

# Humanitarian by “Pictorial Force”

Visual Representations and the Public Diplomacy Strategy of the European Union in Africa

Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association

15 – 18 February 2009, New York City/USA

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## Abstract

The so called “visual” or “aesthetic” turn seems to be the latest fashion in international studies and foreign policy analysis. Many researchers started to integrate pictures, movies and other visual artifacts into their research of international politics (Shapiro 2008; Behnke 2006; de Carvalho; for a critic see Holden 2006). At first glance, this seems to be nothing special – we all know, that our daily live is influenced by pictorial elements to a large extent, so in fact, it seems to be astonishing that this “new” turn has been proclaimed so late, compared to the “linguistic” and the “practice” turn. In this paper, we will focus on visual communication strategies of the European Union and especially on its ESDP-missions in Africa. We argue that visual representations of security missions are a central corner stone of the public diplomacy strategy pursued by the European Union to enhance its international attraction and to describe itself as a “humanitarian” empire by systematically using the “pictorial force”. The narrative of the “humanitarian” empire is not just articulated through specific “speech acts”, but also underlined by visual representations. First, we will show how debates on public diplomacy can be enhanced by theorizing the power of the visual more systematically. Second, we will illustratively show, how this “pictorial force” works by revealing the visual representations of the ESDP-missions in Africa.

“To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power. Photographs furnish evidence. [...] Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph of it.”<sup>1</sup>

## Visual Representation, Public Diplomacy and the European Union



Since the foundation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy the international visibility of the EU as a globally capable actor has steadily increased. The twelve golden stars of the EU grace on water reservoirs in Myanmar, pictures of Javier Solana shaking hands with leaders of the world are published in daily newspapers, and videos of EU’s peacekeeping operations are posted on EUtube. The EU widely uses modern communication strategies to produce and control specific images of its global presence and engagement. In recent years the EU has established a more coherent idea of how to promote its international presence in order to increase its public attraction. Hence, public diplomacy became a buzz-word in Brussels. Margot Wallström, the EU-commissioner for Communication, pointed out, that “Public Diplomacy is now broadly accepted as an essential arm of external relations.”<sup>2</sup> Although Public Diplomacy is directed towards a broader public in foreign countries, it also expresses and formulates “identity politics” at home. “What the EU is”, i.e. its international identity, is largely formed and reproduced by those visual representations. The latest manual of the European Commission for external action clearly articulates the importance of EU’s visibility in order to promote its identity.<sup>3</sup> Analyzing the Public Diplomacy strategy of the EU, especially how its global security missions are visualized, could significantly contribute to the research on the formation of collective identities.

Empirically, we will take a closer look at the EU engagement in the DR Congo. Since 2003, the EU has conducted four missions, two of them were conceptualized as police and advisory missions, two of them were military support missions for the ongoing UN peacekeeping mission MONUC. We understand these ESDP missions as wrapped in a Public Diplomacy strategy, which most likely reveals underlying identity constructions of the EU. Whoever is

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag 1977: On Photography, pg.4 and 5.

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/08/494&guiLanguage=en>

<sup>3</sup> “The manual mainly covers the written and visual identity of the EU. It sets out requirements and guidelines for briefings, written material, press conferences, presentations, invitations, signs, commemorative plaques and all other tools used to highlight EU participation. In addition, it offers tools designed to enable the development of a dynamic communication strategy that will highlight the achievements of EU support.” (European Commission 2008: Communication and Visibility. Manual for EU External Relations, Brussels)

interested in the engagement of the EU in Africa visits its homepage. The EU offers a huge media-archive with dozens of pictures, photographs and videos showing the EU in action. So far, our impression is that the EU primarily depicts its engagement as “humanitarian”, publishing photos of press conferences, visits of EU’s High Representative Javier Solana, or soldiers protecting facilities of the Red Cross. However, pictures of war, violence, and coercive displacement are completely silenced.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the EU produces a normatively positive narrative of its engagement in the DR Congo which could easily be countered with popular images of the ongoing fights and human rights abuses in Central Africa.

The basic topic we want to address in this paper is why and how IR-scholars could and should integrate visual products such as photos into their analysis. The question why visuals might be an important source for IR-research is not difficult to answer. Visuals are - like language - an essential part of communication. While language encodes reality into the abstract form of letters or vocals which have to be decoded by the “receiver”, pictures operate directly toward our visual senses. The power of pictures, its pictorial force, derives from their ability to constitute our “imagination” more affectively. As we will argue in this paper photos supersede the mimetic dimension of reality (“how it really was”) by its aesthetic quality and thereby exercise power over the event.

The empirical aim of this paper is to show how research on EU’s public diplomacy can be linked to debates about collective identity formation and aesthetic power. So far, the EU has been predominantly described as a civilian and normative power promoting the “good in the world”. However, we will only be able to illustrate that the visual discourse on ESDP missions in the DR Congo is mainly directed towards an EU public justifying the deployment of police and armed forces in Central Africa by depicting its humanitarian goals and silencing popular counter-narratives of violence.

The paper proceeds with a short introduction on public diplomacy, visual culture and the aesthetic turn in order to show how these research fields can ‘fertilize’ each other. Following this rather eclectic and still incomplete overview, we will discuss the power of images, in particular photos and their narrative, integrative and legitimizing effects. Our illustration – photos of the EUFOR DR mission published on the EU’s homepage – poses a first attempt to conduct some further research on the Public Diplomacy of the EU. The paper concludes with

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<sup>4</sup> For example, photos of the EUFOR DR Congo mission:  
[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3\\_applications/Applications/newsRoom/GalleryViewer.asp?command=VIEW&BID=80&dateEvent=02/08/2006&rubrique=1548&cmsID=818&LANG=1](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_applications/Applications/newsRoom/GalleryViewer.asp?command=VIEW&BID=80&dateEvent=02/08/2006&rubrique=1548&cmsID=818&LANG=1)

some comments on the relation between the image and the word and tries to show avenues of further discussion.

### **Public Diplomacy and Visual Communication – Theorizing the Field**

The term Public Diplomacy is traditionally described “as a government’s process of communication with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies” (Tuch 1990: 3). Howard Frederick defines Public Diplomacy as “activities, directed abroad in the fields of information about education, and culture, whose objective is to influence a foreign government, by influencing its citizens” (Frederick 1993: 229). Eytan Gilboa (2008: 57) points out, that Public Diplomacy has been re-defined in order to address the structural changes in international relations and the upcoming of new actors such as NGO’s. Gilboa refers to Signitzer and Coombs (1992) who enhance their definition of Public Diplomacy on private individuals and groups. These groups also seek to influence directly or indirectly those public attitudes and opinions which bear directly on another government’s foreign policy decisions (Signitzer/Coombs 1992: 138). Gilboa argues, that this definition is very helpful, because it recognizes new actors and abolishes the distinction between Public Diplomacy and Public Relations, where the later is usually described to be the strategy of NGO’s (Gilboa 2008: 58).

Public Diplomacy is often linked to the term “soft power”. Soft power, commonly defined, refers to the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye 2008: 95). The ability to combine “hard” and “soft” power – very popular in the contemporary discourse – is called “smart power” by Nye. Public Diplomacy is a tool in the arsenal of smart power, but it requires an understanding of the role of credibility, self-criticism and the role of civil society in generating soft power. “Public diplomacy that degenerates into propaganda not only fails to convince, but can undercut soft power” (Nye 2008: 108).

The European Union is often associated with the term soft power, because it has the ability to attract other states and regions around the world by its depiction as a “norm based”, “humanitarian” and “civil” power.<sup>5</sup> However, Bially Mattern (2005), argues that “in the context of world politics it makes far more sense to model attraction as a relationship that is

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<sup>5</sup> The most striking example of EU’s attraction is the process of eastern enlargement and the ongoing debate about the membership of Turkey.

constructed through *representational force*—a nonphysical but nevertheless coercive form of power that is exercised through language”. According to Bially Mattern’s critic of the concept of soft power, we argue, that attraction is not limited to language and its representational force but could be complemented by the visual and its “pictorial force”.

Although some scholars try to theorize the concept of Public Diplomacy, most have failed to offer a systematic reflection of the practices of public diplomacy strategies and the power of images. Visual communication strategies pose a central practice of EU’s public diplomacy. For example, every aid project financed by the EU has to be branded with its flag.<sup>6</sup> So, how can we understand the power of images? Recent debates on how to theorize and use aesthetic artifacts for the analysis of world politics might be helpful to understand these visual forces of public diplomacy.

## **The Aesthetic Turn, Visual Culture and IR**

### *Studying Visual Culture*

An intellectual history of the visual can be dated back to the invention of mankind, for example the wall-paintings of hunting during the stone-age, the cave allegory of Plato or the biblical prohibition of visualizing God. Since the 1950s arts and social sciences have been infected by a cultural turn which emphasized the social construction and reproduction of artifacts as systems of meaning and communication. The turn to culture was closely linked with the linguistic turn confessing that meaning is only produced by and through language. Today, social sciences propagate an “aesthetic” or “iconic turn” arguing that non-linguistic artifacts such as images, photos, symbols, architecture and art also produce systems of meaning.

The scientific tradition of analysing culture, particularly visual culture is long and manifold. While iconography was interested in an intrinsic interpretation of visuals (mainly paintings and sculptures of fine art), opponents of the Frankfurt School such as Theodore W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Walter Benjamin argued that culture is detected by modern, industrial mechanisms of production where artifacts become goods.

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<sup>6</sup> European Commission, ECHO 2006: A Partnership for Communication. Guidelines for the Commission’s partners on the Implementation of Visibility, Information and Communication Activities relating to Humanitarian Aid, Brussels; European Commission 2008: Communication and Visibility. Manual for EU External Relations, Brussels.

After the II. WW the analysis of cultural processes developed as a distinct research field, especially in Great Britain and the USA. Fine art as the dominant research object was slowly replaced by popular culture and mass media. For example, Richard Hoggart studied cultural practices like reading literature in relation to individual lives and analysed the relationship between popular culture and British working class society. Thereby, cultural studies explored cultures' political function and the link between culture and the state (i.e. education, funding). The linguistic turn refocused the analysis of cultural artefacts on semiotics, the study of signs and "their general role as vehicles of meaning in culture" (Hall 1997:6, James Clifford). Hall conceptualised culture as a signifying practice which is distributed by institutions and media. Therefore, questions of coding and de-coding the meaning of culture became more prominent. Hall criticized the linear conception of communication ("sender – message – receiver") and emphasised the active process of producing and understanding culture. While Hall's perspective excluded the question of power to be a category for discursive approaches (Hall 1997:6), upcoming French theory emphasised topics like cultural capital (Bourdieu) and different ways of belonging, self-formation associated with power and knowledge (Foucault).

This (very) short overview shows that artifacts like images and photos are embedded in an interdisciplinary field analyzing the production and reception modes of culture, its societal implications and power effects from various theoretical perspectives. Recently, International Relations (IR) scholars have tried to follow this way by incorporating movies, photos, art, literature and music into their research.

### *The Aesthetic Turn*

Political science in general has occasionally paid attention to visual culture. In the German context, Klaus von Beyme argued for the development of a "Kunstpolitik" (study of art politics) to pose questions of legitimacy and democracy related to cultural artefacts (von Beyme 1998). Von Beyme is mainly interested in the relation between art and political power, e.g. how states fund artists, how architecture communicates principles of democracy. IR has chosen a quite similar way. A growing discussion of visual culture in IR is linked to the formation of postmodern and poststructuralist strands in the discipline (for a critical approach see, Holden 2006). Michael J. Shapiro and James Der Derian were sensible for the visual dimension of politics already in the mid 1980s. Since then, the inclusion of films and images has reached its preliminary climax with two special issues of *Millennium* (2001, 2006) on the

aesthetic turn and a special issue of *Security Dialogue* (2007) on Securitization, Militarization and Visual Culture in the Worlds of post 9/11.

The recent proclamation of an aesthetic turn in IR seems to be a promising starting point in order to understand the practices of public diplomacy and visual communication strategies more systematically. The aesthetic turn is primarily about the inclusion of aesthetic work into the analysis of ir/IR. Aesthetics range from popular culture, e.g. comics, movies, music, photography to arts in a more narrow sense such as literature and paintings. Either the political implications of aesthetic products are analyzed or products of popular culture and high art are used as sources of illustration or critique. The political quality of a painting or a symphony is not primarily judged by its content or context (for example Picasso's *Guernica*) but intrinsic to its relation to the "consumer". The variety of how to incorporate the visual and audio is quite broad and rather creative/eclectic. Let's have a closer look at the proponents of the aesthetic turn.

In the first *Millennium* publication (2001), Roland Bleiker programmatically describes the



endeavor of an aesthetic approach to ir/IR. Distinguishing between mimetic and aesthetic approaches, Bleiker argues that only the latter is able to understand that the "inevitable difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of politics" (Bleiker 2001: 510). While mimetic approaches are based on the discovery of the truth – "how it really was" – aesthetics appreciate the fact that we only access the social world by and through representations. The state is not really a material entity but represented by a range of commonly known practices of power and authority, e.g. the flag, the anthem, representatives such as a president, chancellor, king etc. Bleiker continues to show how postmodernism presented an aesthetic approach and challenged the mimesis of neorealism in ir/IR. Turning their focus on representations and power, postmodernist scholars addressed and theorized the inevitable gap between the signifier and the signified. Bleiker continues to show the normative impact aesthetic approaches can have and writes "[d]irect aesthetic encounters with the political can contribute to a more inclusive and just world order, for they challenge our very notion of common sense by allowing us to see what may be obvious but has not been noted before" (Bleiker 2001: 526).

Bleiker advocates aesthetic approaches as an alternative to mimetic theories such as neorealism. In this sense, he uses aesthetics as a critique of the positivist mainstream of IR and their obsession with objectivity and truth. However, scholars like Bleiker also propagate

the use of aesthetic work as a source of contemplation about and critique of world politics (Bleiker 2001: 526). Why not deconstruct a piece of art instead of a presidential speech? Bleiker also notes that not every work of art is strictly aesthetic and thereby non-mimetic. Warhol's painting of a Campbell's soup can or Velázquez' depicting of the Spanish princess and her family indeed suggest an objective representation of "how it really was" but failed to delete any aesthetic quality.

The Millennium's special issue includes further contributions discussing the relation between ir/IR and science fiction (Brown, Neumann), movies (Caruthers, Lacy), literature (Costantinou, Smith), new media (Der Derian), comedy (Odysseos), music (Shapiro), and art (Sylvester).

In 2006, *Millennium* published a special issue on the sublime including work on movies, literature and art again. Here, Holden's contribution on cinematic IR is extremely instructive. For Holden the gravity centre of the aesthetic turn is the "widespread conception of intertextuality and mutual constitution between aesthetic treatments and the stuff of world politics" (Holden 2006: 801). Although being sympathetic with the aesthetic turn, he argues that "aesthetic IR's self-presentation as 'critical' leads to a dilemma: either works of art are irrelevant to IR, or aesthetic IR fails to make good its claim to offer a specific and original contribution" (Holden 2006: 793). When selecting their sources, most scholars rely on a crude binary of critical/un-critical aesthetic work (Holden 2006: 794). Either fails aesthetic IR to show the added value compared to research done in the cultural studies (for example) or the selected movies and literature simply illustrate the normative judgments of being 'critical' one holds in advance.

The central argument of the aesthetic turn – so far reconsidered – is twofold. First, aesthetics help to understand the inevitable gap between the representation and the represented (the signifier and the signified). Epistemologically, aesthetic approaches are post-positivist and constructivist. What we know and how we know is dependent on representations of x, not x itself. In this sense, the aesthetic turn shares much of its epistemological and ontological basis with the so called linguistic turn, the evolution of social constructivism and poststructuralism in IR. However, the proponents of the aesthetic turn try to go a step further and advocate non-linguistic artifacts such as photos, movies, art, and music as a source for contemplating (mostly "critique") about world politics. If we want to learn something about war, we should look at photos – for example. This leaves us with the question how the word and image relate to each other. Is signification by a painting without uttering words possible?

One major shortcoming, we argue, is an abstinence of a thoughtful theorizing of the visual in aesthetic IR. Most scholars of the aesthetic turn “just use” aesthetic work without debating its aesthetic character. What is a painting? What do pictures do? The differentiation of genres seems to be a quite important topic the aesthetic turn has only slightly addressed. A painting of art is based on different practices of production and consumption than a photo, a novel or a symphony. To understand the use of language – visual language – we should be aware of the context- and genre-specific practices. Common references to intertextuality and representations are not enough to really understand the power of the image. How can we catch the power of images in the realm of international politics?

### **The Power of the Image**

Since the linguistic turn reached IR, scholars use terms such as “discourse”, “speech act” and “performative power” quite easily. Spoken and written artifacts of political language (speeches, parliamentary debates, newspaper articles) have become an important empirical source for analyzing power relations IR (e.g. Bially Mattern). Nevertheless, it is obvious that there are only few research projects in IR, which are systematically referring to visual artifacts. In this paper we want to pose the question “how to do things with images” in order to understand the formation of EU’s international identity. Hence, public diplomacy is one of the key practices to produce and control a specific image of the EU worldwide.

The power of the image relies on its ability to produce performative effects. Instead of just representing a thing or event Barbara Bolt argues that the image enacts and performs the object. Thus, the power of the image refers to its capacity to produce ontological effects (Bolt 2004). For example, photos of cruelty in Abu Ghraib have constituted our understanding of how torture *looks* like. They enable to meaningfully image/imagine acts of sadism and humiliation. These photos perform torture in a specific way and thereby establish knowledge and truth claims. Hence, the photo supersedes the event and pretends to be reality. This logic of “as if” gives the image power over the event.

Such questions of power and aesthetics are widely addressed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault’s work on images mostly concentrates on art paintings from Velazques, Magritte, Manet or Kandinsky. In 1967, he published a short op-ad about the art historian Erwin Panofsky. Being emphatic on Panofsky’s work Foucault argues that the relation between the discourse and the visible is of special interest. Panofsky’s assumption that visual culture “speaks” abolishes the privilege of the discourse in order to describe the

complex relationship between what can be meaningfully *said* and *visualized* in different historical contexts. Although we restrict our illustration in this paper to an analysis of photos, a reconstruction of the wider discourse on EU's action in Central Africa is necessary in order to fully understand how narratives of identity are constructed.

Accordingly, Foucault has argued that there is neither knowledge without power nor power without knowledge. Thus, truth cannot be separated from power (Brass 2000:306). Systems of knowledge and their institutions are nerved with power relations and power produces knowledge in order to control, command, discipline and rule. The “knowledge of man” as the central figure of the *Moderne* lies at the heart of the power/knowledge nexus and enables disciplinary institutions in order to “normalize the patient” (Brass 2000:307). Foucault has emphasised that power is not a continuum or simple relation between A who wants B to do x but always and everywhere part of social relations. A picture of a starving black child makes famine knowledgeable and enables to justify interventions by Western aid institutions. A photo exercises power on those who are imaged as inferior and helpless in order to “normalize the patient”. Images reproduce a system of knowledge not by inscribing what is true or false but through the difference of being visualized/invisible. As Susan Sontag states, what we can see must be true.

Understanding the power of visuals as a disciplining technique stresses the performative dimension of images, photos and symbols. Foucault's insights on the power/knowledge nexus supports our intension to take images seriously. How do visuals enable and constrain what can be meaningfully imaged?

### *The Seduction of Mimesis – Understanding the Pictorial Force*

Photos are one of the most commonly used sources to illustrate world politics. The success of newspapers as a mass media distributed photos as a depiction of reality visualizing public events. Photos also enabled a closer emotional and affective relation between the reader and the stories published in newspapers. Photography of war and violence stand out as the most striking examples how visual representations shape our understanding of the World Wars, the Vietnam War and the ongoing battles in Afghanistan and Iraq. The picture of the naked girl Kim Phuc fleeing from her Napalm bombed village on a street in Vietnam has become a symbol of the brutality of the US army. We do not doubt that the image shows a real incident,



but the photo represents more than just what has happened on this day in 1972. Its popularity has partly replaced the real event and superseded it.

Especially photojournalism is keen on suppressing the fact that pictures have been constructed. Pictures are taken from a specific angle, cropped to include some elements and exclude others. In the news, visual images are presented as authentic and objective pieces of evidence, as reality and not representations of reality. Pictures make us easily believe that what we are looking at shows “what really happened” (Dauber 2001: 210). “The photograph, in a sense, contains a potential narrative account itself” (Dauber 2001: 210).

Accordingly, photos are a universal medium of communication. Nearly everyone can “read” a photo because of its mimetic quality.<sup>7</sup> However, this readability does not imply that everyone decodes/understands a photo in the same way; it just means that visual cultures are broader than linguistic cultures. This point leads us to a more systematic differentiation of visual genres and their power effects.

Icons are the most stylised and universal visuals. They are stereotype images which stand for a message or institutions, e.g. signs for restrooms. Symbols refer to a group of objects, they signify the thing symbolized, e.g. the Bastille as a symbol for despotism and (later) for freedom (Reichhardt 2004). Less than icons, symbols are also abstractions whereby a signified (freedom) is linked to a visual signifier (Bastille).

Commonly, fictional (e.g. cartoons, movies) and non-fictional artifacts (e.g. photos, documentaries) are distinguished. However, in the digital age the separating line between both has become less clear. Medias such as photography and film are the most popular sources of analysis because of their direct and mimetic quality. For example, Peter Hamilton (1997) analyses how Frenchness was constructed and represented in French photography after the II. WW.

### *How to do things with “images”?*

The performative power of pictures can be described by its narrative, integrative and legitimizing effects. Images tell us a story by depicting actors, showing what they do, where they are. This mimetic quality of photos supersedes the event and powerfully represents “how it really was”. The single visual elements we see are



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<sup>7</sup> A video, either fictional or non-fictional – would increase this effect.

connected to a narrative explaining what is going on. To decode an image knowledge is needed: Who is the woman? Why is she speaking into microphones? Who are the three guys beside her? Where is she? The German Chancellor Angela Merkel is holding a press conference (accompanied by the German Defence Minister Jung, XX and XX). Published on the ESDP homepage, we suspect that the photo is taken from the ESDP mission in the DR Congo.<sup>8</sup> The photo performs the event of a press conference in a specific way independent of the real event. The image constitutes a narrative over the event, visually linking actors, action and context and emphasising the diplomatic dimension of the EU mission. Thereby, the photo of the press conference appears to be the event making it knowledgeable to the viewer.

Icons and symbols are interesting sources because of their integrative effects. The historian Jürgen Osterhammel has shown how political symbols secured the imperial integration of the



British Empire through norm hegemony (Osterhammel 2004). The symbols of the Empire, for example medals of honour, persisted the decline of the British preponderance and were able to integrate the Empire horizontally and vertically (Osterhammel 2004:399-400). The integrative power directs our attention to the possibility of identification

and the production of collective identities. The symbols of the EU missions are able to integrate a diverse group of soldiers with different nationalities and enable to identify (with) the military engagement of the EU. These are collective EU mission, not unilateral actions by single member states.

By making an political decision and its consequences visible photos have a strong legitimizing effect. Used as part of a Public Diplomacy strategy they positively show what EU soldiers are actually doing in the DR Congo or pictures of starving children help to justify humanitarian interventions. However, legitimation processes are complex and intertwined with linguistic narratives (e.g. public debates) and institutional practices (parliamentary control of military forces).

We have argued so far that photos are an extremely powerful visual genre because of their mimetic quality. Especially their legitimizing effect makes them a politically powerful resource for Public Diplomacy. The next chapter will try to illustrate this point by discussing pictures of the EUFOR DR Congo mission published on the ESDP homepage.

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<sup>8</sup> That the photo was shot in the DR Congo refers to our context knowledge. The image itself gives us no hint where the conference happens.

## **Humanitarian by “Pictorial Force” – The Public Diplomacy of the EU in Central Africa**

In this paper, we will only be able to give a very brief impression of EU’s pictorial force. We have selected four photos depicting the EUFOR DR Congo mission which are published on the ESDP homepage. We understand these pictures as an attempt to produce a visual narrative justifying the presence of EU troops in Central Africa. However, this mostly humanitarian narrative is countered by popular images of violence and war one can easily find in the internet. This confrontation illustrates the pictorial force of EU’s Public Diplomacy nicely. While the official narrative of the EU depicts the success of a humanitarian engagement, the counter-narrative can strongly function as a justification for intervention in order to end the violence and abuse of women and children. Pictures of EU soldiers are contrasted by the images of non-official combatants and war lords; images of taking care and helping the people are countered by photos of forceful displacement and refugee camps; and, the humanity of laughing children is challenged by the forceful images of child soldiers and the abuse of childhood. Nevertheless, a systematic reconstruction of the narratives and identity constructions is still required.



## **Conclusion: Three Avenues for Further Research**

We have argued that the analysis of visual artifacts could be helpful in order to understand the formation of EU's international identity through strategies of Public Diplomacy.

The next step for further research could be to reconsider EU's identity discourse through the interplay of images and words used by its Public Diplomacy strategy. Based on its public rhetoric, the EU is commonly described as a normative power working for the "good". This narrative envisions the EU as a genuine actor and avantgardistic force beyond crude power politics. So far, we suggest that its strategy of visualization reproduces a "humanitarian" discourse and unravels a specific form of "pictorial force". This strategy of depiction is primarily directed towards an EU public in order to justify interventions and the use of force in Africa.

This path is closely linked to more theoretical considerations about the relation between words and images and how social meaning is constituted. This could encompass insights from social psychology as well as philosophical work on aesthetic theory. Coria Dauber (2001) has argued that images are always linked to written and spoken language. She strongly emphasizes that focusing on images alone without acknowledging the interplay of images and words would be a mistake. So would be the assumption that any particular image can be read only in a single way. Although the words accompanying the images can provide the basis for interpretations, they do not determine in advance which interpretation must be read into a given image any more than the image itself does (Dauber 2001: 211).

A third research approach could focus on the credibility of the EU's Public Diplomacy strategy. According to Nye's statement about the degeneration of public diplomacy into propaganda, it seems to be doubtful, whether the self-depiction of the EU as a "humanitarian" actor and a "force for good" in Africa is corresponding with a substantial disaster relief strategy and its current military engagement in order to prevent further violence. Public Diplomacy might be a useful strategy to convey "legitimacy" and increase public-support in the EU member states. But lacking a substantial financial, personal, and military engagement could lead to counter-narratives doubting the political will of the EU's engagement in the DRC. Therefore, the EU's Africa policy might be in danger of being revealed as purely propagandistic. Public Diplomacy without a coherent set of action will seriously decrease the actors' credibility and attraction in the long run. Comparing EU's Public Diplomacy with strategies of other actors, for example the UN and its peacekeeping missions or the

engagement of the USA in Afghanistan and Iraq could further our understanding of the “pictorial force”.

These are only some ideas how the concept of “pictorial force” could become an integral part of IR research. Nevertheless, much work has to be done on these issues, and this paper is only our starting point.

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