

# DIALOGUE

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## THE MIGRATION CRISIS AT THE EVROS/MERİÇ BORDER: AN ANALYSIS ON THE COVERAGE OF GREEK AND TURKISH NEWS PORTALS

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## ABSTRACT

*Towards the end of February 2020, tens of thousands of people headed to the Greek-Turkish border at Evros/Meriç, after Turkish authorities announced that they would no longer be preventing refugees and migrants from crossing the border into the EU. In reaction to this situation, the Greek authorities responded by closing the borders and announcing that they would not allow people to seek asylum in Greece and would be sending them back to Turkey. Widespread disinformation and the arrival of thousands of migrants in a few days caused tensions at the border, creating a new migration crisis along the Evros/Meriç border, being the top story for more than a week on the media agenda. However, the media agenda changed when the Covid-19 pandemic became alarming for both countries. This paper seeks to unveil how the Greek and the Turkish media covered the crisis, which took place at the border zone between 28 February and 11 March 2020. For this purpose, news items from eight news portals, both pro-government and the opposition, from Greece (kathimerini.gr, eleftherostypos.gr, efsyn.gr, tanea.gr) and Turkey (sabah.com.tr, sozcu.com.tr, hurriyet.com.tr, T24.com.tr) were selected and analyzed in a codebook. The empirical work, which is based on content analysis, aims to assess the media coverage of the two countries during the crisis, by answering the research question: “How do Greek and Turkish news portals portray the migration crisis at the Evros/Meriç River?”*

**Keywords: Migration, Refugees, Greece, Turkey, Crisis Reporting**

## INTRODUCTION

On 27 February 2020, the Syrian Air Force attacked a Turkish Army brigade in Idlib. Following the air raid, the Turkish government announced that it would open its Greek border for refugees who would like to migrate to Europe. A Turkish official statement argued “the migrants were now also Europe’s and the world’s problem” and Turkey decided to relax its border controls at the Turkish-Greek land border “because it had not received enough support in hosting about 3.7 million Syrian refugees”. (BBC News 2020) Thousands of asylum-seekers, migrants and refugees headed to the border city of Edirne and started waiting at the border by the Evros/Meriç River. The move stimulated Greece to increase the security standards at its borders as the Greek government announced that it would not allow anyone to illegally enter the country. The tension at the border was exacerbated by statements by politicians from the EU, Greece, and Turkey that blamed each other for the crisis. (Enria and Gerwens 2020).

At the time, the media’s role in providing information about the crisis was central. However, Europe’s “refugee or migration crisis” was not a new phenomenon. It was first recorded in 2015, when the media, national and international, reported on the biggest movement of people across borders. (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017, 4) Covering crises is one of the most difficult tasks for today’s media. When crises occur, the news media plays an important role not just in informing the public about what is happening, but also in moulding public opinion regarding who is to blame for causing them. These difficulties stem from the large amount of available information and the necessity to keep track of multiple sources. (An and Gower 2009; Iyengar and Kinder 1987) Once again in 2020, the mainstream media’s informational role remained paramount and critical in understanding what was happening at the Greek-Turkish border.

The paper seeks to discuss how the Greek and the Turkish news portals reported on the crisis along the Evros/Meriç River between 28 February and 11 March 2020. The research was conducted by performing qualitative content analysis and a codebook was created for the empirical work of the analysis of the news items.

The analysis is based on the research question: “how do Greek and Turkish news portals portray the migration crisis by the Evros/Meriç River?”. The question evaluates the news items as an example of crisis reporting and analyzes the coverage by looking at the items’ general tone and the usage of adjectives, labels, and actors in the news texts.

The research sample includes eight news portals, four from Greece (*kathimerini.gr*, *eleftherostypos.gr*, *efsyn.gr*, *tanea.gr*) and four from Turkey (*sabah.com.tr*, *sozcu.com.tr*, *hurriyet.com.tr*, *T24.com.tr*), which were chosen by considering their popularity and their different political stances. *Kathimerini* and *Eleftherostypos* are pro-government and center-right oriented news portals, which also exist as daily political newspapers since the 19th century. The other two news portals, *Efimerida ton Syntakton (Efsyn)* and *Ta Nea*, can be said to be oppositional and center-left oriented media organizations. *Ta Nea* was founded almost 90 years ago and has been Greece’s best-selling newspaper for decades. *Efsyn* is a cooperative daily newspaper, which was first published in 2012. It supports political theses of the left and center-left and prioritizes the reporting of human rights, humanitarian, and refugee issues.

The news portals from Turkey that can be perceived as pro-government and leaning to the center-right are *Sabah* and *Hürriyet*. Both papers have been widely circulated titles in the last 30-40 years. Their news portal editions are also popular and are two of the most read news websites. The other two portals are oppositional news organizations. *Sözcü* can be evaluated as a secular-nationalist and widely read newspaper and news portal. *T24* is relatively a young alternative media initiative and receives attention from young and white-collar readers. The portal does not have a paper version and it can be categorized within the left-leaning editorial line which priorities coverage on human rights, women’s rights, and issues related

to refugees.

The sample of the research consists of the exact days of the developments at the Evros/Meriç River between 28 February and 11 March 2020. Therefore, the sample starts with the day of the announcement made by the Turkish Government, stating that Turkey would not stop refugees trying to cross the border into Greece. The sample ends with the day when Covid-19 took center stage both in Turkey and in Greece and the refugee issue lost its momentum in the media agenda. Hence, all news items published between 28 February and 11 March 2020 were included and analyzed in the codebook.

In addition to Google Search’s News tab, which was used with advanced settings, the search option of the news portals was also used. The aforementioned dates were chosen and the keywords “refugees”, “migrants”, “Evros” in Greek and Turkish were used to reach the data set.

## BACKGROUND

The Syrian refugee crisis is the largest refugee and displacement crisis since the Second World War. Turkey, apart for hosting the largest proportion of Syrian refugees estimated at approximately 3.6 million people, also serves as one of the key transit countries in many refugee routes towards Europe. (UNHCR 2021) Greek-Turkish relations had already been beset by complications for centuries. The war in Syria unavoidably affected Greek-Turkish relations and a new challenge was added to the list of differences between the two countries. The summer of 2015 saw the peak of irregular migration towards Europe. The so-called Balkan Route became porous, and refugees arrived in Western European countries via Turkey, Greece, and other Balkan countries. The issue became the most popular topic in the EU agenda.

Thereby, Turkey and the EU agreed on a statement of cooperation on the migration crisis in 2016. This agreement was aimed at reducing the high number of refugees who arrived in Europe in 2015 and attempted to regulate the flows from Turkey to the Greek islands. (Arribas 2016) Meanwhile, Greece, which is attempting to recover from its decade-long economic woes, has taken on the role of Europe’s gatekeeper.

While the number of migrants coming to Greece surged dramatically in 2018, resulting in extreme congestion and filthy conditions in refugee and migrant camps, the EU-Turkey Agreement has kept some 16,000 people in situ in the Greek islands. (Enria and Gerwens 2020)

Consequently, the agreement was not able to deter all problems related to the migration crisis between Turkey and Greece. Turkey blamed the EU by claiming that it follow through with its obligations. The EU and, principally Greece, were concerned about Turkey's insufficient control of its coastal borders. In 2020, the Pazarkule/Kastanies checkpoint at the Turkish-Greek border, just by the Evros/Meriç River became the new focal point of tension.

Turkish authorities claimed that the EU did not transfer the agreed upon sum of 6 billion Euros to Turkey and, therefore, did not keep to the agreement signed on 18 March 2016. (Anadolu Ajansı 2020)

Also, the rising tensions in the city of Idlib in Syria were becoming a cause for concern for Turkey regarding a "new refugee wave". (BBC News 2019)

Lastly, the attack against a Turkish Army brigade in Idlib by the Syrian Air Force in February 2020 triggered a change in Turkey's migration policy leading it to lessen the control at its western borders. Consequently, the massive media interest in the agenda-changing phenomena emerged just before the world was globally hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The section that follows focusses on how the news portals in Greece and Turkey portrayed the crisis at the border by the Evros/Meriç River.

## DISCUSSION: FINDINGS FROM THE GREEK AND TURKISH NEWS PORTALS

According to Table 1 below, 240 news items published on the Greek news portals, which cover the events that took place on the Greek-Turkish border of Evros/Meriç, between 28 February and 11 March 2020 were analyzed. *Kathimerini* is the news portal with the most news items (92), while the other three news portals, *Efsyn*, *Eleftherostypos* and *Ta Nea*, have about 50 news items each.

NEWS ITEMS/ PORTAL & DATE	EFSYN. GR	ELEFTHERO STYPOS.GR	KATHIMERI NI.GR	TANEA. GR	TOT AL
28 FEBRUARY	2	4	8	3	17
29 FEBRUARY	6	3	9	2	20
1 MARCH	4	1	6	2	13
2 MARCH	2	4	9	6	21
3 MARCH	4	7	16	2	29
4 MARCH	2	7	9	4	22
5 MARCH	1	4	7	6	15
6 MARCH	6	8	3	10	27
7 MARCH	6	4	8	4	22
8 MARCH	3	3	3	2	11
9 MARCH	5	3	6	3	17
10 MARCH	6	1	2	2	7
11 MARCH	7	1	6	2	16
TOTAL	50	50	92	48	240

Table 1. Distribution of the analyzed news items on Greek news portals

Table 2 reflects 153 news items published on the Turkish news portals, which cover the events that took place on the Greek-Turkish border of Evros/Meriç, between 28 February and 11 March 2020 which were analyzed by the author. *Sabah* and *Sözcü* are the news portals with the most news items (50 per portal) while *Hürriyet* and T24 published 28 and 25 news items respectively.

What follows is a discussion of how the Greek and the Turkish news portals covered and portrayed the refugee crisis at Evros/Meriç border between 28 February and 11 March 2020. The following common characteristics arise according to the news items that were collected and analyzed from both Greece and Turkey.

First, the type of coverage is highlighted. That is, in most of the Greek and Turkish portals, it is obviously negative and directed against one of the two countries, while some portals describe a “war” scene, blaming correspondingly Greece or Turkey.

Some of the portals maintained a neutral tone while reporting. However, a positive aspect of the coverage is difficult to discern due to the unstoppable nature of the crisis. Regarding the use of the language, the use of militaristic language is the obvious common characteristic. Journalistic clichés and expressions, puns, and irony are some of the other characteristics of the news items about the coverage. Among the news portals, the prominence of the words such as “refugees”, “migrants”, “illegal entries”, and words that derive from the political orientation of the news portals from both Greece and Turkey, were observed.

According to the findings, some of the Greek and the Turkish news portals used international news agencies and sources to describe the situation at the border, while others preferred to depend only on local and national media organizations, official government statements as well as those of political leaders, as well as the EU position. This can again be explained according to the political inclinations of the news portals.

NEWS ITEMS/ PORTAL & DATE	SABAH. COM.TR	SOZCU. COM.TR	HURRIYET. COM.TR	T24. COM.TR	TOT AL
28 FEBRUARY	9	6	2	3	20
29 FEBRUARY	2	7	3	7	19
1 MARCH	5	4	2	5	16
2 MARCH	9	10	4	3	26
3 MARCH	5	2	3	3	13
4 MARCH	7	3	2	2	14
5 MARCH	2	8	2	1	13
6 MARCH	4	1	3	-	8
7 MARCH	1	3	-	1	5
8 MARCH	-	2	2	-	4
9 MARCH	2	3	2	-	7
10 MARCH	2	1	1	-	4
11 MARCH	2	-	2	-	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>153</b>

Table 2. Distribution of the analyzed news items on Turkish news portals

The use of the terms “fake news”, “disinformation” and “propaganda” were observed in all eight news portals. Only two of the Greek news portals (Efsyn and Ta Nea) analyzed further the killing of Muhammad Gulzar, one of the casualties of the border crisis, while the Turkish Sabah and Hürriyet news portals claimed there were more killings. Only the Greek portals Efsyn and Ta Nea commented on the existence of a “secret detention center for migrants” along the Evros/Meriç border.

## THE GREEK NEWS PORTALS

### EFSYN.GR

Efsyn, a left-wing news portal, reported on the border crisis by trying to maintain a neutral tone, without adding further aggressive language on the actors of the crisis, especially about Turkey, and without abusing the use of militaristic language. Most items were predominately characterized by a neutral use of the language. The use of some words such as “explosive”, “barrage”, “pressure”, “risk”, indicate the intensity of the incidents. (efsyn-1-2) The use of some puns such as “kleftopolemos” (efsyn-10), “oriental bazaars” and “sultan” was evidenced. These “orientalize” the refugees and the other side of the border (efsyn-44). In the first instance, it is described a “war” scene by making a parallelism with a Greek military tactic during the Greek War of Independence of 1821 against the Turks; while in the second case, the text refers to the bad communication between the EU and Turkey and that the Turkish President Erdoğan, “continues misusing the millions of refugees and migrants he hosts in his country” (efsyn-44).

According to the findings, Efsyn mainly used the word “refugees”, and sometimes “migrants”, to refer to the “thousands of desperate people who remain trapped in Evros”, “victims not only of Turkish propaganda but also of the Greek actions”. (efsyn-6-7) Many news items presented and highlighted, via the reports of international news agencies, how Syrian refugees arrived at the Greek-Turkish border motivated by the misinformation of the Turkish government and the media. (efsyn-11-22-32)

There are also items that indicate a “humanitarian drama” blaming the decisions taken by all sides – Greece, Turkey, and the EU. (efsyn-14) Efsyn reported on the issue of human rights, while it highlighted the reaction of the international community in favor of the protection of human life. (efsyn-17-28-49)

According to the findings, Efsyn seems to have covered the border crisis both by sending its own reporter to the field and by presenting coverage and photo reportages by international news and photo agencies (efsyn-4-41-50). Efsyn covered the “symbolic move” of the Greek Prime Minister who together with European Officials visited the Evros/Meriç border (efsyn-16), with the support of some European leaders such as Angela Merkel (efsyn-37) and FRONTEX’s announcements. (efsyn-15) Efsyn also covered President Erdoğan’s statements, who said, “The doors are now open, share the burden” (referring to the EU), while sometimes mocking the EU by referring to a “Solidarity in words only”. (efsyn-14)

The news items that are worthy of analysis and were presented through the reports of the international news agencies, are those that referred to the loss of human life and violations of human rights, combined with underlying the extensive use of “fake news”. Efsyn presented “the killing of Muhammad Gulzar” and the existence of a “secret detention center for migrants” on the Evros/Meriç border through testimonies, satellite photos, maps, on-site reporting, and the use of electronic tools of spatial analysis by Sky News, Reuters, and The New York Times and by providing the Greek government’s statements on the issue. (efsyn-20-21-41-50)

### ELEFTHEROSTYPOS.GR

According to the news items that were analyzed, Eleftherostypos, one of the center-right oriented Greek news portals, seemed to present the facts with a lack of a neutral tone, while the heavy use of the militaristic language led the readers to believe that the two countries were in a state of war. Titles such as “Greece shields Evros”, “Scene of war in Evros: Wild incidents at the border with migrants”, “Nonstop thriller in Evros”, “Blockade of 2,867 people” are some demonstrative examples. (eleftherostypos-2-6-35)

*Eleftherostypos*, in comparison with *Efsyn*, used primarily the words “migrants” and “illegal entries”, and only occasionally the word “refugees”. (*eleftherostypos*-1-6-15) Furthermore, it focused on the number of attempts of the refugees to enter Greece by publishing that there were “38,500 attempts to enter illegally”. (*eleftherostypos*-27)

*Eleftherostypos* seems to have covered the crisis at the Greek-Turkish border via the use of reports and photo reportages that were mainly from other Greek media agencies. (*eleftherostypos*-20-29-33) However, some stories came from its own reporter on the ground with the most characteristic being a reference to those “who guard Thermopylae”. (*eleftherostypos*-42) Also, many of its news items were accompanied by unaccredited photos. (*eleftherostypos*-8-10-13) In fact, most stories in the portal included the Greek government’s statements and primarily the military actions to keep the border closed, aiming to boost the Greek national sentiment. (*eleftherostypos*-4-5-7-9-44) In several items, it was highlighted that “Greece defending an asymmetric threat at the European borders” (*eleftherostypos*-30), that “Turks pull the strings” (*eleftherostypos*-40), and that “the EU categorically rejects the use of migration pressure by Turkey for political purposes” (*eleftherostypos*-32), while supporting Greece. (*eleftherostypos*-10-24-49)

*Eleftherostypos* also made use of the terms “fake news” and “propaganda” differently from *Efsyn*’s approach. It focused on how the Greek’s Government’s spokesperson contradicted “The killing of a migrant at the Greek-Turkish border”, which was first presented in an article in the German magazine “*Der Spiegel*”, focusing on the Turkish “disinformation campaigns”. (*eleftherostypos*-46) Finally, *Eleftherostypos* referred to Erdoğan’s “delirium” and “provocation”, who likened Greeks with Nazis by stating that “What the Greeks did is similar to what the Nazis did. It makes no difference”. (*eleftherostypos*-50)

## KATHIMERINI.GR

*Kathimerini* presented the facts in a remarkably neutral tone, without adding any additional aggressive connotations on the actors of the crisis.

Most news items in the sample are characterized by careful use of language, with no puns or irony, as was sometimes the case in *Efsyn*’s coverage, that could add more tension to an already tense context. (*kathimerini*-3-8-10) Furthermore, both the words “refugees” and “migrants” were used (*kathimerini*-3-8-35), with no mention of “illegal entries”, as was the case with *Eleftherostypos*, and with very few words that could invoke a “war” scenario. (*kathimerini*-12-55-87)

*Kathimerini* seems to have covered the crisis at the Greek-Turkish border by presenting reports and stories mostly by specific Greek media agencies. (*kathimerini*-34-54) Although some stories were written by its own reporters in situ (*kathimerini*-19-21-35) and others made use of international media sources. (*kathimerini*-6-12-29) In most news items, *Kathimerini* presented the Greek government’s and the EU’s statements and actions. (*kathimerini*-22-24-41-81) It also included interviews that made reference to the situation at the border with various Greek Ministers and relevant military personnel. (*kathimerini*-4-15-20) Finally, yet importantly, *Kathimerini* used the term “fake news” in the context of presenting the statement of the Greek Government’s representative with regard to Turkey’s actions. (*kathimerini*-53)

## TANEA.GR

*Ta Nea*’s news coverage of the crisis culminated between a neutral approach to a negative one. Most of the news items were characterized by words and expressions that contributed to the heightened tense atmosphere while describing the incidents as a “war” scene. Some characteristic examples include: “alarm signalled in Evros”, “police and military forces are on alert in Evros”, “battles in Evros between refugees and migrants on the one hand and the Greek forces on the other”, “war scene at the border crossing point in Kastanies of Evros”. (*tanea*-8-12-15-16) The portal used many negative adjectives and aggressive connotations against Turkey, while the use of the militaristic language was remarkably heavy-handed. In most of its news items, it was highlighted that “Turkey is entering a new round of escalating tensions” and that it “weaponizes impoverished refugees and migrants to blackmail Europe and to secure more money for those living in the Turkish camps”. (*tanea*-19-20)

According to the findings, *Ta Nea* used both the words “refugees” and “migrants”, as *Kathimerini* did (*tanea-7-25-34*). However, it also highlighted that the Greek government “will no longer allow any illegal entry into the country” (*tanea-5*) and that Turkey “pushes, with unprecedented cynicism and analgesia, tens of thousands of refugees towards Europe, trapping them at the given time on the border with Greece, resulting in absolute chaos”. (*tanea-18-41*) *Ta Nea* presented all the statements made by the Greek government, military personnel, and those stressing the EU’s support. (*tanea-10-17-33-48*) Finally, yet importantly, it reported on how the users of Twitter used the hashtags “#IstandwithGreece”, “#Greece\_under\_attack” (*tanea-8*), how Turkey used “smartphones to guide refugees at the borderline” (*tanea-2*), and the role of fake news and disinformation. (*tanea-43*)

## THE TURKISH NEWS PORTALS

### SABAH.COM.TR

The *Sabah* news portal is an openly pro-government news organization in Turkey. During the days of the crisis, *Sabah*’s coverage was heavily loaded with content that originated from governmental institutions or President Erdoğan’s remarks. (*Sabah-8*)

In the Turkish context, the word “göçmen” (migrant) is historically associated with the migrants coming from the Balkans, Crete, and the Caucasus. (Kodaman and İpek, 2000) Syrians living in Turkey since 2011 have been mostly called “mülteci” (refugee) and “sığınmacı” (asylum seeker) in the media coverage. (Pandir et al 2015). However, during the Evros/Meriç River border crisis, the *Sabah* started to refer to the Syrian and other refugees in the region as “göçmen” (migrants). For example, in an article published on 28 February 2020, the word “migrants” is preferred to the term “refugees” throughout the text. However, when the journalist talked to a refugee heading to Edirne at the Eskişehir bus station, the refugee defined himself as a “refugee” (the portal does not use the word migrant here) who wanted to go to Greece and from there live in Germany. (*Sabah-1*)

*Sabah* sometimes used journalistic expressions that are normally reserved for historical events or football matches in the Turkish press. One title read: “Migrants arrive at the European Gates”. The reference to “European Gates” refers to past Ottoman victories on the battlefield Ottomans or to football matches where the Turkish side had good results against their European rivals. (*Sabah-12*) Moreover, *Sabah*’s coverage also employed military concepts to explain the situation by the Greek border. In one instance, the portal used a striking word in its title which read “Landing operation to Greece”. This warlike rhetoric was accompanied by a photograph showing refugees arriving on Greek soil by boat via the Evros/Meriç river. The lead argued that the refugees were already arriving via land to Greece. In this context, the report referred to Turkey’s Interior Minister comments that more than one hundred thousand refugees left Turkey as of 1 March 2020. (*Sabah-2*) Numbers were important for *Sabah* in the construction of its own narrative, widely shaped by statements by Turkish officials.

*Sabah* published several reports targeting the EU during the crisis where Greece was foregrounded while the portal blamed Germany and other European countries for the occurrence of the refugee crisis on the land border between Greece and Turkey. (*Sabah-6*) Reports with headlines referring to the EU’s position during the crisis were usually connected with the word “fear”, in that the EU was scared and looking for cooperation with Turkey by offering more money to Turkey to find a solution to the crisis, according to *Sabah*. (*Sabah-10*)

*Sabah* emphatically referred to the rubber bullets, tear gas, and sound bombs used by Greek border guards in almost all its reports. (*Sabah-19*) As the tension rose at the border and between the two countries, the portal also escalated its news coverage. *Sabah* claimed that the Greek soldiers killed two migrants. The relevant title alluded to “cruelty” and “murder”. The paper also argued that Greek soldiers seized migrants’ money and clothes and sent them back to Turkey in their underwear. (*Sabah-13*) Another item used the title “Barbarism” in a story about the half-naked migrants who were sent back by the Greek police. The report claimed that Greek police removed the migrants’ clothes while beating and whipping them. The author of the report claimed that the cruelty of Greek police was

## SÖZCÜ.COM.TR

Sözcü is fundamentally an opposition newspaper. As opposed to *Sabah*, Sözcü preferred to use the word “refugee” instead of “migrant”. The paper insisted on the word “refugee” even if the news item came from a news agency that used the word “migrant”. Sözcü was relatively mild in its criticism of Greece in contrast to *Sabah* who covered similar topics in a more sensational manner. For instance, Sözcü used the statement “Greek security guards’ pressure” (Sözcü-2) and presented the actions of Greek border guards as “precautions”. (Sözcü-5)

One news item published by Sözcü was on the bus stop in Istanbul used by refugees who wanted to go to the Greek border. The title read “Refugees’ journey for hope is continuing” with the item including some comments by a refugee who said that “Turkey is dirty. No money here. That is why we are leaving. Turkey is poor”. (Sözcü-15) While another refugee is quoted as saying similar things by stating that unemployment in Turkey is the reason why he and others want to migrate to Germany. Besides, Sözcü’s critical anti-government political stance is reflected in the quote from a bus driver: “If we did this job in the past, we would be jailed. Now we drive the refugees to the border and the police do not say anything”. (Sözcü-15) Sözcü wrote about the volunteer fishermen who offered free boat ride to the refugees by claiming that according to the fishermen it was now the European states’ turn to worry. Some other fishermen suggested that the refugees were “the headache of Turkey”. Interestingly, Sözcü’s editorial line reflected these comments as some sort of positive news for Turkey. (Sözcü-16)

Sözcü was remarkably weak in its coverage of the crisis. Most news items referred to the comments of the political elites or they were simply prepared by news agencies. (Sözcü-23) The portal did not use precise language regarding the shootings at the border; in fact, in contrast to *Sabah*’s coverage, Sözcü referred to the “alleged” shootings. The paper also covered how Greek officials responded to those allegations (Sözcü-34) and how they rejected the Turkish claims that thousands of refugees had gained entry to Greece; thereby the portal questioned the claims of the Turkish Interior Minister that many thousands had entered Greece. (Sözcü-38)

## HÜRRIYET.COM.TR

While the first movements to the border were underway, *Hürriyet* also began to use the term “migrants” (göçmenler) instead of “refugees” (mülteciler) for the people gathering by the Evros/Meriç River. *Hürriyet*’s coverage presented the harsh conditions experienced by the migrants at the border while the portal continuously highlighted the violence used by the Greek security forces. Some news items referred to the remarkably harsh examples of “the relentless approach” of the Greek security forces to counter the migrants. One item even claimed that the Greek police removed the shoes and socks of babies and children and send them back to Turkey barefoot. (*Hürriyet*-15) Another report claimed that Greek soldiers beat migrant children and women. In one story, it was reported that a migrant claimed that even a pregnant woman was exposed to violence by Greek border guards. (*Hürriyet*-28) *Hürriyet*’s visual choices also empowered its narrative about violence. In one story, the photos used by the portal were photo-journalistically powerful as they reminded the reader of a torture camp. The news item claimed that the migrants were beaten by Greek security forces and then sent back to Turkey while all migrants were in semi-naked condition as they were forced by the Greek security forces to remove their clothing. (*Hürriyet*-8)

Another report published in the last days of the crisis dealt with the possible legal actions against the human rights violations at the border. The main protagonist of the story is Metin Feyzioğlu, the president of The Union of Turkish Bar Associations, who claimed that the Union would file a suit to the European Court of Human Rights and sue the Greek Government for human rights violations at the border. Feyzioğlu claimed that Greece’s actions at the border amounted to “oppression” while he also pejoratively referred to Greece as “the spoilt child of Europe”. (*Hürriyet*-7)

While criticizing the Greeks for the events at the Evros/Meriç River, *Hürriyet* justified its critical stance by putting forth two interesting reports from the historical archives. The first was about the Greek migrants in Syria during the Nazi invasion of Greece.

The report blames the Greeks of today and claims that they have forgotten their past, including the time they were themselves seeking refuge elsewhere during WWII. (*Hürriyet-22*) With a similar leitmotif, the second story was about the former Greek prime minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis, the father of Greece's current prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who at the time of the military junta in Greece, he escaped to Turkey. (*Hürriyet-24*)

## T24.COM.TR

T24's coverage of the crisis was generally superficial. Most reports were produced from the content of news agencies. Although it is a left-leaning news portal, T24 did not give enough importance to the humanitarian event at the border. Thus, the portal presented limited material for analysis and contribution to this study. Among these restricted findings, one report had a different stance. In contrast with most of the news coverage in the research sample, one report asked a meaningful question: "why migrants do not want to live in Turkey?" The item quoted an expert on migration studies and claimed that migrants are not happy with working and housing conditions in Turkey, a point which was mostly overlooked by the other portals. The item also referred to the possibility that some Syrians are content with living in Turkey and would not prefer to move to EU countries even if access to them were possible. The expert claimed that this had to do with the socio-cultural ties that had been created by the Syrians living in Turkey. (T24-6) T24's main difference from the other Turkish portals in the sample is that also covered the voice of Syrian migrants who were not happy with their lives in Turkey. (T24-14-25)

## SUGGESTIONS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from our study demonstrate the complexity of the challenges associated with the media coverage of the refugee/migration crisis at the Evros/Meriç border and the complexity within the context of Greek-Turkish and Turkey-EU relations. The challenges, which relate to the media coverage, could be assessed according to the crisis reporting context, the political parallelism in the Greek and Turkish news portals, and the constructive stance of the news media of Greece and Turkey.

## CRISIS REPORTING CONTEXT

As part of hard news reporting, crisis reporting is a field where essential journalistic standards, such as objectivity, detachment, and impartiality, are continually tested. (Tumber 2006) Nonetheless, among journalistic genres, crisis reporting has a high level of legitimacy (Allan and Zelizer 2004: 4) and is thus a realm in which any break with the professional ideology becomes visible. Journalists covering crises must reconcile the conflict between journalism's traditional normative conceptions and the committed narrative that underpins the concept of witnessing. (Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013; Tumber 2006; Glück 2016)

Journalists and the media had once again to cover rapidly developing stories during the humanitarian crisis at the Evros/Meriç border. According to the findings, some reporting showed familiarity with covering humanitarian crises, but others did not, thereby exacerbating the already tense atmospherics. Therefore, the preparation for covering such incidents and the training of the staff on how to approach sensitive and humanitarian issues, should have been and should be a priority of the media organizations and the journalists themselves.

## POLITICAL PARALLELISM IN THE GREEK AND TURKISH NEWS PORTALS

The media's coverage of the Evros/Meriç crisis was inextricably linked to Greece's and Turkey's governmental decision-making. According to the findings, the mainstream political narratives were reflected in the journalistic coverage of the news portals of both countries. It was observed that most presented the crisis through the statements and the stance of each government, always referring to the EU's position on the issue, and always accusing the other side of using hate speech, aggressive, and militaristic language. However, primarily *Efsyn*, among all the news portals, reported on the crisis by presenting how the international media covered the incidents and by using a more sympathetic and "humanitarian" language towards the refugees at the border.

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## THE CONSTRUCTIVE STANCE OF THE NEWS MEDIA OF GREECE AND TURKEY

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The dynamics shaping the media environment of any country is complicated. The key to having a more trustable media ecosystem is related to the quality of democracy in the country. The ideal media coverage about the relations of two countries that have crucial political differences requires a free media system. The tenser the state of political relations between Greece and Turkey, the more antagonistic is the media coverage. The deadlock should be broken by more empathetic and understanding journalists, media management structures, and politicians paving the way for a better media environment and healthier democratic structures. This can be provided by increasing the cooperation opportunities between Greek and Turkish media workers, artists, NGOs, think tanks, and academics.

The news media of both Greece and Turkey should have a constructive stance instead of blaming and demonizing each other in the context of the issues related to irregular migration. The irregular migration issue itself is usually covered during humanitarian crises. Therefore, media professionals should be aware of the harsh conditions that people are facing in the crisis zone. In other words, both the Greek and Turkish media should play the role of conciliator, instead of that of the provoker while producing content about migration issues.

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## CONCLUSION

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The coverage of the migration crisis at the Evros/Meriç border on the Greek news portals showed that politics played a crucial role in the way the media reported on the issue. Five years since the refugee/migration crisis of 2015, the news portals, which were analyzed for this study, did not agree on how to characterize the people at the border, who were struggling to enter an EU country: “refugees”, “migrants” or “illegal entries”. It is obvious that each news portal reported on the crisis according to its political/ideological stance – either right-wing and against the “illegal entries” or left-wing by focusing on a new “humanitarian drama”.

The analysis of the Turkish news portals showed that the coverage was highly affected by the political atmosphere and the discourse used by politicians. The border crisis even led to a change in how the Turkish media refers to the refugees. A refugee could stay in a place for a long period of time and might even be permanently settled but the new term “göçmen” (migrant) in the Turkish media discourse tells us that now these people are on the move and that they are heading to the West.

As a final noteworthy point, some reports in the Greek portals referred to the new fences built at the Evros/Meriç border (*Efsyn* and *Ta Nea*) which was portrayed as a solution to curb migration to Greece. The construction of a wall can be intimidating to migrants but one should also consider that the physical existence of strong fences and barriers could increase the political and psychological division between Greece and Turkey. Moreover, protecting the land border with the erection of fences or high walls could imply that the Greeks are distancing themselves from the Hellenic heritage of Asia Minor and contributing to the alienation of Modern Greece from the antiquity of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace.

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## APPENDICES

### CITED NEWS ITEMS FROM GREEK NEWS PORTALS

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efsyn-1 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/kosmos/233144\\_ekriktiki-katastasi-stin-intlimp-me-toys-prosfyges-apeilei-palio-erntogan](https://www.efsyn.gr/kosmos/233144_ekriktiki-katastasi-stin-intlimp-me-toys-prosfyges-apeilei-palio-erntogan) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-2 (2020) <https://www.efsyn.gr/node/233229> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-10 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233419\\_omiro-i-se-xira-kai-thalassa](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233419_omiro-i-se-xira-kai-thalassa) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-44 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/kosmos/eyropi/234524\\_kombi-kis-simasias-i-26i-martioy-gia-tis-sheseis-ee-toyrkias](https://www.efsyn.gr/kosmos/eyropi/234524_kombi-kis-simasias-i-26i-martioy-gia-tis-sheseis-ee-toyrkias) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-6 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233330\\_hiliades-anthropoi-omiroi-ton-paihnidion-toy-erntogan-ston-ebro](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233330_hiliades-anthropoi-omiroi-ton-paihnidion-toy-erntogan-ston-ebro) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-7 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/233343\\_epikoinoniaka-paihnidia-agkyras-me-toys-prosfyges](https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/233343_epikoinoniaka-paihnidia-agkyras-me-toys-prosfyges) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-11 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233380\\_egklobismos-prosfygon-ston-ebro-enishyseis-stelnei-i-frontex](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233380_egklobismos-prosfygon-ston-ebro-enishyseis-stelnei-i-frontex) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-22 (2020) <https://www.efsyn.gr/node/234116> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-32 (2020) <https://www.efsyn.gr/node/234225> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-14 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233437\\_anthropistiko-drama-sta-synora-i-eyropi-symparistatai](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233437_anthropistiko-drama-sta-synora-i-eyropi-symparistatai) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-17 (2020) <https://www.efsyn.gr/node/233640> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-28 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/234182\\_tin-prostasia-tis-nomimotitas-kai-tis-anthropias-zitoyne-66-organoseis](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/234182_tin-prostasia-tis-nomimotitas-kai-tis-anthropias-zitoyne-66-organoseis) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-49 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/234767\\_ekklisi-dianooymenton-gia-tin-prostasia-ton-prosfygon-se-ebro-kai-nisia](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/234767_ekklisi-dianooymenton-gia-tin-prostasia-ton-prosfygon-se-ebro-kai-nisia) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-4 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/kybernisi/233263\\_ebros-proti-efarmogi-toy-dogmatos-apotropis](https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/kybernisi/233263_ebros-proti-efarmogi-toy-dogmatos-apotropis) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-41 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/234353\\_ki-alli-sfaira-stin-kardia-metanasti](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/234353_ki-alli-sfaira-stin-kardia-metanasti) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-50 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/kybernisi/234745\\_emesi-epibebaiosi-petsa-gia-mystiko-kentro-kratisis](https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/kybernisi/234745_emesi-epibebaiosi-petsa-gia-mystiko-kentro-kratisis) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-16 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233499\\_mitsotakis-me-eyropaiki-troika-ston-ebro-se-aihmalosia-oi-prosfyges](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233499_mitsotakis-me-eyropaiki-troika-ston-ebro-se-aihmalosia-oi-prosfyges) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-37 (2020) <https://www.efsyn.gr/node/234414> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-15 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/233465\\_prasino-fos-apo-tin-frontex-gia-taheia-epembasi-sta-ellinotoyrkika-synora](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/233465_prasino-fos-apo-tin-frontex-gia-taheia-epembasi-sta-ellinotoyrkika-synora) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

efsyn-20 (2020)  
[https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233698\\_xanagias-nekro-prosfyga-mila-i-agkyra-diapseydei-o-petsas](https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/233698_xanagias-nekro-prosfyga-mila-i-agkyra-diapseydei-o-petsas) (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

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<https://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/530200-pairnei-metra-i-ellada-meta-tin-apeili-tis-toyrkias-gia-anoigma-synoron-thorakizei-ton-ebro/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-6 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/530568-skiniko-polemoy-ston-ebro-%ce%acgria-epeisodia-sta-synora-enisxyontai-o-dynameis-tis-el-as/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-35 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/diethni/532849-epistoli-57-eyroboyleyton-stin-igesia-tis-ee-lysi-sta-ellinotoyrkika-synora-tora/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-1 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/530232-deite-live-kymata-metanaston-apo-tin-toyrkia-se-ebro-kai-nisia/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-10 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/politiki/531280-metanasteytiko-ektakto-symbouliao-ton-ypourgon-exoterikon-tis-ee-ti-eipe-o-sxoinas/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-15 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/531611-metanasteytiko-apotrapikan-pano-apo-26-500-paranomes-eisodoi-ston-ebro-218-oi-syllipseis/>
- elefetherostypos-27 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/532563-ebros-mono-to-4-einai-prosfyges-pano-38-500-apopeires-paranomis-eisodoy/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-20 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/531753-binteo-ntokoumento-tourkoi-astynomikoi-rixnoun-ximika-sta-synora-enantion-tis-ellinikis-pleyras/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-29 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/diethni/532435-apisteyta-pragmata-kanoun-oi-tourkoi-ston-ebro-markaroun-metanastes-promitheyoun-peroukes-kai-stelnoun-eidikes-dynameis/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-33 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/politiki/532873-xastouki-stin-tourkia-kai-minyma-plirous-allileggyis-pros-tin-ellada-apo-tous-ypex-tis-ee/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-42 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/533082-odoiporiko-toy-e-t-ston-ebro-konta-sa-aytoys-poy-fylane-thermopyles/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-8 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/politiki/530744-stefanis-apotrepame-9-600-paranomes-eisodoys-stin-ellada/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-13 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/politiki/531564-omitsotakis-edeixe-se-oli-tin-eyropi-ton-omo-ekbiasmo-erntogan-kare-kare-i-aytopsia-ton-xenon-igetont-ston-ebro/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-4 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/politiki/530319-xrysoxoidis-apo-ton-ebro-i-ellada-einai-asfalis-xorapoy-prostateyei-ta-synora-tis/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-5 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/530466-synagermos-ston-ebro-pano-apo-3-000-sta-synora-enisxyontai-oi-dynameis-tis-el-as/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-7 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/politiki/530415-ektakti-syskepsi-sto-maximoy-gia-tin-krisi-sto-prosfygiko-metanasteytiko/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)
- elefetherostypos-9 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/531045-synexizetai-to-thriler-ston-ebro-enisxyi-ton-synoron-kai-askiseis-me-pragmatika-pyra/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

elefetherostypos-44 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/politiki/533403-stefanis-dexomaste-epithesi-apo-tin-tourkia-me-oxima-tous-metanastes/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

elefetherostypos-30 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/politiki/532499-ebros-ayto-einai-to-binteo-ntokoumento-me-to-opoio-i-ellada-xemprostiase-ton-erntogan/>(Accessed: 10.10.2020)

elefetherostypos-40 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/570137-trabane-to-skoini-oi-tourkoi-dyo-nea-peristatika-me-pyrobolismous-ston-ebro/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

elefetherostypos-32 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/diethni/533001-ektakto-o-erntogan-zitise-apo-tin-merkel-anatheorisi-tis-symfonias-gia-to-metanasteytiko/>(Accessed: 10.10.2020)

elefetherostypos-24 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/diethni/531849-o-erntogan-pseydetai-kai-apeilei-tin-eyropi-neo-paralirima-apo-ton-tourko-proedro-gia-to-metanasteytiko/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

elefetherostypos-49 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/politiki/538062-stirixi-merkel-gia-ebro-kai-nisia-aparadekti-sympertifora-apo-toyrkia/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

elefetherostypos-46 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/politiki/571287-oi-toyrkoi-arxisan-pali-ta-fake-news-skliri-apantisi-petsa-gia-dimosieyma-toy-spiegel/>(Accessed: 10.10.2020)

elefetherostypos-50 (2020)  
<https://eleftherostypos.gr/diethni/538677-aisxres-diloseis-erntogan-paromoias-toys-ellines-me-toys-nazi/> (Accessed: 10.10.2020)

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kathimerini-3 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1066900/mazike-s-afixeis-metanaston-sta-synora-ston-evro-lemvoi-se-samo-kai-lesvo-fotografies/>(Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-12 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/1067046/anoigei-ta-synora-gia-toys-prosfyges-o-erntogan/> (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-55 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/1067573/ameioti-i-piesi-ston-evro-mploko-se-4-600-apopeires-eisodoy/> (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-87 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1068595/evros-periorismenes-oi-prospatheies-paraviasis-ton-synoron-apo-to-vrady-toy-savvatoy/>(Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-34 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1067222/proedr-os-synoriofylakon-evroy-kratame-gera-o-evros-den-peftei/> (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-54 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1067549/vinteo-apotropis-sta-chersaia-synora-kai-apothisis-metanaston/> (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-19 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1067125/ti-symvainei-stis-kastanies-ena-gramma-apo-ton-evro/> (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-21 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1067154/stratiotikes-askiseis-me-pragmatika-pyra-simera-ston-evro/> (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-6 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1066941/evros-katadromeis-mat-kai-ayximenes-peripolies-sta-synora-fotografies/> (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-41 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/1067379/fon-nter-laien-ta-synora-tis-elladas-einai-kai-eyropaika/>  
 (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-81 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/1068272/mitsotakis-apaiteitai-emprakti-allagi-stasis-tis-toyrkias-sto-metanasteytiko/>  
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kathimerini-4 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/1066925/chrysocho-dis-apo-evro-i-ellada-prostateyei-ta-synora-tis/>  
 (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-15 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/1067063/m-chrysocho-dis-i-ellada-kai-i-eyropi-echoyn-synora-kai-ta-synora-oi-ellines-ta-fylame/>  
 (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-20 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/1067130/n-papagiotopoylos-ta-synora-froyroyntai-kai-fylassontai-arista/>  
 (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

kathimerini-53 (2020)  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/1067540/st-petsas-fake-news-tis-toyrkias-ta-peri-nekroy-prosfyga/>  
 (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

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<https://www.tanea.gr/2020/03/02/greece/istandwit-hgreece-kyma-symparastasis-meso-twitter-stin-ellada/>  
 (Accessed: 10.01.2021)

tanea-12 (2020)  
<https://www.tanea.gr/2020/03/02/greece/evros-epithesi-me-dakrygona-dexontai-oi-ellinikes-dynameis-metanastes-apokalyptoun-ti-methodeysi-tou-erntogan-2/>  
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