity is focused on European features and values, people remain suspiciously off the radar. By contrast,
cartoonists above all portray people. It is no coincidence. Because it is easier to identify with a person than with a piece of cloth (aka flag). Why is it important to study who personifies the European Union? Social identities are build on narratives, speaking of the first settlements, the founding stones of the community. They speak of heroes of old times, who spilled blood for the country. Every community, ancient or modern, has its founding fathers, its ‘heroes’, great leaders of the past and present (Anderson 1991, Pugsley 2006, Gordon 2010). No one can doubt the ‘Americaness’ of president Obama or Uncle Sam. Europe too has its narrative of the first European Charles the Great – Charlemagne. Other characters appear in the story of unification of the European Union, for all Jacques Delors. So while the English Queen is the symbol of the English monarchy, who symbolizes Europe? And what kind of cultural stereotypes and clichés relate to them and other European personifications?

Europe and the Others

Post-structuralist approach presupposes that identities are, to an extent, created by so called ‘othering’ – articulation of difference (Diez 2004; 2005, Neumann 1996, Manners - Whitman 1998 a 2003, Hansen 2006, Kösebalaban 2007). One of the means to conceptualize this process is through the framework of conceptual pairs of Self/Other. European identity itself is a problematic concept, mostly because its existence is to this day contested. Ever since the Middle ages served the Other as a ‘mirror’ of stereotypes and xenostereotypes in which one occasionally could get a glimps of Europe (Stråth 2002: 393, Neumann 1996, 1999). For European Union’s identity as an international relations actor are the relationships with Others crucial.

While a great deal of articles is preoccupied with active construction of European identity (e.i. European Union’s institutions and agencies actively participating in the identity discourse) or devote time and energy to uncovering constructions of the Self vis-à-vis an Other, Natalia Chaban and her colleagues argue that besides all this, it is also important to take into consideration how others perceive the EU (Chaban et. Al. 2006). The reasons are the following:

- They are a source of knowledge of how successfully/unsuccessfully were the foreign policy objectives put into practice – they are a feedback
- Views of others help shape EU identity and its roles – foreign policy is to an extent a reaction to others’ expectations
- Expectations of others directly influence performance of the Union in international relations – for example through legitimation of its foreign policy

(Chaban et. al. 2006: 247-248)

In this case, The Economist represents the views of others not only on European foreign policy but it also gives its opinions on performance of other actors of international politics. Thus, this article will not present a classic research of identity construction based on Self/Other differentiation, because the chosen cartoon discourse is not Europe’s own, but is created by a third party – the media.
Theoretical concept of Self/Other in connection to EU’s relation to other actors is, in this case, not given but tested! So, instead of implicitly assuming that, a European identity defined by certain visual characteristics (personifications and stereotypes) is radically different from, say, American identity, the aim here is to find out if this is really the case. Should the European Union and its identity as an actor of international relations be portrayed in contrast to a collective Other – i.e. the ‘normal’ nation-state actors – it would tell us more about EU’s actorness as such. Construction of European Union’s identity as radically different from Others would mean support for claims about Europe’s sui generis status.

First part of the analysis will thus be primarily focused on persons and personifications, as identified by the European symbols, and stereotypical meanings related to them within the context of Western culture.

Second part identifies a collective Other (a collection of visual representations of other actors portrayed in the sample), focusing on its characteristics and personifications and their stereotypical interpretation also in the context of Western culture.

In the third step, I will compare the two sets within the Self/Other framework: if they make a conceptual pair Self/Other, there is reason to believe that the EU is indeed perceived as a ‘different kind of actor’. If not, then we can consider the EU to be a ‘normal’ actor of international relations:

1. step: identification of stereotypical characteristics of the European Union
2. step: identification of stereotypical characteristics of the collective Other (generalisation of other actor’s characteristics portrayed in the sample)
3. comparison of results within the framework of Self/Other

The results: European Union’s identity as an international relations actor

‘All nations are imagined (Anderson 1991), and even if Europe is not a ‘nation’ in the traditional sense of the term at least, it is still a kind of political identity that reaches beyond the immediate face-to-face encounter and therefore needs imagination’ (Diez 2004: 320). How does The Economist imagine the European Union? And how are the other actors imagined? Based on a sample of 120 political cartoons collected between 1st January 2008 and 14th May 2011, I’ve reached the following results:

Step one: Europe’s symbols, personifications, stereotypes and its positive identity as an IR actor

First phase of the study focused on what/who symbolizes the European Union and how is it personified in political cartoons.

European Union is beyond doubt predominantly identified with golden stars on a blue field. European Union and its representatives were identified by the EU flag or various combinations of stars and blues in 85 cases. Other symbols used to identify the EU include the euro € - in nine cases, the abbreviation ‘EU’ or to a little extent
world-famous monuments of European cities (the Eiffel tower, Big Ben, Brandenburg gate and the Brussels’ Atomium).

Continuing with living symbols and personifications, we enter a more uncertain territory. European Union has in political cartoons three complex symbolic personifications:

First, European Union is most frequently identified with the representatives of its member states and/or its own officials (in 41 cases). But if we take a closer look a who exactly is identified with the EU, which persons are associated with European Union’s foreign policy conduct, we find out that the group is very heterogeneous. In the studied cartoons, the EU is most often represented by the French president Nicolas Sarkozy and the German chancellor Angela Merkel (Sarkozy takes the lead with the total of 11 visualisations, Merkel follows close with 7 appearances).

The EU representatives, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton or the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy symbolize the EU ‘only’ in five cases each. It needs to be added that both Ashton and Van Rompuy were elected representatives only in October 2009 (their mandate started on 1st December 2009). Still, it doesn’t change the fact that the EU was represented by five more people from the member states including Silvio Berlusconi, and Tony Blair, while the European Commission chief José Barroso appeared only twice and the still incumbent ‘Mr. CFSP’ Javier Solana never once made it to represent the EU (see table 1.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (affiliation)</th>
<th>Number of visualisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Ashton (EU)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José Barroso (EU)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silvio Berlusconi (IT)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Blair (UK)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon Brown (UK)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Cameron (UK)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Merkel (GER)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viktor Orbán (HU)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herman Van Rompuy (EU)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolas Sarkozy (FR)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Frequency of cartoons of politicians symbolizing the EU

Frequent presence of the French president and the German chancellor ‘in between the lines’ suggest a situation that is not so politically correct in the official EU discourse: because of their thick visualisation as symbols of Europe it almost seem as if the EU foreign policy was done by the French and Germans! On the other hand, this situation might suggest ignorance of intra-European affairs on part of The Economist, when it credits or criticizes the Frenchman for a political decision only because his face is more popular that that of the Czech prime minister Topolánek – who lead the Czech EU presidency in 2009.

At this point it’s not important why it is so, what’s important is the fact that the representatives of the big member states symbolize the EU on the outside, to the detriment of small states and even official EU representatives! From the table 1 above the member state politicians dominate the visual discourse over EU officials in a ratio of roughly 3:1 (29:12 respectively). Association of the European project with national
Heterogeneity, fragmentation at the top of the political ladder of EU representation does not speak of a unified European foreign policy. The whole situation rather resembles Henry Kissinger’s query about who to call if he wants to talk to Europe. The chaos in top political representation hasn’t changed and the plethora of people symbolizing and acting in the name of the Union just confirms the old saying about EU’s disunity (see cartoon from 3rd May 2008 or 11th April 2009).

Meaning of such a heterogeneous visualization can be interpreted quite clearly. Not only in the context of Western culture, it is obvious that a defining characteristic of European identity is fragmentation. A fact that official EU representatives and politicians elected to national positions (i.e. without a proper mandate to speak for Europe) alternate as leaders of Europe constructs a picture of unresolved internal competences and crumbling leadership.

A situation in which visual representations of the EU are dominated by national leaders instead of the European representatives does not inspire confidence in the European project, and as such undermines the role and influence of European Union in international politics. In this commotion, it is hard to identify with the leaders – ‘heroes’ of the European projects – precisely because there’s just too many of them. There is no one bearer of European identity. This status quo is well illustrated in a cartoon from 25th October 2008 tagged ‘What the Europeans hope for after the American elections’ showing (Western) European state leaders – Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel – in anticipation of the future American president. In other words, if anyone wants to ‘speak to Europe’, he’ll do better meeting the big member states rather than EU institutions (cartoon from 11th April 2009).

Second, the most frequently used symbolic personification of the European Union as an actor in international politics is, well, a bureaucrat. In the collected sample, European Union was impersonated by a ‘Eurocrat’ 27 times plus in seven more cases by a whole crowd of nameless officers, making up a total of 34 bureaucratic personifications.

European Union is in general (even in the member states) perceived as colossal bureaucratic machiner, so it is quite understandable that a Eurocrat became the typical symbol of the EU abroad. The character of a bureaucrat represents a classic EU stereotype: grey, nonspecific, nameless officer in a suit could belong to any one of the member states, could be a cog in the wheel of any number of international organisations. The only thing identifying him as a European is his briefcase or a tie with golden stars and blues. This prototype of an officer reminds of an example from Benedict Anderson’s book on Imagined Communities (1991), who speaks of tombs of

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9 Confusion for the European citizens as well, why should a Slovak identify with the French for the greater good of the European project?! Also we can observe a great disparity between the visibility of the ‘old members’ and the new ones. Only Viktor Orbán – a Hungarian prime minister – was cartooned as opposed to other 40 people coming from ‘the West’ (both member states and representatives of EU institutions).

10 Please see the cartoon attachment an the back of this document.
unknown soldiers: such nameless figures can be appropriated and celebrated in practice by any nation. The Eurocrat has a similar fate of being an unknown pawn in the field of politics, but in contrast to the soldiers who ‘gave their lives in the name of nation’, Eurocrat remains disowned.

See, a Eurobureaucrat is no popular icon. He’s often portrayed as naïve (19th January 2008 or 7th of June 2008), clueless (4th October 2008), aged (8th November 2008) or even old-fashioned, a person who can’t keep up with modern times (18th April 2009). He’s also portrayed as confused (3rd April 2010), retarded (6th February 2010), a person at the mercy of others (13th September 2008).

Eurobureaucrat’s significance lies precisely in his insignificance. A heterogeneous identity dispersed between a national (Western) and a European level is complemented by a trait of a confused, helpless, naïve and insignificant officer – a cog in the EU machine. In one case only, the Eurocrat acts as an authoritative figure (1st March 2008) against Microsoft. But if we better consider the context, the European Union acts authoritatively against a company (although a software giant) not a state – not an equal kind of actor.

The bottom line is that European Union personified by a bureaucrat gives the impression of being lost, bureaucratically fossilized, weak and out of this world. If a cartoon exaggerates the negative characteristics of its characters then, surely, the basic characteristic and a problem of the EU internationally is lack of confidence and authority. The whole EU image falls flat, and I’m quite sure there are not many people who would want to identify with this character.

The bureaucrat, by and large, although giving a good impression of the EU administration, certainly does not paint the picture of a hero to be identified with, because his appearance is aged and insignificant.

Third, and last significant cartoon personification of the European Union is a woman. I’m not talking about chancellor Merkel or baroness Ashton, only a feminine visualization of the European Union. In the cartoon sample, the European Union was portrayed by a woman twelve times.

Although in Slovak and Czech languages European Union is of the feminine gender, that is not the case in English – language of The Economist. The reasons for this visualization, however, could be several. Theoretically, we could search for the roots of Europe’s visual femininity in the ancient mythological narrative about the Phoenician princess Európé. Certainly, the likeness between Europe and Európé are obvious. And in one case, the European Union is indeed visualised as a sleeping beauty remarkably resembling the ideals of the antic world (10th October 2009). In other cases however, Europe/European Union is not so easy on the eyes (see 21st February 2009) and the prevalent image is that of a woman-in-years.

The other explanation could be uncovered by stereotypes attached to femininity in the Western culture. Despite the formal equality of genders, there are still a lot of stereotypes coupled with the ‘pretty gender’: while men are commonly seen as strong, decisive, active, aggressive, rational and authoritative; women are perceived as the weaker of the sexes, dependent, emotional, passive and reliant (see figure 1. men/women are Lene Hansen’s first choice for a mutually exclusive pair of
Self/Other see p.11). In none of the cartoons is She-Europe portrayed as active, decisive or authoritative. She is always passive only watching the Arab Spring from a distance (9th April 2011) or is a passive receiver of economic ‘medicine’ from other (men). Furthermore, She-Europe (along with Eurocrat) is visualised as undecided home (15th March 2008) and abroad (26th February 2011). The Economist goes as far as depicting She-Europe in a role of a housewife, who’s task is to take care of the household and who’s no danger to the neighbours (21st November 2009).

Usage of the female stereotype suggest weakness rather than power, passivity rather than activity, insignificance and undecisiveness rather than authority and dedication. Despite the gender equality the message is clear: European Union is a weak, effeminate actor, dependent on others, undecisive and passive.

![Figure 2. Positive construction of European Unions international identity through process of linking of the uncovered characteristics](image)

The positive construction of European identity from political cartoons reveals that European Union as an actor of international relations is characterized by fragmentation of its top political leadership – with national and European politicians squabbling for influence. Personifications of the EU, whether the Eurobureaucrat or the She-Europe, are in overwhelming majority of cases passive – only looking at events, paralyzed by indecision. Furthermore their common trait is age, both She-Europe and the Eurocrat are certainly not in their prime time and there are hits they are rather aged or old-fashioned. Visualisation of Europe by a feminine avatar carries with it all the stereotypes of being a woman in a man’s world: weakness, passivity, housechores. Personifying Europe by a bureaucrat highlights its insignificance – the nameless, grey mouse instead of a top rank politician.

**Step two: the collective Other**

What kind of visualisations do the other actors of international relations have? How are the USA, Russia or China cartooned?

*First*, I focused on political representation of other actors in the cartoon sample. For all, I wanted to find out who represents other actorsm who is the symbol of a ‘normal’ political community. Expectantly, the United States are most often
symbolized by its president. Curiously, even though Barack Obama was in 2008 still campaigning for presidency he was portrayed in connection with the US a lot unlike the still incumbent G.W. Bush who wasn’t depicted once.

As regards other actors, China is not symbolized by anyone from its leadership (see below), but similarly to the EU, by a nameless comrade (23rd January 2010). Other actors that made it into the cartoon sample are represented either by their respective heads of state (Lybia’s general Gaddafi) or prime ministers (Russia’s Vladimir Putin).

On observation, it becomes clear that other actors – the collective Other – has a compact and unified political representation. The cartoon identifies heads of states and prime ministers as the ultimate symbols, other real-life politicians are not visualized. There is only one figure portrayed as a leader, so it is beyond doubt who represents the country on the outside. The collective Other thus looks more consolidated, more *homogeneous*.

Second, other actors too have besides their official representations various other personifications: for instance Russia is stereotypically visualised as a brown bear (3rd May 2008). The symbol of a big brown bear has several meanings at hand – Russia is the biggest country in the world by area, the bear too is one of the largest animals living within its borders. Two, a bear or a lion is also frequently referred to as the ‘king of the animals’ dominating other species – Russian federation too had a long-term grip on Eastern Europe and the composition of the federation itself means exercising control over the countries from the centre. Characteristics of bears also include ‘tubbiness’, but that is sufficiently compensated by its strength and aggressivity. A bear is, after all, carnivorous beast (8th November 2008). Thus personification of Russia by a bear implies identity of a powerful country with power ambitions that, from the top of the foodchain, has the ability to scare others into submission.

Likewise China is personified by a powerful animal – a dragon to be more specific (see dragon-girl’s tee-shirt 18th April 2009 or the pando-dragon from 7th June 2008). Both bears and dragons are thought to be powerful, on top of that dragons, the mythical creatures are imagined to have magical powers. Also, at least in the Western perceptions, dragons are man-eaters. Although the symbolic dragon personification clearly has roots in Chinese folklore, metaphorically speaking, an international relations actor with such dragon qualities is surely well suited for a world power status along the strongest of them all.

United States of America are not personified in the cartoon sample by any power animal, not even the golden eagle. A regular American personification ever since the end of the 19th century is Uncle Sam – usually an older gent with a goatee dressed in stars and stripes (Relin 1996). The national motives of his clothing may imply patriotism as his images were used for recruitment campaigns in both world wars. Unlike the power animals above, Uncle Sam has a more human range of character traits that range from a bully (19th June 2010) to a street beggar (16th February 2008). Personification of Uncle Sam constructs the American identity as close to the people, patriotic, sometimes strong, othertimes weak. Anyways we interpret it, Uncle Sam is a persona that is easy to relate to (unlike the nameless bureaucrat from Brussels).
Third, with one exception only (18th April 2009), all other actors are pictured as males. Uncle Sam, the Chinese communist, even bears and dragons are generally thought of as males. Stereotypes of men, at least in the Western culture, include strength, energy, activity, rationality and authority. The stereotype of a man as a hunter has been repeated over and over from popculture to political literature.

Figure 3. Positive construction of the collective Other’s international identity through process of linking of the uncovered characteristics

Figure 3 shows the positive identity constructed through linking of the main characteristics found throughout the cartoons. The collective Other, consists of generalized representations of other state actors in the cartoon sample, it is characterised by a unitary leadership. Typically, the top level political representation is symbolized by one person – the president or the prime minister. Personifications include powerful beasts such as bears or dragons. Human personifications are generally of male gender (Uncle Sam, comrade). Common stereotypical traits of men and power animals suggest strength, authority, activity, domination so we can conclude masculinity is another defining characteristic of a standard IR actor.

Concerning the passivity/activity of the collective Other it can’t be determined in any reasonable way whether he’s prevalently active or not, because the ratio of active and passive visualisations is roughly the same. Determining the collective Other’s age is also inconclusive: in some cases the Other is extremely young and vibrant (18th April 2009) in other cases the collective Other is aged - old and toothless (16th February 2008). A more thorough investigation would lead to more detailed results, in relation to US or China, but this was not the aim here. As to The collective Other’s significance, I assume it has the status of a standard, normal actor. It is this standard the EU visualisations will be compared to in the next section.

Step three: comparation of the positive identity constructions of the European Union and the collective Other

The results of the comparation of cartoon identities of the European Union and the standard collective Other are, surprisingly, not as straight-forward as the academic discourse on European Union actorness teaches us. In principle, the academic discourse constructs EU’s actorness identity as having a a different quality to a
normal IR actor: Bretherton and Vogler imagine the EU as a *presence* in international relations (1999), other authors construct the image of the EU as an ethical power (Aggestam 2008), ‘incapable’ power (Hill 1993), a power that can’t step up to the level of a realistic environment (Hyde-Price 2006, 2008). In other words, as a by-product of the academic discourse, we help construct the European international identity as *sui generis* or as a soft power that is different from classic superpowers (Sjursen 2004, 2006).

But, if we take a closer look at the results of visual representation of the European Union and compare it to visualisations of other actors, we cannot say for certain that the EU is ultimately and radically different from a standard actor. Although there is significant differentiation, as a whole, EU’s international identity is *not* the antithesis to an IR actor identity.

European Union’s identity as an actor of international relations, as visualised in cartoons if the weekly *The Economist*, is stereotypically portrayed as *fragmented, feminine, passive, aged and insignificant* (see figure 2 and 4). The collective Other, on the other hand, is stereotypically portrayed as *unified and masculine* – often symbolized by the president/prime minister or a power animal implying authority and power. In this comparison the EU is not even a paper tiger.

As to other characteristics, the differences are not so stark: we can’t conclude unequivocally if the collective Other is pictured as more active or passive, because the ratio of both visualisations is even. The same can be said of the Other’s age – it can’t be definitely established whether the Other is predominantly young or old, aged or modern since it is both (we could achieve different results if I treated the other actors separately – but that was not the aim here).

As we can see in figure 4 (next page), at least in two characteristics are the identities of European Union and the collective other *not radically different*. But, let’s take it from the beginning:

If we want to compare European Union’s symbolic representation to other actors – the collective Other – we find out that the EU is identified by a plethora of people and personifications. Other actors usually rely on one or two symbolic representatives, the head of state or the prime minister, whereas the EU is represented by a mix of national and European level politicians. Such visual representation implies *fragmentation* of European political leadership between the powerful Western member states and the EU institutions, and is *radically different* from the *unitary* representations of the collective Other.
Personifications of the European Union – the Eurobureaucrat and the She-Europe – in contrast to the Russia brown bear or Chinese dragon, do not bring out the image of a strong and authoritative actor. Eurocrat is neither a proud not a formidable symbol of the EU, there are no mythical qualities associated with a bureaucrat, he’s just a cog in the EU bureaucratic machinery. He lacks the antiquity and nobility of other actors. Eurocrat is not muscular, armed or toothed, he’s just a passer-by, a toy of other players (13th September 2008). A Eurocrat, as much as the Chinese comrade, is characterized by anonymity and insignificance.

Compared to the visualisations of others, Eurocrat is a rather comical character. From the cartoons it is obvious that not even a whole crowd of European administrators is able to tackle a problem – Russia for instance (3rd May 2008). European Union disqualifies itself from international action by neverending squabbles about technical details and Russia needs not lift a finger, the Europeans will reliably sabotage themselves. Internal conflicts and unclear leadership pacify European Union’s capability to pursue and active foreign policy, and thus unsurprisingly, cartoons visualize the EU as passive.

However, if we examine the cartoons of the collective Other and compare them with the EU as far as activity/passivity goes, we can see that the EU is not so radically different from the Other. The difference is only partial. For instance, in an already mentioned cartoon, Uncle Sam idly begs for money relying on help of others (16th February 2008). Also the Russian bear does not need to act in the face of the EU (3rd

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11 If it was more important than technical detail, I suppose the leaders of Europe will be pictured
May 2008). Thus we can’t say for certain that EU’s passivity constitutes an example of othering – the differentiation is only partial.

As to the feminine personification of the European Union, it is necessary to mention that while the masculine/mixed Eurocrat personification appears 34 times, She-Europe symbolizes Europe in twelve cases ‘only’. However, if we compare Europe’s feminine personification to others, we find that the collective Other was personified by a woman only once (even in this case the young and hip Chinese woman dominated Europe see 18th April 2009). Despite the proclaimed gender equality, stereotypes about inequality of the two sexes remain.

Picturing the feminine Europe among its masculine ‘colleagues’ suggests discrimination in the relationship. She-Europe waiting for the ‘prince Charming’ to wake her from slumber (10th October 2010), Europe the housewife (21st November 2009), these stereotypes do not construct an identity of an able and authoritative international negotiator – qualities especially praised in superpowers.

The whole feminine identity for Europe resembles a rather bad novel. Cartoon of the transatlantic partnership from 3rd October 2009 parodies an unhappy marriage or a couple’s fight, just like the John Gray book Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus (1990). Such interpretation is the basis for explanation of transatlantic issues by Robert Kagan (2003). Political cartoons only continue in this trend by indicating feminine weakness in European identity, while other actors keep their masculinity. Thus, in the cartoon sample, we observe a case of radical differentiation of European identity from the collective Other.

The age/youth differentiation is also questionable (at least in this cartoon sample). Both Eurocrat and She-Europe are in middle lives. Although some contrasts are certainly visible (18th April 2009 or 8th November 2008), the Eurocrat portrayed as an old man in sharp opposition to the Chinese youth, we cannot conclude that the collective Other is young in general. At large, the Other is not youngster either. Although it might be problematic to determine age in bears and dragons, we can find cartoons showing Uncle Sam with grey hair and just a few teeth (16th February 2008). Thus we can conclude that although European identity is constricted as aged, collective Other is not better off. EU’s agedness is not radically different from its Other’s, othering is only partial.

The last point of comparison, that made itself apparent throughout the comparation, is the size of the actors portrayed in the cartoons. Size can indicate all kinds of power relations: portraying one actor bigger in size that the other reveals an unequal relationship making the bigger actor more significant than the other. Bigger means more powerful. Pointing out a few cases (8th November 2008, 18th April 2009, 19th June 2010 or 26th June 2010), European Union is, compared to the Other, visualised quite literally as tiny. In the cartoon sample, European Union was in more than half of the cases portrayed as smaller than the collective Other. This kind of visualisation onlystrenghtens the construction of European identity as a dwarf, who is forced into subordination by others. Imagining the EU smaller than the collective Other represents the case of radical differentiation.
Conclusion

While political science, especially its constructivist paradigm, offers a broad range of tools for image analysis, the Inconic turn did not happen here, instead images are predominantly analysed in other specializations such as political culture, media studies, psychology, advertising etc. (Wetherell – Taylor - Yates 2001: 4, Hansen 2011). As much as texts and language have been the predominant interest of discourse analysis, photographs of starving African children (Campbell 2004), footage of the Rwanda genocide, cartoons of Adolph Hitler (Coupe 1983) or prophet Muhammad, all these images have provoked an international response and ignited interest in the role of images in international relations (Diamond 2002, Campbell 2004, Campbell - Shapiro 2007, Mazid 2008, Müller – Özcan - Seizov 2009, Klausen 2009, Hansen 2011). With mass expansion of print, television and internet, the meaning of visual discourse grows everyday. I agree with Michael Williams that ‘an examination of the ways in which images themselves may function as communicative acts, an analysis of how meaning is conveyed by images, as well as an assessment of how images interact with more familiar forms of verbal rhetoric’ is necessary (Williams 2003: 527).

Thus the aim of this paper was to focus the attention of political science and international relations on political cartoons and the role they play in construction of a political identity. More specifically, I have used the post-structuralist interpretative discourse analysis to examine the identity of European Union as an international relations actor, as portrayed by The Economist political cartoon visual discourse. The overarching goal was to find out if cartoon discourse constructs a European identity as different from other ‘standard’ international relations actors.

Political cartoon is a specific type of discourse on social reality. It is part and parcel of a wider media discourse that has been the subject of textual discourse for quite some time now (Kratochvíl - Cibulková – Beník 2011, Trenz - Conrad – Rosén 2007). Withal we can argue that political cartoon too is a form of visual opinion, and that it too takes part in construction of events, problems and identities in much the same way editorials and comments do. Maybe to an even bigger extent, because in today's fast consumer society, cartoons are more easily consumed by the public than long political analyses.

I argue that political cartoons, through humour, satire, metaphors, symbols and stereotypes, exaggeration and catch-phrases construct, reify and confirm the meanings of the world around us, including identities. However, cartoon’s humour is not self-serving. Through humour, cartoonists avoid political correctness and illustrate opinions from inbetween the lines.

In a three-step analysis I came to these findings. European Union identity is linked together predominantly from these characteristics: fragmentation, feminity, passivity, agedness and insignificance. When compared to a collective Other, a further characteristic is revealed – the EU is portrayed as significantly smaller than other actors.

Fragmentation of European identity has roots in the heterogeneous political representation that includes ten different people, whereas the collective Other is unified symbolically identified with a head of state or some other top level politician. Personification of the EU by a woman, as opposed to masculine visualisations of the Other, reveals an imagination of inequality and weakness, in some cases resembling
a Mars-Venus relationship (3rd October 2009). EU’s weaked position is further reified by the personification of a Eurobureaucrat, an uninspiring, nameless and insignificant cog in the EU machine. The (in)significance of the actors is further exacerbated by their relative size to each other. European Union is in a majority of cases pictured as the smaller of the two. Thus, in three characteristics, European Union’s identity is constructed as radically different from the collective Other – the standard actor.

In the remaining two cases, the differentiation is not as clear and definitive. Although European Union is characterised as the passive one, the Other is not uniformly portrayed as an active actor, thus the othering is only partial. The same goes for agedness. There is no abysmal difference in age and vitality of the two actors. Both the EU and the collective Other are portrayed as mature to old. In one case only, the Other was a vital youngster. Thus the difference is only partial and is not constitutive of EU’s identity.

Concluding the interpretation of political cartoons, it is clear that constructions of European identity as an actor of international relations are in the same spirit as the textual discourse about a soft, weak and/or insignificant actor. Surprisingly, male-female stereotypes entered the realm of international politics too. Visualisation of the European Union as feminine a world of men reifies EU’s identity as the inferior of the two (actors). Such imaginations only strengthen the ‘special’ actorness status of the European Union. The visual discourse reaffirms the position of the European Union as an irregular international relations actor.
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Eight wasted years. Two useless treaties. Three No votes. Ignored by China and America. But still the world’s biggest economy. Will somebody please...

**Wake Europe up!**