

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the Hellenic Republic



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

- 2019 -



Context to the Greek Discussion on Migration

- Greece has been a member of the European Union since 1981, with a population of 10,858,018 in 2015. In the same year, official **asylum seekers in the country made up 0.17% of the population**.^{*} Greece was one of the first countries to bear the burden of the migration crisis in Europe.
- Public social media conversation in Greece around migration in the measured year consists of ~213,876 posts. Compared to population size, **the conversation on migration in Greece is the 19th largest in the EU**.
- Greece's immigration policies have previously been judged for their harsh treatment of asylum seekers by the European Court of Human Rights. The **left-wing government** in place since 2015, lead by prime minister Alexis Tsipras **is trying to push for more humane policies, while also deporting illegal border crossers to Turkey**.



^{*}Source: europarl.europa.eu

Understanding migration in Greece: the key is Turkey



While both countries are the members of NATO, Turkey and Greece have a longstanding conflict over Cyprus, and the regional tension has an effect on the migration discourse.

On top of the EU migration deal with Turkey and their shared land border with Greece, migration is often discussed within the context of the relationship of the two countries. Turkey has supported Macedonia's decision to keep their name, which is a thorn for Greece, and Erdogan's maneuvering within NATO is viewed with suspicion - casting a shadow over whether or not Turkey can be trusted to stem the flow of migration. The border is often the terrain of sabre-rattling within this ongoing dispute as well.



All images represented in this report appeared as attachments to posts on public social media platforms, and are used here as illustrations of the public online conversation.



Key Findings | GR

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

Size of Pan-European Narratives

Security is the dominant discourse with **humanity** coming second, expressing anxieties and echoing a sentiment that views migration as a policing issue, mirrored by a strong streak of humanitarianism and solidarity that's present in Greece.

Local Issues

Suspensions over **Turkey's** geopolitical moves and their actions on the border are strongly influential in the Greek conversation.

EU & Domestic Politics

The influence of both local and EU politics within migration is very high - up to 50% by category, reflecting that one way or another, **migration is primarily a political question.**

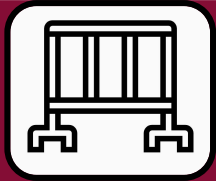
Conversation Channels

The majority of the discussion takes place on **Twitter**. Within a sea of voices, content triggering highest engagement comes from journalists.



Key Findings | GR

Pan-European Narratives in the Greek Context



The security narrative in Greece was dominant, focusing on the policing efforts required to contain refugees within camps and the general criminality associated with immigrants.



Humanitarianism was the second biggest narrative, lead by news of international events and the situation of the migrants in Greek camps as well as their troubles on sea routes.



Demographics were discussed primarily from the viewpoint of a struggling economy, as many have emigrated due to austerity and an aging population. The integration of migrants was viewed as a potential tool to manage the local demographic crisis.



Identity was discussed in the context of the rising right wing in Europe fueled by immigration's threat, as well as referencing the uneasy relationship with Turkey, especially the identity of divided Cyprus.



The economic narrative in regards to migration was the smallest, in which migration was discussed within the wider context of the economic crisis and austerity measures imposed on Greece and the European South.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in Greece*

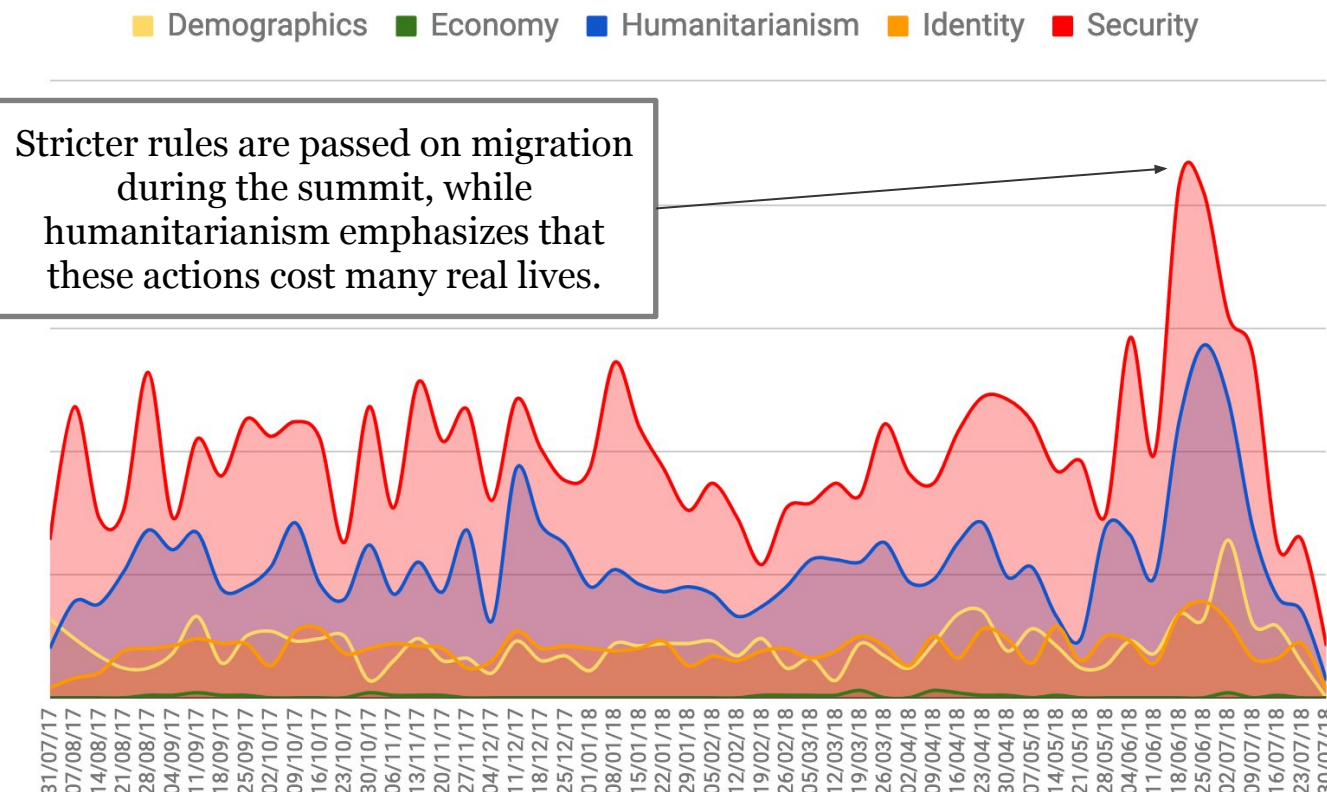
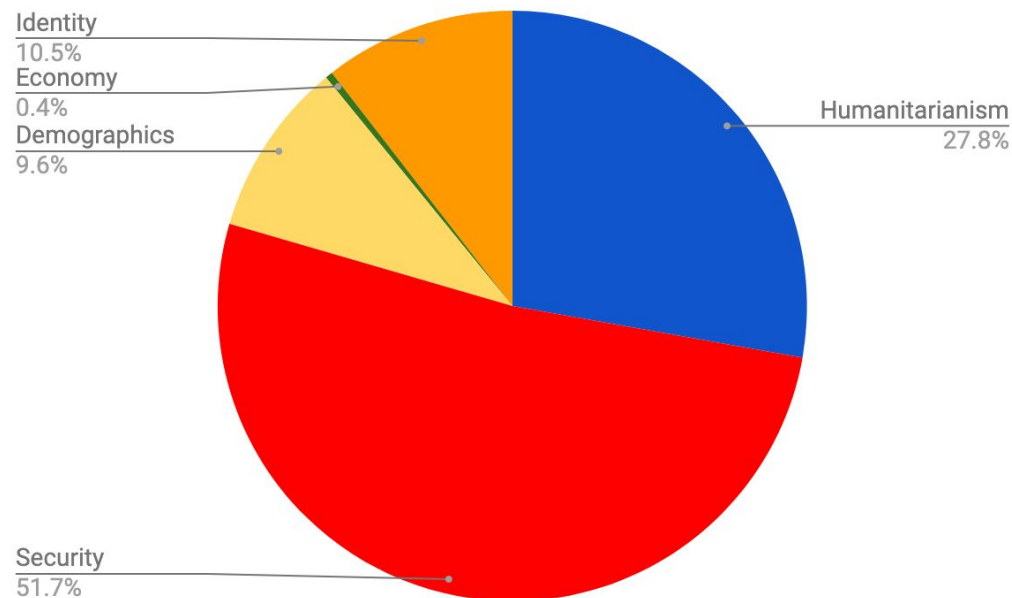
1.



The shape of the migration discourse

As usual, the biggest narratives, humanitarianism and security moved together following domestic news and international events, with the greatest peak happening around the **EU migration summit in June 2018**. Both narratives had a focus on Turkey and the EU-Turkey deal, which, in light of Greece's demographic and economic plight, raised issues of political hypocrisy and concerns over the ascending right-wing populism throughout Europe.

Results:
~208,700

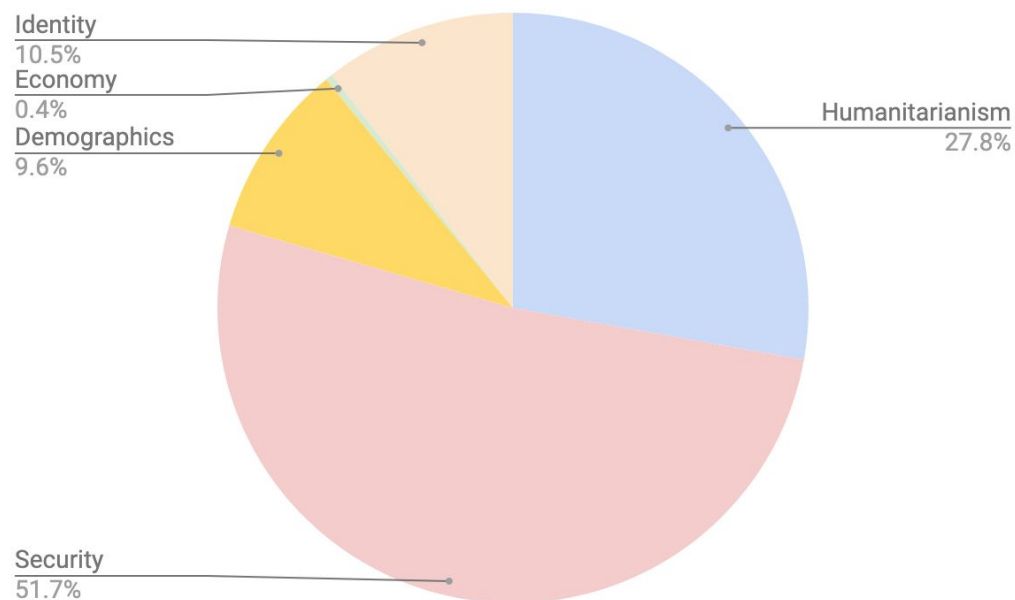


Pan-European Narratives | GR

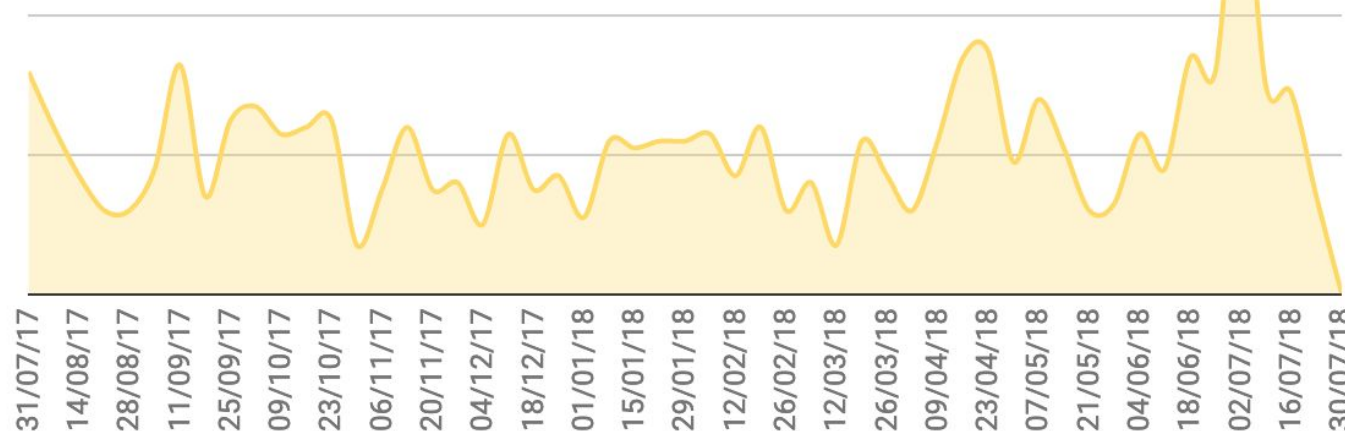
Demographics (1)

The demographic discourse in Greece is concerned primarily with the population decline to austerity measures since 2010, which lead to a higher number of deaths and increased emigration. On the flipside, conspiracy theories regarding the “population replacement” theory are pushed by the right wing, despite the poor economic conditions in Greece which propel even the migrants to leave the country if they can.

Results:
~20,000



Concerns are raised by the news that Greece may lose 3 million people by 2080



Demographics

Pan-European Narratives | GR

Demographics (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The cause of economic emigration will not be fixed by immigration

Greece is getting older and older while the most brilliant minds leave for other countries.

We went abroad because we can not stand it at home, they told us. Migration is not the easy solution especially for those who have not experienced it.

Desperate Africans will come, who, according to the International Organization for Migration, even reach 1 million, waiting to go to the European "Promised land".



Images within the demographic narrative reflect anxieties that soon there will be no Greece to speak of. Poor economic conditions are blamed for this, that lead to an abandoned aging population, while the Greek economy is unable to bear the burden of integrating immigrants.

Because of this situation, conspiracy theories about “replacement migration” spread easily.

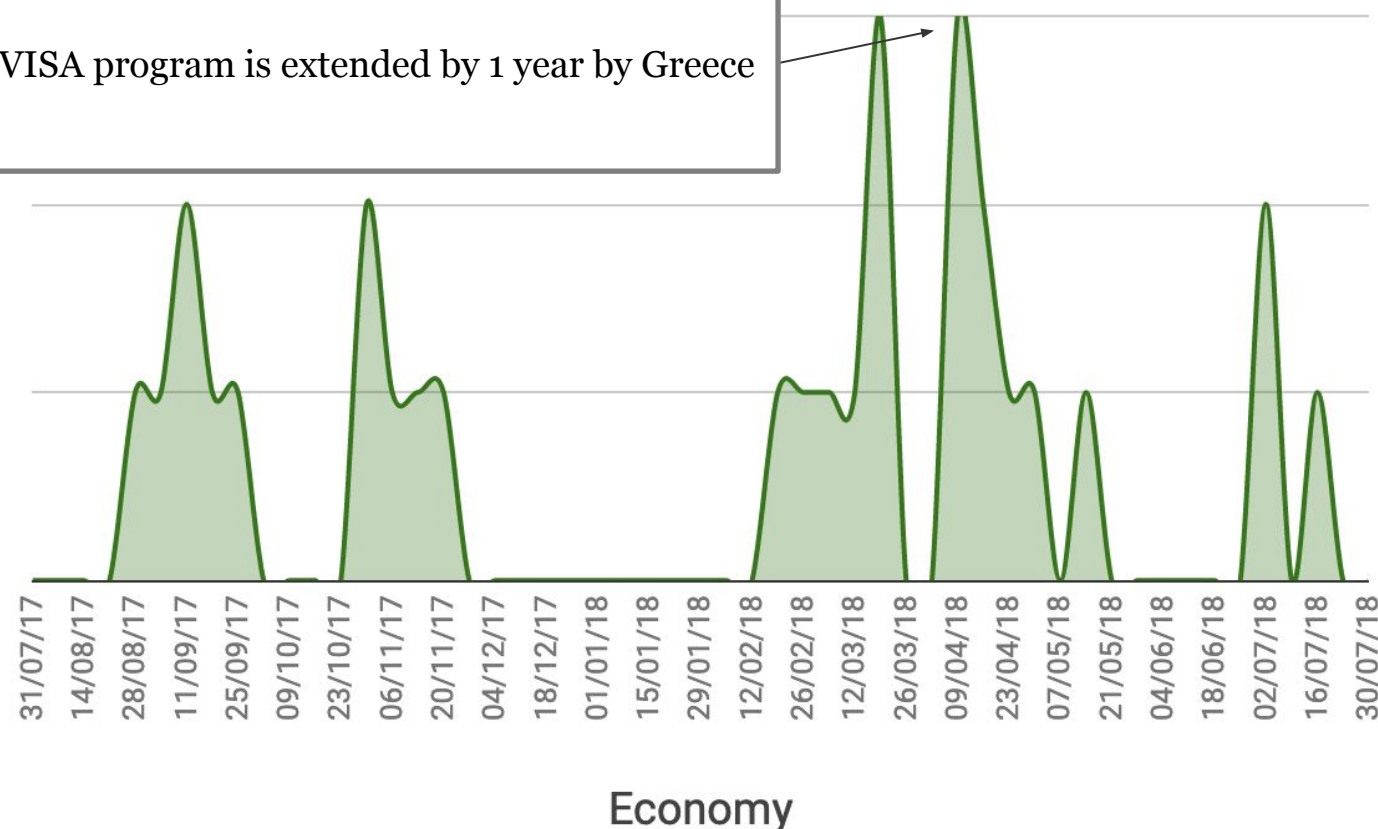
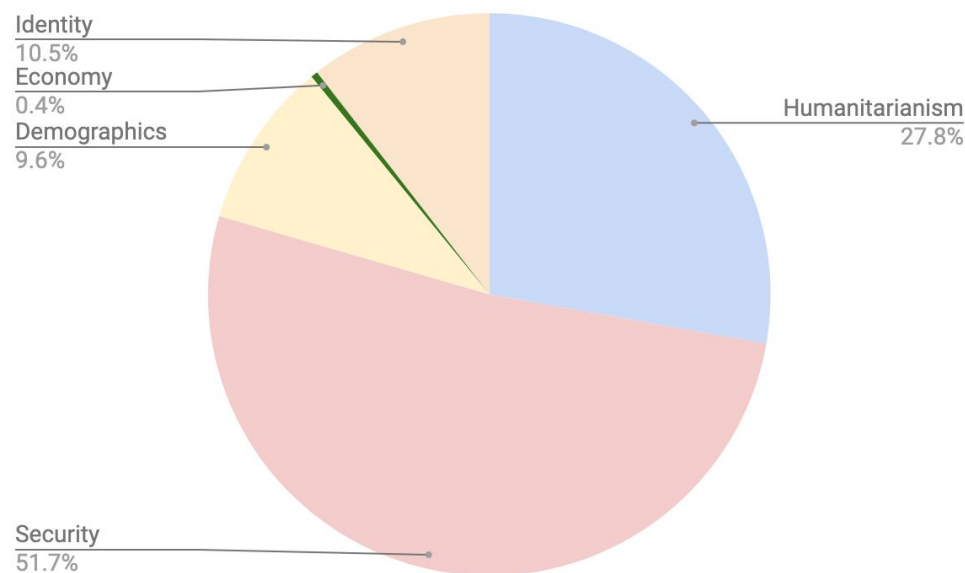
Pan-European Narratives | GR

Economy (1)

The economic discourse was the tiniest, yet it clearly echoed a sentiment that finds it unfair that the EU is willing to spend billions on handling the migration crisis, while in certain crisis-stricken countries such as Greece it is unwilling to help its own citizens. In addition, people express outrage over pension cuts planned due to emigration.

Results:
~740

Turkish VISA program is extended by 1 year by Greece



ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migration is juxtaposed with more pressing economic problems

The best antidote to unemployment is to make it easier to migrate to the EU. Something particularly convenient for German capital.

Unfortunately, the problem in Greece is that we have retired people aged 40 and 50. Further cuts in pensions are unavoidable because it is not possible for pensions to eat more and more of the GDP.

Greece, a colony of debt of the European Union, has been downgraded to a Balkan partner in Germany, a zone of expanding US bases and a gray area under the Turkish threat. And Tsipras celebrates "the recovery of the country's leading role in the region"!



Images in the economy conversation speak of technocratic approaches and echo the sentiment that the economic benefits of migration favour some while others are left holding the burden of yet another set of policies that are perceived either as 'unavoidable' or as 'hypocritical'.

Pan-European Narratives | GR

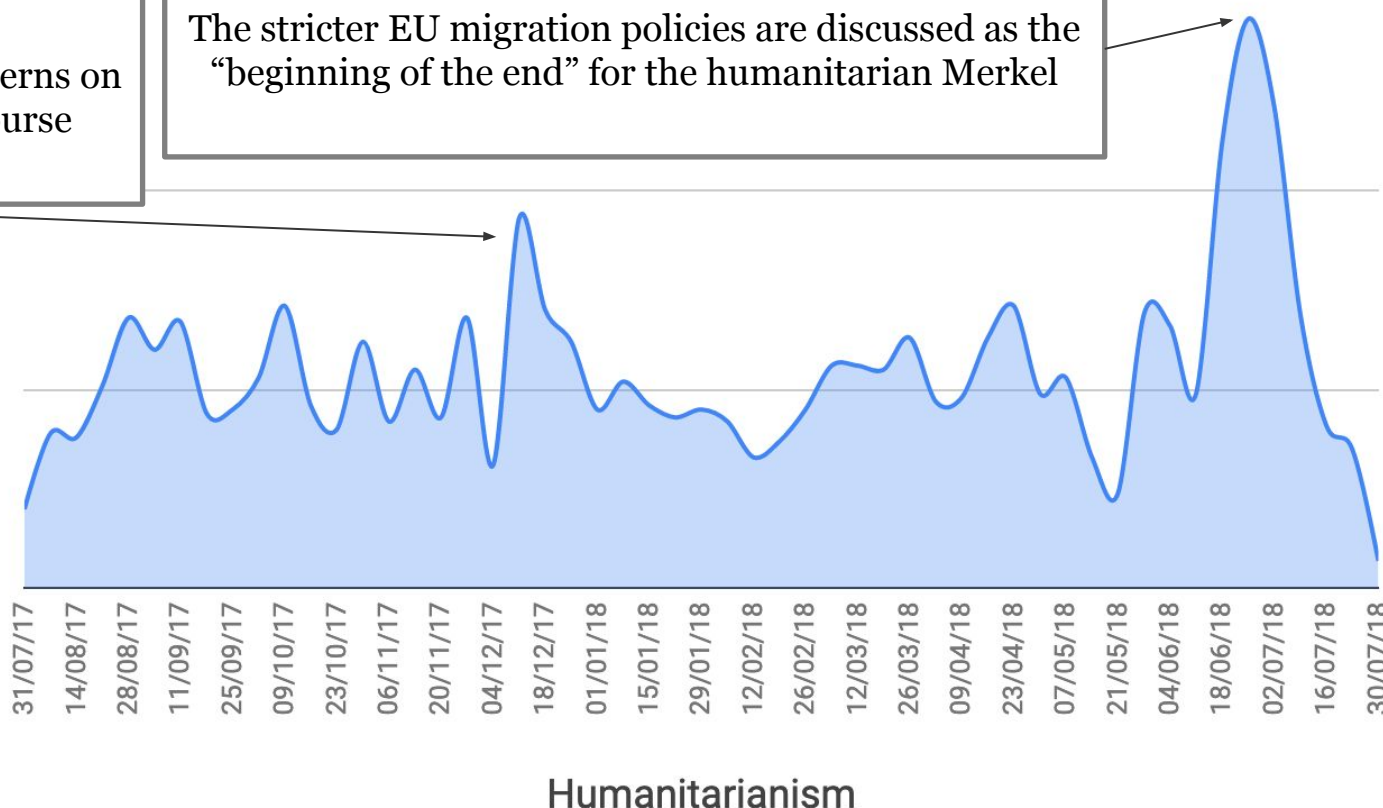
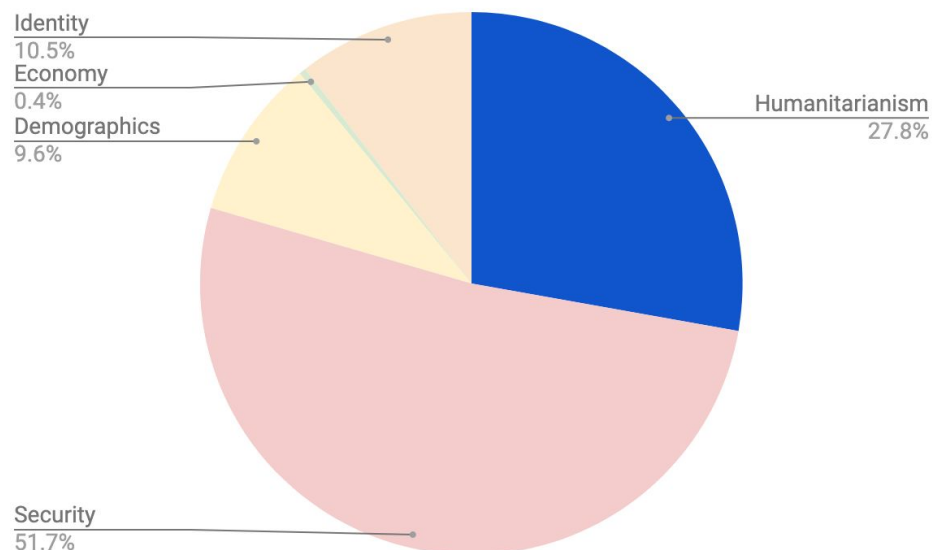
Humanitarianism (1)

People commenting on humanitarianism were primarily concerned with the dire situations of migrants and asylum seekers on the islands and the harsh borders. In a wider context however, we can see anxieties arise on the political capitalization of the migration question by the far right and how the humanitarianism of Merkel might end her career.

Results:
~58,000

Far-right parties meet in Prague, sparking concerns on the rise of the right via anti-immigrant discourse

The stricter EU migration policies are discussed as the “beginning of the end” for the humanitarian Merkel



Pan-European Narratives | GR

Humanitarianism (2)

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Humanitarianism is often invoked to call out hypocrisy in the treatment of migrants

The guys who look at refugees who came to Greece like garbage are the same ones who pride themselves on the Greek homogeneity abroad, the institutions and traditions that kept the Greek inscriptions on their shops. Migration is not a Greek privilege.

How come society is not ashamed to bow down to flags and borders, while a four-year-old child, a refugee from Iraq, loses his life on Europe's shores

Being an economic migrant now in the Middle East, I have two things to share: 20-25 year-old ladies are laughing to show the scars of battles with ISIS. Many do not even have a village anymore because it does not exist. 5-to-7-member families have been reduced to 3 people



Images in the humanitarian narrative were focusing on successful integration stories or the plight of asylum seekers due to poverty or ill treatment by security forces, showcasing a strong current of empathy present in Greek society.

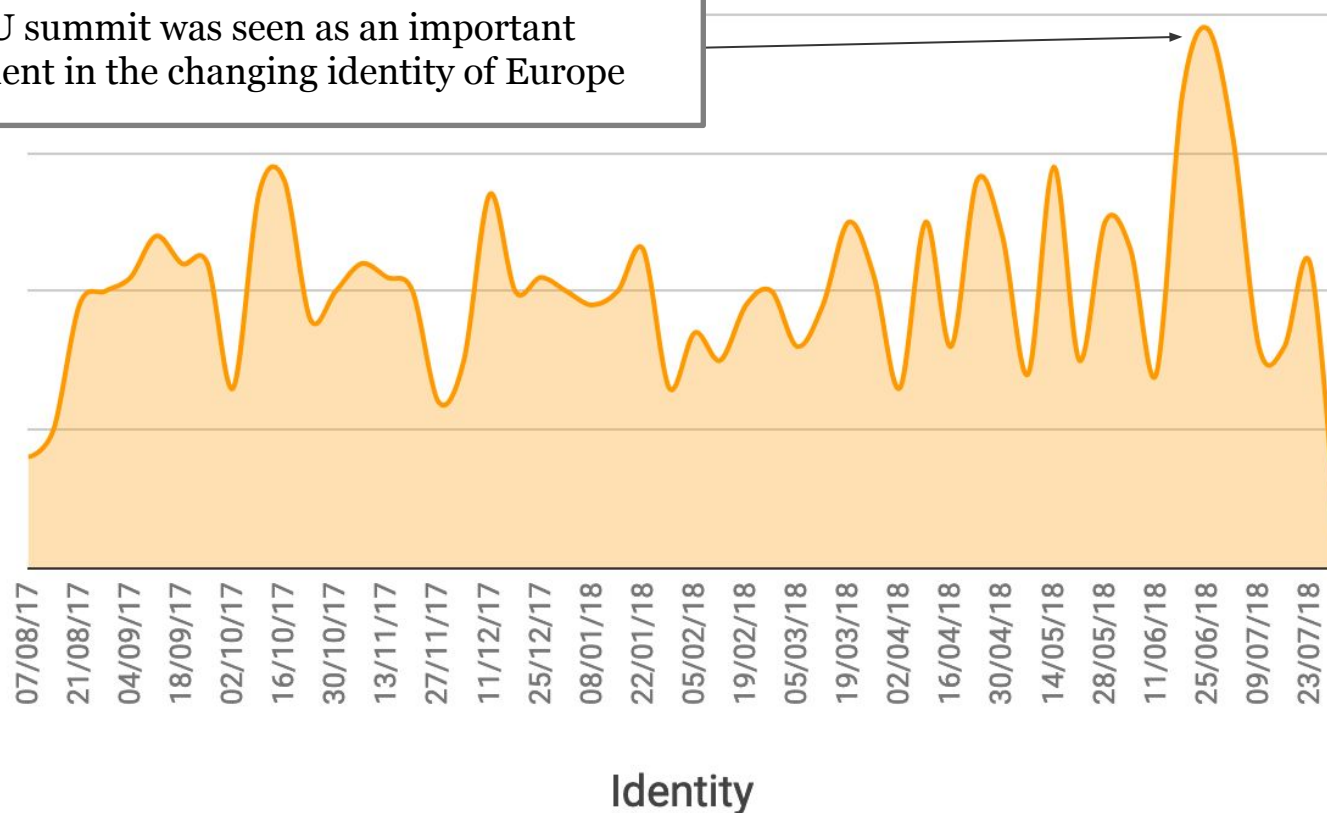
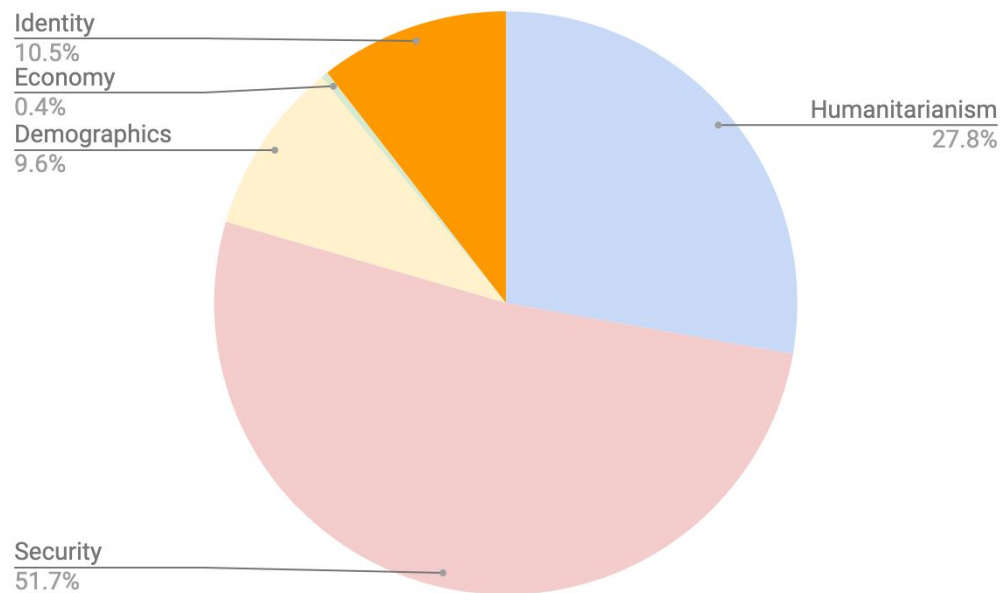
Pan-European Narratives | GR

Identity & Customs (1)

The identity discourse was primarily around the identity of Europe – not as a Christian project, but as one sliding to the right on the wave of immigration, mirroring the concerns in the humanitarian narrative. This was contrasted by concerns over the changes in Europe due to the meddling of Soros, and some of the tension towards Macedonia and Turkey, based on historical experiences.

Results:
~22,000

The EU summit was seen as an important development in the changing identity of Europe



Pan-European Narratives | GR

Identity & Customs (2)

Europe's shifting identity through populism

Populist parties of the radical right - focusing on large-scale immigration, which is itself a symptom of neoliberal globalization and the freedom to move capital - (and the wars of the Transnational Elite) have rose to fill the gap in the discourse.

Orban defends the border, defends banks, defends depositors' savings and blocks immigration!

Anyone who has looked at the history of the Soros Foundations in Eastern Europe and in the world since the late 1980s, should know that the supposed "charity" and "pro-democracy" programs in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine enabled entrepreneur Soros to plunder the wealth of former communist countries.



The identity conversation in images was concerned with the visible rise of right wing populism home and abroad by capitalizing on migration.

On the other side we find a strong discourse on the perceived threat to European and Greek identity that is posed by migration, a story primarily told through conspiracy theories that answer to **economic** woes.

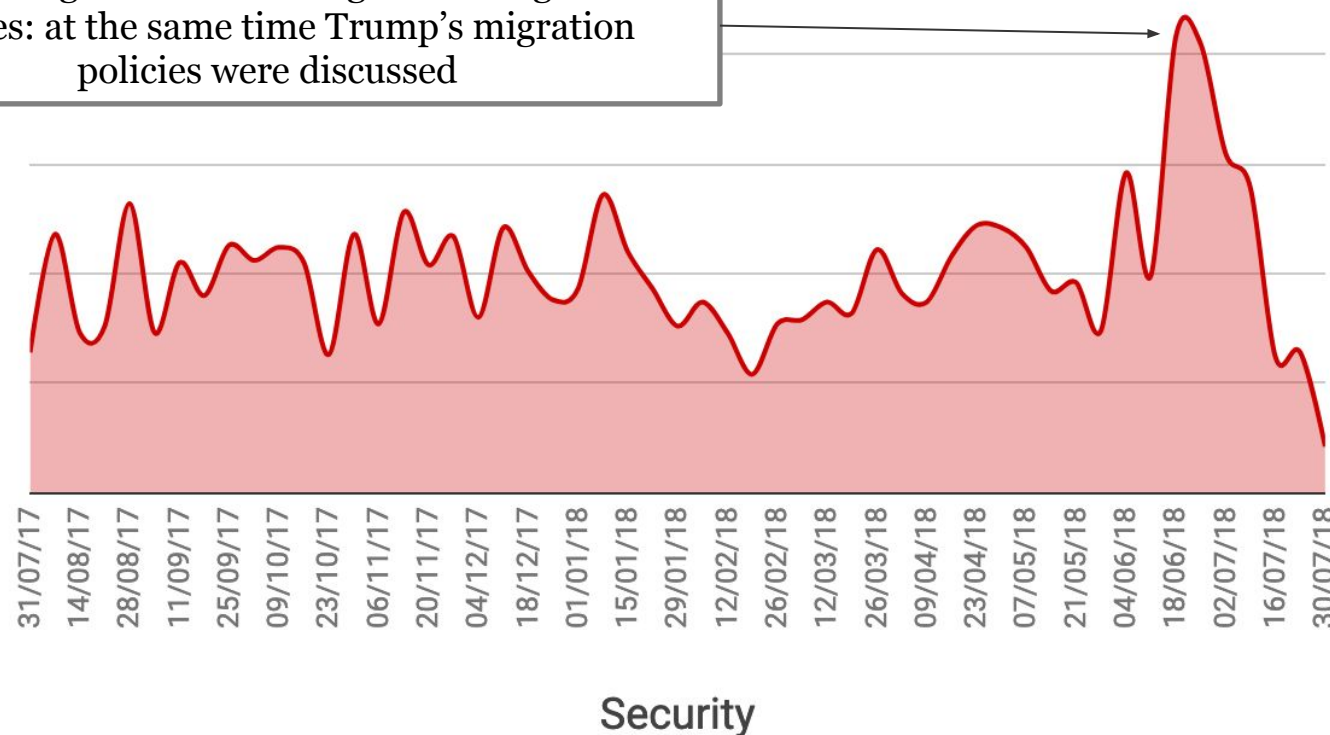
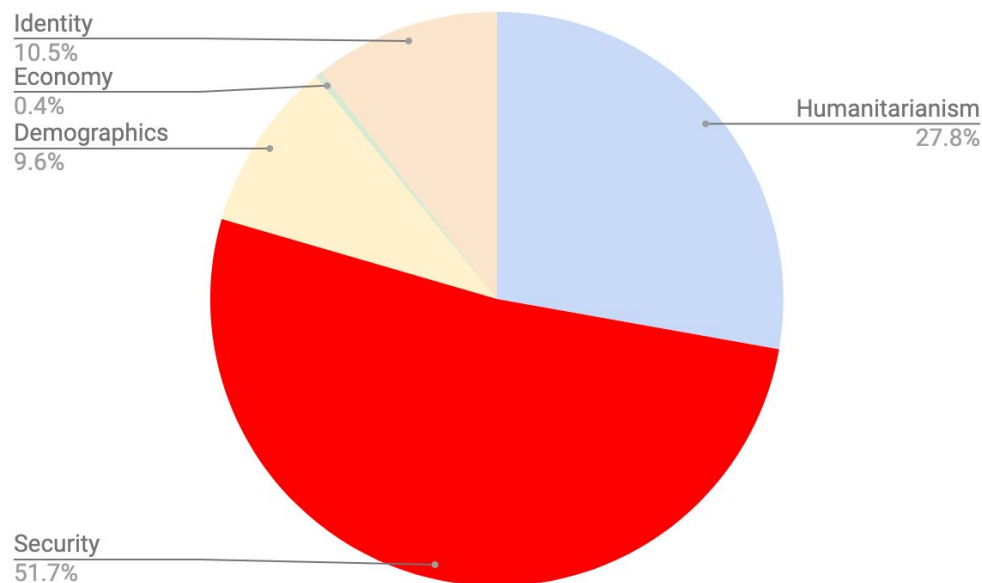
Pan-European Narratives | GR

Security (1)

The Greek security discourse on migration is strongly influenced by the regional politics and the country's tensions with Macedonia over the naming dispute and with Turkey over Cyprus. Both borders are now fenced off and migrants are shoved around frequently between the countries as a part of the larger disputes on Turkey's shifting relations with the US and the EU-Turkey migrant deal. Within this, Trump's anti-migrant measures are also discussed as EU migration policies tighten.

Results:
~108,000

The EU migration summit tightened migration policies: at the same time Trump's migration policies were discussed



ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The security discourse is widely anti-migrant

We can not allow the "tsunami" of uncontrolled immigration



There are fears of a generalized "conflict" in the port of Patras as migrants start fights.



For the sake of national security (Erdogan declared), the islands of the North Aegean must not be permanently hosting refugee and migrants.



The most influential images in the security narrative indicate two key issues:

On the one hand, they reflect a wider European trend of migrants treated mainly as a security threat that require policing, showcasing figures such as Viktor Orbán or news about rioting migrants.

On the other hand, popular images illuminate local issues on the Turkish-Greek border.

+ *Local Issues in Greece Around Migration*



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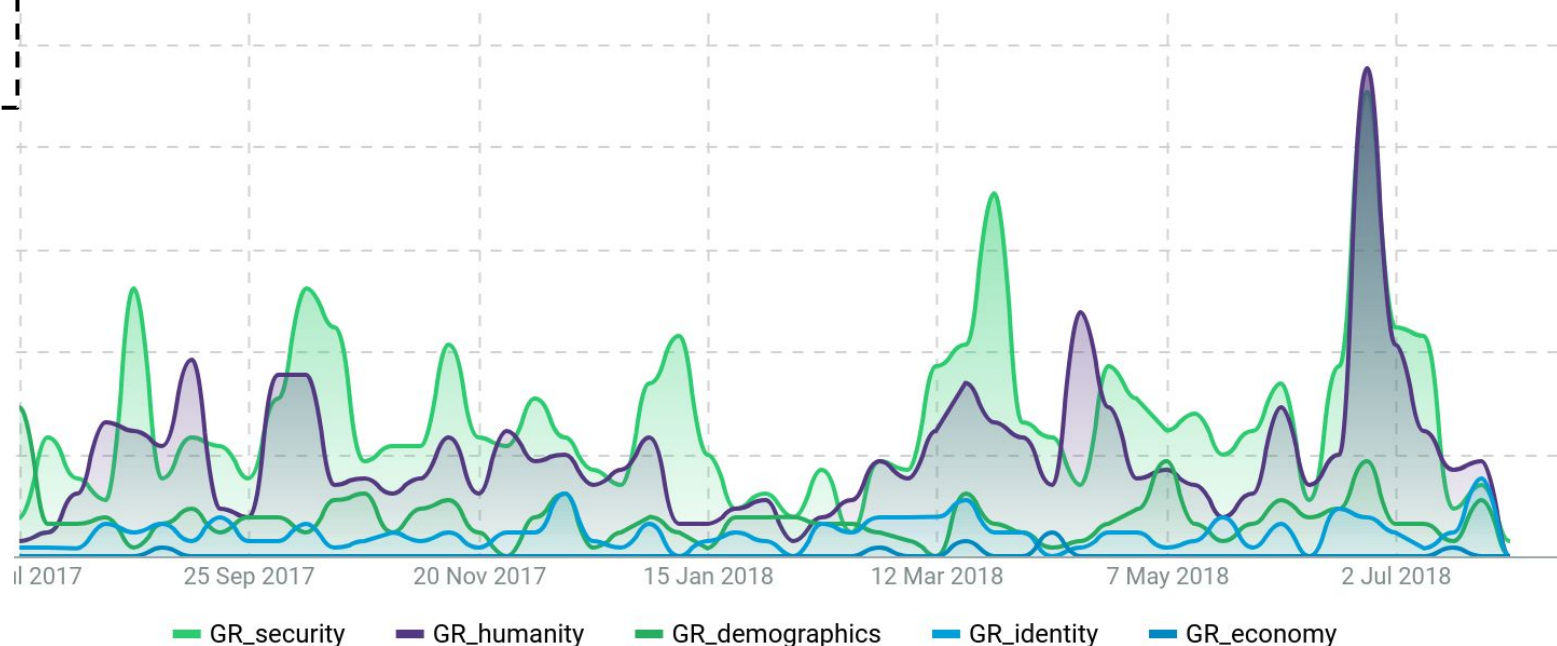


Local Issues | GR

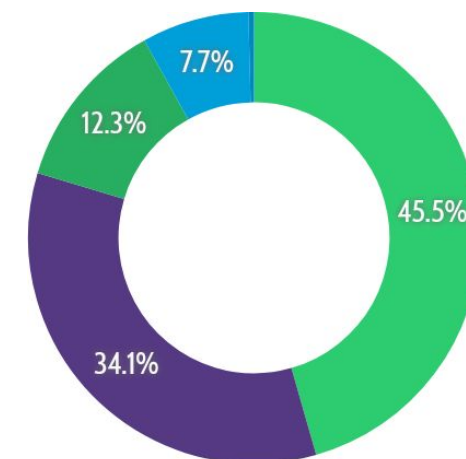
Tensions with Turkey

Mentioned 20% of the time, Turkish-Greek relations appear often in the conversation. Migration is a proxy subject used as sabre-rattling between the two countries and is showing increasing escalation, with Greek border guards abducted by Turkey and tensions rising with Erdogan's regional ambitions.

Results:
~40,000



The composition of the discourse reflects real security concerns and questions the humanitarian goal of the EU-Turkey deal



GR_security
GR_humanity
GR_demographics
GR_identity
GR_economy

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



3.

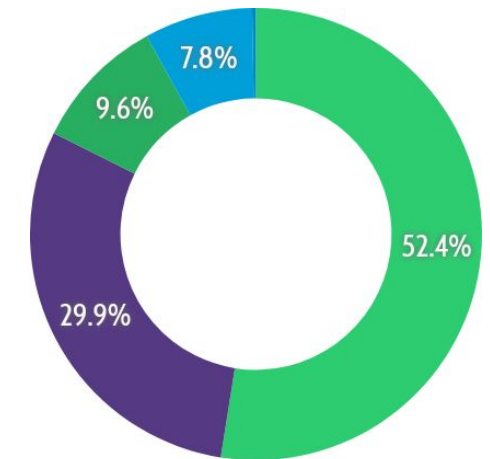
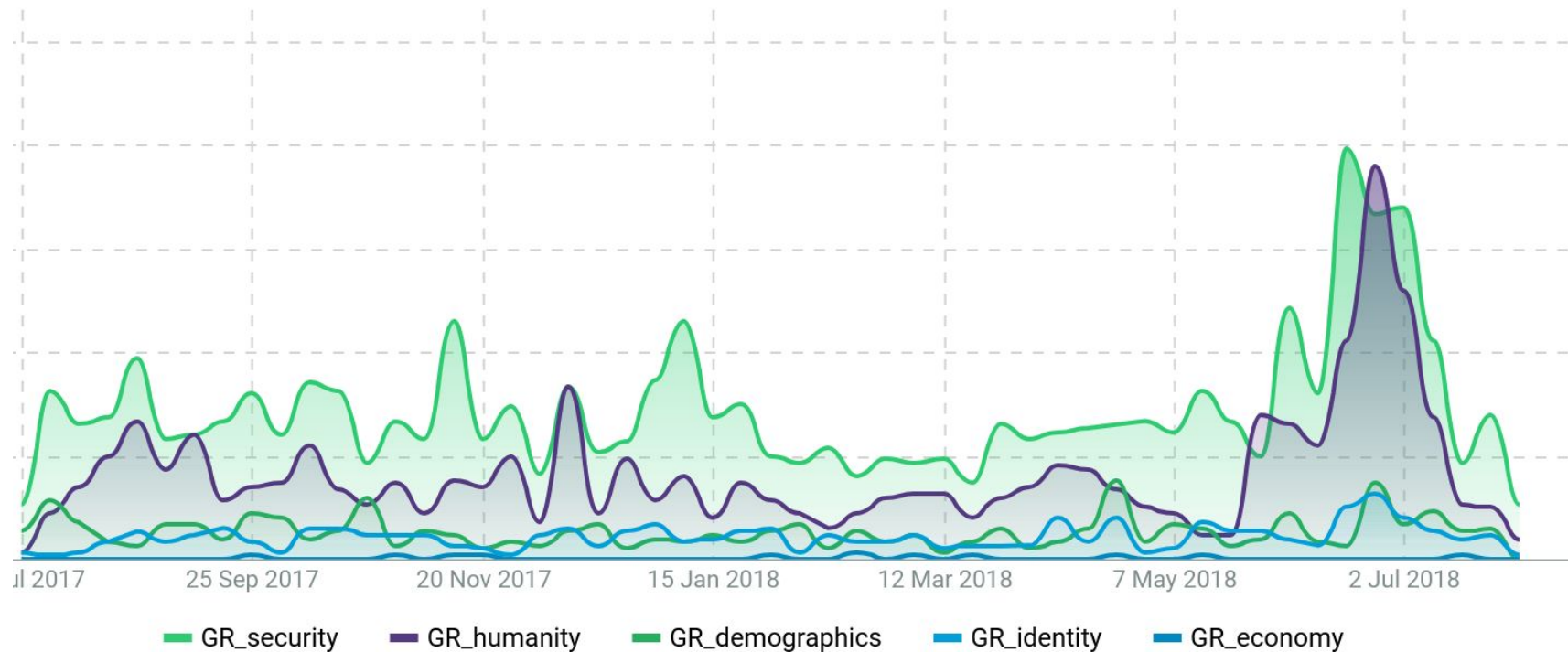


European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | GR

Migration is generally viewed as an EU question

EU politics was invoked in 44% of the migration discourse, echoing a sentiment that solutions to migration are to be found on an EU level, with **increasing interest of securitization over humanitarian approaches**.

Results:
~88,000



● GR_security
● GR_humanity
● GR_demographics
● GR_identity
● GR_economy

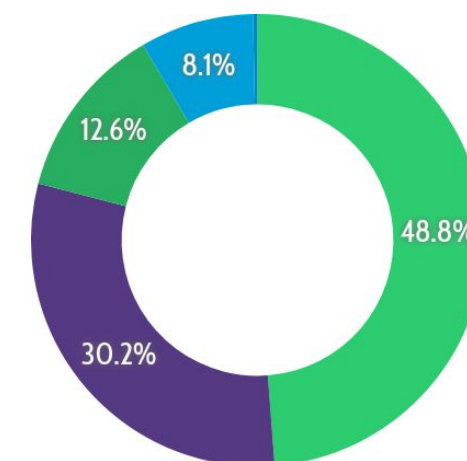
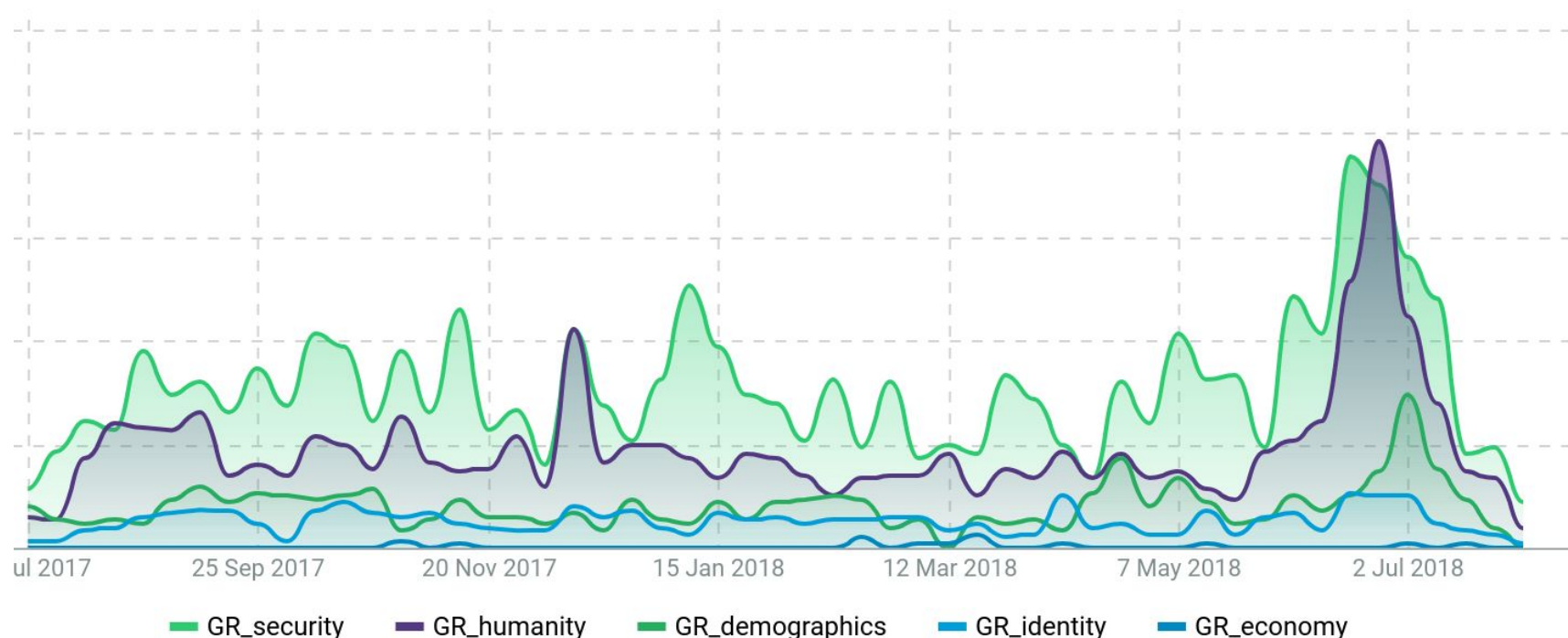


European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | GR

Local politics concerned with domestic crisis

With a pressing migration crisis locally, domestic politics was mentioned almost 50% of the time, as local politicians tried to find solutions both locally and on the EU level. With tie-ins to other subjects, such as the Macedonian name dispute and the Turkey relations, the subject is highly politicized in multiple narratives.

Results:
~100,000



● GR_security
● GR_humanity
● GR_demographics
● GR_identity
● GR_economy

+ *Conversation Channels*



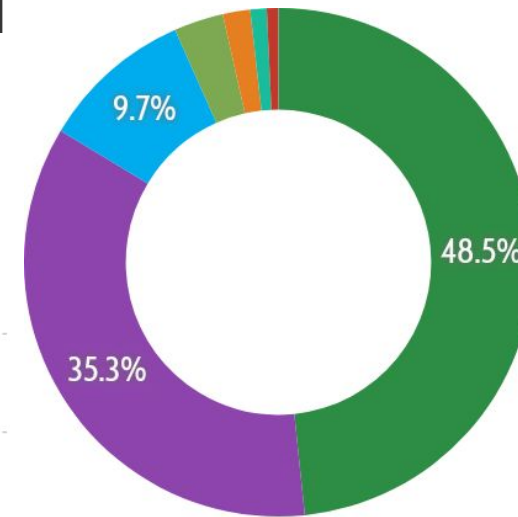
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Channel Distribution | GR

Blog posts winning over the news

In addition to a handful of influential news sites, migration was mostly discussed in the blogosphere, indicating a very opinionated and polarized public sphere. This polarization could be traced not only through the political spectrum, but also through moderate official media outlets versus the more passionate blogosphere.



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