

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the Slovak Republic



A Bakamo Public  **Project for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**

- 2019 -



Context to the Slovak Discussion on Migration

- The Slovak Republic has been a member of the European Union since 2004. The population in 2015 was 5,421,349, and the **number of refugees is one of the lowest in the EU** (0.02%).*
- Migration-related public social media posts in Slovakia in one year consists of ~87,000 posts. Compared to population size, **the Slovak conversation on migration is one of the smallest in the EU**.
- The prime minister's office was held by Robert Fico until March 2018, when he was succeeded by **Peter Pellegrini**. Both politicians represent the **social democratic** party 'Direction' (Smer-SD).
- Although the number of migrants in Slovakia is extremely low, the country generally expresses an anti-immigration stance. **The Slovak government filed a lawsuit in 2015 challenging the European Union's planned quota system.**



*Source: europarl.europa.eu

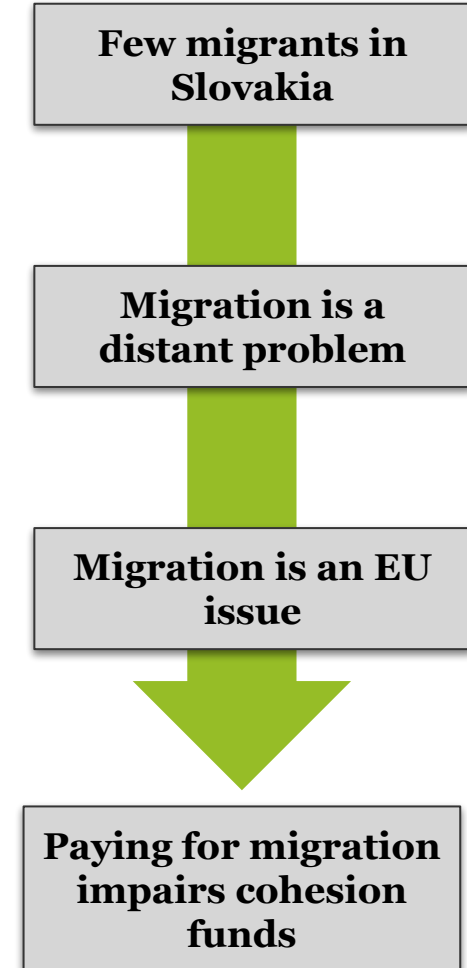


Migration is the EU's Problem, Not Slovakia's

The number of migrants is one of the lowest in Slovakia, where the migration crisis is perceived as a distant problem. Most people express sympathy towards migrants' suffering based on the Christian value of compassion, but the migration agenda also gave more exposure to the rising far-right in the country.

Instead of a problem with direct local implications, most Slovaks perceive migration as a challenge for the European Union. On the one hand, people call for strengthened protection of the EU's external borders, but on the other hand there is a strong opposition towards the European initiative of refugee relocation. In this sense, the EU is perceived to force an external problem on the country.

In the meantime, some Slovaks claim that with the increasing EU-level costs of migration there is a financial zero-sum game between migrants and citizens of Central- and Eastern-European member states who are eligible for Structural and Cohesion Funds.



How and where do Slovaks discuss migration in the social media space?



Size of Pan-European Narratives

Most Slovaks discuss the **humanitarian** aspect, both from the pro- and anti-migrant perspective (this is the highest share across Europe). Security appears in about one-fifth of public social media conversations, while the cultural and economic consequences of migration are rarely discussed.

Local Issues

The **European Union's** role and its' measures to tackle the migration crisis appear in all domains of the conversation. People look at the EU to strengthen its outer borders to raise security, and fear the decrease in member states' funding due to costs of migration.

EU & Domestic Politics

All domains of the Slovak conversation are **highly infused with references to other EU member states and international politicians**, which reflect that most Slovak people perceive the migration crisis as a distant problem.

Discussion Tone

Apart from a few, isolated exceptions, the conversation on migration in Slovakia is one of the **most reserved** in the European Union.

Conversation Channels

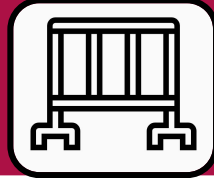
The majority of the conversation is triggered by **online news sites**, from both sides of the political spectrum.



Pan-European Narratives in the Slovak Context



In the humanitarian narrative many Slovaks express **compassion** towards migrants who face hardships. However, some people believe it is the **far right** who has the right tools to effectively handle the migration crisis.



The low number of refugees in Slovakia do not pose a direct security threat, thus **border protection** is the most desired tool to avoid crime perpetrated by migrants.



Although the cultural implications of migration are rarely discussed in Slovakia, individual **stories of successful integration** receive great exposure.

However, some people express their worry over the **unfavourable influence of Muslim culture in Europe**.



Albeit rarely discussed, some Slovaks consider **migration** as a potential **tool to tackle the demographic crisis** of low fertility rate in the country.

People also pay attention to **EU-level measures** to integrate migrants to local labour markets.



Direct cost of handling the migration crisis in Slovakia causes outrage, while many people fear that at a European level **the cost of migration is paid using EU cohesion funds**.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in Slovakia*



1.

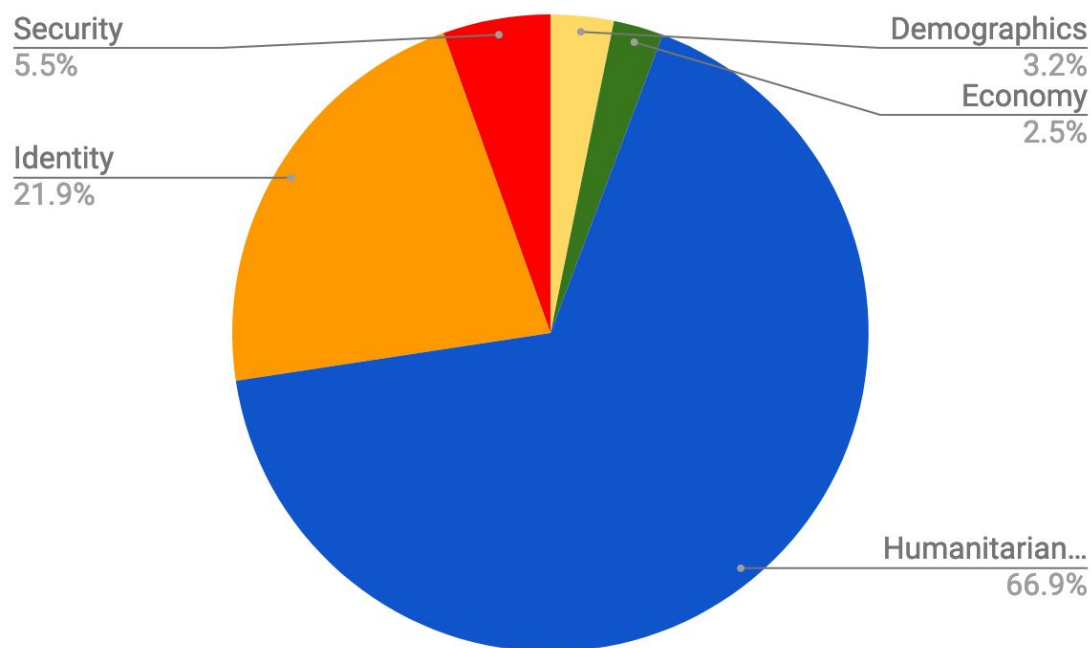


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Context of Slovak migration discourse

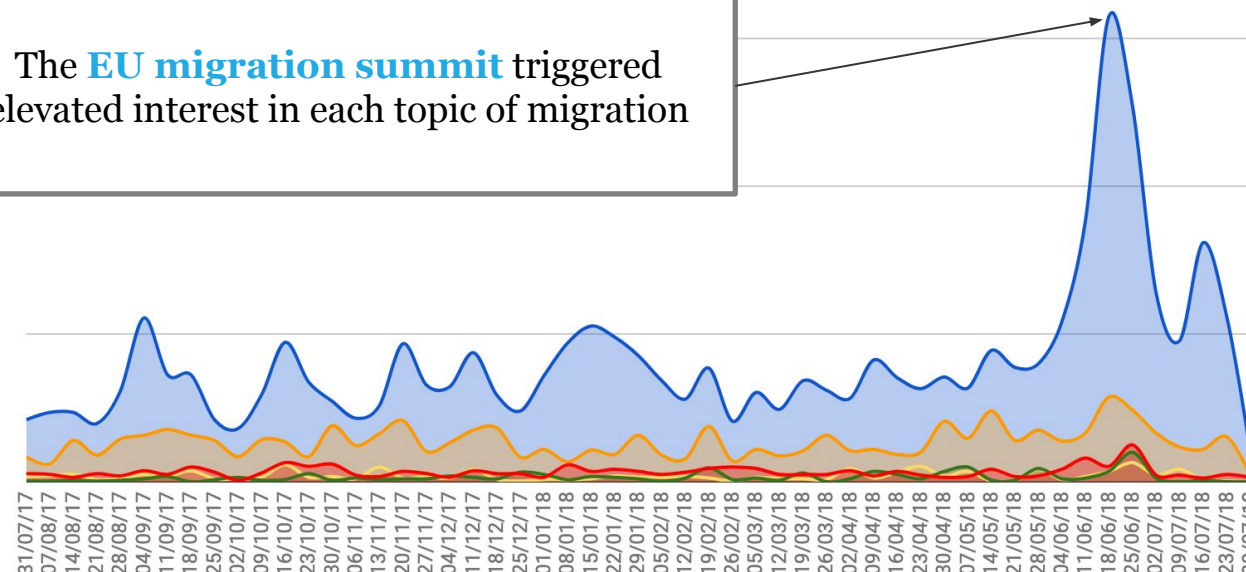
Since Slovakia hosts one of the lowest number of migrants in the EU, all aspects of the migration crisis are addressed from a certain distance. The biggest interest is triggered by the **humanitarian** aspect, in which both pro- and anti-migrant opinions emerge. **Security** achieved through border protection is the second biggest topic, while the cultural and economic consequences of migration are rarely discussed.

Results:
~ 87,000



Demographics Economy Humanitarianism Identity Security

The **EU migration summit** triggered elevated interest in each topic of migration



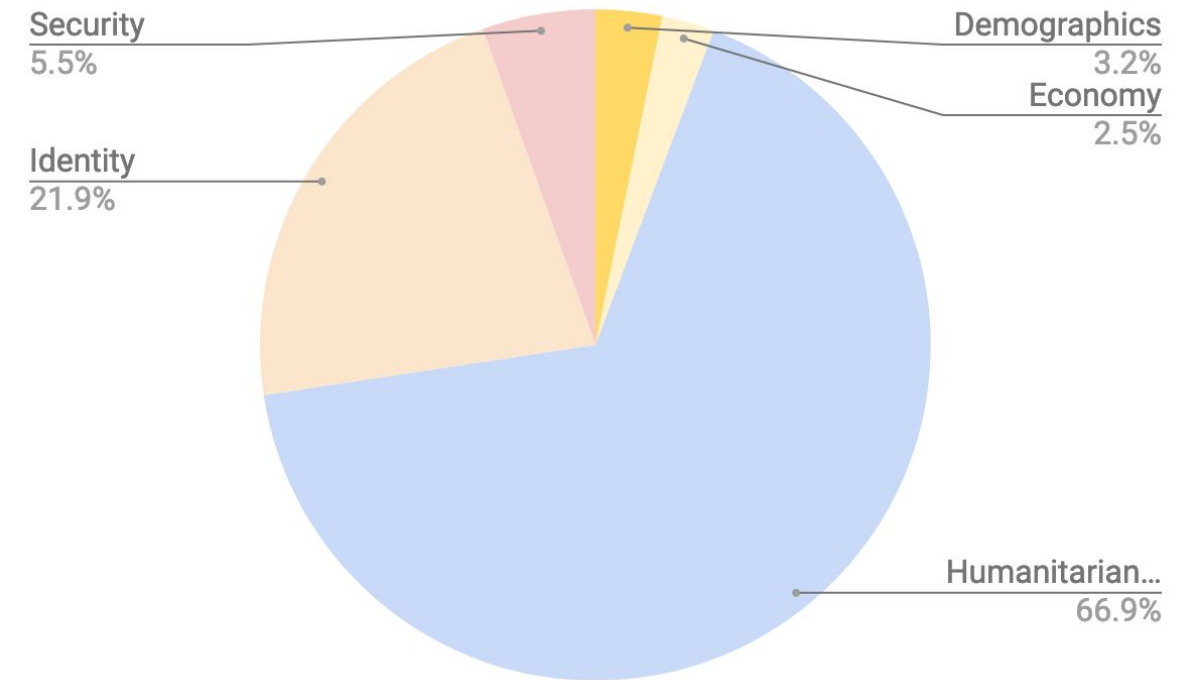


Demographics (1): Tackle Low Fertility Rate With Integration of Migrants

The influence of migration on Slovakia's demographic composition is very rarely discussed.

Despite some anti-migrant voices who typically cite international examples to reflect the downside of migrants' presence at the local job market, many people look at migration as a potential tool to tackle the demographic crisis in Slovakia that is the result of **low fertility rate**.

Slovakia and the EU both experience the challenges of the demographic crisis and an aging population, thus **EU-level measures** to support migrants' integration to the local labour market receive wide news coverage and discernible interest from the Slovak public.



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Demographics (2): Quotes

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Migration is vital to manage the local demographic crisis

Birth rate is plummeting in Slovakia if we do not count migrants. The only place where the fertility rate is slightly higher is Bratislava, but in smaller Slovak towns the fertility rate is devastating.

EU-level measurements to support integration of migrants to the local labour market

Avramopoulos claims that “all actors, whether from the public or the private sector, have to participate in the successful integration of refugees, and we want to join forces. We commit to working together with the social and economic partners on a model that will work not only at European level but even at the level of each member state”

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants are stealing locals' jobs

This is not just a Slovak issue. People in the UK also say that migrants are taking British people's jobs.

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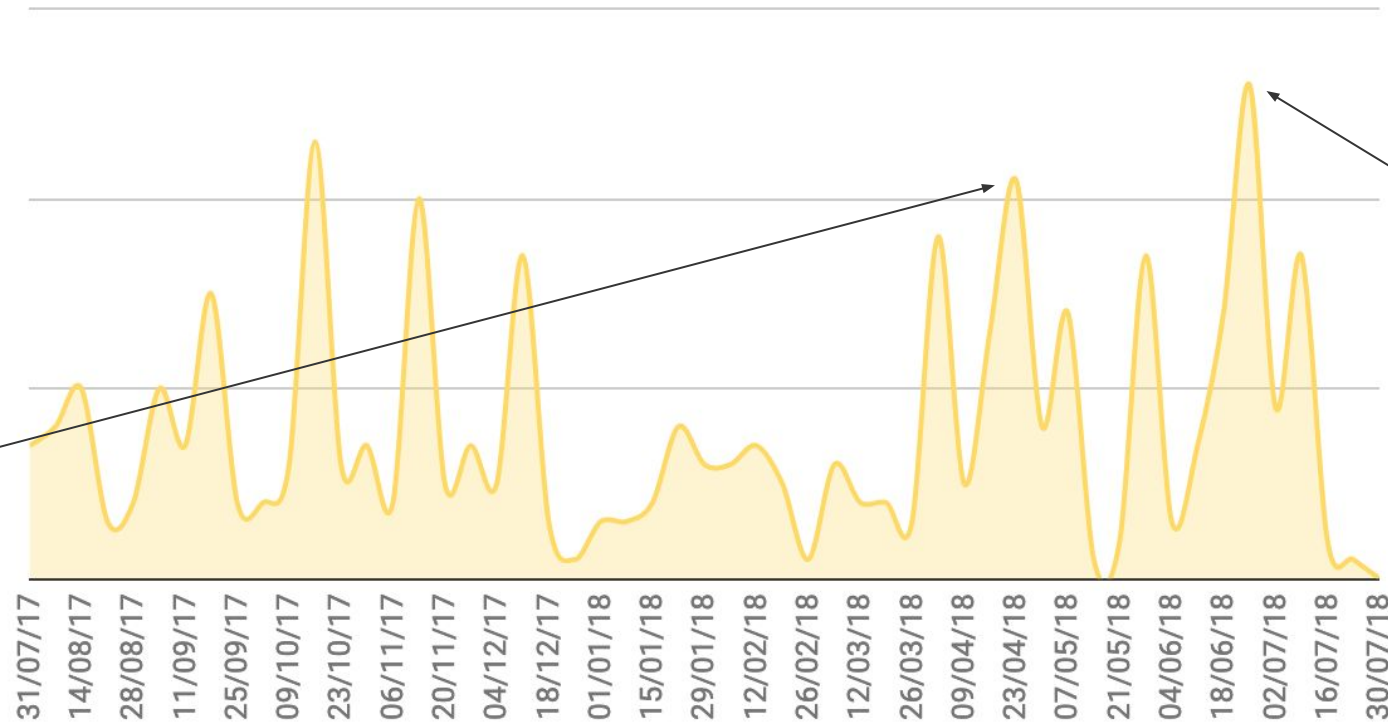
Demographics (3): Top Stories

Although the topic rarely comes up, some Slovaks are indeed concerned about the country's low fertility rate. Similarly to other aspects of migration, people are keen to understand how the EU plans to leverage the benefits of migration in order to tackle the demographic crisis in member states.

Results:
~ 2,800 (3,2%)

Birth rate in Slovakia is at historic low - news coverage discuss the role of migration in increasing low numbers

EU summit on migration



Demographics

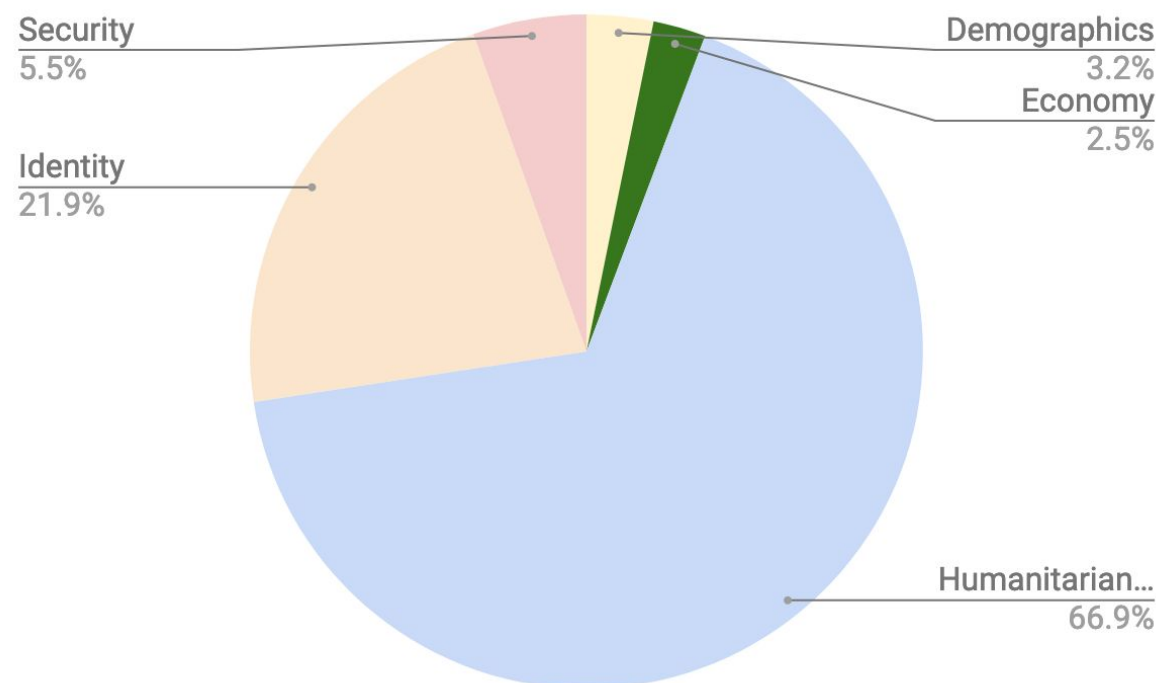


Economy (1): Cohesion Funds Perceived to be at Stake

The economic burden posed by the migration crisis triggers very little interest in Slovakia. Those who are concerned typically point to two aspects of the financial strain.

On the one hand, people are outraged about the **cost of handling migrants within the country**. For example, the central payment for integrational centers triggered major scandal.

On the other hand, Slovak people perceive the **zero-sum-game at a European level**: the cost of migration is understood to be covered by reducing the European cohesion funds, which the Slovak public and leading politicians find highly unfair. Apart from the cohesion funds, the EU is also attacked for forcing the relocation quotas – and its subsequent financial costs – on member states.



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Economy (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Refugee influx brings immense financial burden to Slovakia

"A new **Integration Center for Immigrants**, established in Zvolen and along with other centers, **has Slovak taxpayers to spend more than 2.2 million euros next year**" says Kotleba.

The influx of **refugees from Africa** will bring an **unrealistically big financial burden for us**.

Zero-sum game: cost of migration VS. EU cohesion funds

Although he is aware that more money must be allocated to security and migration, **Pellegrini does not like that less money is spent on European cohesion**.

Limitation of EU fund usage causes outrage

Referring to the Czech prime minister Andrej Babiš, Peter Pellegrini said "We have the same strategy within the EU: **we do not want quotas or illegal migration. We should be able to decide freely on how EU funds are distributed.**"

Brussels wants to almost triple the EU budget for migration. In the same time, **Paris supports issuing fines against those states that are not willing to accept migrants.**

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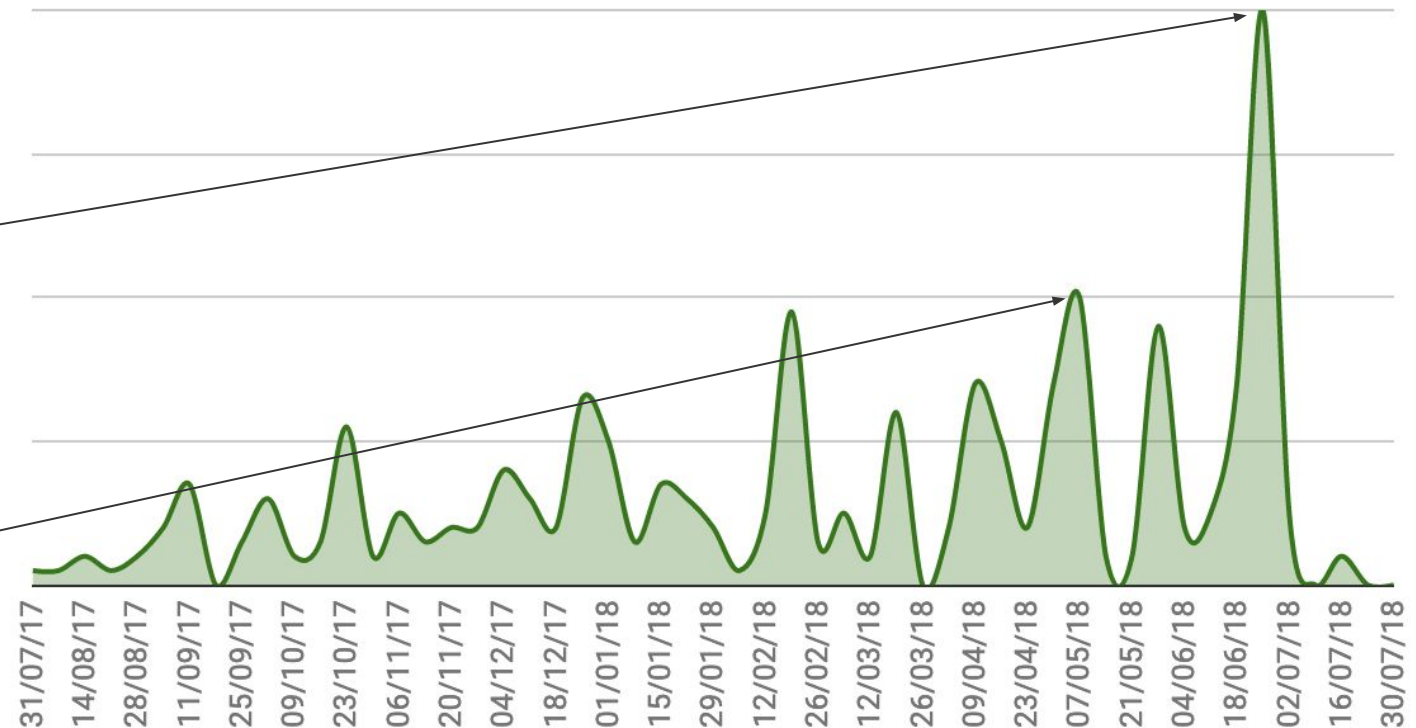
Economy (3): Top Stories

Some Slovaks are concerned that with the EU facing the financial burden of migration, European Cohesion Funds will be cut significantly.

Results:
~2,200 (2,5%)

Slovak Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini meets French President Emmanuel Macron and discuss **economic partnerships** of the two country in the wake of the migration crisis

First draft of the **EU budget for 2021-2027** seems acceptable to the Slovak government as the **priority remains on cohesion policy** instead of migration expenditures



Economy

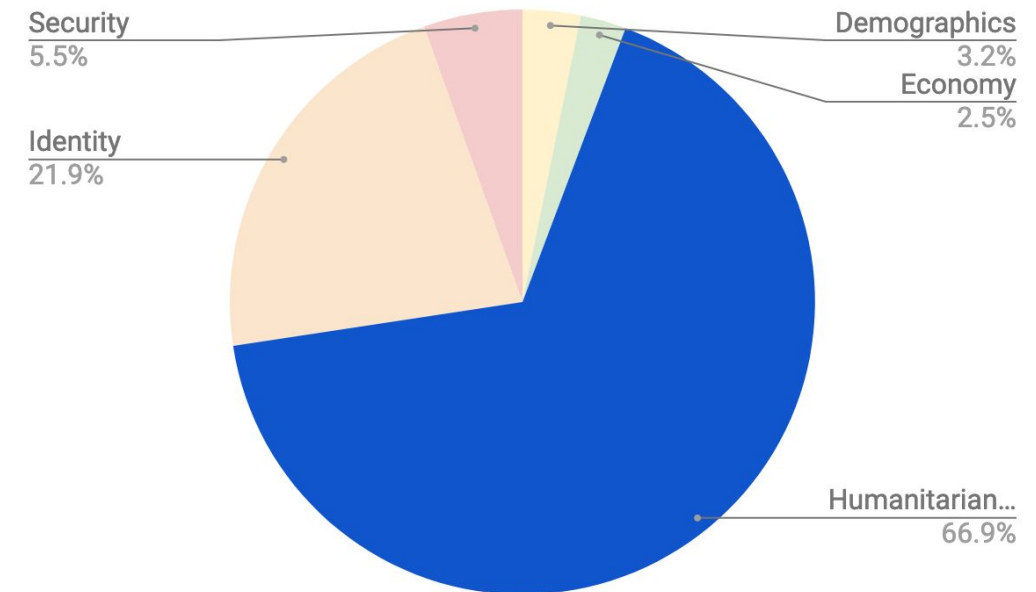


Humanitarianism (1): Compassion VS. the Rise of the Far-right

Due to the small number of migrants in the country, news pieces strongly feed into the opinions that are present in the humanitarian narrative.

On the one hand, many Slovaks express **compassion** to those whose life was ruined by war. Much of this sentiment springs from the Christian values that are deeply rooted in the Slovak society, but the inclination to help is also present at governmental level. An example for this is the Slovak military police's participation in refugee rescue operations at the Mediterranean Sea.

However, some people in Slovakia deeply oppose the welcoming of migrants and express no compassion whatsoever. These voices emphasize how migrants are only exploiting the help offered to them in search of a better life in Europe, while others claim that only the **far right** (in Slovakia, Marian Kotleba's party, the *People's Party Our Slovakia*) is able to handle the migration problem appropriately.





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Humanitarianism (2): Quotes

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Syrian migrants lost all and thus deserve help

*Let's be clear. **Syrian refugees lost their homes** in war and now have no place to live.*

Helping migrants is a **Christian duty**

*So who are those that He protects? **Bible says**: a widow, an orphan, a foreigner, **a migrant** – all of those that are most lonely and vulnerable.*

Helping migrants is a **collective responsibility for all EU member states**

*Head of the European Commission claims that **Europe shares a collective responsibility** for helping migrants in Libya.*

Slovak military police officially helps migrants at the Mediterranean Sea

***Military police officers from Slovakia**, operating under the second rotation of EUNAVFOR MED Sophia II, have contributed to the **rescue of more than 400 migrants** at the Mediterranean*

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Trust in the **far-right** to solve the migration issue in Slovakia

*She likes to take pictures with a baseball bat and considers [leader of far-right People's Party Our Slovakia] **Kotleba** to be someone who could rule and **manage all issues in Slovakia, including the migration problem.***

Migrants **deceitfully exploit** the EU's humanitarian help

*The problems of illegal migration shall be solved already in the countries from which migrants come to Europe. According to the **Ministry of Internal Affairs, entering a boat shall not be perceived as an entrance to Europe.***

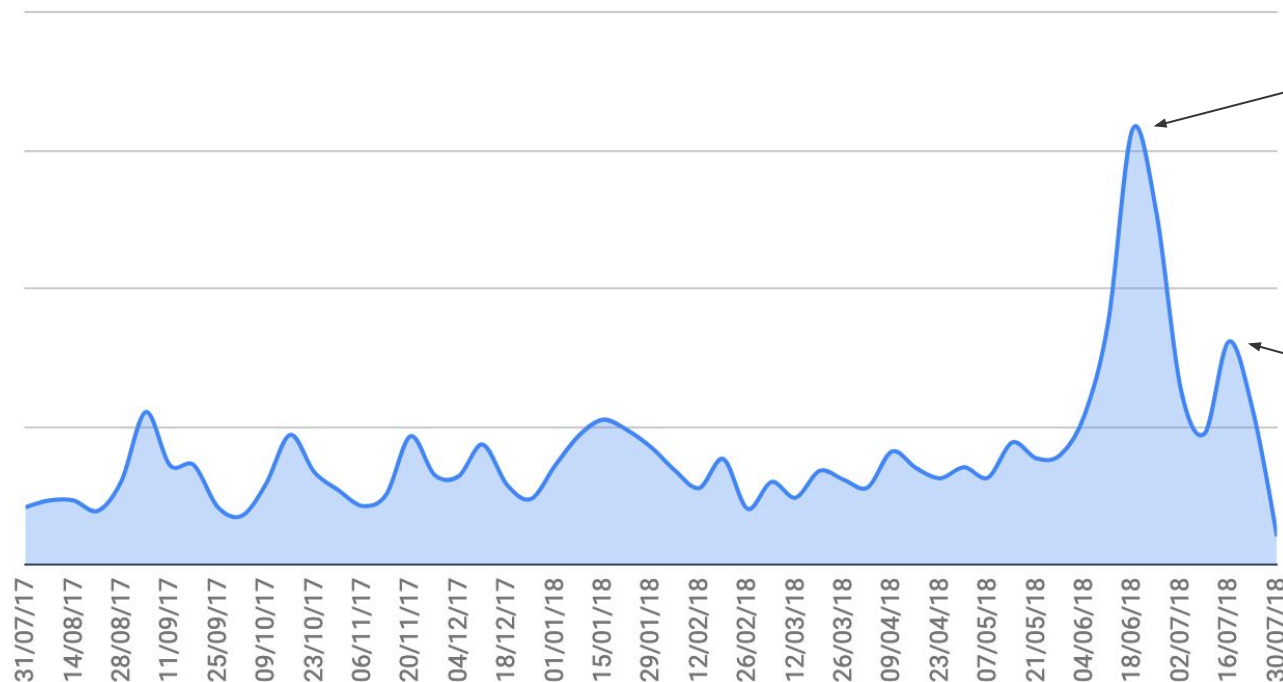
*After tightening the control in Libya and Turkey, **migrants found a new way to arrive in the EU.***

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Humanitarianism (3): Top Stories

Slovaks' opinion on migration develops mainly through the discussion of international (and especially, EU-level) events in managing the migration crisis.

Results:
~58,300 (66.9%)



EU summit on migration, where Slovakia adopted a strong approach on securing the borders and establishing refugee camps outside the EU.

The news of a **potential EU legal suit on Hungary** for the Stop-Soros anti-immigration law triggered discussions in Slovakia on why accepting refugees is correct

Humanitarianism

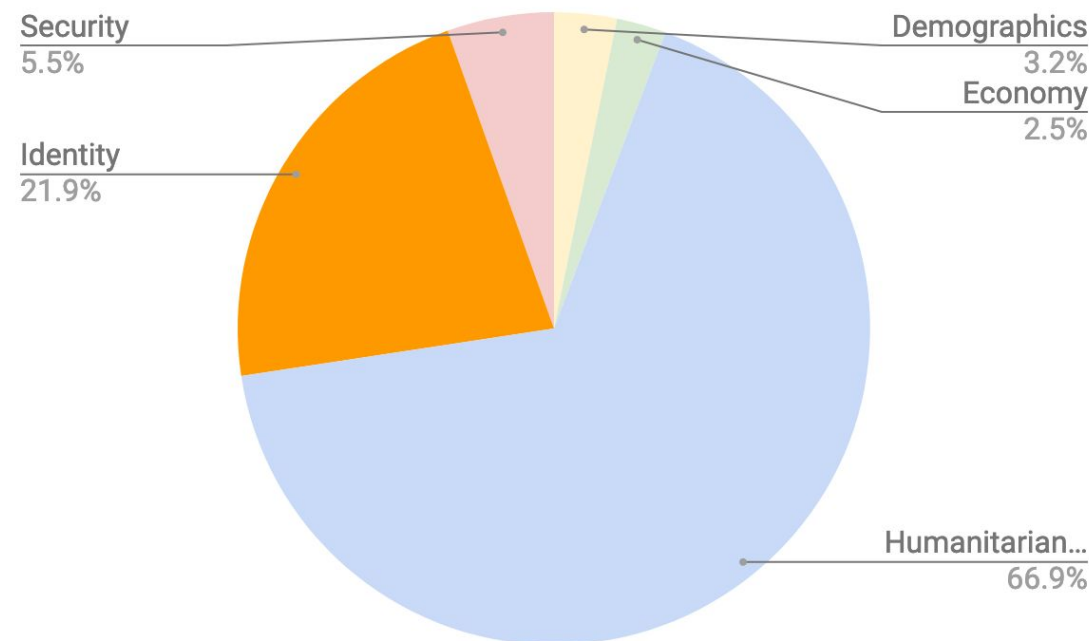


Identity & Customs (1): Success Stories of Integration VS. Fear of Losing Local Identity

The influence of migration on local identity is relatively rarely discussed in Slovakia. Despite the low number of migrants in the country, **individual stories of successful integration** receive great exposure in the public online space.

Apart from the specific positive examples, some people speak in general and claim that migration is not a threat for the local culture – in fact, people with differing background have been living together in the country for centuries.

Despite the miniscule number of migrants in Slovakia, some people express **fear over the negative influence of Muslim culture in Europe**, worrying about how migration will alter Slovak national identity.





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Identity & Customs (2): Quotes

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Success stories of migrant integration

Huda Kattan established her own brand Huda Beauty in 2013. Huda is 34 and is a daughter of Iraqi migrants. #polls #forbes #beauty #businness

The official commission will pronounce results of the election. Refugees from Iraq who live in Nitra may participate in the communal elections.

Raise awareness to migrants' cultural heritage

The play 'Noise of the water' of Marco Martinelli, a theater drama based on thousands of refugees stories, will be put on stage this season.

Multiculturalism is part of the Slovak identity

Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians, Czechs and Jewish lived here together in peace. Can you imagine having a mosque in Bratislava? Is there space for migrants? Keep in mind that Bratislava is and has been a multicultural city.

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migration will significantly alter Slovak national identity

There will be a point when Central European nations, especially Slavic ones, will have to give in to the pressure of accepting migrants. That will be the moment when local identities will start to erode.

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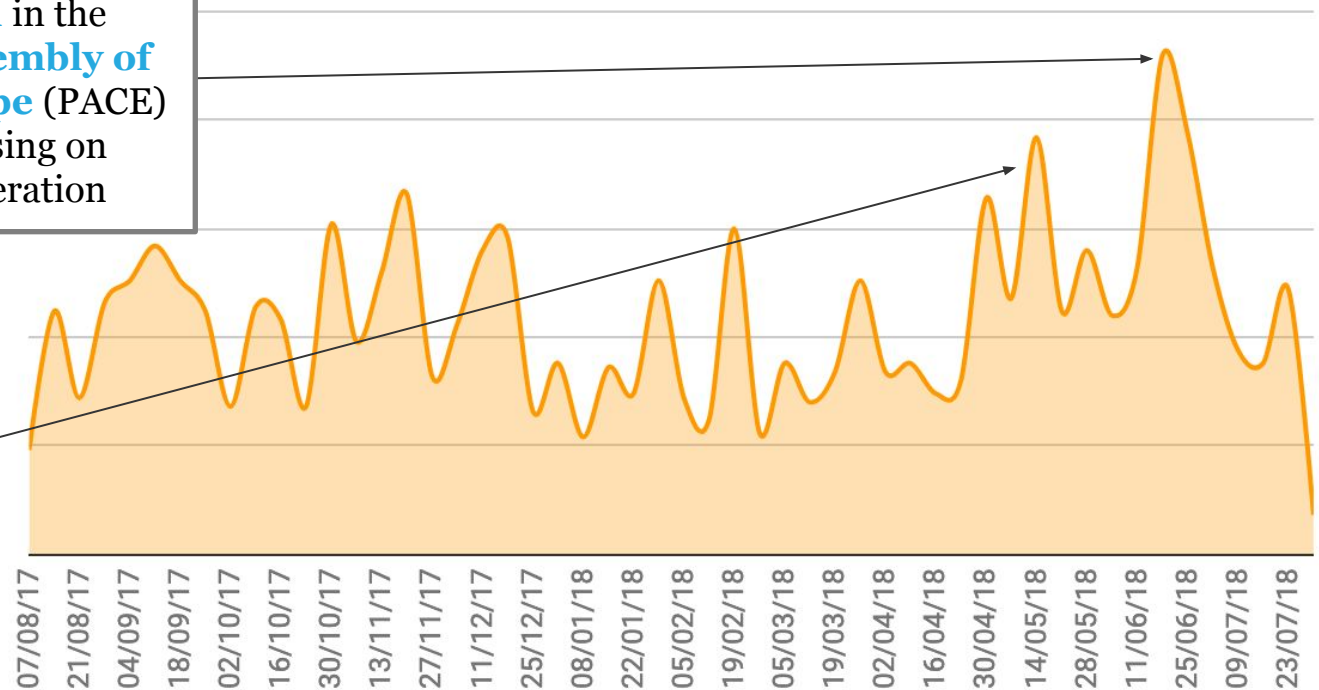
Identity & Customs (3): Top Stories

Raising awareness to the cultural heritage of migrants and emphasizing the importance of cooperation triggers major interest in the Slovak conversation.

Results:
~4,700 (5,4%)

Prime minister **Peter Pellegrini** delivers a speech in the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)** in Strasbourg, focusing on multinational cooperation

Plans of the “**Umbrella March**” in Bratislava on the World Refugee day coming in June 2018, remembering the difficulties of those having to flee their home and celebrating the cultural heritage of refugees



Identity

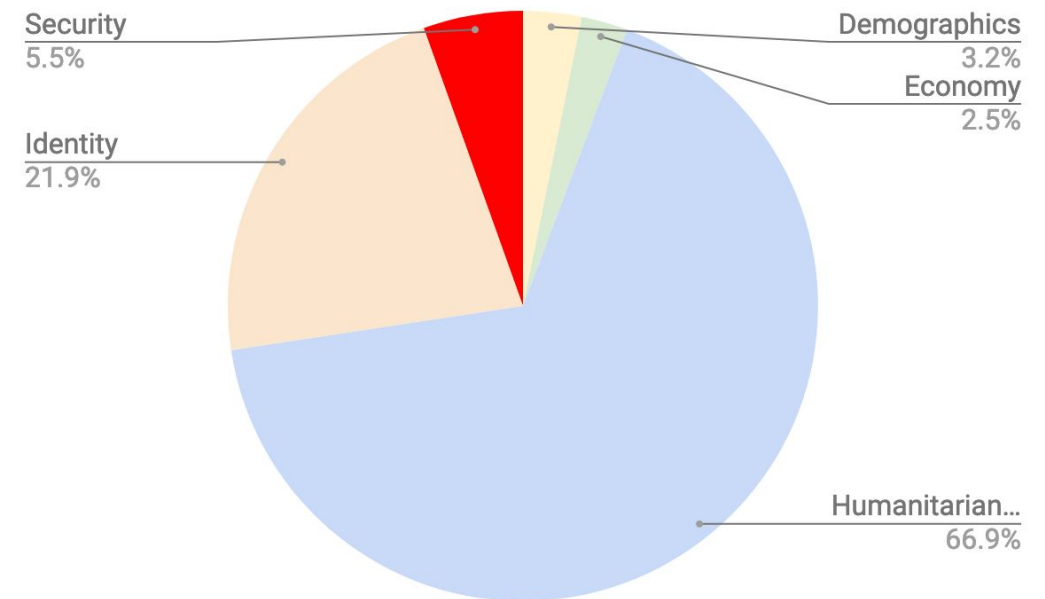


Security (1): Few Refugees Mean No Immediate Danger, Border Protection is in the Focus Instead

Due to the minimal number of migrants in Slovakia, the security threat imposed by them is not directly palpable. However, many Slovaks discuss the security implications of the migration crisis, mainly focusing on **border protection**. People often criticize the quota system and instead call for more specific actions to protect the country. Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán's policies are perceived as a good example – especially the fence built at the border between Hungary, Serbia and Croatia.

Apart from requesting direct action to protect the country, some Slovaks point out the **contradictory measures of the local government** as it follows an anti-immigrant campaign at home and in the EU, while it also grants asylum to refugees.

Under the influence of international news, some people discuss the **security threat on an EU-level**, and call for stronger marine security.



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Security (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Solutions to the security threat of migration:
Reallocation *quota* is not a sustainable

*[Deputy minister of foreign affairs] Korcok asks for solutions that will not divide Europe for accepting migrants. **Quotas are not a sustainable solution to migration crisis.***

Solutions to the security threat of migration:
Border protection is key

*She said what ought to be said for a long time. **We either protect our external borders or we will not be able to deal with the migration now and later in future.***

Solutions to the security threat of migration:
Police surveillance of migrants

*Thanks to the technology of the **foreign police, now they can check fingerprints of illegal migrants and find out the truth.***

Solutions to the security threat of migration:
Orbán's *fence* is the way to go

***Orban** won the election because he does what his voters want from him. **He stops migrants with a fence**, so they rewarded him. The western elites only try to consolidate their voters.*

Local politicians blamed to bring illegal migrants to Slovakia

*Will you tell us finally how many migrants you brought here overnight? Of course, the most important is that **your mouth was full of talks about why Slovakia will not accept migrants.***

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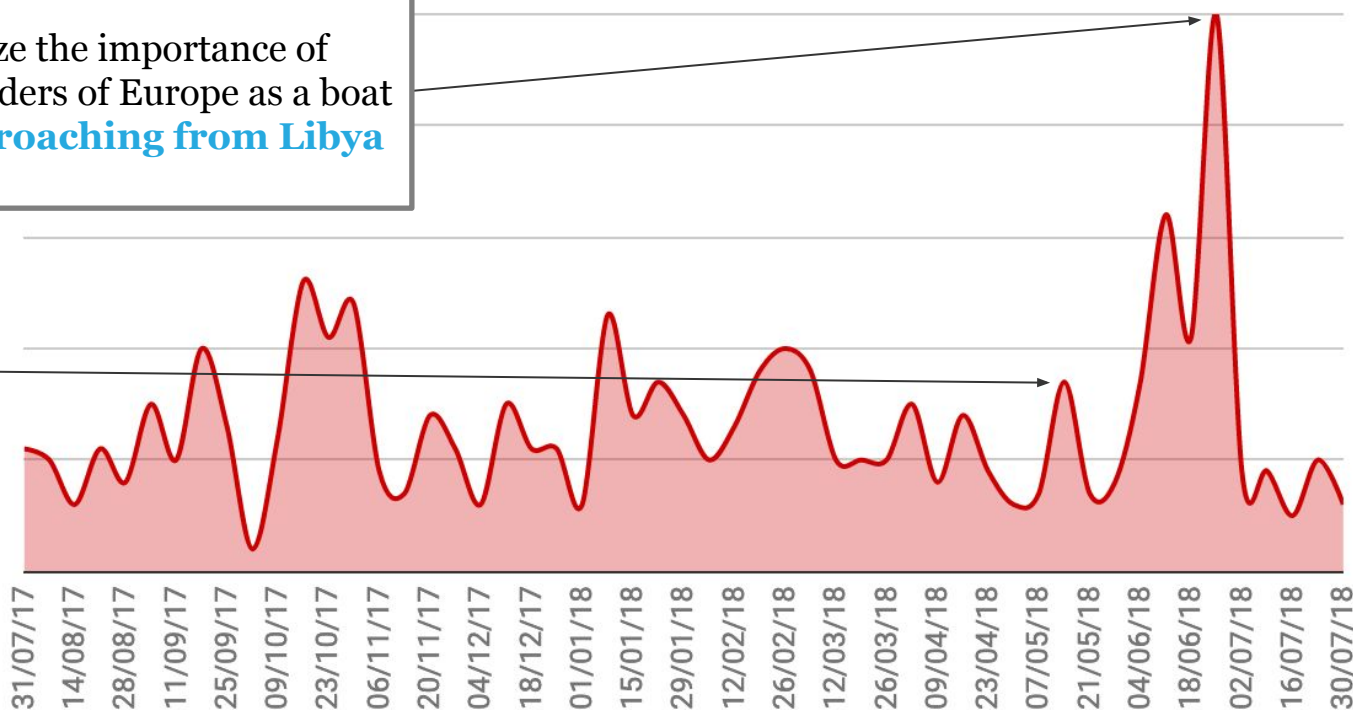
Security (3): Top Stories

Border protection is not only discussed domestically, but also through international examples, such as Trump's measures to tackle the migration crisis in the US. Reflecting Europe, many Slovak people demand strengthened protection of the EU's borders and the Schengen area with the aim of keeping migrants out.

Results:
~19,000 (21,9%)

Slovak posts emphasize the importance of protecting the marine borders of Europe as a boat with **460 refugees approaching from Libya**

Ivan Korcok, Slovakia's ambassador to the USA claims that **securing borders is key**, while Trump compares migrants to animals



Security

+ *Local Issues in Slovakia Around Migration*



2.



Relation with the European Union

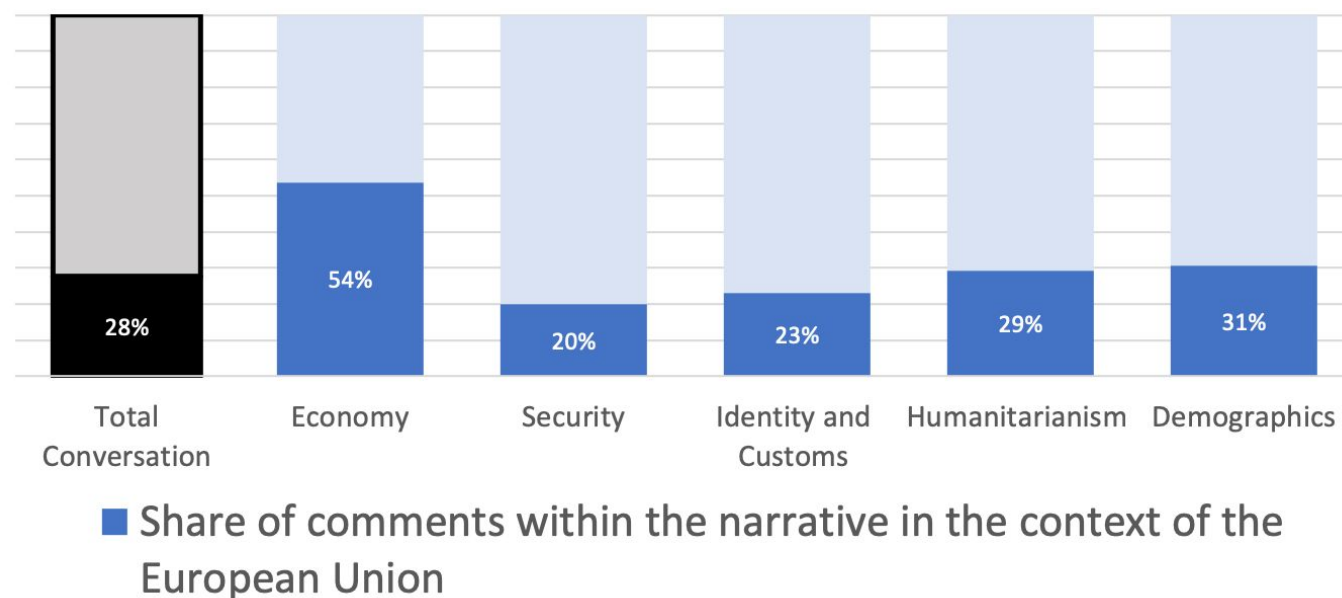
Many Slovaks discuss the migration crisis in connection with the European Union and claim that the problem should be solved by the EU.

In the meantime, people in Slovakia often worry about the obligatory measures set by the EU – this is especially true for the assumed consequences of the relocation quota system.

Relations with the European Union infuse all aspects of migration, but it is most represented in the economy narrative. Apart from the (assumedly unfair) obligations posed by the EU, many Slovaks fear a **direct financial loss implied by migration**.

This perception is rooted in the belief that increasing costs of migration at an EU level will decrease the funds available for member states through the Structural and Cohesion Funds.

*The EU forces us to accept 652 refugees from Greece and 250 from Italy.
Robert Fico is the first one to refuse that quota.*



+ *Migration in the Context of European- and Domestic Politics*



3.

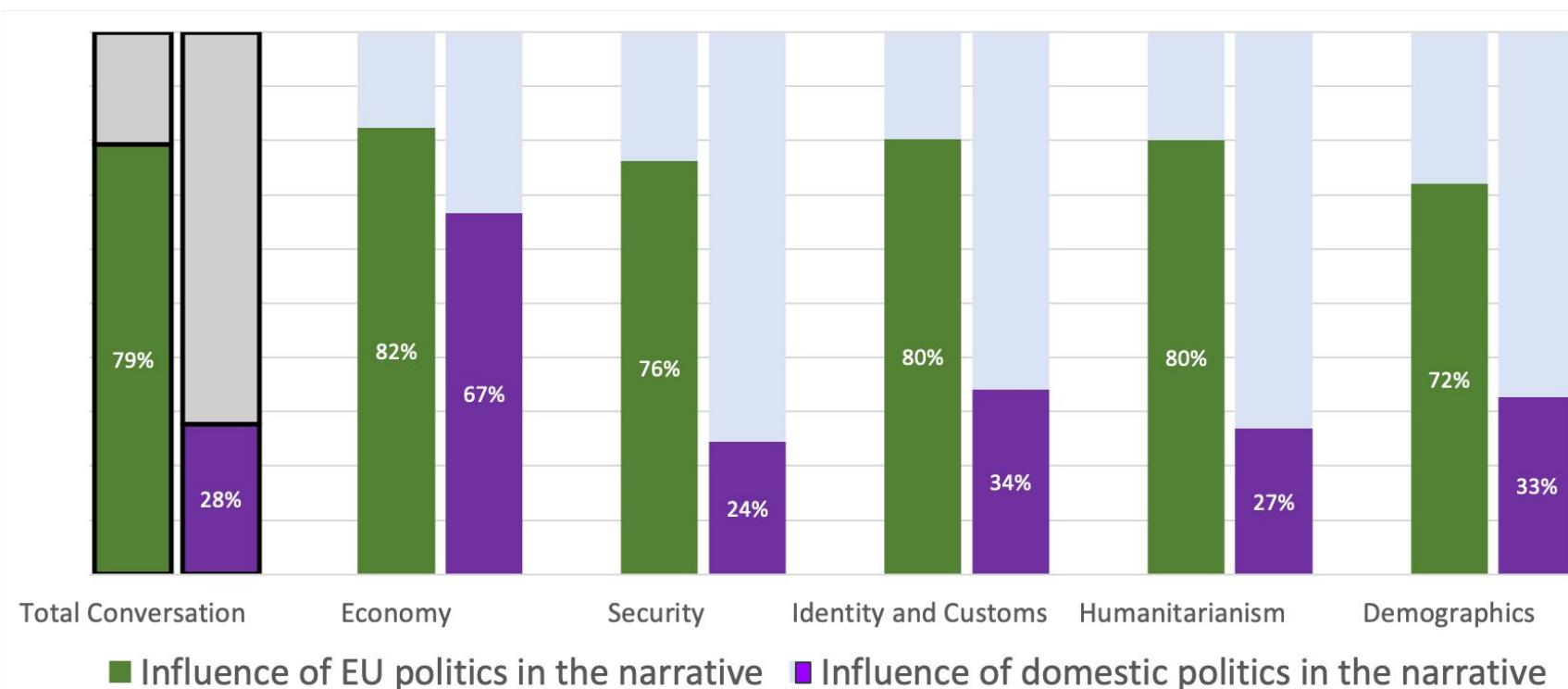
European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | SK

“The Migration Crisis is not Our Problem”

All domains of the Slovak conversation are highly infused with references to other EU member states and international politicians, which reflect the overall impression of the conversation: most Slovak people perceive the **migration crisis as a distant problem**, that has not yet reached Slovakia.

To a lesser extent, but local politicians are also clearly represented in the conversation.

They are most often mentioned in connection with economic issues, as some Slovaks are vocal in expecting local politicians to minimize the financial burden of the European migration crisis in Slovakia.



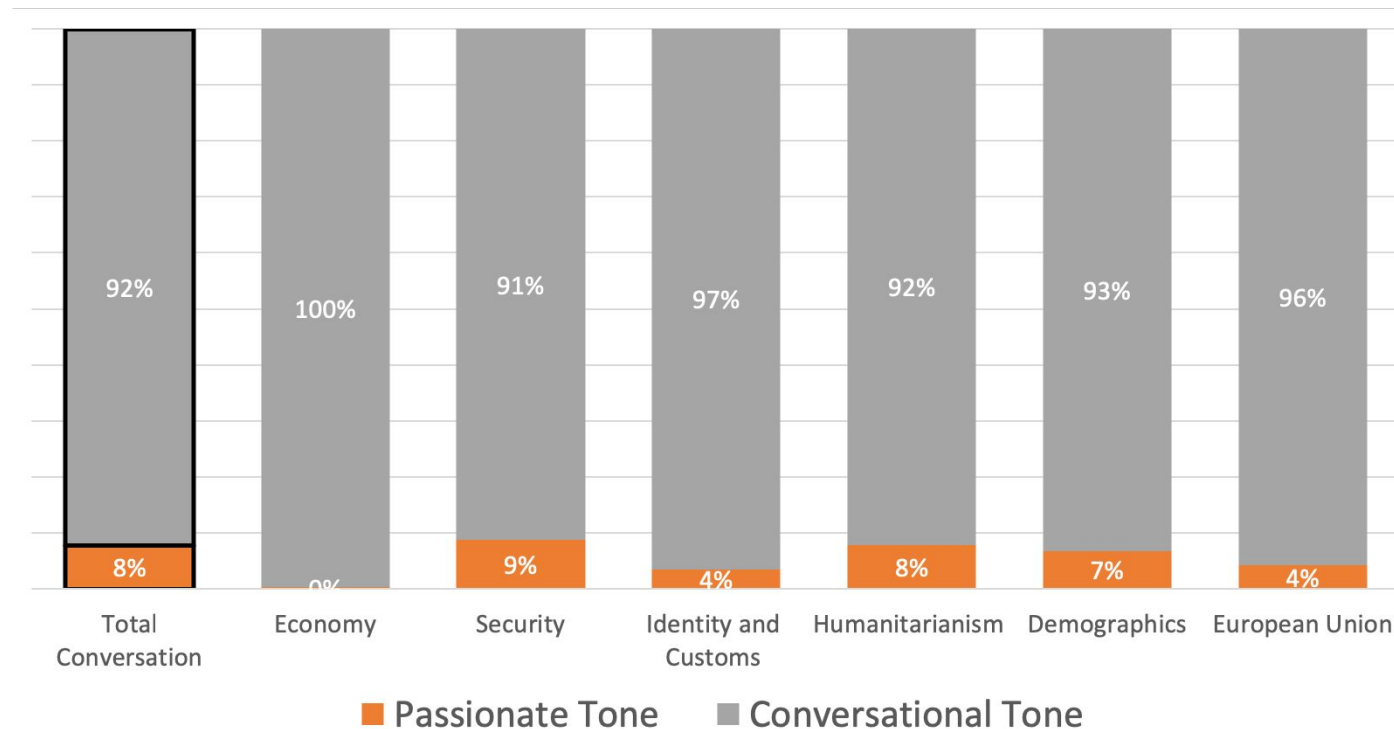
+ *Discussion Tone in Slovakia*



4.

Placid Conversation on Migration

The conversation in Slovakia is exceptionally reserved. Although the most frequently discussed narratives of humanitarianism and security trigger recognizable passion among users of public social media, it seems clear that for the majority of Slovak population migration is a distant and remote topic.



+ *Conversation Channels*



5.



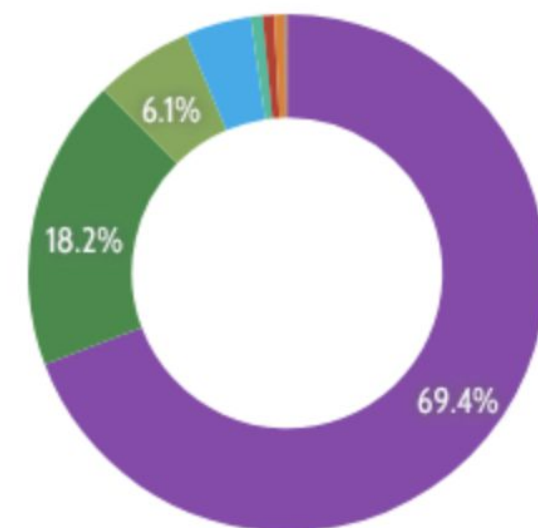
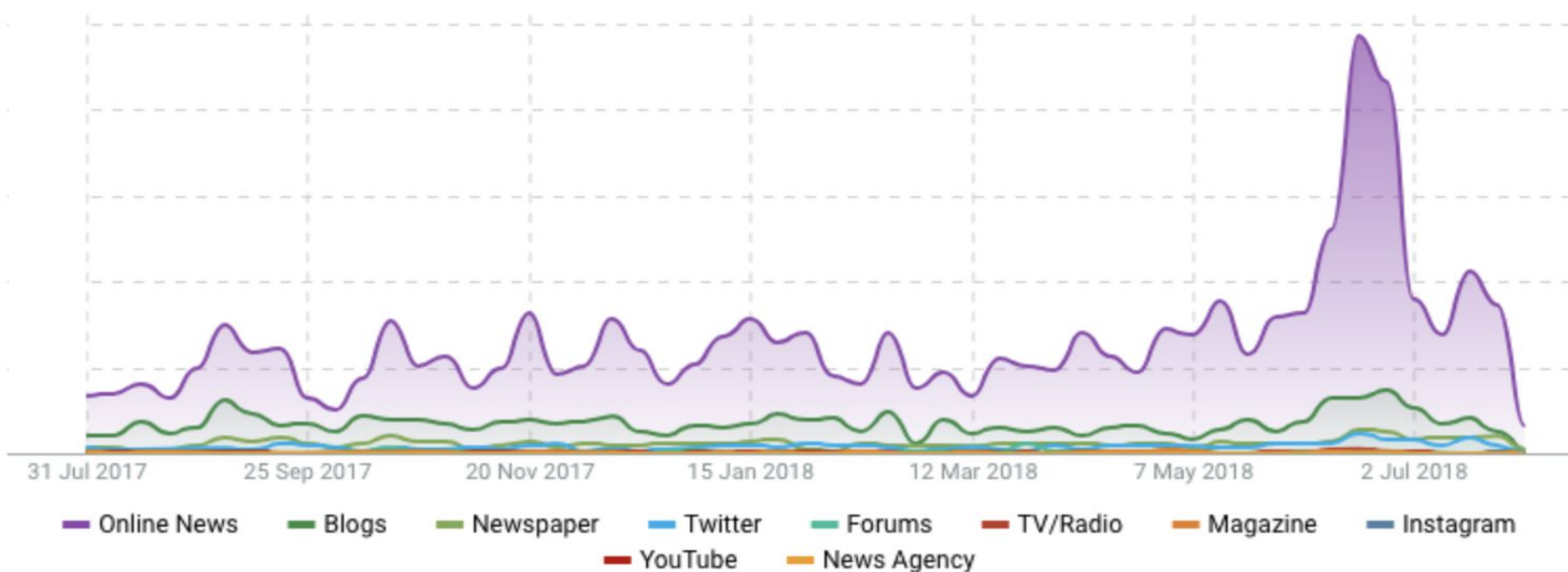
Channel Distribution | SK

Online News Dominates the Conversation

The discussion on migration in Slovakia is dominated by **online news platforms**.

Individual users express their opinion in the public social media sphere using **Twitter** and **forum** sites.

Results:
~87,000



- Online News
- Blogs
- Newspaper
- Twitter
- Forums
- TV/Radio
- Magazine
- Instagram
- YouTube
- News Agency



Most Influential Authors | SK

Top Online News Sites Trigger Most Attention

Online news sites provide the platform for the majority of public social media conversations in Slovakia.

Leading news sites trigger the highest engagement, while on an individual basis, blog posts of politicians or authors also trigger considerable interest.

Most Influential Sites in the Overall Conversation	
tyzden.sk	Online news site
infovojna.sk	Anti-EU, pro-Orbán news sites
nicholsonova.blog.sme.sk	Personal blog of a liberal politician (SaS) / journalist
postoj.sk	Conservative-Christian news sites
gumurin.blog.pravda.sk	Blog of science fiction author/journalist
svet.sme.sk	Major online news site
zasvatenyzivot.sk	Christian news site
domov.sme.sk	Major online news site
komentare.sme.sk	Major online news site
hlavnespravy.sk	Conservative news site