European Years –
A Discursive Solution to the EU's Crisis of Representation

Camelia-Mihaela Cmeciu

Postdoctoral Student, Romanian Academy, Iasi Branch, Romania
Email: cmeciu75@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper outlines a shift from a centered visibility focused on the images of EU high officials towards a peripheral visibility focused on an awareness of different European issues. The analysis provided to this shift from a centre to some margins (European citizens) will include three European Years: 2010 – combating poverty and social exclusion, 2011 – volunteering, 2012 – active aging and solidarity between generations. Following Thurlow and Aiello's strands of discursive interpretation, I will analyze the official posters of the three European Years on three levels: a) the descriptive micro-level: the quantitative analysis of the social participants; b) the interpretative micro-level: the qualitative analysis of the processes that the European social actors are visually involved in; c) the critical macro-level: a qualitative analysis of the power relations established through the European Years' issues.

Keywords: European issues, visual framing devices, visual processes.

Introduction

Mainly associated with a "top-down" process (della Porta & Caiani, 2006, p. 77), Europeanization presupposes that the more Europeanized a policy, actor, target or issue scope is, the less civil society actors seem to have access to the public sphere. If Americanization is often linked to "the American dream", Europeanization is associated with "the return to the West". This metaphorical representation of a coming back especially of Central and Eastern European countries implies a clash between the European public sphere and the national public spheres.

D. Wolton (1993, p. 13) mentions that the European population does not possess the symbolic frameworks and the cultural codes that are to be used in the daily interpretation of the European politics framed in the media. A symbolic deficit is also acknowledged by Romano Prodi (Pribersky, 2006, p. 146) because of the negative interpretation provided to two visual embodiments of EU: a) as a family, representing the high officials of the European Council; b) as a reconstruction site. Thus one aspect of the EU's crisis of representation implies this excessive visual focus on the center (European institutions) and on the visual exclusion of the margins, namely of the common European citizens as members of the European community.

The first attempt of changing the visual framing of EU involved a metamorphosis at the visual identity level: the logo of a stripe code was considered to be a solution to "Blueeurope" (Pribersky, 2006, p. 147). This visual change of the EU flag was provided by the Dutch architect, Rem Koolhaas, appointed by Romano Prodi to offer a better visual counterpart of the syntagm "unity in diversity". Whereas "Blueeurope" was the embodiment of each member state through the use of one colour thus laying an emphasis on "unity", the stripe code embodied the member states as a multitude of splattered colors, thus laying an emphasis on "diversity". A stripe code has a twofold significance: on the one hand, as a sign of difference through the diverse colors and on the other hand, as the consumption of goods, a daily social practice specific to each European citizen. The replacement of the homogeneous design pattern of Blueeurope with the heterogeneous design pattern of a colorful stripe code and consequently Europe as "a common market" where each European citizen turns into a consumer were considered, in 2004, a solution to the crisis of representation at the visual level that EU had been going through. Framing the European citizen as a mere consumer can be interpreted as a means of downplaying him/ her.

Since 1983 European Years (EY) have been considered a means of stopping the EU's crisis of representation by the social campaigns implemented at the macro-level (European institutions) and at the micro-level (national organizations). Considered "strategies of social control" (Paisley, 2001, pp. 5-6), public communication campaigns can be defined in terms of: (1) objectives, focusing on one group's intention to change another group's beliefs or behavior; (2) methods, focusing on a conventional and innovative mix of traditional, new and social media. A campaign is based on a cognitive flow from a mere objective of informing towards a motivational objective which implies a change of attitude and behavior. Thus the EY issues as the starting points of some public campaigns highlight one function of social representations (Moscovici, [1961] 1976): to enable communication among members of a community. The first step in making the EY issues visible is to promote them through official posters. Our analysis will focus on the salience of visual framing devices used in the representation of EY issues and on the visual processes that European citizens are discursively involved into.

European Years – Discursive Embodiments of "Unity in Diversity"

European Years focus on stirring Europeans' awareness by promoting a common European issue. The thematic European Years can be linked to what Thomas Risse (2003, p. 3) defines as the public sphere: "(…) we can speak of a European public sphere, if and when people speak about the same issues at the same time using the same criteria of relevance and are mutually aware of each other's viewpoints". Thus European Years focus on a shift from a discourse of exclusion to a discourse of inclusion where unity is represented at the macro-level through a shared issue and diversity is represented at the micro-level through the national (none)verbal framings of the respective issue.

The inclusion of national organizations (signs of the margin) in the discursive construction of Europe implies some guiding principles that European Years are based on: a shared responsibility and participation, highlighting both the collective and individual responsibilities; the emphasis of

the benefits for all societies; the establishing of commitment for concrete actions at all levels of governance.

As every social representation, European issues have been "generated by social actors, partially impregnated with ideology and centered on the action of social life" (Seca, 2008, p. 65). Figure 1 shows the salience of the seven issues promoted through European Years and in Annex 1 European Years are assigned to a thematic field.
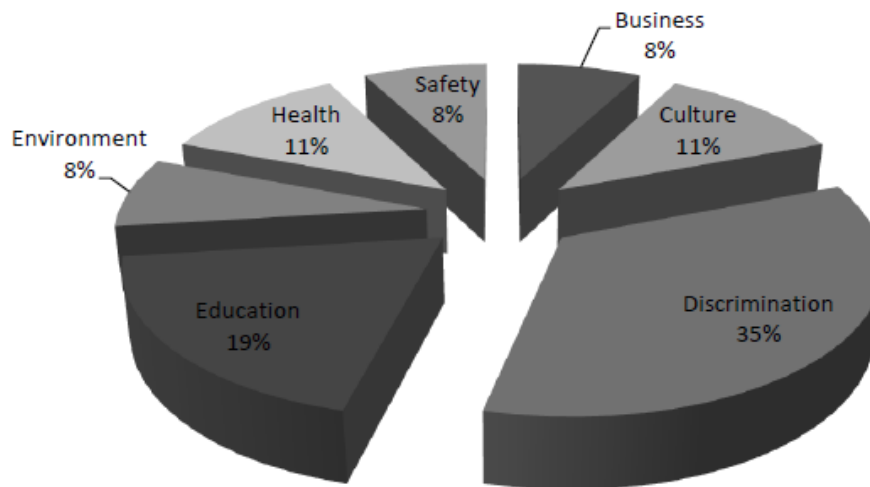

Figure 1. The salience of European Years' issues

As it can be observed, *discrimination* is the most salient EY theme (discursively embedded in nine European Years through racism and xenophobia – 1997, violence against women – 1999, people with disabilities – 2003, poor people – 2010, old people – 2012 etc.), followed by *education* (the second salient theme embedded in five European Years), *culture* and *health* (embedded in three European Years) and *business* and *safety* (embedded in two European Years).

This "plunge" into reality through the selection of the most pervasive and sensitive issues that have prevailed in European member states can be linked to the relationship that Serge Moscovici (1976, p. 47) establishes between social representations and behaviors. Social representations as "preparations for action" have a twofold function: a) to guide behaviors and b) to reshape the elements of the context where the respective behaviors should take place. The seven European themes promoted can be interpreted as signs of guidance for the organizational behaviors of different national bodies towards some common European problems. The difference lies exactly on the elements of the context which will bring to surface different (none)verbal discursive framings of the same concepts.

A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of European Years' Visual Framing Devices

The European and national campaigns centered on raising citizens' awareness on a particular issue constitute "socially constructed knowledge of (some aspect) of reality" (Kress, Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 24). Thus it is clear that European Years have brought a shift in the visibility strategy of EU: the centered simple visibility (Klintman, Boström, 2008, p. 180) mainly focused on the images of EU high officials was turned into a peripheral negotiated visibility focusing on an awareness of an issue verbally and visually framed at a national level.

The analysis will focus on the discourse "in situation" (Beciu, Perpelea, 2007, p. 15), namely on the way in which three European issues (combating poverty and social exclusion – 2010, volunteering – 2011, active aging and solidarity between generations – 2012) are framed by the European bodies in charge with the promotion of European Years.

The empirical data will be the official promotional posters for the 2010, 2011, and 2012 European Years released by:

- the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL);
- the Directorate-General for Education and Culture (EAC).

Social Semiotics - Qualitative Research Method

In the article "Social semiotics and fieldwork: method and analytics", Philip Vannini (2007, pp. 113-140) provides four reasons for choosing social semiotics instead of structural semiotics as a research method:

- *the lack of structural determinism*. Unlike structural semiotics, social semiotics places human beings as participants within context-bound and conflict-laden interpersonal interactions. In our case, the participants have a double nature: on the one hand, the European institutions which provide the visual regulations for each European year, and on the other hand, the member states' institutions which have to perform their activities within the visual context imposed by the European institutions.

- *the study of power.* Unlike structural semiotics, social semiotics attributes meaning to power. Social semiotics focuses on social structures where dialogue, the other, multimodality, identity and motivation govern (Cobley & Randviir, 2009, p. 22). European Union is maybe the best institutional embodiment of what W.J.T. Mitchell (1994, p. 324) says about the dominance of images and power: "we are prisoners of images of power and the power of images".

- *the relation to the study of sign.* Unlike structural semiotics, social semiotics investigates how semiotic resources are used in "specific historical, cultural, and institutional contexts" (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 3). Once entered into European Union, member states have to comply themselves, at a visual level, to the European Years' communication toolboxes which impose

specific semiotic resources that must be used in order to verbally and visually frame the respective European issue.

- *the scope of analysis*. Focused on diachrony, time, history, process and change, social semiotics provides resources with a twofold potential: a theoretical semiotic potential (past and potential future uses) and an actual semiotic potential (uses known by specific users, e.g. European member states, with specific needs in specific contexts). The European Years' thematic change that occurs yearly may be interpreted as European Union's concern for actual issues, such as combating poverty and social exclusion, volunteering, active aging and solidarity between generations.

The analysis of the verbal and visual framings of European issues at the European level will focus on a threefold level[1]:

a) *the descriptive micro-level*: the quantitative analysis of the participants;

b) *the interpretative micro-level*: the qualitative analysis of the visual processes that the participants are involved in;

c) *the critical macro-level*: a qualitative analysis of the power relations established at the visual narrative level.

The Descriptive Micro-Level Analysis of EY Issues

The aim of this subchapter is to provide an analysis of the visual framing devices for three European issues: combating poverty and social exclusion, volunteering, active aging and solidarity between generations. The content analysis is based on pinpointing three visual framing devices:

- iconic images: images based on an analogy relation with referents from reality;
- indexical images: images based on a correlation relation (an object serving as a pointer for another object);
- symbolic images: images based on a conventional relation specific to a community.
  These visual framing devices will be analyzed at two levels:
- the institutional level: the visual devices through which one may identify the European organizations involved in the social campaigns promoting a European issue;
- the narrative level: the visual devices through which one may identify the participants (people ad objects) who take part in the representation of the European issue.

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[1] These three levels are adapted from C. Thurlow and G. Aiello's three strands of activity (2007, p. 313): *descriptive text analysis* (the basic semiotic repertoire and a typology of signs), *interpretive text analysis* (the different ways in which meaning potentials are established), *critical text analysis* (the semiotic strategies used for generating symbolic capital and the analysis of the power relations which appear to frame a certain issue).

The coding procedure was performed on eight EY official promotional posters (Stop Poverty Now – 2010, Volunteer! Make a difference – 2011, Never too old …to be young at heart – 2012) and it focused on the following research questions:

RQ1: Who and what are the (kinds) of persons and objects framed in the eight posters?

RQ2: What meanings and values do we associate with the people and objects framing the European issues?

Whereas RQ1 served for the identification of iconic images, RQ 2 focused on the identification of indexical images (social practices) and of symbolic images (institutional conventions through logos).

EY official promotional posters									
		EY 2010		EY 2011		EY 2012		Total	
		NL	IL	NL	IL	NL	IL	NL	IL	Total
Visual framing devices	Iconic images	6	5	18	7	12	2	**36 (72%)**	**14 (28%)**	**50 (63 %)**
	Indexical images	2	1	2	1	5	1	**9 (75%)**	**3 (25%)**	**12 (15%)**
	Symbolic images	0	12	0	3	0	2	0	**17 (100%)**	**17 (22%)**
	Total							**79 (100%)**		

Table 1 – Visual framing devices in EY official promotional posters

* NL – narrative level, IL – institutional level

As it can be observed in Table 1, there is a salience in the use of iconic images (63%), the second type of images used being the symbolic images (17%). The discrepancy between symbolic images (22%) and indexical images (15%) lies in the visual presence of the EU logo and EY logo on each poster. Another aspect that should be highlighted lies on the cognitive flow that should always exist between iconic images, on the one hand, and indexical and symbolic images, on the other hand. Beyond every association-by-inference of iconicity, there lies some indexicality in reference and some conventional process. This cognitive flow can be observed in the interpretation of the EY logos (Figure 2):

	2010 EY	2011 EY	2012 EY
Iconic images	straight lines colors	diagonal lines colors	curved lines colors
Indexical images	bricks	holding arms balloons	A smaller person (younger) & a bigger person (older)
Symbolic images	*Position of bricks* ↓ Building together → **Unity**	*Lines* ↓ Communication, power of working together → **Unity**	*Lines* ↓ people connecting ↓ **Unity**
	Unequal form of bricks ↓ Building together ↓ **Diversity**	*Differently colored hands and balloons* ↓ **Diversity**	*Unequal form of the figure-shapes* ↓ **Diversity**

Figure 2 – The interpretation of EY logos

The 2010 EY issue (combating poverty and social exclusion) was visually frame in six posters, four posters on poverty (Figure 3-6) and two on involvement (Figure 7-8). The iconic images used for framing these two abstract concepts were different objects: *poverty* – wallet + coins, ball, bed, bread + tin and *involvement* – pen and colors.

The 2011 EY issue (volunteering) was visually framed in one poster (Figure 9). The iconic images used for framing volunteering were the heads of nine men and nine women.

The 2012 EY issue (active aging and solidarity between generations) was visually framed in one poster (Figure 10). The iconic images used to frame these abstract concepts were 12 persons (five iconic instances of the same old woman in the foreground and seven iconic instances of old persons and young persons in the right-hand corner).
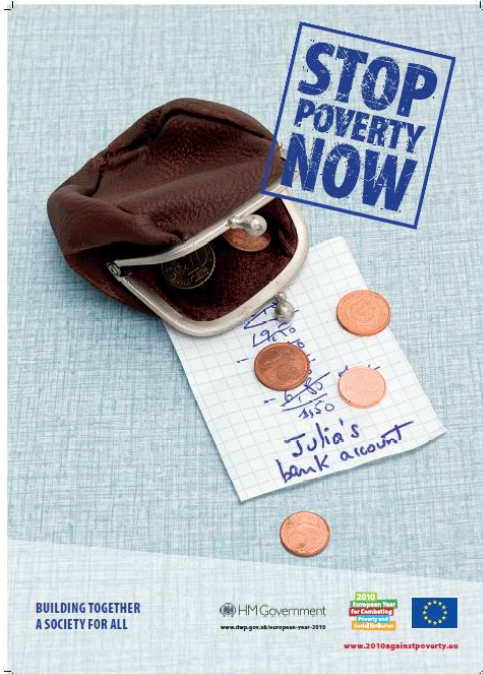
Figure 3
Poster of
European Year of combating poverty and social exclusion (2010)
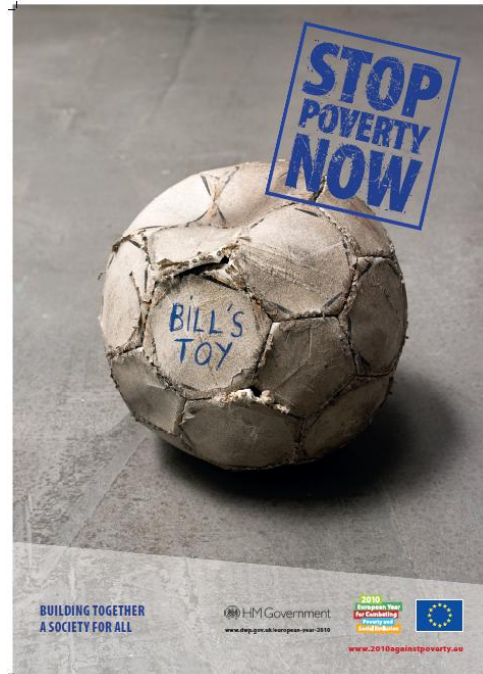

Figure 4
Poster of
European Year of combating poverty and social exclusion (2010)

Figure 5
Poster of
European Year of combating poverty and social exclusion (2010)

Figure 6
Poster of
European Year of combating poverty and social exclusion (2010)

Figure 7
Poster of
European Year of combating poverty and social exclusion (2010)

Figure 8
Poster of
European Year of combating poverty and social exclusion (2010)

Figure 9
Poster of
European Year of volunteering (2011)

Figure 10
Poster of
European Year of active aging and solidarity between generations (2012)

The Interpretative Micro-Level Analysis of EY Issues

Each participant (person or object), visually framed through iconic, indexical or symbolic images, is used in the representation of the European issues either to "design a social action" (Kress, van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 45) or "to design social constructs" (*ibid.*, p. 79).

The interpretation that I will provide for the participants framing EY issues will take into account four visual processes mentioned by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006):

-   (1) *transactional processes*: relate participants in terms of a transactional structure (social actions) visually represented by vectorial patterns;
-   (2) *classificational processes*: relate participants in terms of a kind of relation, a taxonomy (groups, communities);
-   (3) *analytical processes*: relate participants in terms of a part-whole structure.
-   (4) *symbolic processes*: participants whose meaning is established through a conventional relation with an abstract concept.

Table 3 illustrates the salience of the four processes visually embedded in the three European Years' issues:

European Years' official posters				
	2010 EY	2011 EY	2012 EY	Total
Transactional processes	0	0	9	**9 (24%)**
Classificational processes	0	2	1	**3 (8%)**
Analytical processes	6	18	0	**24 (65%)**
Symbolic processes	0	0	1	**1 (3%)**
	6 (16%)	**20 (54%)**	**11 (30%)**	**37 (100%)**

Table 3 – The salience of social semiotic processes in European Years' official posters

As it can be observed in Table 3, analytical processes are the most salient visual processes (65%) in the EY posters and they prevail in the visual representations of EY for combating poverty and social exclusion (n=6) and of EY of volunteering (n=18). The salience of analytical processes in the framing of European issues lies on the part-whole structure that prevails in the visual composition of the 2011 EY poster: the heads of European citizens (parts) for their bodies (whole).

Unlike the previous two years, 2012 EY lays a visual focus on transactional processes (24%), highlighting some social practices that European citizens may get involved into.

Poverty (Figure 3-6) is visually framed through analytical processes (Table 4) that imply a twofold flow: the objects (wallet + coins, ball, bed, bread + tin) of four participants (Julia, Bill, Hugo, Erica) become carriers of some attributes which signify poverty.

Iconic images	Different objects: wallet + coins, ball, bed, bread + tin
	Implicit visual participants: Julia, Bill, Hugo, Erica
Indexical images	Indexicality of poverty through their attributes [shabbiness], [scarcity]
	Instances of personal exclusion & stirring awareness

Table 4 - 2010 EY – Poverty – analytical processes

The names of the four human participants imply an inclusion process through some referents from real life. Julia's bank account, Bill's toy, Hugo's bed, Erica's menu are real instances of some implicit social practices: be economical, playing, sleeping, eating.

Involvement (Fig.6-7) is visually framed through explicit objects (pen and colors) of two implicit participants: a journalist and a painter. These two working instruments become indexical signs of their creation and instances of a creative contribution to the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Volunteering (Figure 9) is represented through a blending of analytical processes and classificational processes. Unlike the previous year where the inclusion was performed through faceless referents bearing names, the 2011 EY focuses on an inclusion based on different attributes (gender, age, race) which may constitute identification traits for every European citizen. This identification is formed of a cognitive flow from iconic images to indexical images:

- iconic images – heads – analytical processes: part-whole of a body;
- indexical images – (1) Indexicality of volunteering through different features ([gender], [age], [race]) – classificational processes of different types of volunteers; (2) Instances of diversity, equality and commitment (9 men + 9 women)

Active aging and solidarity between generations (Figure 10) is visually framed through transactional processes whose main Actors are old people performing actions which are the visual embodiments of the 2012 EY slogan "Never too old … to be young at heart". There are depicted two types of social practices:

- in the foreground, an old lady playing and singing in a music band, the interaction being with an implicit audience;

- in the right-hand corner, four instances of guiding the young generation, painting a wall, diving, singing, the interaction being with an explicit audience (young people and children).

Unlike the previous posters, the 2012 EY poster is verbally and visually built on binary oppositions (old versus young), old people helping young people or behaving as if they were young. It is exactly this behavior which can be coded as belonging to a symbolic process. The five instances of the same old lady performing in a band constitute a classificational process and at the same time a symbolic process since they are based on a pictorial metaphor with one pictorially present term (Forceville, 1996). The secondary subject (source concept – young women singing and playing in the music band) which should have been perceived in the visual composition (2012 EY poster) is totally replaced by the primary subject (target concept, the old lady singing and playing in the music band). This secondary subject (young women) projects onto the perceived element (old woman) some concept, such as dynamism, force, and lack of social stereotype (only young people are capable of performing in a band).

The Critical Macro-Level Analysis of EY Issues

This level of analysis will focus on two aspects:
(a) the power relations established at the visual narrative level;
(b) the critical reflections about the value basis and the usefulness of the three European Years' issues (poverty & social exclusions, volunteering, active aging & solidarity between generations) within a European context.

   (a) Unlike structural semiotics, social semiotics provides meaning to power (see 2.1.). The visual representations of the three EY issues at the European level showed a visual shift from a centre focused on European high officials towards two embodiments of the margin:
- on the one hand, the generic European citizen whom each of us can identify with;
- on the other hand, the specific European citizen, bearing names, who share his/ her experience and who become arguments of authority. This process of sharing one's experience constitutes the main visual strategy of the shift from the centre towards the margins.

The power of European Union and of the European bodies in charge with the promotion of European Years upon the member states is obvious at the visual level as well. The Visual Guidelines of each European Year's communication toolboxes provide specific comments on the position of the EU and EY logos and of the national bodies' logos. This imposed inclusion of identity signs of the social actors within the visual composition of posters and videos is a discursive means of authority and of ownership. In the visual distribution of the EY, EU, and MS logos, the 2010, 2011, and 2012 EY logo is always the last one in the distribution line, being placed on the right-hand bottom position, thus being the last visual item to be remembered. Another instance of EY's power over the member states implies a preserving of the visual composition for member states' promotional materials but a recontextualization of the verbal text into each MS language (for example, 2011 EY – Volunteering! Make a difference! – Oferă-te voluntar! Schimbă ceva!; 2012 EY – Never too old … to be young at heart → Nu e niciodată

prea târziu … să ne păstrăm spiritul tânăr). This strategy highlights the fact that images have a universal persuasive effect whereas the verbal message should be translated in order to be mentally grasped.

(b) The visual framings of poverty, social exclusion, volunteering, active aging and solidarity between generations highlight some sensitive issues that are common to all European citizens. The implementation of each European Year is supported by Eurobarometers and Eurostats which constitute authority signs foregrounding this selection. Starting from the values for volunteering identified by Pro Vobis, I consider that these three European issues, apparently different, have in common the following values:

- *social value*. The framing of poverty & social exclusion, volunteering, active aging & solidarity between generations are a means of stirring one's awareness towards the other. The numbers provided in the Eurobarometers and Eurostats (eg. 17% of EU citizens have such limited resources that they cannot afford the basics; in Romania, 23% of the population is at risk of poverty; at the beginning of 2010, there were 87 million people aged 65) constitute powerful arguments for focusing on the margins (the anonymous European citizens). The involvement in different social practices specific to European issues develop certain social skills, such as solidarity, compassion, trust, tolerance, civic spirit, and social responsibility.

- *social capital creator value*. The visual framings of the European issues clearly highlighted the development of communities, of networking among volunteers. Helping, the key concept, of all the three European issues actually implies a social actor/ social actors who directs/ direct his/ her actions towards some goals/ beneficiaries.

- *educational value.* The awareness of the existence of such sensitive issues across Europe should have a double impact: on the one hand, the national and European organizations should learn about the importance of the public policies they release, and on the other hand, the common European citizens involving in different actions specific to these European issues are provided with practical experiences which might serve at their workplaces.

- *economic value*. Quantifying and evaluating the three European issues at the national level are the final implementation steps within these awareness campaigns. The Eurobarometer (no.73) shows that 20% of the Romanian respondents acknowledged taking part in volunteering activities, the economic value of 96 millions of volunteering hours rising to 90 million Euro (http://issuu.com/pro_vobis/docs).

Conclusions

Annual issues constitute a means through which European Years can be interpreted as social practices of avoiding European Union from being regarded as a centre. The inclusion of the margins (European citizens as indexical signs of member states) within the visual composition of promotional materials has been a solution.

The findings of the analysis provided to the 2010, 2011, 2012 EY posters are the following:
- a salience of iconic images (63%) in promotional posters. These framing devices highlight a representation of reality through slices of life, specific to particular or generic European citizens.
- a salience of analytical and transactional visual processes. This dominance through identification and guiding behaviors visually designs the social actions that European citizens are and should be involved into, thus turning them into active social actors.

Annex 1

Thematic fields	European Years
Business	1983 - European Year of SMEs and the Craft Industry
	2006 - European Year of Workers' Mobility
Culture	1985 - European Year of Music
	1988 - European Year of Cinema and Television
	2008 - European Year of Intercultural Dialogue
Discrimination	1984 - European Year for a People's Europe
	1993 - European Year of the Elderly and of Solidarity between Generations
	1997 - European Year against Racism and Xenophobia
	1998 - European Year of Local and Regional Democracy
	1999 - European Year of Action to Combat Violence Against Women
	2003 - European Year of People with Disabilities
	2007 - European Year of Equal Opportunities for All
	2010 - European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion
	2011 - European Year of Volunteering
	2012 - European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations
Education	1996 - European Year of Lifelong Learning
	2001 - European Year of Languages
	2004 - European Year of Education through Sport
	2005 - European Year of Citizenship through Education
	2009 - European Year of Creativity and Innovation
Environment	1987 - European Year of the Environment
	1990 – European Year of Tourism
Health	1989 - European Year of Information on Cancer
	1992 - European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work
	1994 - European Year of Nutrition and Health
Safety	1986 - European Year of Road Safety
	1995 - European Year of Road Safety and Young Drivers

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Acknowledgments

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