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A thematic analysis of YouTube comments on 2020 Turkish–Greek border crisis: The case of Euronews¹

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Abstract

Following the heavy military losses in Idlib, Syria, Türkiye opened its Greek border to European-bound asylum seekers and migrants on February 27th, 2020, paving the way for a political tension and border crisis between Türkiye and the EU. This research investigates the anti-refugee and anti-immigrant discourses articulated within the comments on the YouTube channels of the official EU website Euronews both in English and Turkish communicating about the Turkish–Greek Border crisis that erupted in March 2020. To this end, it analyzes a large dataset of comments taken from the most interacted videos respectively on 15th May 2020 in English (V1) and 16th June 2020 in Turkish (V2). The number of comments is 2255 (C1) for the former, and 817 (C2) for the latter. The comments were analyzed through the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA.2022. While the themes communicating about the crisis revolve around the debates of religion, national security and conceptualization of refugees and migrants within the C1, the expulsion of the refugees, negative framing of the refugees and hate speech are prominent in the C2. The themes of social welfare and daily practice are prevalent in both C1 and C2. Consequently, refugees in C1 are mostly perceived in terms of security and/or economic considerations, while in C2 they are seen as people who benefit from social welfare but do not contribute to the state and society. In both C1 and C2, refugees are considered an economic burden and undesirable actors.

Keywords: EU, Türkiye, Refugee, Migrant, Thematic analysis, 2020 Türkiye-Greece border crisis

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INTRODUCTION

Following the eruption of the Syrian Civil War, the massive influx of people to Türkiye and the EU has led to a critical change in the attitudes and perceptions towards refugees⁵ and migrants within the host communities. Comments are often affected by various factors, including their reasons for migrating, their legal status, when they migrate or the articulated true or false news about them. Since the popularity of social media has increased considerably in recent years, citizens of the host communities usually articulate their opinions, emotions and attitudes on online media platforms and various social networks, especially on the videos they watch on video-sharing sites such as YouTube (Asghar et.al., 2015). Such a digital exchange of opinions is considered as a critical part of modern democracy (Shanahan, 2017). They play an increasingly important role in the formation and dissemination of public discourse. Therefore, analysis of the comments provides useful data about the themes and the contents of the videos.

By bearing this fact in mind, this paper examines the anti-refugee and anti-immigrant discourses articulated within the comments on the YouTube channels of the official EU website Euronews both in English and Turkish communicating about the Turkish–Greek Border crisis that erupted in March 2020. During the crisis, online-wide reactions from many commentators that express their opinions and attitudes about the crisis from many different perspectives were received. This study presents a thematic content analysis of the comments communicating about the crisis given the fact that conducting such analyses is valuable in terms of enlightening the policymakers and other actors to understand public concerns and take necessary measures relating to migration in preventing the prospective social conflict and disharmony between the host society and the newcomers. To this end, the two most interacted videos in English and Turkish were selected and in total 3072 comments were extracted. The comments are coded and analyzed through the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA.22.

⁵ In this study, the term of refugee is used in terms of sociological perspective. That's what it includes Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye as well. Moreover, migrants includes both regular and irregular migrants in Türkiye.

The paper first briefly explains the background of the Turkish-Greece border crisis to provide a certain contextualization to the analysis in order to consider it within the larger socio-political and international context. Then, it elaborates on the methodology it employs to conduct the thematic analysis. Finally, it presents and discusses the main themes identified and extracted through thematic analysis. The research concludes with the main findings of the research.

BACKGROUND OF THE 2020 TURKISH–GREEK BORDER CRISIS

While the Arab revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa led to the collapse of the dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, their repercussions resulted in a civil war in Syria when the Assad regime violently oppressed the protests (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012). The situation was aggravated further after the radical Islamist terrorist organisation, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) took Aleppo and extended its control over the territories in western and northern Syria in 2012 (France24, 2014). The massive destruction of the country, dramatic violation of human rights and civilian deaths forced the vulnerable Syrian civilians to escape to other countries in search of security and shelter, resulting in the massive displacement of over 6 million Syrians (UNHCR, 2022). They initially fled to neighboring countries including Lebanon, Türkiye, Iraq, and Jordan (UNHCR, 2022). However, since the prolongation of the situation and the unprecedented influx of refugees have burdened these countries in terms of supplying basic needs and services such as education, healthcare, and employment (Kirişçi, 2014), Syrians started to risk their lives and took dangerous routes in order to reach Europe. As a result, the immense overcrowding of refugees generated a critical challenge to the EU with the record number of asylum applications (Connor, 2016).

The EU member states diverged highly in responding to the refugee flow regardless of the humanitarian aspect of the situation and moral obligation (Spijkerboer, 2016). They were essentially divided into three groups: those who welcomed the refugees, those who firmly opposed them, and those who were vulnerable to the massive refugee flow due to their geographical proximity (Greenhill, 2016). Thus, they could not propose a unified voice at the EU level. The persistent divergence resulted in political friction that also put

European solidarity in danger. In this respect, the EU internalized the crisis (Özoflu & Kahraman, 2019).

While member states such as Germany and Sweden adopted an open-door policy, Central Eastern European Countries (CEECs) and the Baltic States opposed the implemented packages within the framework of the European Agenda on Migration formulated respectively in May and September 2015 for the relocation of the refugees from Italy and Greece. Thus, there was escalated tension between the member states such as Italy and Greece, the Mediterranean gateway for refugees, and its EU partners. Athens was accused of deliberately waving through migrants who ought to be registered as soon as they enter the EU; a violation of the Dublin Regulation's⁶ rule of 'the first country, while it insisted on the fair burden-sharing among member states (BBC News, 2016). That has been a dilemma among member states between implementing the EU *acquis* and showing concrete solidarity with the burdened member states. Moreover, the terrorist attacks all over Europe exacerbated the situation and generated a Europe-wide feeling of insecurity.

The political tension of the crisis among member states was resolved through EU-Türkiye Joint Action Plan on 15 October 2015 (European Commission, 2015). The Plan which was activated by the historical EU-Türkiye summit of 29 November 2015, mainly aimed to halt the irregular refugees coming from Türkiye to Greece and strengthen the information sharing with Frontex and Europol in exchange for financial assistance and visa liberalization dialogue for Türkiye and reenergizing the bilateral relations through regular summits that would be arranged twice in a year (European Commission, 2015). In the following process, a resettlement mechanism was also agreed upon by the EU-Türkiye statement of 18 March 2016 (Council of the European Union, 2016). It envisaged sending EU's all irregular refugees trespassing to Europe from Turkish soil back to Türkiye. In exchange, for each Syrian being returned to Türkiye from the EU, another Syrian was resettled from Türkiye to the EU (Council of the European Union, 2016).

While Türkiye was regarded as a reliable partner by being the main host country of the Syrians and the main corridor for incoming migrants and refugees (Nestoras, 2015), such

⁶ Dublin Regulation requires that Member State, where irregular migrant enters, is responsible for examining an asylum application of irregular migrant.

a political maneuver by the EU placed Türkiye as the most critical third-country partner that provided political leverage to Türkiye in mediating its relations with the Union. Accordingly, the way of the management of the crisis by the EU generated a bargaining tool for Türkiye in its accession negotiations by revitalizing the political dialogue between the two parties (İçduygu & Aksel, 2014). Following the statement, the migratory flows in the Turkish-Greek frontier remarkably decreased (Spijkerboer, 2016), since the entries of undocumented people from Turkish soil into Europe were strictly controlled until 2020 (Oztig, 2020).

However, on February 27th, 2020, in the face of the aggravated threat of more refugee arrivals from Syria (Ergin, 2020) after a deadly airstrike in Idlib, Syria by Syrian regime forces that killed 33 Turkish soldiers (Jamieson, 2020), Türkiye opened its Greek border to European-bound asylum seekers and migrants. Türkiye alleged that the EU had not kept its promises within the framework of the 2016 deal (Oztig, 2020). While thousands of refugees and migrants from different nationalities (Syrians, Afghans, Pakistani, Iranians and Somalians etc.) approximately about 12.000 to 25.000 gathered on Türkiye's western border (Ergin, 2020), Greece and the EU were left prone and ill-prepared for the sudden influx of refugees. Greece's prime minister Kiriakos Mitsotakis regarded the developments as "a conscious attempt by Türkiye to use migrants and refugees as geopolitical pawns to promote its own interest" (Mitsotakis, 2020). He evaluated the situation along the Greek land and sea border 'as an imminent threat to the country's national security' (Oztig, 2020). In order to avoid the repetition of the 2015 refugee crisis, Greece declared no illegal entries would be allowed (BBC, 2020) and applied disproportionate force including tear gas, plastic bullets and water cannons to halt the border crossings. In addition, it suspended asylum applications for a month (Infomigrants, 2020). The decision was criticized by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the grounds that there was no legal basis to halt asylum requests within either the European refugee law or the 1951 Refugee Convention (ECRE, 2020; UNHCR, 2020).

Yet, the EU refrained from any explicit condemnation of the ill-treatment of the asylum seekers (Cortinovis, 2021) and it deployed all the necessary support to Greece. On March

3rd, Ursula von der Leyen, the head of the European Commission, visited the Greek side of the border and expressed the EU's support for Greece: “[o]ur first priority is to ensure the order is maintained at the Greek external border, which is also a European border... I am fully committed to mobilising all the necessary operational support to the Greek authorities” (European Commission, 2020). In this respect, both Greece and the EU adopted a heavily securitised approach in responding to the border tension. Greece closed its borders on 19th March due to the Covid-19 outbreak and the crisis was de-escalated temporarily. Refugees, who gradually lost hope to reach Europe, were sent to quarantine places in various regions of Türkiye (Daily Sabah, 2020). Against this background, this paper investigates the anti-refugee and anti-immigrant discourses articulated within the comments on the official EU website Euronews and Euronews Turkish YouTube channels communicating about the crisis.

METHOD

The research analysed the comments made by commentators of the social networking site YouTube in response to the two particular videos that went viral and received the most comments communicating about the Turkish–Greek Border Crisis in March 2020 on the English and Turkish channels of the EU official news agency Euronews. The reason for choosing these videos is to capture the discourses of commentators who reacted quickly during the escalated tension of the crisis. In other words, the study aimed to provide a detailed description of the qualitative nature of people's online reactions to and attitudes towards refugees and migrants within the specific context of the border crisis. To this end, it analyzes a large dataset of comments taken from the most interacted videos respectively on 2nd March 2020 (V1) and 28th February 2020 (V2). The former was uploaded to the analysis program on May 16, 2020, while the latter video was uploaded on June 15, 2020. As of these dates, the number of comments has been respectively 2255 (C1) and 817 (C2). Accordingly, in total 3072 comments were traced and analyzed.

The comments were coded and analyzed through the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. The use of the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA.22 speeded up the process and allowed the researchers to analyse the high volume of data in depth from different perspectives. Code and sub-codes related to comments were assigned and

analyzed. Since the encoding process is prone to errors in the application of the codes to the corpus under analysis (Oliveira et.al., 2013), the encoding process has been repeated by the co-authors separately as well. Except for the swearing comments, all the comments in the video were utilized unchanged in the findings section.

Thematic analysis of the YouTube comments on the English video identified mainly 32 codes. These are related to main themes including security, economy, culture, and politics. In total, the number of coding is 394. The codes and their respective definitions are laid out in the following Table:

Table 1

Codes identified through the English video and their descriptions

Code Theme	Sub-Theme Name	Number	Explanation
Security	Security (General)	6	Security reasons in general
Security	Crime	10	Perception that refugees and immigrants are criminals
Security	Illegality	8	Perception that refugees and immigrants are illegal
Security	National Security	48	Entrance of the refugees and immigrants as a matter of national security
Security	Public Safety	3	Perception that refugees and immigrants are threat to the public security
Security	Terror	25	Featuring relationships between refugees and migrants and terrorism, framing them as terrorist
Categorization	Different categorization of Refugee and Migrant	41	Using refugees and immigrants interchangeably, Framing refugees as economic immigrants
Economy	Economy	5	Economy related issues in general
Economy	Economic Conditions of Refugees	5	Perceptions that refugees are in good conditions
Economy	Employment	12	Perception that refugees and immigrants are stealing jobs of the native population
Economy	Social Welfare	27	Perception that refugees and immigrants live a comfortable life by utilizing social welfare opportunities and they put burden to the hosting states

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Economy	Better Job Opportunities	5	Perception that refugees and immigrants leave their countries for better job opportunities
Economy	Access to Public Services	7	Perception that refugees and immigrants live a comfortable life by benefiting from the public services of the EU member states
Economy	EU-TR Relations	5	Economic perspective within the EU-Türkiye relations
Economy	Development	6	Perception that refugees and immigrants are necessary for the development and that they are accepted for German interests
Culture	Culture	8	Culture and cultural differences in general
Culture	Racism	5	Discriminatory comments based on race
Culture	Age/Generation	14	Perception that refugees and migrants are young and they are not in need of help & that they will be a burden when they get older
Culture	Nationalism	2	Constructing cultural differences and discrimination through a nationalist perspective
Culture	Europeanism	8	Constructing cultural differences and discrimination through European perspective
Culture	Hate Speech	15	Hate speech including direct swearing, humiliation and insult
Culture	Religion	60	Cultural differences and discrimination based on religion (Islamic religion)
Culture	Language	4	Language (Arabic) based cultural differences
Culture	Daily Practice	11	Cultural differences and discrimination based on their daily-life practices
Culture	Food	1	Cultural differences and discrimination based on their eating habits (alcohol, pork etc.)
Culture	Clothes	6	Cultural differences and discrimination based on their clothing
Culture	Discrimination	3	Comments based on discrimination
Political	Political	3	Comments on politics in general
Political	Migration Policy	2	Comments on the migration policy
Political	Minority/Ethnicity	2	Comments based on minority issues and ethnicity
Political	Border	33	Comments on the border issues

Political	EU-TR Relations	4	Comments within the context of the EU-Türkiye relations
	TOTAL	394	

On the other hand, thematic analysis of the YouTube comments on the Turkish video identified mainly 19 codes. In total, the number of coding is 174. The codes and their respective definitions are laid out in the following Table:

Table 2

Codes identified through the Turkish video and their descriptions

Code Theme	Sub-Theme Name	Number	Explanation
Willing to Expel	Expel	35	Desire to send migrants and refugees, especially Syrians, back to Europe or their home country
Qualification	Qualifications of Refugees/Migrants	29	Humiliating the refugees and immigrants by their education, characteristics and qualifications
Security	Crime	3	Perception that refugees and immigrants are criminal
Categorization	Different Categorization of Refugee and Migrant	1	Using refugees and immigrants interchangeably, Framing refugees as economic immigrants
Economy	Economic Crisis	11	Economy related issues in general
Economy	Economic Conditions of Refugees	1	Perception that refugees and immigrants live a comfortable life
Economy	Employment	6	Perception that refugees and immigrants are stealing jobs of the native population
Economy	Social Welfare	16	Perception that refugees and immigrants live a comfortable life by utilizing social welfare opportunities and they put burden to the hosting states
Economy	Access to Public Services	4	Perception that refugees and immigrants live a comfortable life by benefiting from the public services of the EU member states
Culture	Culture	3	Culture and cultural differences in general
Culture	Racism	1	Discriminatory comments based on race

Culture	Nationalism	4	Constructing cultural differences and discrimination through a nationalist perspective
Culture	Europeanism	1	Constructing cultural differences and discrimination through European perspective
Culture	Hate Speech	36	Hate speech including direct swearing, humiliation and insult
Culture	Religion	3	Cultural differences and discrimination based on religion (Islamic religion)
Culture	Daily Practices	14	Cultural differences and discrimination based on their daily-life practices
Culture	Discrimination	1	Comments based on discrimination
Political	Political Tool	4	Regarding refugees and immigrants as a political tool
Political	EU-TR Relations	1	Comments within the context of the EU-Türkiye relations
	TOTAL	174	

FINDINGS

Codes and Themes: General Perception of Euronews Commentators

This section presents the themes, their respective codes and code relations of comments on both English and Turkish videos. The comments on the English video are mostly associated with the codes related to “religion” (60), “national security” (48), and “definitions of immigrants and refugees” (41), respectively. In addition, codes related to “border” (33), terrorism (25), and social welfare (27) sub-themes are also prevalent. In order to define our standpoint with regard to the coded themes here, it is first necessary to give a general definition of these most-occurred terms in our data analysis. Accordingly, the sub-theme of “religion” is mostly associated with statements signifying the cultural differences and discrimination based on religion (Islamic religion), while “national security” implies the statements made upon the entrance of the refugees and immigrants in close relation to the concerns of “national security”. The sub-theme of the “definition of immigrants and refugees” is generated mostly because of the misinterpretation of refugees as economic migrants. On the other hand, the sub-theme of the “border” has a close relationship with the Turkish-Greek border crisis of 2020 given that all of the comments were uttered during the crisis. The sub-theme of “terror” has

been expressed through featuring relationships between refugees and migrants and terrorism and framing them as terrorist. Lastly, the sub-theme of “social welfare” refers to the perception that refugees and immigrants live a comfortable life by utilizing social welfare opportunities and they put burden to the hosting states.

Codes related to religion-based themes are often articulated through the othering and securitization of the Islamic religion. In addition, these are conveyed through the sentiment that Islam is invading the European territory. The examples are as such, *“I hope you will solve your Muslim invasion problem before it’s too late”, “invading jihadists”, “Quran virus”, and “do not accept any Islamic immigrants other than refugees”*.

In a similar manner, the security concerns towards Europe and Greece are raised within the codes related to national security, *“These Muslims want to invade Greece”, “... this is not asylum...Ethnic cleansing of the Greek population from their homeland”*. The threat perception against European security is also evident in the comments such as, *“these people are a threat to the nation”, “this is a radical Muslim invasion of Europe organized by Turkey”* and *“this is an invasion, not immigration!”*.

The third commonly used code which is related to the sub-themes of “the definition of immigrant and refugee” shows that YouTube commentators often use refugee and immigrant interchangeably. The refugees are often constructed as ‘economic migrants’; *“they are not refugees but economic migrants, I have no sympathy for them!”*, *“they are economic migrants... they have nice clothes and money???”* and *“I can't see women and children, only economic migrants”* are just some examples of such statements.

Apart from these three codes, the codes related to the sub-theme of the "border" refer to closing the borders, keeping borders closed, not allowing the entrance of refugees and protecting the Greek and Bulgarian borders, which are the external borders of the EU. In a similar way, codes associated with the sub-theme of terror evoke the general understanding of the incoming immigrants and refugees as invaders, members of ISIS, and terrorist groups. The codes related to social welfare, on the other hand, convey the perception that these people are entering the EU to benefit from the social and economic welfare of the EU member states.

In the comments written on the Turkish video, the codes are related to the sub-themes of ‘hate speech’ (36), expelling refugees (35), and ‘qualifications of refugees and immigrants’ (29). The sub-theme of “hate speech” covers the expressions that promote and incite direct swearing, humiliation and insult directed against the refugees. In fact, adding hate speech to the Eurocrimes counted in Article 83 (I) of the TFEU in the near future is currently on the agenda of the European Commission. (Parliament, 2020) The sub-theme of “expelling refugees” refers to the commentator’s desire to send them away from the country regardless of their final arrival country. The utterances related to the “qualifications of refugees and immigrants” are constructed through the negative portrayals that humiliate them based on their education, characteristics and qualifications and stereotypes.

Comments coded within the sub-theme of hate speech often involve the dehumanization of refugees, “*Are they human *** (censored) they are wasting oxygen*”, “*I can't deal with this cannibal tribe Arab leftovers*”, “*Look at the dishonored, He says we will live in despair when asked whether he would live in Turkey. Shame on those who will take back bloodless people like you who left their homeland!!!*”. These examples conclude that how refugees are negatively viewed.

Under the sub-theme of the expulsion of refugees, two typical representations of refugees have been identified: The support for those who are trespassing to Europe on the grounds that the financial burden is being lifted from Türkiye, and sending them back to Syria. The examples coded by the sub-theme are such as; “*I hope they all go. Do not give up my refugee brothers, they [European States] have to take you*”, “*please go*”, “*go away, go to your country, fight for your country or side with Esad [President of Syria]. I do not understand the Europeans either. These guys are not integrated, my friend, they are all bigoted and ignorant people, and they should go to their own countries*”, “*They say there is a war in Syria, go and fight in Syria, save your country*”.

Within the sub-theme, the fact that European states should share the burden of the influx is also highlighted via comments as such:

“You [Refugees] should leave for good. Euronews, you are dishonored, but they will enter Europe sooner or later, leaving Turkey alone with these millions of refugees is not that easy.”

“Europe goes to the fore in defending the terrorist rights and tries everything to not to take the refugees... you were talking from afar (world), now let’s take it easy. I hope those doors will not be closed again. Let the people who want to leave.”

“Now it is your [Europe] turn to look after them [refugees].”

Another prevalent sub-theme in the comments through the Turkish video has been identified as the qualifications of the refugees and immigrants. The categorization of refugees and immigrants is identified to be conducted through their abilities, characteristic features and qualifications. Migrants, whose character traits are usually described as "ungrateful", "traitor", "treacherous" and "cowardly", are often accused of being "uneducated" and "unskilled". These negative portrayals of refugees have especially come to the fore when they publicly expressed the difficulties and challenges, they face during their stay in Türkiye while they were trying to reach Europe in March 2020:

"You are ungrateful people, you exploited us, we don’t give our blessings."

"I can’t tell you about ingratitude, but I can show you its video... Here you are, sir, I am so touched by it..."

On the other hand, the perception that the European states and societies will not welcome the refugees are often emphasized through such negation of their characteristic features as well:

"Why should they accept them [refugees and immigrants]? 90 per cent of them are treacherous disrespectful, ignorant people who lack manners. If they integrate into society and behave well, people accept them [refugees and immigrants], why not? I do not discriminate against people but European people cannot get along with them [refugees and immigrants]."

“Human rights and welfare are for their own people [European people], do they think of your uneducated refugees and immigrants?”

Comments on Security: Different Interests, Different Concerns

While commenting on the English video often interpreted the crisis in relation to the concerns of both national security and terrorism, the national security sub-theme has been especially prevalent. The analysis encoded sub-themes of national security and terrorism, respectively, 48 and 25 times. These sub-themes are followed by sub-themes of crime (10), illegality (8), security in general (6) and public safety (3). The sub-theme of crime is used to generate the perception that refugees and immigrants are criminals. In a parallel way, the sub-theme of “illegality” refers to the statements portraying refugees and migrants as illegal. The sub-theme of “security in general” refers to the security concerns of the public in general. The sub-theme of “public security” involves the expressions generating the perception that refugees and immigrants are threats to the public security. Accordingly, those who commented on the English video of Euronews regard the border crisis as a threat to their own nation and that those who come may involve in terrorist acts. These comments are often intertwined with the discourses of ‘invasion’ and ‘Islamic religion’ and ‘Muslim population’. In this respect, the border is associated with the protection of Greece and Europe from the invasion of [muslim] refugees and immigrants:

“An army by any other name...”

“These Muslims want to occupy Greece.”

“Don't accept any Islamic migrant other than refugees. if Europe accept them, it will cause destruction like in Syria”

“Islamic Jihadist invitation of Europe.... Don't let them in... you'll be doomed.”

“They are trying to enter a sovereign state with violence. This is an invasion. They should be happy they are not being shot.”

“95% Jihadist infiltrators (military age men as refugees) mixed with 5% women+children use them as a coverup/humanitarian shield to play their infamous habitual *victim card same as when they fight the army..”

In the sub-themes of crime, illegality and public security, there is an emphasis that they are entering the country through illegal means and statements that they are pedophiles and criminal gangs:

“Now it will be all our responsibility to never let any illegal criminals surpass or aggressively threatening our national borders.”

“Paedophiles we don't want these men to come to Finland”

“Gangsters with no health checks.”

“If they cross the border they will be arrested and deported because they are illegals. Simple.”

“Greece has the right to protect its borders. They do not want the illegal aliens.”

“This is not asylum. It's ethnic cleansing of the greek population from their motherland”

On the other hand, there is not any strong security concern articulated through the comments made on the Turkish video. The security-related themes were encoded only 3 times. Yet, the reactions are still harsh and there is generally a discursive construction based on the daily practice:

"They don't act like human beings, our soldiers greeted you with coffee, why are you being ungrateful here, you raped women and children, ****s"

“It's enough, we did more than we could do, we helped them that no other country has done. Still ungrateful people went to the border, where the Greeks pushed them back with gas bombs. They came back to Turkey. They still say that Turkey is bad, if so, they should go without waiting. They do not defend their country and they are messing with Turkey. Turkey is not their farm, they were standing while they were flying the flag in Taksim look at the nation, look at the people, all of them are in the latest fashion, look at our country. I can't think of these idiots who are stupid, they don't like it here, they work for 4 hours in their country, of course, they don't like where they should work while they can enjoy smoking hookah and harass women instead”

In summary, those who commented on the English video regarded the crisis the most from the perspective of fear of invasion and national security, while security concerns are not at the top of the list for those who comment on the Turkish video. Those who expressed security concerns generally formed their discourses through examples of daily practices.

Comments on Economy: Similarities and Differences

The common sub-themes raised through the comments on both the English and Turkish videos are social welfare and employment. While the sub-theme of “social welfare” is explained above, the sub-theme of “employment” refers to the comments revolving

around the implication that the refugees and immigrants are stealing the jobs of the native population.

Commentators on both videos have stated that immigrants and refugees are not beneficial to the hosting society and in contrast, they put a burden on and negatively affect unemployment rates in the host countries.

More specifically, within the English video, 27 of the coded themes related to the economy belong to the sub-theme of social welfare. The employment code has been assigned 12 times. When the prominent discourses under these two titles are examined, the discourse that they are unemployed masses taking advantage of social welfare conditions comes first. Even the Turkish diaspora in Germany is associated with such discursive constructions. Accordingly, there is a discourse on social welfare, formed usually through the construction of ‘similar cases’ in Germany and Sweden:

“85% of Turks who live in Germany are welfare guests, they don't work, over 90 % of these fake refugees are welfare guest, THEY DONT WORK, no one needs these people”

“Then what happens when those migrants get old? Does Germany just keep having to expand its population to infinity?”

“Their aim is to get to the wealthiest EU countries so they can cash in on all the "free stuff" (free house, free car, free food/medical care, and a lot of money).”

“Because of classism. The refugees are a huge financial and social liability and burden the host countries.”

The discourse on employment is intertwined with social welfare. It has been constructed via the statements that immigrants and refugees are employed instead of local people or they come for social benefits:

“Are you serious? Every European country has an unemployment rate well above 0% mate. The natives need the jobs themselves and this will only become more so the case as technologies continue to make human labour redundant. But you're right, there's no such thing as “free stuff”. All that is given for free to the invaders of Europe are paid for by the European natives”

“These journalists should be neutral! Those are economic migrants who only come for their own benefit! They want free healthcare, free food, free housing, without having to work”

“We do not accept all the misery of the world, we already have our poor, the vast majority are Muslims, and they do not speak our languages in Europe! they have no diplomas, housewives are forced to have a degree, security guards are obliged to have a diploma, electricians are obliged to have a diploma (empowerment)”

In the comments on the Turkish video, social welfare (16 times), the perception that they are the cause of the economic crisis (11 times) and employment (6 times) come to the fore. Under the sub-theme of social welfare, the statements often allege that refugees and immigrants receive a salary from the state, that they comfortably live, which demotivates them to return to their country, and that they benefit from health and education services unconditionally come to the fore:

“The Syrians will not return. Why should they? Salary, food, school, everything was given.”

“They fled the war-torn country and were met with salaries, houses and jobs. They were considered superior to the citizens of the state. I've come across these very often, they come and fool around in the city, and there is not any exception. Then, they don't like the country.”

“There are 4 million Syrians living in your country, they have more rights than you, and they benefit from everything, it happens to us that we cannot find a job or a house because of Syrians.”

In addition, the comments reflect the concerns of social welfare which are associated with the public services and economic instabilities in Türkiye. Given the ongoing economic challenges within the country, the refugees and immigrants are attributed as the source of economic crisis, inflation and increased prices:

“The price of everything has increased, he/she says what he/she is going to do. The country collapsed because of you.”

“The prices are increasing because of you, you hungry dogs. You are hungry and you are never full.”

“Refugees devastated the economy of the country, and they are still talking about price increases, it is because of you, you spent the whole money of the country”

In the employment sub-theme, the belief that there are no suitable jobs in the market since refugees and immigrants are employed without insurance is disseminated:

“Two Syrians work for a single minimum wage, they do not want insurance, the workplaces employ them. I cannot find a job because of them.”

“Wherever I look, they are full of Uzbek, Turkmen in the business sector, there is no job for our people, I have been unemployed for two months, I am stressed”

Apart from these themes, there are comments that refugees and immigrants have unconditional access to public services and that their conditions are not really bad after all. In summary, the overlapping points in the Turkish and English videos are the perception that refugees and immigrants live comfortably by utilising the opportunities of the hosting states, that they worsen employment conditions and cause unemployment and that they benefit from public services without any restriction. The diverging point, on the other hand, is that while refugees and immigrants are blamed for the economic crisis by the comments on the Turkish video, Türkiye -EU relations are regarded as a source of concern by the comments on the English one.

Comments on Culture: “Not from us”

The statements which were encoded under the theme of culture were built upon the ‘othering’ of refugees and immigrants. While these were formed through religious differentiation in the comments on the English video, hate speech against them was prevalent in the Turkish comments.

In the English comments, religion as a coded sub-theme (60 times) has been way ahead of the other sub-themes. It was followed respectively by hate speech (15 times), age (14 times) and daily practices (11 times). While the sub-theme of “hate speech” is explained above, the sub-theme of “age” refers to the young migrant and refugee comers. The sub-theme of “daily practices” is about stereotypes regarding their daily life routines such as sitting in the beach with doing nothing and smoking shisha. The religion of the refugees and immigrants [Islam] is articulated through associating it with violence, conflict, invasion and war:

“Hope you manage to solve your Muslim invasion problem also before it’s too late.”

“There are large differences in terms of culture, language and religious sect.”

“Islam have phobia to Christians, to Jewish, to Buddhist, to Sintoist, to Confucius religion, to agnostic, to Athee people. Islam is war, disaster and poverty always.”

“95% are not refugees, they are illegal immigrants, they don't have any job skills, many of them were jihadists or in prison for serious crimes...”

Especially the second excerpt is intertwined with social welfare. Some comments even claimed that social welfare is not the welfare of the states, but the welfare of the white Christian population: *“These Muslims just want white Christian welfare.”*

Hate speech, on the other hand, involves insulting words and implications. The comments proposed that refugees and migrants arriving at the Greek border should die, they deserve all kinds of ill-treatment, and they deserve hell because they are not human:

“The nazis at the Greece border couldn't even show their faces.”

“Open the gates of HELL, and usher them in, I'm pretty sure they'll be welcomed there”

“They are trying to enter a sovereign state with violence. This is an invasion. They should be happy they are not being shot.”

“Why does she use the term, "men, women and children"? Why can't she just say human animals? Because of this human rights fanaticism, the UK left.”

“Daedalus Greeks the ones who "pushes the refuges on boats to sea or sinking their boats.”

Age-related comments emphasized the influx of the young men to the Europe:

“You only mention woman & children.... most of them are single young men...a invading force...”

“And the vast majority of them are military aged men.. yet again”

“75% are Afghani men...approx age 25! Invasion is what these migrants are! Why are they not going to Islamic countries?”

On the other hand, the most prominent theme in the Turkish comments is hate speech including harsh insults. The expressions along with various descriptions attributed that refugees and immigrants are not human and they are ungrateful:

“Are they human? They are wasting the oxygen”

“Rights apply only to people?”

“I can't deal with this cannibal tribe Arab leftovers.”

“I feel like they are puking the country more and more”

“Treason is in their blood”

“You will shoot anyone who crosses the border, it's that simple”

The comments about daily practice often emphasized the high pregnancy rates among the refugees and immigrants. These were often reflected through a picture that previously became viral on social media. In the picture, a Syrian smokes hookah while looking around on the beach. This image radically feeds the discourse that Syrians live comfortably in the country. There have been constant references to this image in the comments about daily practice:

“If anyone who says "Allahu Akbar" is a Muslim, terrorist organizations would be the best Muslims. There is not a single Syrian in the mosque. They are all in the internet cafe. On the beach. In hookah”

“Here, they have 9 or 10 children, they all smoke hookah and chasing girls on the beach, eeee, you didn't expect us to say that they are mujahids! I guess”

“You could have taken care of your country instead of making love and giving birth to children”

Comments on Politics and Other Issues: Tool or Threat? Who are They?

Politics has been the theme over which the comments were mostly diverging. While the vast majority of those who commented on the English video constructed their comments on the border issue, those who commented on the Turkish video saw the issue of refugees as a political tool. The border is not perceived here as a security issue. Since the current crisis is from the border region, the border was emphasized. However, the policy-themed comments in the Turkish video are very few. While providing a general overview regarding the stemming reasons is beyond the scope of this research, this can be explained by the fact that the year 2020 has been the year that the parties have not yet seen the phenomenon of migration as a means of gaining political votes in Türkiye yet. At the beginning of 2023, the atmosphere dramatically changed with the approach of the general election. Thus, for those who commented on the video in 2020, the issue of immigration is not overly politicized in Türkiye.

In the videos, 49 themes were encoded about the policy theme in total. While border theme was encoded 33 times in the English video, the rest is related to EU- Türkiye relations, the general political situation, and minority and immigration policies.

In the comments in the Turkish video, there are statements highlighting that migrants and refugees can be used as a tool to press Europe politically and that Türkiye can be a trump card that will strengthen its hand against European countries.

In the comments on the English video, the prominent discussion other than the themes of economy, politics, security and culture is about the qualifications of the incoming refugees and immigrants. There is a constructed confusion as to whether they are economic migrants, asylum seekers, or war survivors. The embedded perception here is that they left their country for economic purposes and they actually come to earn money rather than to seek protection and they pose a danger to the destination countries they arrive at. In this vein, refugees trying to cross the border are defined as immigrants, economic migrants, and welfare tourists:

“NO!! They are not innocent and they are not poor and they are not refugees - They are immigrants and NOT welcome - why can't they understand that they are not going into Europe”

“These are economic migrants. They have good clothes and money”

“Don't let them in! They are not refugees; they want a better life at the expense of the Europeans!”

“Keep the borders closed as these are not refugees but welfare tourists and seekers for freedom of drinking and bothering girls, (don't forget what happened in cologne)”

“I can't see women and kids. Just economic migrants.”

“They not seeking asylum, they seeking for money”

HOLISTIC EVALUATION

Theme Relations

Looking at the relationship between the themes in the English news video, "religion-national security" (16 relations), "terror-national security" (8 relations), "terror-religion" (7 relations), and "social welfare-employment" (6 relations) stands out. In the religion-national security theme relationship, comments have been made on the basis that Europe is in danger of an Islamic invasion, that only Christian refugees should be accepted for security reasons, and that Christianity should be defended, as can be seen in the following examples:

“Islamic Jihadist invitation of Europe.... Don't let them in... you'll be doomed.”

“Close ALL borders and accept genuine Christian refugees who are persecuted. All Islamists are no longer trustworthy. There is a front and a back door. Respect the law of the land and go the proper way. Don't jump fences and act unlawfully. They have NO rights. This is an invasion!”

“Should stand again to defend our land our people our way of life and religion.”

When the theme relationship between terrorism and national security is analyzed, it is seen that comments show the perception of the commenters that they will be invaded and that this will be supported by terrorism:

“Europe is not responsible to raise and feed the people who left their abode! These people are Islamic foot soldiers! and They were involved in war crimes!!!”

“Invaders. Soldiers. I wouldn't really refer to them as "migrants"”

“It's a deliberate Islamic invasion. Say NO”

In the relationship between terrorism and religion, comments were made on the invasion of Europe by jihadists: “*Those young men are Islamic Warrior for the Jihad against Europe*” and “*95% are not refugees, they are illegal immigrants, they don't have any job skills, many of them were jihadists or in prison for serious crimes...*”

In the social welfare-employment code relationship, there is a perspective based on the fact that they benefit from the opportunities of the social state and they do not have any economic contribution. Examples of such statements can be given as such:

“85% of Turks who live in Germany are welfare guests, they don't work, over 90 % of these fake refugees are welfare guest, THEY DONT WORK, none need these people”

“These journalists should be neutral! Those are economic migrants who only come for their own benefit! They want free healthcare, free food, free housing, without having to work”

In the Turkish video, when the code relations are examined, "hate speech - the quality of immigrants and refugees" (6 relations), "social welfare - daily practices" (5 relations) and "social welfare - employment" (4 relations) come to the fore. It is noteworthy that they regard refugees and immigrants as the cause of economic concerns and economic problems, and they are bothered by Syrians' existence within the social circles. The

employed hate speech is vivid as well. The excerpt below is one of the relational examples of the themes of hate speech and qualifications/attributions of immigrants and refugees:

“The ungrateful people look for the ungrateful, hope they will not come back. They are running like mice. Young people, go fight. It is pity for our soldiers. But they are saving their own ass”

“You are not wanted in Turkey, you are ungrateful traitors, there has already been an inflation, life is hard”

“*** ** (censored) traitorous dishonored, you fled your homeland, to whom will you be good for? Greek soldiers, tear gas is not enough, shoot bullets at these ungrateful people”

On the other hand, following comment is example of relationship between social welfare, daily practices and employment:

“They fled the war-torn country and were met with salaries, houses and jobs. They considered themselves superior to their own citizens. I've come across these very often, they come and do licentiousness in the city, not an exception, but in general. Then they don't like the country. What if you hadn't come then? If this is not a good country, if you were fighting for your own country to be good?”

“4 million Syrians live in your country, they have more rights than you, and they benefit from everything. The only thing that happens to us is that we can't find a job or a house. We go to the hospital; the Syrians don't have time to come. Despite this, are the people in your country unscrupulous, what will you do yet?”

Theme Maps

In order to interpret and make sense of the comments and coding in the Euronews' English video in general, it is necessary to examine the general map of the themes. The map shown below was created according to the frequency of simultaneous use of the themes with each other. The colours of the themes are according to the themes and sub-themes made in the MAXQDA.22. Accordingly, orange dots represent the cultural theme, red dots represent the theme related to security, yellow dots represent the theme related to economy, purple dots represent the theme related to the definition of migrants and refugees and brown dots represent the theme related to the political dimension.

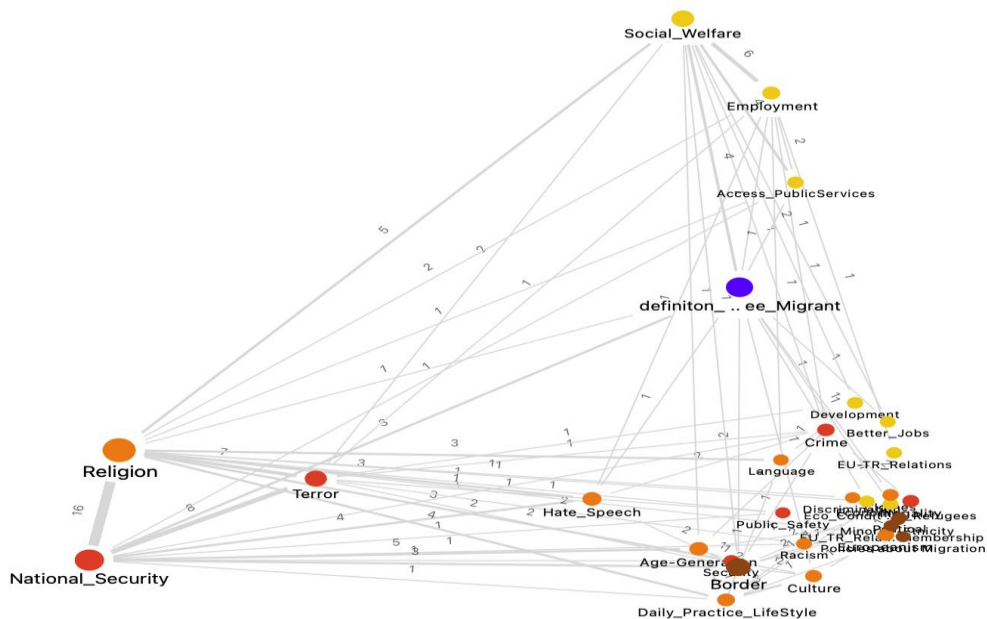
According to the map, themes of religion, national security, and terrorism are located close to each other and the relationship between them is high. Apart from this, it is observed that social welfare, employment and access to public services under the theme

of the economy are also located relatively close to each other in the upper right corner and other themes are generally close to each other. It is also observed that the code on the definition of migrants and refugees is more related to national security and social welfare, while the theme of social welfare is more related to the themes of employment, access to public services, the definition of migrants and refugees, and surprisingly, it is also related to religion.

The themes in the map below about the Turkish video were created according to the frequency of use of the themes at the same time with each other. The colours of the themes are according to the themes and sub-themes made in the analysis program. Unlike in the English video, the black dot represents the theme of "characteristic of migrants and refugees."

Map 1

Thematic map of comments on the Euronews video in English

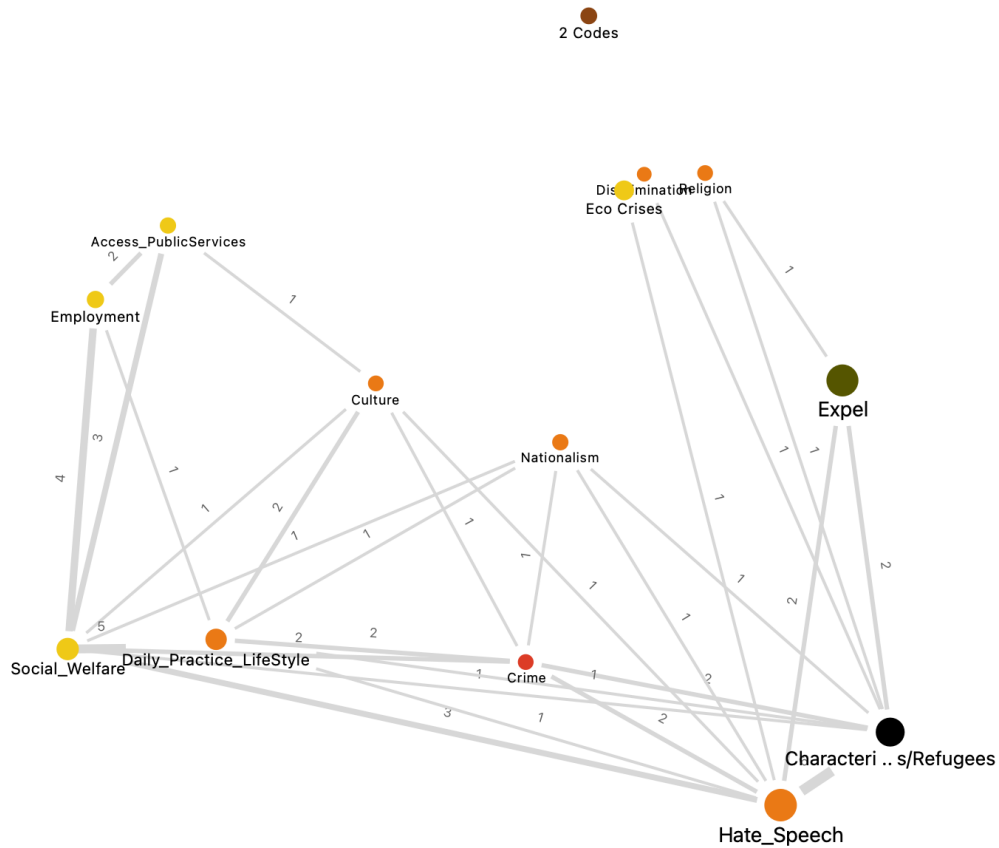


When the map in the Turkish video is analysed, it is seen that the themes of "wish to expel", "characteristic of migrants and refugees" and "hate speech" are located close to each other and are in mutual relationship with each other. While the sub-themes related to the economy are generally close to each other, social welfare and the daily practices of refugees and migrants are located close to each other, which is different from this pattern.

In addition, the themes related to political issues are not related to other codes, but stand independently in the lower right.

Map 2

Thematic map of comments on the Euronews video in Turkish



CONCLUSION

By investigating the anti-refugee and anti-immigrant discourses articulated within the comments on the English and Turkish YouTube channels of Euronews communicating about the Turkish–Greek Border crisis, this research empirically contributes to the relevant literature. It provides a novel analysis regarding the perceptions towards refugees and migrants within the current global context of the aggravated anti-refugee and migrant sentiments leading to the crises between neighboring states. We argue that conducting such analyses is valuable in terms of enlightening the policymakers and other actors to understand public concerns and take necessary measures relating to migration in

preventing the prospective social conflict and disharmony between the host society and the newcomers.

The analysis of the large dataset of comments taken from the most interacted videos respectively on 15th May 2020 in English (V1) and 16th June 2020 in Turkish (V2) during the crisis showed that while the motivations and reasons may differ, both videos contain negative portrayals of and attitudes against refugees and immigrants.

The commentators in the English video perceive the border crisis as an invasion boosted by economic and cultural concerns often implying that culturally different ‘other’ would disrupt the social harmony of European society. In this regard, religion appears as the most encoded theme, which can be explained as largely arising from cultural concerns. Besides, religion was also found to be the most co-occurred theme with the other themes.

As another prevailing issue, national security has been among the most brought-about themes, which can be associated with the fear of terrorism and the massive influx of people during the 2015 European Refugee crisis. In this respect, the securitized approach adopted by both Greece and the EU might have played as a critical denominator as well.

The third most encoded theme was the framing of the refugees as the ‘migrants’ which should be handled in close association with the economic concerns that involve the pejorative designation of refugees as economic migrants portraying them as the exploiters of the host society. Such raised arguments remarkably evoked that economic welfare would be lost was realized through and in relation to the themes of burden and social welfare as well.

In a similar way, the alleged economic burden that the refugees put on Turkish society was one of the prior concerns of the commentators in the Turkish video too. Because of the economic setbacks in Türkiye, the commentators stigmatized the refugees as scapegoats and sources of financial difficulties. Thus, the prevailing theme of expulsion was vowed through such concerns.

Yet, in close association with the economic problems, hate speech directed against the refugees was the most encoded theme in the Turkish video. It was realized through dehumanization, discrimination, criminalization, and marginalization with ‘us’ vs ‘them’

dichotomy. These were also accompanied by cultural racism which involves the constructed reaction that their daily practices were different culturally. Such cultural racism was also observed within the discussions of the qualifications of the refugees that negatively label refugees as "ungrateful", "traitor", "uneducated" or "unskilled" people. These negative portrayals have especially come to the fore when refugees publicly expressed the difficulties and challenges they face during their stay in Türkiye while they were trying to reach Europe in March 2020 in the middle of the crisis.

When the two examples are compared based on the comments made on both videos, it is found that while the perception towards Syrian refugees and migrants might be affected by various factors including social interaction, religion, cultural backgrounds etc., they were often articulated in a close association with different experiences of the societies with the refugees. Accordingly, one of the critical and interesting findings of this research was that each side's negative perceptions are constructed through the divergent standpoints stemming from the so-far divergent levels of contact between the Turkish and European public. In this vein, while the border crisis triggered security-based considerations with the 'fear of invasion/terrorism' on the Greek and EU side as a cover for the ill-treatment of the asylum seekers, Turkish commentators regarded the crisis as a leeway for the expulsion of the refugees from the country, which culminated in the generation of the hate speech discursively boosted by the real-life experiences as a cover for the ill-treatment against the refugees.

In this regard, this research serves as a comparison ground for further studies on the arrival and existence of refugees and migrants to investigate the different experiences of the host societies which might be replicated notably in the context of the ongoing Ukrainian War. In addition, conducting a comparative thematic analysis of the comments regarding the arrival of Ukrainians to the EU member states with the refugees from different countries such as Syrians could also provide an important contribution to the literature.

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