

Eurovision Song Contest: Between Symbolism of European Unity and a Vision of the Wild, Wild East

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In its size and popularity, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) rivals the European soccer cup and represents one of the major media spectacles in contemporary Europe. In this annual contest, members of the European Broadcasting Network (submitted by national TV stations) compete “in terms of burning desire, true love, kitsch and spectacular exuberance” for the best European song.² Yet, is Eurovision just a TV spectacle for “appeasing the masses; is it a venue for marketing institutional political ideas; or are we, as a matter of fact, witnessing a new Europe in the making?”³ Although ESC is officially not supposed to be a political event, its increasing popularity over the past fifty years has made it into more than just an annual TV entertainment event. Since its very foundation and for nearly a half of the century, EUROVISION has been continuously expanding across Europe and promoting its political vision through the equivalent unity of broadcasting services. Performances by national representatives in the song contest suggest that nationhood is not only communicated through the singers, songs, costumes and language, the notion of “Europeanness” can also be negotiated through similarities and differences between nations, evidently dependent on their view of European identity. This yearly negotiation of the European self-consciousness through Eurovision reveals various tensions in contemporary European politics, reflecting the complexities of European transition toward a more uniform coexistence of multiple national states (Figure 1).

Although it is predominantly perceived as a media spectacle, the political connotations of the Eurovision Song Contest far outweigh the entertainment impact for the billions of its faithful viewers.⁴ In many ways, Eurovision mirrors the vision of the European Union, yet it precedes its political equivalent: its official debut was on May 24, 1956 in Lugano.⁵ Inspired by the San Remo Music Festival, the Eurovision song contest was initiated by the EUROVISION network. As an activity of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the network’s aim was to link both culturally and technically the different TV broadcasting services in Western Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.⁶ Despite the profit-making premise of the TV unity, EUROVISION network also started with

¹ Various ideas and research regarding the Eurovision Song Contest have been developed in collaboration with Tijana Vujošević. I have integrated parts of our draft text for this paper, in addition to my own research and ideas on Eurovision. I am grateful to Asja Mandić and Nadja Akšamija for their editorial help.

² Akšamija, Azra and Tijana Vujošević, “The War is not over for Latvia,” (Unpublished draft paper on the Eurovision Song Contest, May 2005).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ In the first Eurovision 1956, the participating nations were: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands and Switzerland.

⁶ Konrad M. Kressley, “Integrated Television in Europe: a note on the EUROVISION network,” *International Organization* 32.4 (1978): 1045.

some noble intentions. In light of the pioneering ideas for the European Union at the same time, the idea was to create a song contest as a “people-to-people” program for a future vast audience.⁷ The only condition for participating in the contest was the existence of a national television, and a paid membership in the EBU.⁸ The accessibility on the individual level was also made easy, as it involved minimal technology – all one needed was a TV. Aiming to eliminate costs imposed by geographical distances of its members, EUROVISION’s pioneers thus created a new noble vision of Europe, one that ignored its geographical and political reality, but employed technology in service of what they saw as a common interest.⁹ Referencing parallel political intentions for uniting Europe, the choice of the network’s name included two symbolically representative words, “Euro” and “vision.” While the prefix “Euro-” indicated that something was European, the notion of “vision” referred to an open-ended process, while also implying its future ambition. It is then not surprising that the Eurovision Song Contest, the EUROVISION’s most successful program, soon became stripped of its less symbolic name component, and became popularly just referred to as “Eurovision.”¹⁰

Yet, the outlooks on the impact of this program were controversial from the very beginning, from Pope Pius XII, who saw the potential of the “unity of nations” for diminishing barriers and prejudices, to the French Communist weekly *Radio Liberte*, which characterized it as a “new weapon for psychological warfare, aimed at uniting Europe” (Figure 2).¹¹ Just as the political goal of European unity was not easily achievable, the network’s goal of united TV Europe faced a series of obstacles throughout its history.¹² Instead of uniting Europe, the success of EUROVISION fragmented the continent, for it provoked the emergence of the INTERVISION network, the parallel broadcasting service of the Eastern European Bloc in the 1970s (Figure 3).¹³ While this Communist counterpart reflected the political circumstances of the Cold War era, its Intervision Song Contest might have also helped prevent the Eastern TV viewers from curiously sneaking behind “the other side of the Curtain.”¹⁴ When in the early 1990s the end of the Cold War era opened up the Eurovision stage to the new participants from the East to compete for the first time, the song contest was enriched with further dimensions.¹⁵ The increased attractiveness of Eurovision allowed for territorial

⁷ Ibid.,1046.

⁸ Having a national TV does not necessarily imply a territorial substance of a nation state in Eurovision.

⁹ Kressley, 1047.

¹⁰ From here on I will be referring the network with EUROVISION and the Eurovision Song Contest as “Eurovision.”

¹¹ And even if the Pope could not have imagined the EUROVISION’s contemporary outgrowth into a massive multi-media laboratory for production and reproduction of stereotypes of a supposed European citizen, Eurovision Song Contest still traces some noble original visions from its founding fathers. Some ESC winners actively engage their publicity for their political agenda and support of various charity organizations. See Kressley, 1046.

¹² Next to political barriers, the limits of the European cooperation in the network seem to be also defined by the economical premises based on the self-interest. The rapid technical development and expansion evoked internal organizational difficulties of EUROVISION and conditioned its decentralization in the 1970s.

¹³ Intervision Song Contest was held between 1977 and 1980.

¹⁴ “Intertel Intervision” <<http://www.transdiffusion.org/intertel/gallery/intervision/>> (5 December 2005).

¹⁵ Since 1993, EUROVISION network has been enlarged with participants from Eastern Europe.

“Eurovision Song Contest, Historical Milestones” <<http://www.eurovision.tv/english/history.htm>> (5 December 2005).

expansion of TV Europe beyond political boundaries of the continent.¹⁶ Israel's debut in 1973 and Morocco's in 1980, made Eurovision's endless openness obvious and its success a "transnational celebration."¹⁷ At the time when EUROVISION served over 300 million viewers and became the largest international TV network in the world,¹⁸ Italy's representative Toto Cotugno took the trophy in 1990 with his song "Insieme 1992: Unite, Unite Europe!" (Figure 4). This appeal seemed to be a victorious celebration of the long-term political goal promoted by the Eurovision.¹⁹

Although Eurovision has had many ups and downs throughout its history, its territorial expansion seems to capture an ongoing phenomenon. Yet, this is not the only dynamic aspect that reveals the political connotations of this song contest. Wining the competition entails the honorable hosting of the next "ritual" spectacle. Since it is always hosted by a new winner country, the Eurovision area moves each year; the attention of TV Europe is then frequently refocused to different cities and countries. Being in charge of the construction of the symbolic European Unity, Eurovision hosts are also responsible for creating a common space for the congregation of different nations. The design of a prestigious stage thus represents an important task for providing a spectacular culminating point for this yearly pilgrimage. The preparations for the event take place long ahead the competition, as they involve an invasion of performers, journalists, fans, and the masses of visitors. Moreover, the constantly shifting Eurovision centers create a dynamic experience of Europe through this movement. While various advertising campaigns in mass media and the Internet aim for the largest possible tourist impact, they also aim to reflect the social and cultural uniqueness of the host to the rest of Europe. During the contest, the short video clips introduce individual participants before their performance, presenting them in various "typical" situations. Although these situations often reinforce stereotypes, they also reflect the idealistic interaction of the host and other participating countries.

Obviously, the Eurovision Song Contest involves knowledge about Europe and implies the existence of certain selection criteria for self-representation among the participants. As a "festival of nations," Eurovision allows the different countries to demonstrate how they are similar, yet different from each other. Within the contest's advertisement campaigns, significant architectural examples and various cultural metaphors – food, language, and customs – advertise the nations by highlighting their distinguished traditions and thus establish a link to their claimed historical origins. Consequently, the knowledge of Europe is produced and re-produced from year to year. The self-representation of nations takes on a more explicit expression in the actual song contest and the way it is carried out by the individual performers. Since the singers and their songs are the main vehicle that communicates a particular national identity, the choice of a performer worthy of national representation is the first important decision. To determine who this is, each country usually organizes a domestic Eurovision Song Contest with the purpose of selecting a representative from a wide range of local talents.

¹⁶ Next to political barriers, the limits of the European cooperation in the network seem to be also defined by the economical premises - the self-interest represents another coin side of Eurovision.

¹⁷ Akšamija and Vujošević

¹⁸ Yet the idea of a TV exchange started rather small, when it was officially initiated by Switzerland and Belgium in the early 50s, "little neutral" countries with inadequate domestic media recourses and a desire for more. See Kressley, 1046.

¹⁹ Akšamija and Vujošević

Frequently, the winning performers do not originate from the country they are chosen to represent. Some countries even import internationally established pop-stars with the hopes that their fame will improve a nation's chances for winning.²⁰ Obviously, the identification with a national hero does not necessarily involve the matching national origin or citizenship. In fact, such identification and "subsequent replacement by other nationals" is a common practice. This strategy of representation is a widely spread phenomenon among contemporary European soccer clubs as well.²¹ What European Union did for European soccer when it "removed restrictions of nationality of players comprising a given team," Eurovision did for contemporary pop-culture. By blending the transnational bodies and international superstars and multicultural performers into a particular national identification, Eurovision springs these relations from national to European, and even global, which encourages the rethinking of the very idea of citizenship.

The level of communication of a particular national identity in relation to its European self-consciousness is also dependent on the choice of the song, the artist, the costume, and the language. The national song is a medium that reconciles how certain indigenous national and cultural components are merged with the wider European pop culture.²² A modernized version of folk music may seem best suitable to translate tradition into the contemporary context and "mobilize national sentiments."²³ However, exclusive cultural specificity may hinder a song from winning over a wider European audience, with negative consequences apparent during the final voting. Thus, the reflection of the "current taste of a nation's mass entertainment industry"²⁴ should not be limited only to national identification. Finding the appropriate hybrid of native and foreign elements is one of the key ingredients for a successful Eurovision song. A scandalous performance, however, can troubleshoot the eventual failure of finding the balance between the national and "European" characteristics. Therefore, nationhood in Eurovision is often carried out through outrageous choreographies, contemptible costumes, and shocking sexual identities that can be "represented by a gay, transsexual, transvestite, groupie, abandoned bride, Carpathian warriors, underage starlets, or combination thereof"(Figure 5).²⁵ Yet, scandalous performances in Eurovision do face limits, even though they guarantee to catch the attention of the jurors. The success of Dana International, for instance, a transvestite from Israel who won the Eurovision contest in 1998, spotted the intricate sexual geographies in Eurovision (Figure 6).²⁶ Her pioneering achievement initiated the acceptance of other sexually divisive entrances, yet the idea of a transvestite becoming a symbol of national pride provoked many controversies in Israel. With her being crowned and de-crowned simultaneously illustrated the biases present in the Eurovision's sexual politics.²⁷ Shedding light on the

²⁰ For instance the Canadian star Celine Dion represented Switzerland in 1988.

²¹ Borneman and Fowler, 509.

²² Gad Yair, "Unite Unite-Europe – The Political and Cultural Structures of Europe as Reflected in the Eurovision Song Contest," *Social Networks* 17. 2 (1995): 149.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Akšamija and Vujošević

²⁶ By sexual geographies I refer to different administrative regulations of bodily practices across the European continent.

²⁷ John Borneman and Nick Fowler, "Europanization," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 505.

diffusion of the conflict between apparently national and supranational norms in Eurovision, Dana International revealed the struggle between the religious and secular authorities in Israel.²⁸

Similarly, the choice of language represents an intricate concern. While singing in English may reach broader audiences, dismissing national language can be perceived as unpatriotic. Some performers settle for a compromise, singing partly in both languages, or even inventing a new one. While the invention of a new language may seem to represent an “elixir that could solve the problems of European polyglotism,” it often lacks understandability and can also hinder the comprehension of the message.²⁹ Finally, the combination the national language that symbolizes an inherited cultural treasure, with an additional language that addresses the audience on a wider European scale, seems to be an optimal way out of such communication barriers. Nevertheless, the choice of the second language imposes yet another difficult decision. According to a statistical study by Gad Yair, an Israeli sociologist who analyzed the alliances within the Eurovision’s voting behavior, the language issue seems to condition patterns of voting.³⁰ Although matching language does seem to be one of the determining factors in these voting-clique formations, it does not necessarily guarantee one a better chance for winning.³¹ While English as a second language predominates in the European Union, it is in competition with German and French. In addition, Russian ties the communication between former countries of the Soviet Union; similarly, Arabic links North African and Middle Eastern participants. While diglossia already prevails in European educational institutions, a competition for linguistic dominance still represents an ongoing process that can be endlessly explored and tested in the world of Eurovision.

Reflecting more than just mutual “likes and dislikes”, Eurovision is not only reliant on a national taste and cultural proficiency, but also on the cultural match between the “evaluator and the evaluated.”³² Reading the song contest as a symbol of European unity, Gad Yair’s analysis of Eurovision’s voting system conversely reveals a three-bloc structure of alliances, informed by different sentiments and interests (Figure 7).³³ Yair also produced an algorithmical spatial map representing the nations in terms of their allocating and receiving points, portraying the so-called “islands of taste” in Europe (Figure 8).³⁴ The result of this study shows that the countries with “universal” taste have

²⁸ In context of their treatise on “Europeanization,” Jan Borneman and Nick Fowler see such controversies around the regulation of bodily practices as a “central domain for negotiating and reconfiguring popular authority in the context of Europeanization and globalization.” See Borneman and Fowler, 506.

²⁹ Borneman and Fowler, 499.

³⁰ Yair, 154.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 149.

³³ “The Western Bloc can be viewed as a coalition based on historical and political interests. The Northern Bloc draws its solidarity from common cultural and primordial linguistic codes. The loosely reciprocating Mediterranean Bloc probably achieves its unstable alliance from cultural experiences with the sea.” Yair, 160. In the politics of taste, the Western Bloc is dominating through its solidarity, while the Mediterranean Bloc seems to form a strong clique in terms of a shared cultural spirit, yet it is the most diffuse of the three. Ibid., 159-160.

³⁴ Ibid, 157-160.

marginalized positions.³⁵ Small countries have a high possibility of winning, but the concept of “equal opportunities” can not be sustained.³⁶

Nations who do not command entry into a clique, and whose voting behavior tends to be universal, have few chances of winning. Thus, their fairness is their weakness. Their objectivity becomes their major hindrance to success.³⁷

Such hostile fragmentation in the Eurovision’s voting pattern seems to have reversed the noble ideas of the Eurovision’s founding fathers and their “Olympic values”³⁸ with a resulting new motto: “NOT ONLY PARTICIPATING, BUT ALSOWINNING!”

However, Yair’s study covered Eurovision voting statistics only for the period from 1975 to 1992. While a more recent visualization of contemporary political alliances in Eurovision still needs to be made, it can be assumed that the opening up of the song contest to Eastern Europe in the early 1990s further added to this complexity. As witnessed through the recent entries from Western Europe and the success of the Eastern newcomers, Eurovision’s expansion initiated a shift of interest for the contest from the West to the East.³⁹ In Western Europe, Eurovision seems to gain more popularity only in sub-cultural spheres. For instance, each year the Austrian public Radio FM4 promotes a parody show of Eurovision which is moderated by the comedians Stermann & Grisseemann. Eurovision’s sound is here substituted by the radio spoof, while the actual song contest is transmitted live and projected onto large scale panels in various public spaces across the country (Figure 9). The emerging Eurovision open-air parties have been continuously attracting wide masses of leftist Austrian youth and transforming urban parks into barbeque-drinking fiestas. In recent years, Stermann & Grisseemann have been promoting their own informal voting system, which led to linking the audiences of Austria and Germany. The popularity of this radio show then initialized the emergence of a new TV parody in Germany on the Pro7 TV channel, moderated by the star entertainer Stefan Raab. Both the Austrian and the German comedians challenged their luck in the actual Eurovision Song Contest. Stermann & Grisseemann’s entry was deprived of success by the expert jury decision for Manuel Ortega in 2002, while Stefan Raab made his way up to the international event and represented Germany in 2000 with the song “Wadde Hadde Dudde Da?” (Figure 10). While his song title implies a baby-talk of the phrase “What do you have there?” it also contemplates children’s discovery of their sexuality. Singing this message in an Elvis costume, Germany’s representative reached the fifth place in the final rating, despite its ironic position.

While Western European representatives tend to caricature the Eurovision, the song contest evokes a diametrically-opposed meaning for Eastern Europeans. It allows the EU newcomers and prospective countries to negotiate not only what they are, but also what they want or could be.⁴⁰ Thus, the participation and the winning in the Eurovision contest represent an opportunity to draw attention to one’s position as well their role

³⁵ Ibid., 158.

³⁶ Ibid., 160.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ By “Olympic values” I refer to its motto: “It is important to participate, not to win.”

³⁹ The Eastern European success in winning indicates that the ESC’s popularity has shifted from West to East. “Eurovision Song Contest” < <http://www.eurovision.tv/english/history.htm> > (5 December 2005).

⁴⁰ Akšamija and Vujošević

within the current expansion of the European Union.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the new Eurovision countries seem to articulate their statements in various ways. For instance, the highly sexualized performance of the Bosnian gay singer Deen in 2004 and his three female and sparsely dressed background dancers, were rather surprising given the fact that he came from a Muslim background as well as a homophobic society (Figure 11). The twenty-three year old Fuad Backović (Deen) came from Sarajevo, from a politically prominent Muslim family -- this made his homosexual coming out even more controversial. Whether Deen actually reflected the Bosnian openness towards homosexuality is questionable, but it certainly communicated the current hegemonies present in Bosnia.⁴² Just as his artistic name signified “foreignness,” his song “In the Disco” performed in English and while he wore Versace sun-glasses, reflected Deen’s self-westernizing attempt. Ultimately, his entry became more than just a “zeal for making a performance outrageous enough to win,” but rather a desire to identify with Europe.⁴³ At the same Eurovision contest, Željko Joksimović represented Serbia and Montenegro very differently from his neighbor. His song “Lane Moje” (“Oh, My Fawn”), performed in Serbian, almost triumphed at the song contest, as he reached the second place in the final scoring (Figure 12). Whether Željko’s choice to sing in his native language is related to national sentiments or Serbia’s tense relationship with the rest of Europe is debatable. However, as Serbian national hero of Eurovision, his name made its way into the flourishing businesses of sports betting and introduced Eurovision into the country’s present survival economy.

Significantly, the winner of the 2004 song contest, the Ukrainian singer Ruslana, championed with an entry very different from the ones that aimed to identify with Europe or only confirm their national and cultural identity. Ruslana’s energetic performance of the song “Wild Dances” involved various sexual implications that were occasionally interrupted by fire effects (Figure 13). Her unique style was characterized as a mix of ancient rhythms and mystical Balkan sounds, self-labeled on her homepage as “ethno-hard-dance”:

On the cover there is a wild Amazon in a mystical light, inside - there is a wild fantasy from the mixes of styles. Album is full of exotic sounds of "trembitas" (ancient gusle instruments) and distortion-guitars, incendiary wild trumpets and hundred ethnic military drums, wild shouts and ancient rhythms.⁴⁴

Yet, Ruslana’s performance was not only interesting for its entertaining aspects and its possible impact on her fans, but also for her national self-representation of Ukraine. Her sexy militancy obviously appropriated the representation of the warrior princess Xena from the recent Hollywood series (Figure 14). Yet, different from her model, Ruslana was not only provisionally “wild,” for she literally shared a cage with wolves during her video shooting. Thus, her image goes beyond the ancient references or staged studio production: Ruslana is truly a modern warrior (Figure 15). As a woman, she embodies

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Given the novel possibility of tele-voting, a viewer-based voting via SMS, Bosnia was one of the rare countries still selecting its representative through the traditional jury system. As Deen was the only candidate in the selection, Bosnia had a difficult task to choose only one of his five proposed songs.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Ruslana’s Homepage” <<http://www.ruslana.com.ua/>> (5 December 2005).

the notion of the energetic, sexy, and exotic Eastern European *femme fatale*. As a soldier, she is an influential activist, who participated in the recent Ukrainian Orange Revolution - not only in service of the construction of her image through media.⁴⁵ Drawing her inspiration from mysterious Carpathian cultures and the musical heritage of the Balkans, as much as from the Hollywood stereotypes and Britney Spears, Ruslana made a proposal for rethinking the notion of “Europeanness,” with supposing roots in the forests of the Carpathian Mountains. Introducing new elements of originality into Eurovision’s system of self-representation, Ruslana’s proposal thus questioned the origins of Europe, and therefore added to the idea of Europe’s new elements – those of Eastern Europe.

Yet, what can Ruslana’s militant jargon tell us about the biases that influence contemporary “singing arenas“of Eurovision?⁴⁶ The implied European rebirth through neo-primitivism has possible historical roots in *Zenitism*, an Eastern European avant-garde movement from the inter-war period.⁴⁷ The *Zenitist Manifesto* entitled “Man and Art,”⁴⁸ written by Ljubomir Micić in 1921, introduced the concept of the “barbarogenius,” a human ideal of a Balkan *Übermensch*, a “metaphorical figure”⁴⁹ to serve as “the guard against the West!” and its polluting influences (Figure 16).⁵⁰ Ruslana’s heroism shares similar characteristics with the spiritually-inspired defensive militarism of the *zenitist* “barbarogenius.” Conversely, this “*Übermensch* “glorifies the national spirit and spiritual supremacy” of the East.⁵¹ Eclectically embodying various paradoxes of the “pro-Western and the anti-Western, the modern and the anti-European,” the concept of the “barbarogenius” reflects the controversies of the intellectual combat between the Eastern and the Western Europe from an art-historical perspective.⁵² Paradoxically, the Eastern European claims to European primacy are today coupled with their geographical position on the edge of the European Union, yet within the boundaries of the European continent.⁵³ Perhaps it is exactly this “laminal status,”⁵⁴ that is being the “outsider within,” that causes tensions of their belonging to Europe, as rendered by the

⁴⁵ Orange Revolution in 2004 and 2005 involved a series of protests and political events in Ukraine responding to the country’s corruption.

⁴⁶ Yair, 160.

⁴⁷ *Zenitism* was first launched by Ljubomir Micić, a Serb from Croatia, who established the review *Zenit*. The review was first established in Zagreb (1921-1924) and then in Belgrade (1924-1926). Embodying the intellectual spirit of the avant-garde, *zenitism* refers to the peak of the sun in zenith and corresponds to an overlap of “expressionist rhetoric and constructivist aesthetics.” See Dubravka Djurić, “Concrete and Visual Poetry in the Avant-garde and Neo-avant-garde,” in *Impossible Histories: Historic Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991*, eds. Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 68.

⁴⁸ The Manifesto was originally published as “Manifest Zentizma,” in *Zenit* 1 (1921).

⁴⁹ Nevena Daković, “Yugoslav Avant-garde Film 1920-1990,” in *Impossible Histories: Historic Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991*, eds. Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003): 474.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Daković, 475.

⁵¹ Nevena Daković interprets Micić’s appeal for the salvation of the West as a call for the *balkanization* of Europe and: “...spreading this raw, primitive energy that would revive and allow the recovery of the rest of the world. The *zenitists* believe that “the religion of thought and emotions is born in the Southeast.” Daković, 474-475.

⁵² Djurić, 68.

⁵³ K.E. Fleming, “Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan historiography.” *American Historical Review* 105.4 (2000): 1231.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1232.

East-West hybrid “superhero” Ruslana. How far her sexualized performance will contribute to the stereotypes of Ukraine probably does not present a threat. Yet, Ruslana’s proposal for the “Wild, Wild East,” a mysterious land of forests, in which the unified Europe could explore its possible origins, is certainly very seductive.

In representing Ukraine as a nation state, Ruslana’s performance raises important questions of how nationhood is defined, redefined, and reaffirmed through Eurovision. Controversial performers, extravagant costumes, scandalous sexual identities, and the choice of language may be the strategic means to express nationhood in the song contest. Nevertheless, the success of national self-representation is dependent on the appropriate mix of national and trans-national characteristics. Then, the spectacle of Eurovision involves the production and reproduction of knowledge of Europe with enrichment through mutual cultural exchange. Yet, the echo in Eurovision’s voting system often reveals political alliances and indicates the tensions between the national versus European self-identification. However, if hostility, unfairness, and interest-oriented alliances, as revealed in Gad Yair’s analysis, represent secrets to success in Eurovision, the question of how the new Eastern European participants will be challenging Eurovision in the future should be carefully considered. While Eurovision cannot be taken as a “reality show” of Europe, it may serve as a testing ground for examining the effect of equivalent non-symmetrical relations on the politics of the European Union.⁵⁵ When the influx of Eastern European newcomers marked the shift of interests for Eurovision from West to East, it also redefined the negotiations of “Europeanness.” Competing for the “honor of dominating the geo-strategic space of the pan-European Utopia of a hyper-spectacle,” the new participants also brought new elements for defining European identity.⁵⁶ As shown through the different performances during the recent song contests, a nation’s belonging to Europe can be expressed through its identifying with existing popular “European” tastes, or by identifying Europe with new elements of origin and originality. Signalizing their active position in shaping contemporary European self-consciousness, Eastern European participants reversed the idea of the European Union expansion as perceived only towards the East. Thus, the project of restructuring the fragmented European society toward the European Union renders its dynamic structure of “unstable territories and an unpredictable future.”⁵⁷ In this transition, Europe is already actively influenced by “the others,” from within.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Yair, 160.

⁵⁶ Akšamija and Vujošević.

⁵⁷ Kyong Park, “Europe Lost and Found” (Multidisciplinary research project, an initiative by Centrala: Foundation for Future Cities, 2005).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

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Figure 1: Contemporary map of European Union

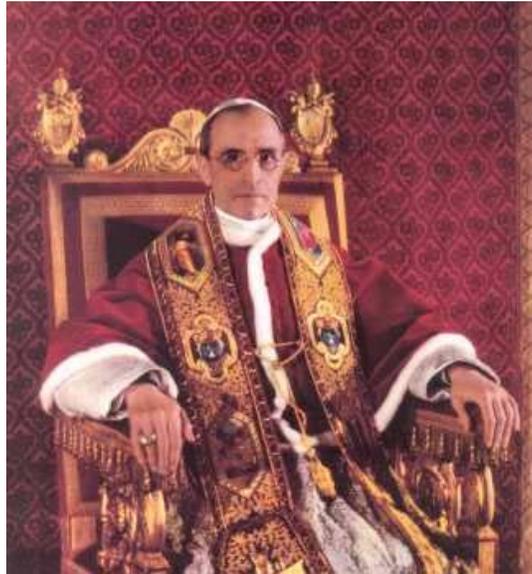


Figure 2: Pope Pius XII and the French Communist weekly *Radio Liberté*



Figure 3: Screen shots of the Intervision Song Contest



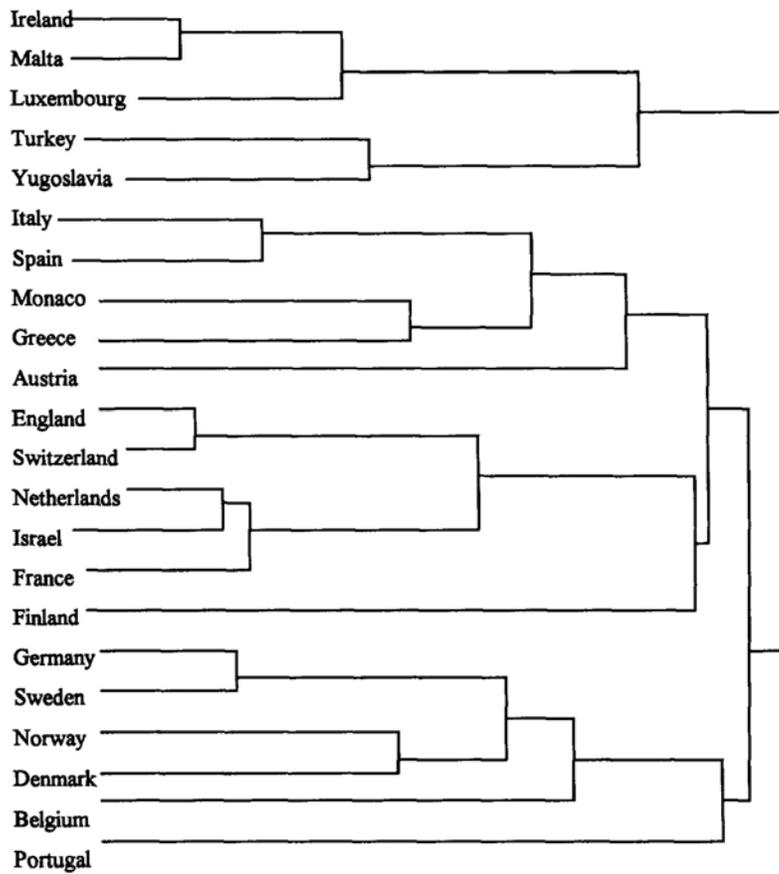
Figure 4: Toto Cotugno, Eurovision of 1990 in Zagreb



Figure 5: Examples of sexual identities in Eurovision



Figure 6: Dana International representing Israel in Eurovision 1998



Average points received and number of victories by Bloc

Bloc	Average points	Victories ^a
Western	4.09	12
Northern	2.72	5
Mediterranean	2.67	2
Isolates	1.62	0

Figure 7: Gad Yair's diagram of cohesion cluster analysis in Eurovision's voting patterns 1975-1992 showing the three Bloc structure of alliances.

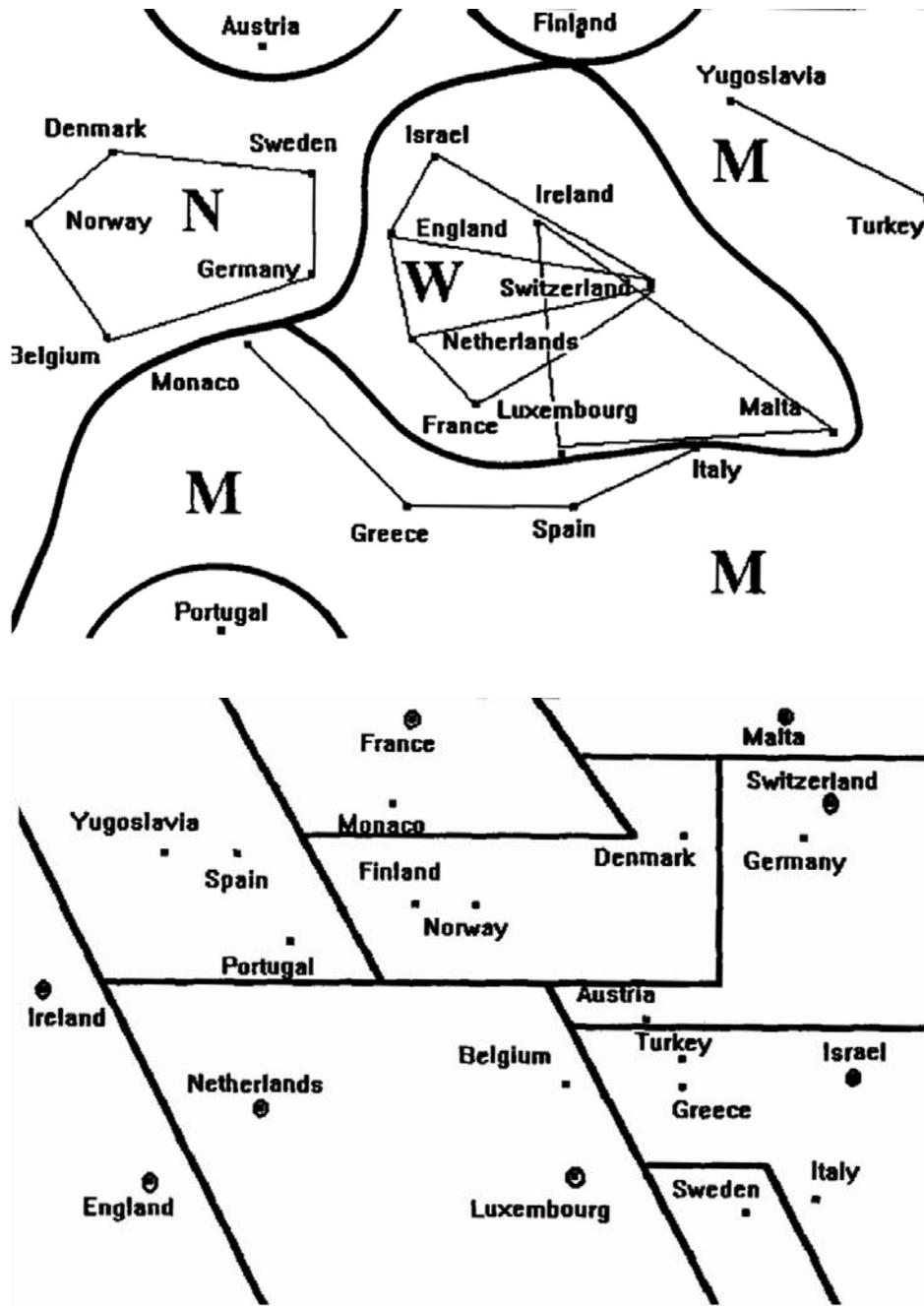


Figure 8: The politics of taste: Gad Yair's spatial map of cohesion of cliques (top) and the MDS analysis of voting behavior revealing cultural islands of taste (bottom, Western Bloc nations are circled)



Figure 9: Austrian comedians Stermann & Grisseemann

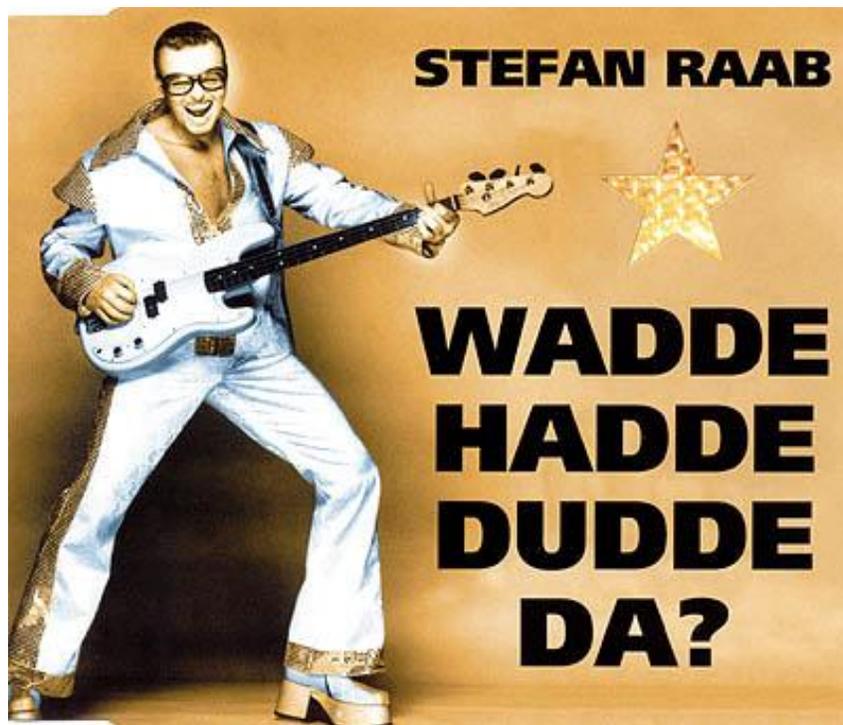


Figure 10: German comedian Stefan Raab

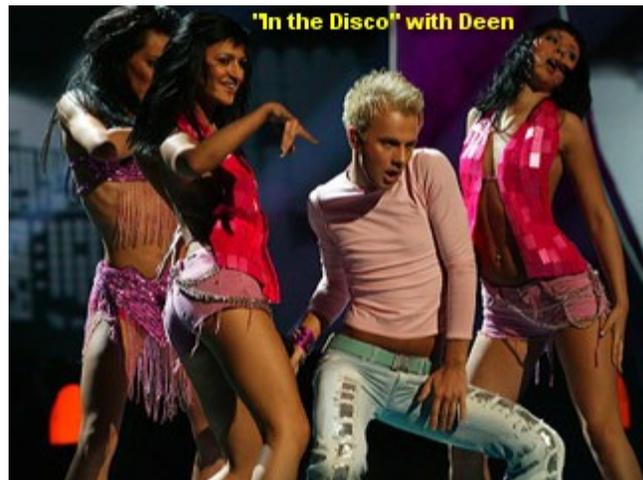
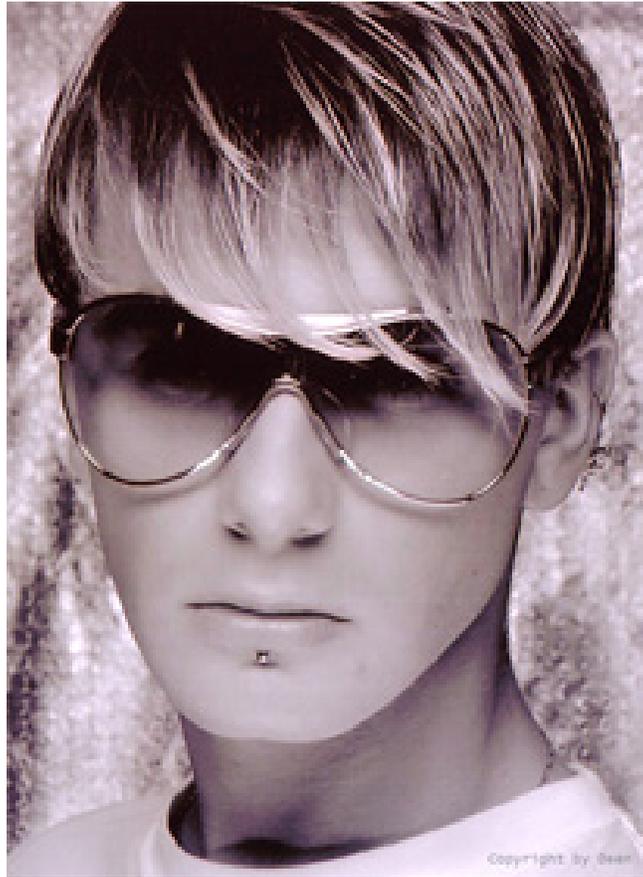


Figure 11: Bosnian representative Deen in Eurovision 2004

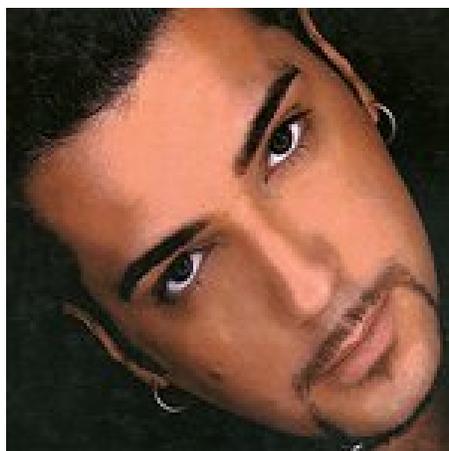


Figure 12: Željko Joksimović represented Serbia and Montenegro in Eurovision 2004



Figure 13: Performance of the Ukrainian singer Ruslana, the winner of Eurovision 2004

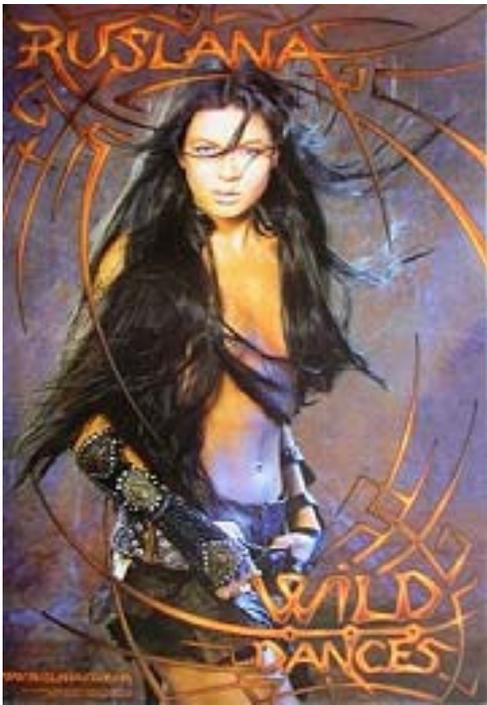


Figure 14: Ruslana and the warrior princess Xena



Figure 15: Ruslana sharing the cage with wolfs



Figure 16: Issues of the magazine *Zenit*