

The financial and refugee “crises”: Discursive practices and narratives on Europe in the northern and southern public spheres

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

European Integration Journalism

The “managed” information society

Information is a reference point for contemporary (post)-modern societies (Poster 1990:7)

Among the most important characteristics of the 20th and 21st centuries is **the intensification of persuasion efforts** (Enzensberger 1981), due to the **modernization of politics (generalization of political participation)** (Demertzis 2001)

Perception management includes the **attempt to influence the public opinion** and the adoption of the influence tactics to the rationale of media used to disseminate the pre-managed information (Siegel 2005).

Information becomes a specific means of (re)orientation of power structures, a means for constructing reality (Terranova 2004: 37).

Public sphere in the age of information management

There is nothing new in misinformation
Governments, organizations and individuals have always used it –



and people often want to believe in stories that reinforce their worldview



The capitalist condition of the news publishing-broadcasting industry (quantity over quality, "viral" stories over journalistic research, speed over information crosschecking)



The phenomenon of the rejection of facts in favour of emotion is also a consequence of the marketization of education and the privatization of the public sphere.

Public sphere in the age of information management

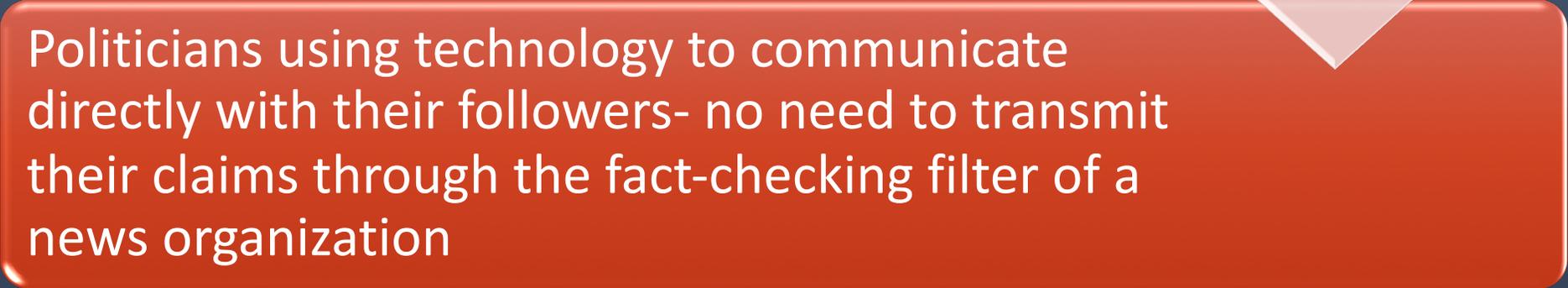
Populism as propaganda (people vs. elites/Manichean rationale)



Propaganda/populism nowadays seek to manage the public insecurity caused by neoliberal economic policies



Politicians using technology to communicate directly with their followers- no need to transmit their claims through the fact-checking filter of a news organization



Public sphere in the age of information management

Deliberate construction and dissemination of specific -usually unilateral- information.

The **use of exaggeration** aiming at the distortion of either positive or negative (aligned to specific interests) information.

The evocation to feelings (e.g. fear or hope).

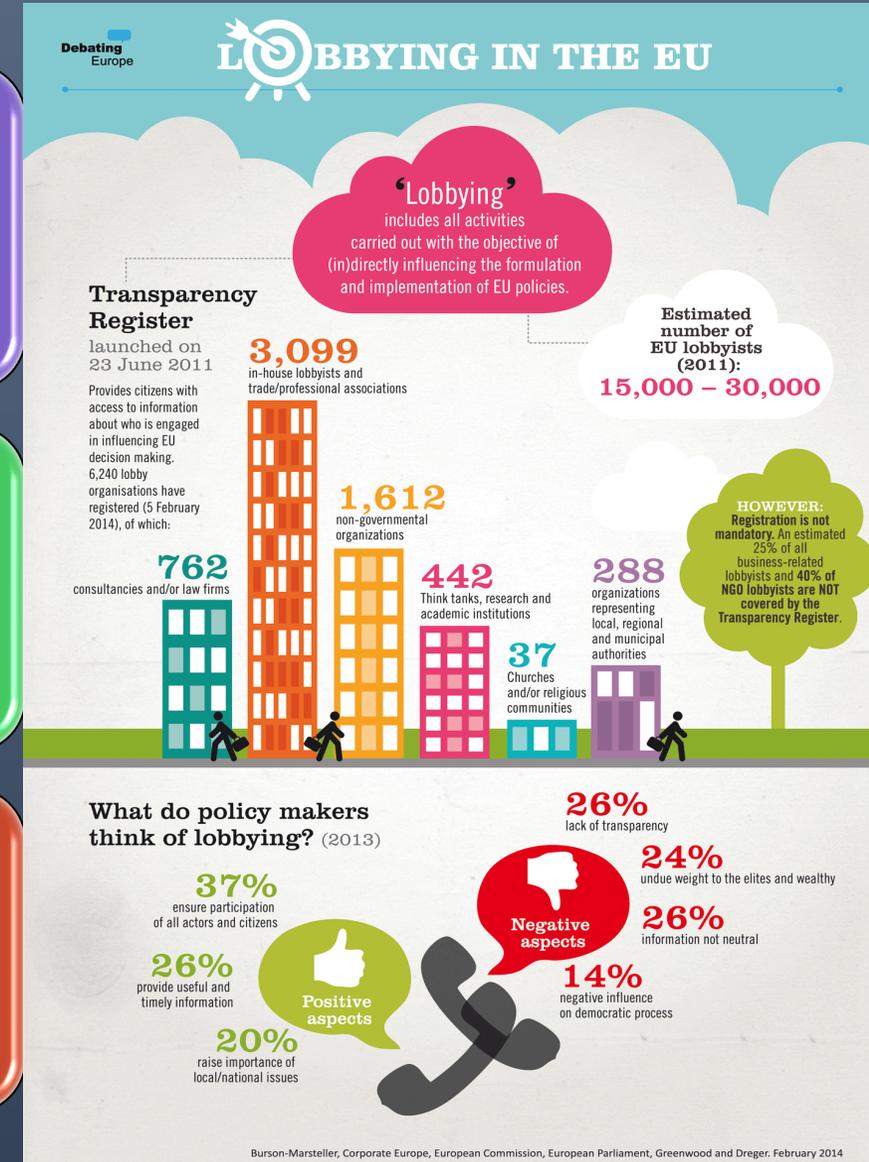


Public sphere in the age of information management

Journalism: **articles-assemblage of facts, information, rumors, statements, rumors of statements, officials' estimations and predictions of future** (Triantafyllou 2017).

Politics: **Feelings, not facts, are what matters** (The Economist 2016).

An attempt to influence public opinion, through the use of specific discursive practices -**opinions over facts, emotions over rationalism, half-truth or even lies (e.g. fake news) instead of research, rumors instead of cross-checked information.**



The debate in and for the EU

Europe is faced with a political reality in which a complex set of assertions and claims are not in discord with established and verified facts, especially when regarding the 'truths' which serve agendas of politicians and media that are critical to the EU.



The narratives of the mainstream media and 'pro-European' politicians have (mis) represented the debt-crisis as a predominantly economic one, rather than addressing the political concerns of European citizens (Tamsin Murray-Leach, 2014:3-4)

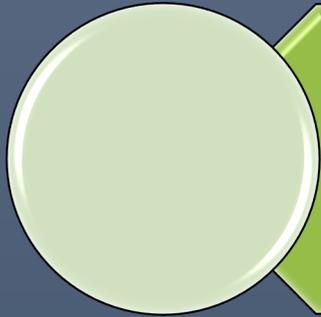
The political-media context

The mainstream media, are unable and/or unwilling to properly connect with the frustration and anger of people and communities.

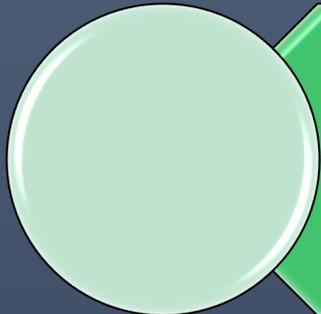
Crouch (2004) has used the phrase 'post-democracy' to describe a model of politics, where a society continues to have and to use all the institutions of democracy, but in which the energy and innovative drive pass away from the democratic arena and into small circles of a politico-economic and media elite (elitization of democracy).

Political debate certainly exists, but debate is a tightly controlled spectacle, managed by rival teams of experts in the techniques of persuasion.

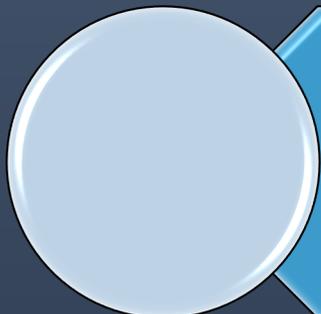
The political-media context



Mainstream parties also offer and implement policies that are clearly incompatible with each other (e.g. austerity and development).



This is not to agree with populism neither to deny its chauvinistic elements. Neither it is to deny that the EU today is more necessary than ever.



It is more than convenient for mainstream politicians and media to construct the narrative 'populists versus the rest'.

Moving beyond post-truth

We have to move beyond the argument of the 'ignorant' and 'disastrous' choices of the people who voted for Brexit on the basis of 'post-truth'.

The term 'post-truth' is problematic and the analysts who perceive it as a 'threat' might be nostalgic for certainty. However, we live in a world of diversity, difference and disruption.



This argument facilitates the divide between 'good' and 'bad' Europeans, 'friends' and 'enemies' of the EU, 'progress' and 'repressiveness'.

Main research question- Hypotheses

Do the discursive practices and narratives on Europe in the German and Greek public spheres differ in terms of...

The critique to the EU, its institutions (EC, EP, ECB) and policies on financial and refugee crises

The evocation to feelings (use of sentimental discourse)

The populist characteristics (e.g. elites vs people)

The transfer of responsibility

The reference to data

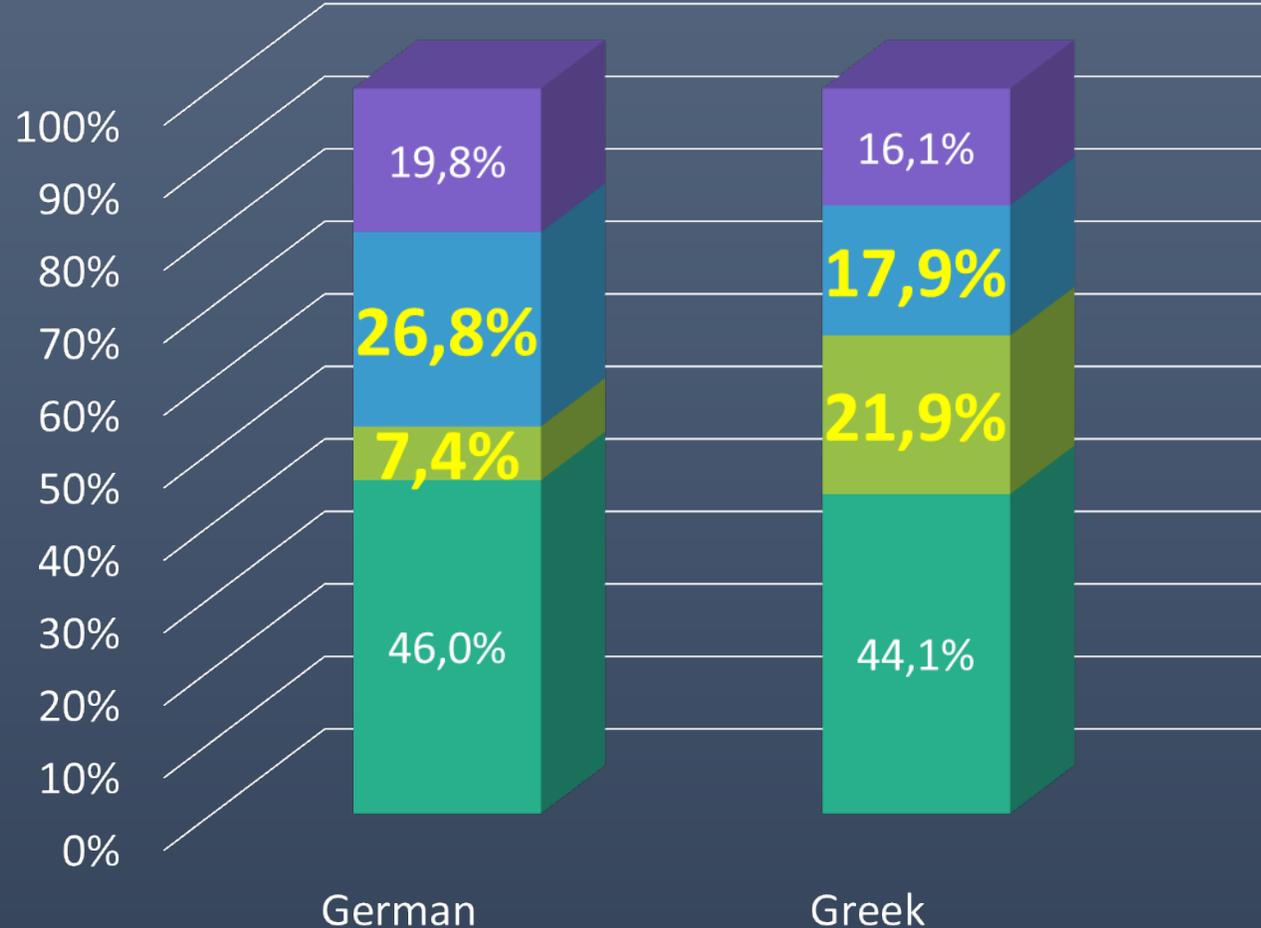
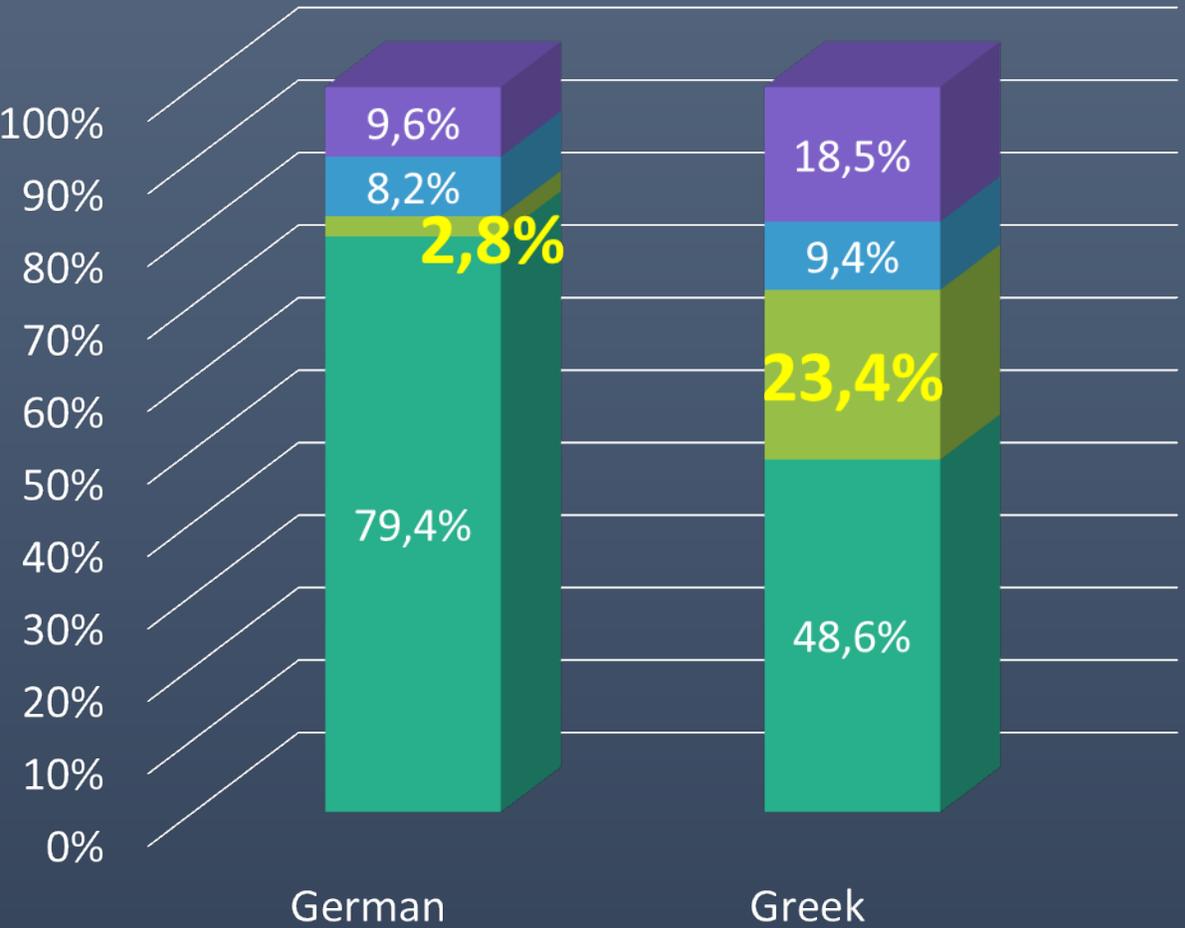
The research

829 “interview bites” (statements by journalists, politicians, experts, civilians) in articles referring to the EU financial crisis and the immigrants/refugees issue (mainly from 2016 and 2017).

2 Greek (Kathimerini, EFSYN) and 2 German (SZ, FAZ) news sites

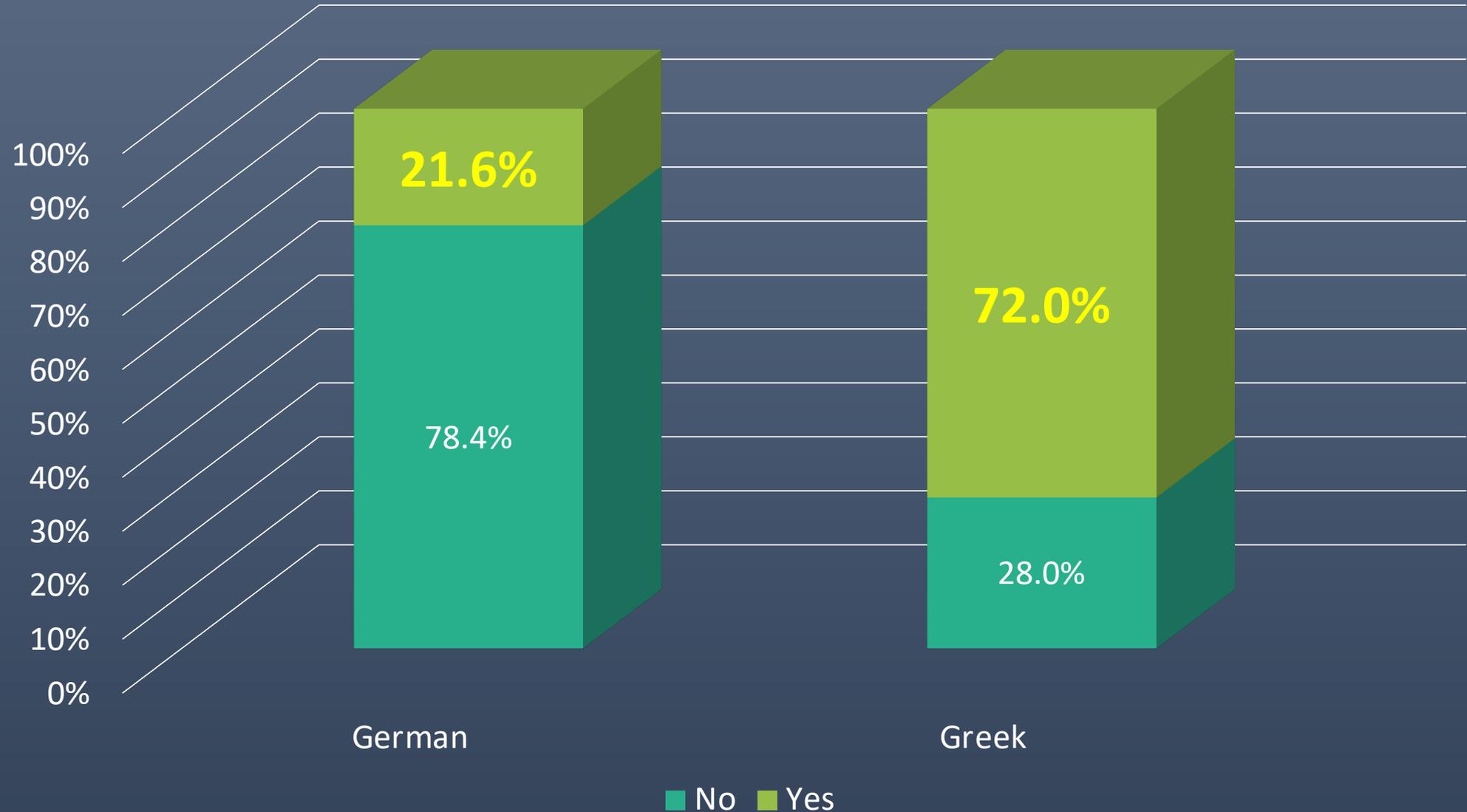
Quantitative content analysis with the use of a coding frame

More positivism in the Greek media towards the EU (as a whole and policies), more criticism towards its policies in the German media (related mainly to the refugee issue)

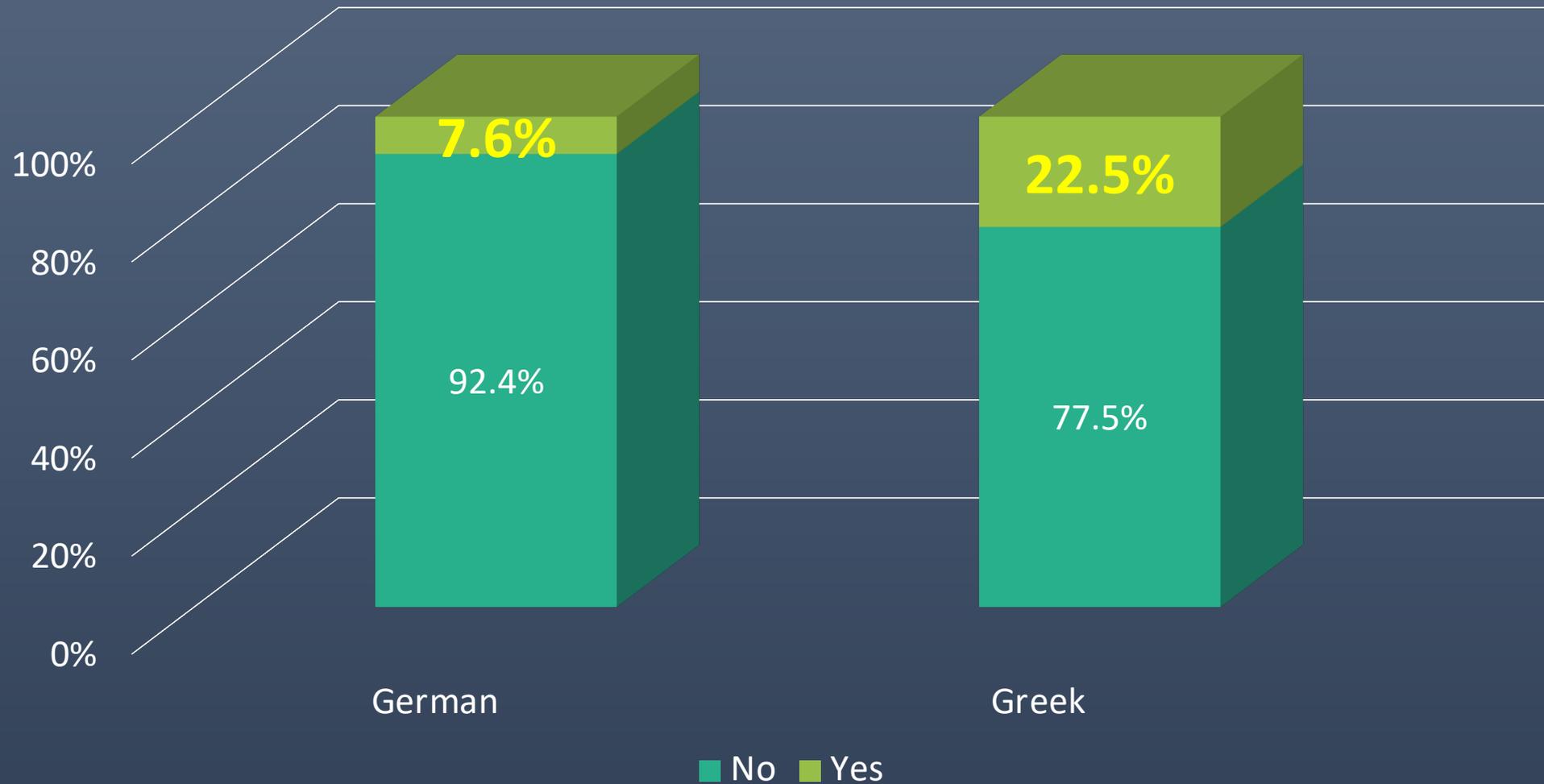


■ No opinion on the EU
 ■ Positive
 ■ Negative
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Negative
 ■ Positive
 ■ No opinion on European policies

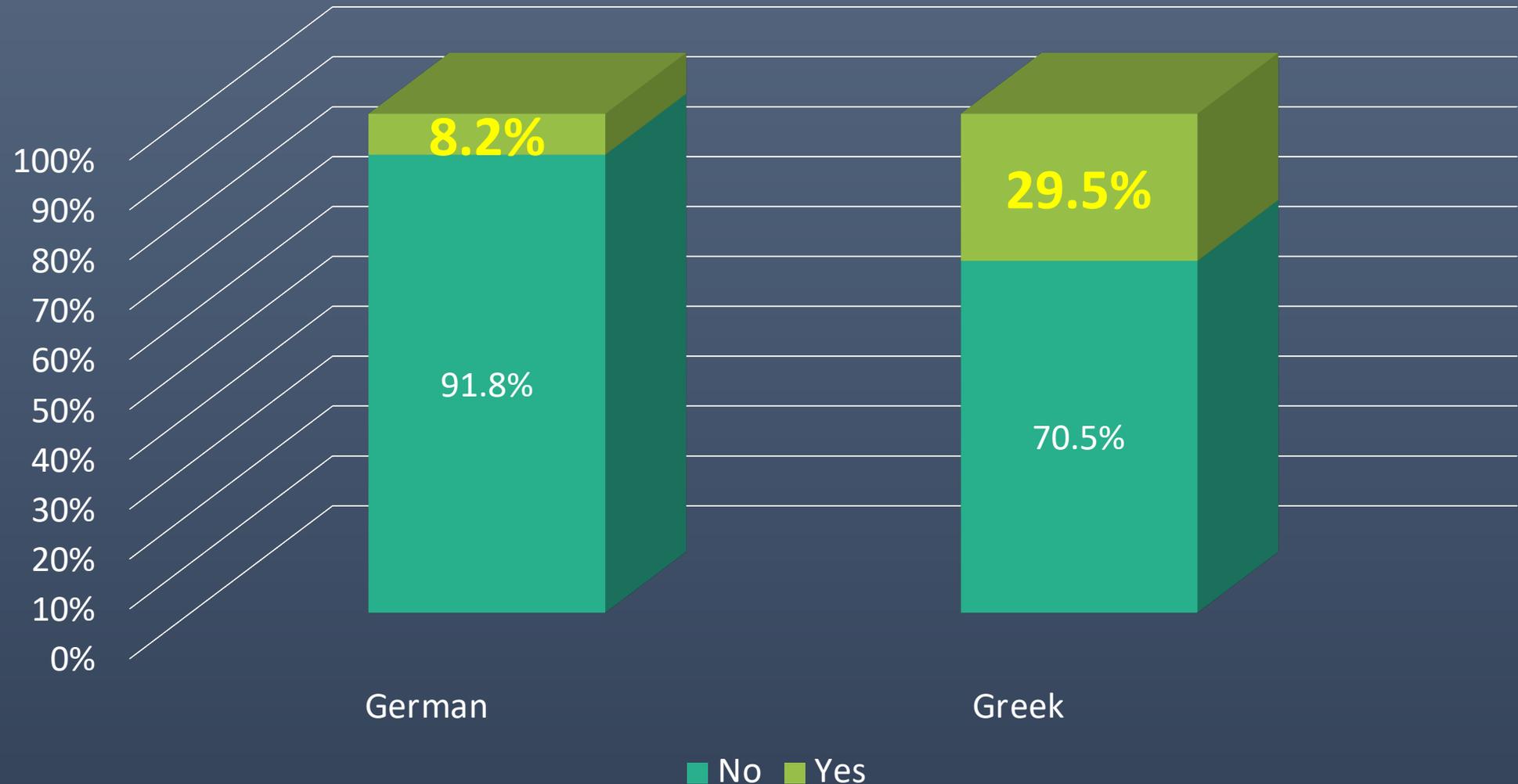
Different public spheres in terms of the evocation to feelings



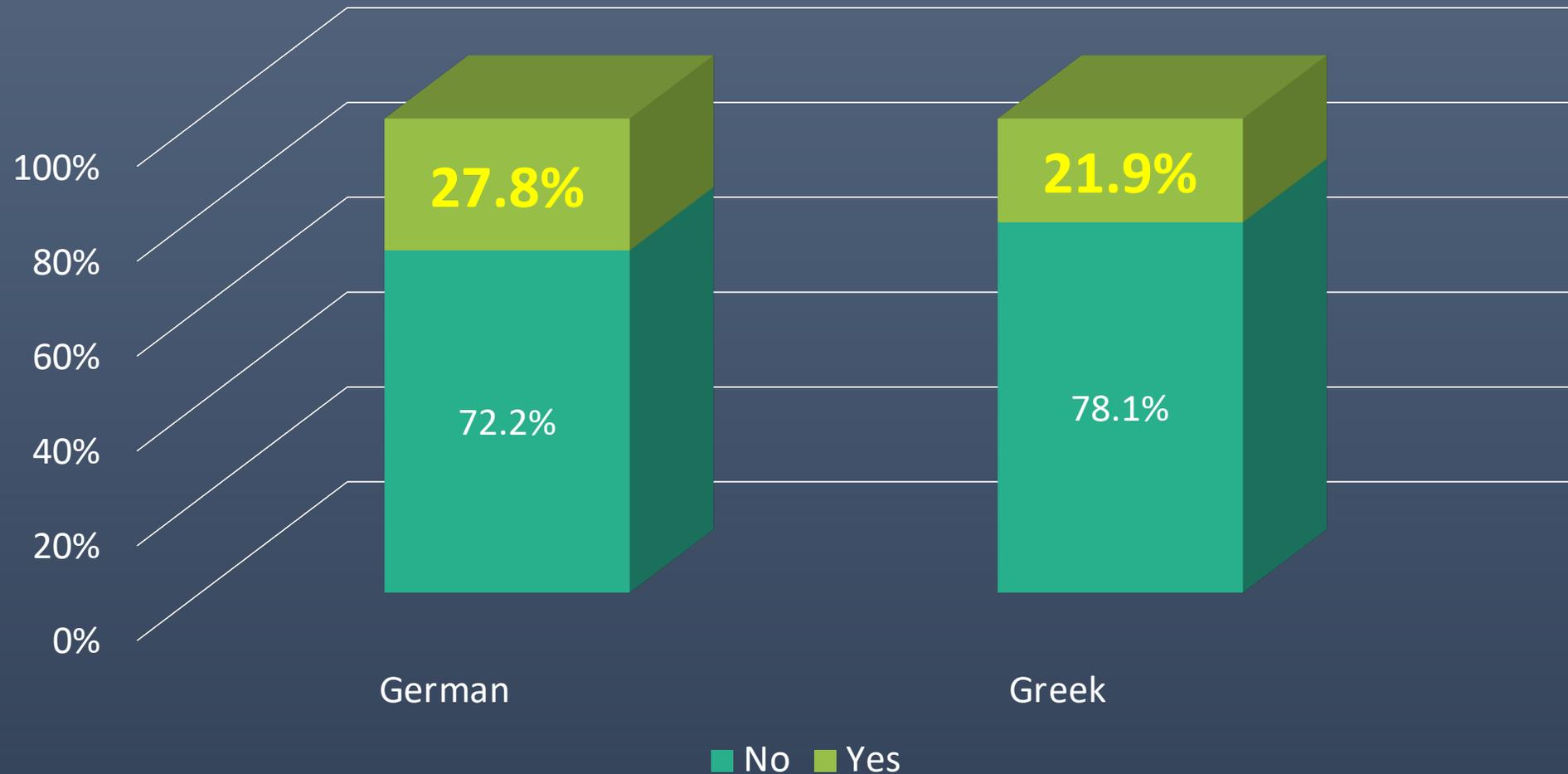
Significantly more populist characteristics in the Greek public discourse



Significantly more transfer of responsibility in the Greek public discourse



Slightly less reference to data/evidence in Greece



Group Statistics

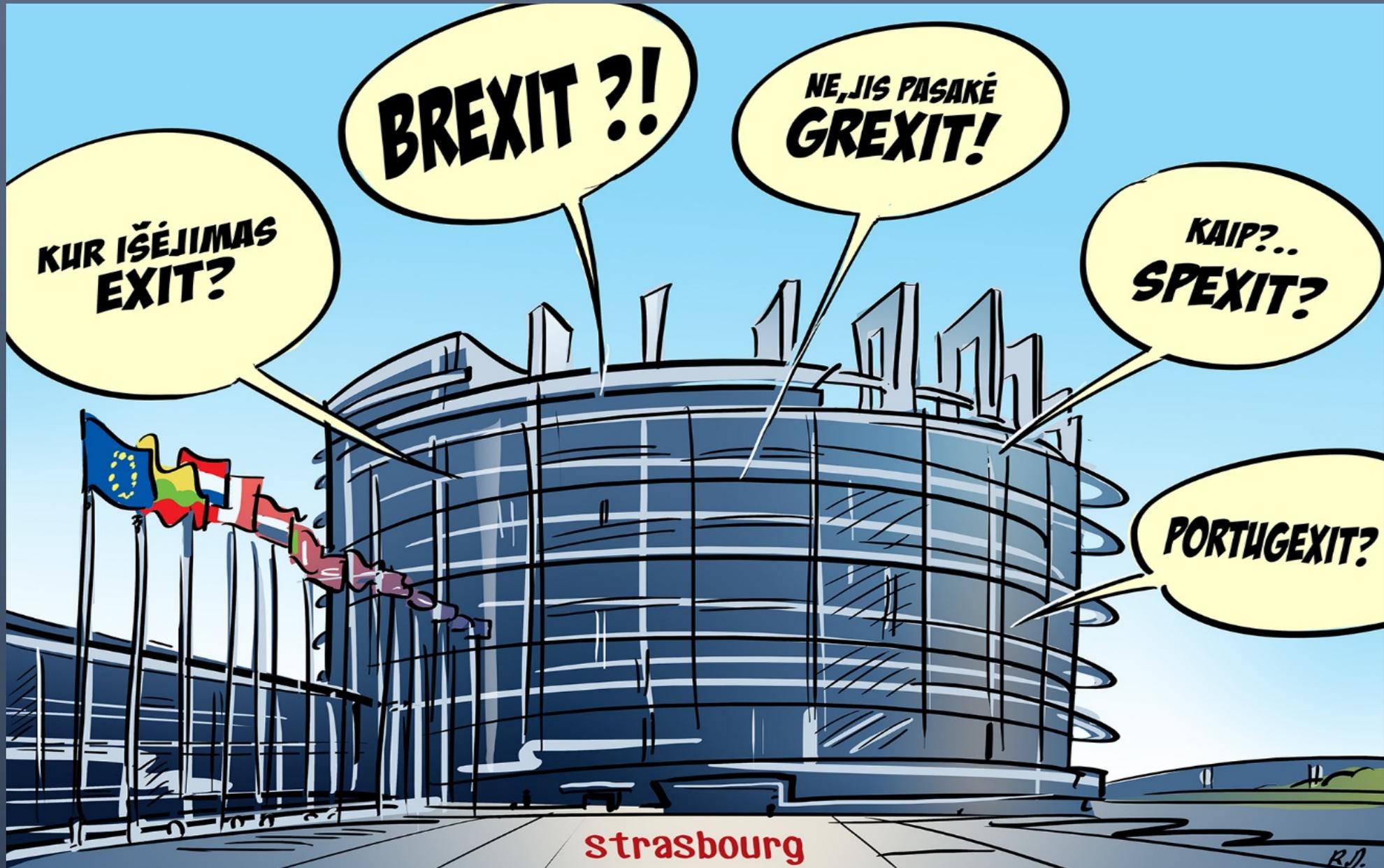
Nationality of the medium		Mean
Is there sentimental discourse (evocation to feelings)	German	0,22
	Greek	0,72
Is there evocation to positive feelings?	German	0,08
	Greek	0,42
Is there evocation to negative feelings?	German	0,15
	Greek	0,36
Is there Manichean discourse?	German	0,02
	Greek	0,09
Is there populist discourse?	German	0,08
	Greek	0,22
Is there “demonization” of the enemy”?	German	0,03
	Greek	0,03
Is there “responsibility transfer”?	German	0,08
	Greek	0,29
Does the statement include (selective) reference to data?	German	0,28
	Greek	0,22

Discussion

- The EU is not being contested (lack of reference in EU institutions, positive or neutral opinions on the EU as a whole)
- EU's refugee policy seems to be more contested (especially in the German media)
- Evocation to feelings mainly on behalf of politicians and in the Greek public sphere
- More populist elements in the public discourse articulated through the Greek media
- More responsibility transfer in the statements published in the Greek media (the Greek media favor the "blame game" rationale)
- Slightly less presentation of data/evidence in support of opinions in the Greek media

Discussion

- The “crises” context enhances the evocation to feelings (especially in the Greek public sphere)
- The Greek media seem to present a less “orthological” public dialogue
- More populist discourse, more “blame game”, slightly less use of data/evidence in the Greek public sphere
- Inherent characteristics of the Greek culture, along with the crisis context have resulted in the polarization of the public discourse



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