Intercultural Conflict and Dialogue in the Transnational Digital Public Sphere: Findings from the MIG@NET Research Project (2010-2013)

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Introduction

The transnational MIG@NET research project (http://www.mignetproject.eu/) explores how migrants – both as individuals and communities – make use of digital communication technologies to form and transform transnational networks. Eight European universities collaborated to analyse the effects these networks have on the mobility and integration of migrants. The different areas of research approach these networks as socioeconomic orders and hierarchies related to gender, race, and class. One part of this project focuses on Intercultural Conflict and Dialogue (WP 10) as a central dimension of communicative interaction within these transnational networks. The respective case studies cover migrant online activities in three European countries (Greece, Cyprus, and the UK). This chapter is based on the final report and summarises the main research interests as parts of the larger Mig@Net project and outlines key findings.

Digital communication has become a crucial element in the formation of discourses on migration and the forging of transnational networks but also extended the sites for conflicts, as minority groups make manifold use of the Internet for maintaining communities in host countries as well as to remain linked to their countries of origin. In doing so these transnational networks expand the spectrum of contested social spaces into the digital public sphere (Karatzogianni 2006); processes of identity formation, the negotiation/imposition of hierarchies, and the entailed struggles for power become visible and thus accessible on a diversity of online platforms that connect individuals across great geographical distances (e.g. Madianou and Miller 2011). Migrants create discursive spaces that go beyond the discussion of practical information for life in their host countries but that provide insights into their self-perception, their views on integration processes, and the socio-economic as well as cultural conflicts they either carry with them or that ignite as results of their arrival in a foreign environment (Brinkerhoff 2009; Everett 2009; Mallapragada 2000; Wong 2003); they reproduce their cultures – and thus 'cultural identities' – through constant communication of shared 'symbols, meanings, and norms of conduct' (Jandt 2010: 15, citing Collier and 1988; see also Harney and Baldassar 2007). Understanding the underlying social dynamics and the interplay of cultural as well technological factors remains a challenging, somewhat under-researched area, especially in the intersection of migration, transnational networks, and intercultural conflict. Instead of approaching migrants' online activities in the context of the infamous divide (e.g. Alsonso and Olazarbal 2010; Benitez 2006), the MIG@NET research project focuses rather on the 'multiple intersections between migrant practices and digital networks'

(Karatzogianni et al. 2012); in other words, it takes a look at the 'connected migrant' (Diminescu 2008). In light of the so-called "migration crisis" that preoccupies much of Europe's – if not the world's – public discourse(s) at the time of writing, it seems likely that research on these very issues will gain in momentum. The politicization of migration discourses and the extremely controversial character they inevitably acquire are likely to raise increased interest in the social sciences and humanities, including the media studies and communication sciences. After all, migration continues to dominate political agendas – and therefore public discourses carried by on- and offline media – not only in Europe but across the globe and it has tangible affects on existing socio-economic orders as well as cultural configurations.

From an empirical perspective it is the Internet in particular that offers an abundance of data to approach the complex, often ambiguous relations between migration, culture, and technology critically-analytically and to bring clarity to important questions related to the self-understanding of migrants, their perception of their new and old homes, as well as the cultural, social, and historical baggage that they bring with them; linguistic barriers left aside, one does not have to search long to find a diversity of communicative spaces created by migrant communities with the help of a variety of digital devices and online media platforms. Especially social networking media seem to facilitate modes for transnational interaction and enable to overcome distances across and within countries. However, there are also the different political groups in the host countries that use online media to talk about migrants from different political positions and who turn the issue into a contested site tied to a string of fundamental questions about identity, community, solidarity, and practical migration politics. Ethno-nationalist/racist groups and their anti-racist counterparts confront each other on the streets and on the Web and online practice of racism have their own qualities (Nakamura 2002). Taking a critical, analytical look at transnational migrant networks and their online activities as well as on the perception of migration in political movements in the host countries enables empirical research on at least three increasingly important issues related to migration, integration, conflict, and digital technologies: How do migrants and political groups appropriate and utilize online media? How do they construct social-cultural orders? And how do they negotiate or engage in conflict through Internet communication?

The MIG@NET project is one of the first attempts to address these issues in several different countries at once, in order to produce sufficient empirical data for comparative qualitative analyses as an important step towards a better understanding of the complex socio-cultural mechanisms behind these communicative processes. This extensive research venture is inherently transnational itself: coordinated by Panteion University (UPSPS) in Kallithea, Greece, it integrates the work of seven partner universities from across Europe (Hamburg, Bologna, Hull, Utrecht, the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l' Homme from France, the Peace Institute from Slovenia, and the non-governmental organization Symfiliosi from Cyprus). Since 2010 researchers from these institutions pooled their expertise in areas as diverse as the social sciences, humanities, arts, and policy development to approach migration and digital communication from a holistic, interdisciplinary perspective. The project's results then serve as a basis for further research but also for the development of policy recommendations that aim at precise political actions.

MIG@NET's unit WP 10 "Intercultural Conflict and Dialogue" was developed for comparative analyses of discursive struggles and ideological conflicts in digital spaces – best described as 'cyberconflicts' (Karatzogianni 2006) – and debates on racism as well as cultural identity. It further included offline interviews researching the perception of European citizenship against the background of migration discourses in three European countries, which are Cyprus, Greece, and the UK; each of these countries sees itself confronted with increasingly controversial public debates on migration, integration, and responsibility, catalysed by a constantly growing influx of migrants. The primary research interest is to map the digital networks built by migrant communities as well as political groups engaged in migrant discourses and to assess what role they play in reinforcing practices of intercultural conflict, i.e. how they expand the sites for these sort of socio-cultural struggles into the digital public sphere. Since public discourses tend to emerge on specific fault lines in society that cause political and social stakeholders to make a stance and to compete with each other by instrumentalising all available means for communication, the Internet becomes a communicative space in which researchers can critically observe particularly controversial discourses of broader societal concern. In the case of migration discourses in the UK, Greece, and Cyprus, the involved political and social groups can be broadly divided into racist and anti-racist ideological discourses; these groups or movements tend to form digital networks that can become the basis for the organisation of political activities. The three case studies hence placed emphasis on the intercultural conflicts that emerged as a direct reaction to migration in the three sampled host societies:

Cyprus. In this case, the urban spaces of the island's capital Nicosia became subject of a qualitative analysis of their function as contested spaces in which migrants, anti-racist, and racist groups encounter and confront each other. The interplay of online and offline activities reproduces both digital and non-digital materialities that have tangible impacts on the country's wider discourse on migration.

Greece. The country was not only hit hard by an economic crisis that shook the very fundaments of Greek society – at the same time it has to deal with a massive influx of migrants, since the country belongs to the traditional entry countries in the EU's South-Eastern periphery. Online media play a crucial role in migration related debates that are coined by outbursts of racial violence; these are strongly linked to the pressure of economic despair that affected social cohesion in the country in general. Right-wing groups repeatedly blamed increased migration as one factor that allegedly catalysed the country's economic demise, which triggered anti-racist reactions from the political left. However, migrants themselves often find it difficult to express their own views, i.e. to have their own voices in these heated discussions; they are talked about but seldom have the chance to make their own case.

UK. This case study examines tensions between migrants and their host society that have an impact on integration. Migration has become a top issue on the UK's political agenda in recent years, especially in the context of the general debate on the countries continued EU membership. As migrants from within and outside Europe seek to find

a better future in the UK, parts of the British population as well as political class have expressed increasing scepticism towards the overall benefits of this trend for their country – up to the point that anti-migration sentiments become clearly visible on the public stage. However, the British case study also discusses the potential for political mobilization as well as the chances for dialogue within migrant networks for community building; in this regard a real potential for the formation of digital counter publics becomes observable.

Despite the unique social, cultural, economic, and historical backgrounds of the three sampled countries there are several important cross-sections that the case studies have in common (to one extent or the other): firstly, all of them involve intersectional conflicts that mainly centre on the collision of seemingly incompatible socio-cultural configurations or at least diverging visions for the same. Secondly, as a direct result of the these collisions racist and anti-racist discourses emerge that include questions of ethnocentrism as well as questions on the chances and limits – if not the very meaning of – multiculturalism. Thirdly, these partly extremely volatile and controversial discourses are heavily affected by competing ideologies and the entailed negotiations of identity and difference. Fourthly, the respective discursive settings are shaped by the specific propensities of digital, web-based media. A comparative view on these issues can serve as a basis for general conclusions on the socio-cultural dynamics of these discourses and the role of technology as a decisive element in their configuration.

Research Aims and Methodology

The main purpose of the three case studies was to explore online-based discourses that involve active participation of migrants in order to set the foundation for further research and to enable the development of concrete policy recommendations that may translate into political actions that correct potentially existing imbalances in migration-related discourses: especially in regards to representation, pluralism in the public sphere, and improvements in democratic processes of integration. The case studies integrated forms of qualitative discourse analysis, participant observation, and cyberstudies techniques, with a particular interest in cyberconflict as a framework of analysis (Karatzogianni, 2006).

For the Cypriot case the city of Nicosia was mapped and analysed as a contested field in a divided country that displays three different “states of exception” (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 14-19): firstly, there is the still existing soft-border between the EU-South and the Turkish North that divides the capital’s centre. Secondly, there is the buffer zone, which remains under UN control since 1974. Thirdly, there is the migration state of exception that affects Cypriot society and politics on different levels. Racist reactions on the political right frame the influx of migrants as a general threat to Cypriots, especially in regards to its economy and culture. Racial hatred among the Cypriot-Greek youth has a certain history on the island and insufficient countermeasures enabled a “hard core” group to resurface that was around 10% of young people in 2000 (Charakis 2005). This leads to a new and partly very local

polarization in public discourse and the increasing radicalization of anti-racist groups as a counter-reaction; these anti-racist groups make attempts to claim their 'right to the city' (Harvey 2008; Purcell 2002), in order to defend their pluralistic vision for life in Nicosia. Two distinct groups represent this position that frames migration in a positive light: Firstly, there are the urban multicultural youth and other anti-racist groups; supporters and members of these left-leaning groups do not necessarily share the same experiences as migrants but form a firm opposition towards their racist counterparts. Secondly, there are the migrants themselves; the majority of them are residents of inner Nicosia. Since 2006 clashes between anti-racist and racist groups increased significantly with both being engaged in heated debates on identity politics. During these confrontations inner Nicosia frequently becomes both a digital and geographical site of conflict. The researchers focused on the resolution of intercultural conflicts both off- and online and chose four interconnected spaces in Nicosia: firstly, they mapped the conflict terrain online; secondly, they mapped inner Nicosia as a physical space; thirdly, they mapped the contested buffer zone; fourthly, they focused on two municipal gardens.

In the case of Greece, the quasi-permanent economic and political crisis shapes the general societal background for conflicts between anti-racist groups, extreme right-wing organisations, and migrants. The researchers sampled both anti-racist and racist websites/online content to get insights into the conflict configurations and the entailed struggle for meaning over migration as a reality for Greek society (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 19-22). Furthermore, they also conducted interviews and added observations to get a comprehensive picture of the current situation. Their main interest lied on the interconnection between on- and offline practices, i.e. how actions in the former have consequences for the latter and vice versa. In this respect, the Greek example has some striking implications for how both the "offline" and online environments cannot be seen as somehow separated but that they merge through complex communication processes, especially in the context of crises and conflicts.

The case study conducted in the UK focused on a very specific group of migrants, namely the Russian-speaking post-Soviet community and their utilisation of online media to discuss immigration issues in general, the prospects of European citizenship, as well as chances for political participation and activist mobilisation (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 20; Morgunova 2013); the analysis aimed for both dimensions of virtuality and reality, i.e. how the digital and non-digital are intertwined in complex communication processes that create new discursive spaces with specific socio-cultural dynamics (Karatzogianni 2012b). Main research subjects were websites and blogs maintained by the Russian community in Britain (e.g. Moscow London), which were examined through a qualitative content analysis. Additionally the researchers conducted offline interviews with the respective authors/bloggers/website hosts to gather more data on the perspectives of these migrants on their work, self-understanding, and the state of their migrant community.

In sum, all three case studies provided access to previously under-researched but crucial aspects in the area of migration, conflict, and technology. The results of this explorative work eventually allows drawing tentative general conclusions about the

nature of these discourses and how they will potentially continue to affect European societies.

Political Conflict, Ethno-Nationalist Discourse and Ideology

The case studies quickly revealed the specific political conflict constellations for each analysed example and how racist and ethno-nationalist discourse and ideology determine their shape as well as direction. In the Cypriot case the historical conflict of Greeks and Turks continues to resonate in current political debates, including ideological conflicts over the role of migration and the question of whether to welcome or exclude new arrivals from overseas. However, alongside existing discursive formations that have an affect on socio-cultural tensions in Cyprus, and Nicosia as a contested physical and ideological space in particular, new forms of negotiations of identity politics also have an impact on the political context for intercultural conflicts and migration discourses (Karatzogianni et al 2012: 23-29). Identity politics, access to public space, and visions for the future of the country are at the very heart of the conflict between racist groups, their anti-racist counterparts, and migrants (Trimikliniotis 2008; 2005; 2004; 1999; Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2006; 2007; 2009a; 2009b; Trimikliniotis and Pantelides 2003).

In the Greek case grave economic and political instability form an extremely volatile background for encounters between nationalist-racist groups and their oppositions (Karatzogianni et al 2012: 29-31). Right-wing movements perceive increasing migration and multiculturalism as both an economic and cultural threat to "their" country; they seem to actively pursue a strategy of brutalisation and dehumanisation in the migration discourse, while verbal abuse and defamation are accompanied by physical acts of anti-migrant violence. Anti-racist groups try to counter these positions and engage directly with their opponents in the public sphere, both on- and offline. At the same time the cash-strapped country sees itself largely left alone with the burden of increasing numbers of migrants, of whom many see Greece as a portal to other destinations within the EU (e.g. Germany, the UK, France). This lack of Paneuropean solidarity resonates in the lack of solidarity for migrants communicated by nationalist-racist positions.

The UK example of Russian online communities focuses on a very specific group of migrants (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 31), whose diaspora began to form probably even before the end of the Soviet Union (e.g. Byford 2009; Makarova and Morgunova 2009). However, the socio-cultural ties to the country of origin remain clearly visible in the respective online discussions, which topicalise current events and developments in Russia. The re-election of Vladimir Putin in 2012 is one such example that triggered communicative activity on Russian online platforms in the UK. This case study illustrates how migrant identity politics are shaped through transnational networks that connect different social, economic, political, and cultural spaces.

Racist Discourse and European Citizenship

In Cyprus, Greek-Cypriots initiate populist discourses that target on illegal immigrants, which are perceived as a threat. Differentiating between ethno-nationalist and radical right-wing populism becomes difficult in the Cypriot migration discourse; how to deal with migrants has turned into a national issue and it is commonly referred to as the "Cyprus Problem" (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 35-38). Turkish-Cypriots are no longer the exclusive focus of "othering" but practices of exclusion are expanded to a diversity of ethnic and cultural groups subsumed under the rather broad label of "migrants". Anti-migrant arguments mainly point to economic costs incoming migration would allegedly cause to Cypriot society but it is also framed as a security threat. Cypriot media outlets play a considerable part in the construction and distribution of negative stereotypes about migrants. Since the country is a member of the EU and Eurozone, the local migration discourse is also affected by the general economic and political crisis of the EU along with the various implications for European identity.

In the Greek case economic turmoil and controversial discussions on European identity are directly linked to intercultural conflicts that unfold as a result of increased migration to a country that is in a constant state of crisis since 2008; in other words, the spike of racism in public discourse and anti-migrant violence cannot be seen a separated from the general Greek crisis. Migrants seldom have any chance to claim their voice in public debates on their very future but remain passive and largely marginalised – they are subjects of the migration discourse but can hardly be seen as active participants. Greek right-wing and racist groups also tend to frame migration as an immediate threat to Greek economy and society in general (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 38-45); alongside their negative impact on the Greek labour market migrant are portrayed as a danger to Greek culture and identity as well; right-wing groups equate migration with an invasion. Through discursive techniques of quasi-dehumanisation they are basically perceived as enemies and legit targets for racist violence. Especially non-European migrants from e.g. central Asia, Africa, or South East Asia are targets of racist violence. One of the primary hotspots for socio-cultural conflicts related to migration is the country's capital Athens, though the struggle over meaning is not limited to physical spaces but expands to the Internet as well. Athens has become a highly dynamic transnational space that is shaped by "indigenous" Greeks, migrants with a variety of backgrounds, and the digital networks formed by the different involved groups. Ethno-Nationalists and other extreme right-wing positions frame migrants as a primary reason for the capital's decline and advance their pejorative anti-migration arguments in public discourse via all communication means available to them. 'Transit-migration' and 'ghettoization' seem to ignite conflicts between extreme right-wingers, anti-racists, and migrants. Furthermore, the Greek case study shows how migration discourses are not only linked to the economic-fiscal Eurozone crisis but a crisis of EU politics and solidarity in general, including questions on European citizenship and its relations to identity and race.

For the UK case study the researchers decided to ignore the internal diversity of the Russian-speaking diaspora and instead focused their analysis on cross-cultural conflicts or dialogues with either the British host society or other migrant communities (Karatzogianni et al 2012: 45). Migrants of Russian origin to the UK can

be separated into the following intersecting streams, which are highly qualified specialists, marriage migrants, and Russian-speaking EU citizens who come mainly from the Baltic countries. The case study indicates that female Russian-speaking migrants form a hidden majority. Conflicts and tensions that either involve Russia or take place in the country itself are of considerable relevance for Russian-speaking migrants. This illustrates the strong ties to the country of origin and genuinely transnational scope of migrant networks. Aside from intercultural conflicts the findings imply that in a few instances there are also attempts to initiate dialogues and work towards reconciliation with other migrant groups. Furthermore, the analysis shows how debates on offline violence become subjects of digital discourses but also how online activities have a tangible impact outside the Web; both are mutually affective in hybrid reality environments. Similar to the Greek and Cypriot cases European identity is a central issue among the Russian-speaking community in the UK (Morgunova 2006). In their on- and offline discourses two notions of European identity are of particular relevance: Firstly, Europe is perceived as a civilization and cultural space; in this context, it is often used as a means to establish differences towards other, non-European migrants. Secondly, Europe is construed as a modern political and economic construct that is different from other world regions on the global stage. Russian-speaking migrants see themselves as European for historical and cultural reasons, especially due to their Christian roots and Enlightenment-based education. This self-perception as Europeans further serves as a legitimisation for migrating into the UK. This implies a racialised understanding of a white Europe that actually contradicts the empirical situation on the continent, which is in fact much more diverse due to global migration.

Cyberconflicts in Cyprus, Greece, and the UK

In all three countries online media expanded the sites for community building but also for confrontation and conflict to what could be described as digital public spheres (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 47-59). In Cyprus both anti-racist and racist groups implement online media as tools and sites for their conflicts, though the actual strategies and outcomes vary between the involved stakeholders. For instance, anti-racist online mobilisation remains limited due to a growing general xenophobic sentiment in Cypriot society; the general economic crisis not only undermines social cohesion and solidarity but diminishes the level of support for migrants in particular. Nevertheless, anti-racist groups are involved in cyber-warfare (e.g. hacktivism, framing) and a graffiti war (Weizman 2006) in Nicosia that is documented on the Web (Karatzogianni et al 2012: 47-49).

In Greece, online media facilitated networking of racist groups and expanded their public reach (ibid: 53). In the past right-wing positions were mainly excluded from general public discourses and most mass media platforms; however, the situation has changed with the widespread distribution of Internet access and easy-to-manage online platforms. The Greek example illustrates how the Internet provides a range of efficient alternatives for producing and sharing ideologically loaded statements with a wider public on relatively low costs (Karatzogianni 2006); framing central issues related to migration in the country is a key function of online media for extremist

groups on the political fringes. These make successful attempts to harness this potential to the fullest and online media – especially social media – have also become crucial tools for mobilisation as well as organising political activities. Their networks tend to be largely based on user-generated content and are widely dispersed and de-centralised (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 53-55). On- and offline activism is not clearly separated but rather deeply interconnected. Racist discourse can be seen as an anti-establishment discourse that heavily criticises non-racist mainstream positions and political correctness policies (both explicit and implicit ones) while at the same time anti-migration perspectives become more acceptable in Greek society. Ethno-nationalist and racist arguments against migrants cover at least three discernable categories: one dominant theme frames migrants as "unclean" and "dirty", which implies a de facto dehumanisation of the same; they are perceived as "unhealthy" for Greek society and incompatible with Hellenic culture if not downright dangerous for Greek nationals (e.g. through alleged acts of crime and violence committed by migrants); as Bauman (1997) explains, this framing of the other as "unsanitary" is common strategy in inter cultural conflicts. The second theme further exploits the "migrants as a threat" frame and places emphasis on security issues; the bottom line of related arguments reads something like this: among the masses of migrant were countless criminals and potential terrorists who would enter the country unchecked and therefore pose a real threat to ordinary Greeks whom had to defend themselves against foreigners. The third theme focuses on the cultural differences and related arguments imply that migrant cultures were not only incompatible but even inferior to Greek culture; biological racism is basically complemented by cultural racism (Balibar 1991) and culture becomes a site of conflict itself (Wallerstein 2001). Being marginalised for decades forced extreme right-wing organisations to become experts in the construction of alternative counter publics and they quickly adapted to the efficient instrumentalisation of online media for their communication strategies. Though Greek anti-racist movements mainly focused on offline activities for their political campaigning (e.g. demonstrations, press releases, open discussions, posters, festivals, face-to-face dissemination of information etc.), they implement online media for a similar set of objectives today. Internet communication plays a crucial role in "spreading the word" when it comes to organising political events or actions and networking in particular. However, many of their efforts seem to be limited to politically similar groups, i.e. networking within the anti-racist and/or leftist political scene (*Indymedia* would be a prime example).

In the UK, the short-lived "Slavic spring" triggered intense online- and offline activities within the Russian-speaking Diaspora (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 55). A digital-transnational opposition formed as a direct reaction to political developments in Russia. Viewpoints and issues discussed in these networks partly translated into concrete online protest, which again lead to actual street protests to reach a broader public and to provide counter frames against the official stance of the acting Russian government under Putin. In this regard, political online discourse on the events unfolding in Russia were not at all limited to the country but spanned across a transnational network that connected different Russian migrant communities around the globe (Morgunova 2012; Byford 2012). The analysis shows how developments and events in the country of origin can have a tangible, lasting affect on identity politics in migrant communities. For example, Russian-speaking migrants criticised the undemocratic political system and distanced themselves from their country of

origin in this particular respect. However, ethno-nationalist sentiments are also part of the Russian-migrant community's reality and its members expressed a range of arguments of belonging (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 58): firstly, there is *geography* and/or *symbolic geography*, such as identifying with a particular region or city in Russia or the UK (also there is a historic association with the territory of Britain that some expressed); secondly, there are *professional spaces*, i.e. labour markets or the acquisition of companies by Russians. Quite surprisingly the sample analysed for the case study did not mention ideological spaces specifically related to Russian culture, though Russian migrants tend to legitimise their belonging to their host country on historical and cultural grounds. The most notable difference to the other case studies is the observation that in the context of the Russian-speaking minority in the UK digital spaces for reconciliation and dialogue become identifiable (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 59). For example, participants make genuine attempts to overcome ethnic and social divisions among migrants in Britain, who has a multi-ethnic population. In these discourses common positions and values serve as points for the exchange of arguments and mutual understanding. However, it is important to note that despite these tendencies actual participation of Russian-speaking migrants in grassroots networks remains low. Furthermore, others completely refrain from approaching other migrant groups and import as well as foster their racist and ethno-nationalist views.

Conclusion and Research Outlook

The results of the three case studies point to a number of important aspects of and sub-areas in migration related discourses in transnational digital networks that need further investigation. They also already indicate where political intervention through reasonable policy development could counteract against shortcoming and imbalances in communication about migration. In other words, through their explorative analyses on the complex relations between intercultural conflict, chances for dialogue, and the impact of digital technology on the forging of transnational networks, the Mig@Net research project provides a starting point for further research that can have an actual impact on migration politics. In a general respect, it seems that despite the many possibilities to alter one's online identity, across all case studies users tended to reproduce their actual ethnic/"racial" and gendered identities. In order to provide an overview for the most urgent problems and their potential solutions, this paragraph summarises the key findings of each case study:

Cyprus. The island's capital Nicosia has turned into the main site for socio-cultural conflicts related to migration, with cultural and identity politics at the core of extremely controversial, heated debates; it is a primary space for the formation of political identities that antagonise each other and a site for 'geocultural contestation' (Wallerstein 2005). Ethno-nationalist/racist groups and their liberal anti-racist counterparts are locked in an ideological struggle over the very definition of the urban space – their home territory so to say – as either an open international/multicultural-cosmopolitan space or as a secluded area of contamination, ethnic alienation, and annihilation. The conflict over physical space covered both the off- and online dimensions (which makes the political contest model proposed by Wolfsfeld 1997 particularly relevant for the Cypriot case). At the heart of the debate is the

fundamental question of whether the city is a free cosmos or a closed, quasi-militarised zone of ethnic cleansing. All of this is intrinsically linked to the idea of European identity. In this regard, the streets of Nicosia and its digital networks give insight to the struggle over the very notion of Europe: Is it open, democratic, and multicultural? Or does it symbolise a "European apartheid"? Research finds pockets and elements of both: one the one hand one finds "mobile commons" produced by social actions and "migrant digitalities" thate reshape notions of citizenship i.e. "the right to the city" and on the other, surveillance and repression of the "European apartheid" type (see Trimikliniotis et al., 2015).

Greece. Whether to integrate or exclude and ban migrants as well as their options to actively participate in public debates are subjects of constant negotiation and conflict; migration forms one of the most controversial issues on the political agenda and in the public sphere – both on and offline. The findings from the case study indicate that migrants themselves are largely excluded from public discourses on their situations and future; only very few manage to get actively engaged in the respective debates and migrants usually have no agency to speak of in the Greek public sphere. If they can express something like a representative voice it is almost exclusively limited to issues directly related to migration but they are hardly heard in other relevant social, political, cultural, and economic debates that affect their lives. But even in the few instances when they are able to provide their own accounts their contributions seem limited to factual summaries of their migrant experiences, as they are not asked for personal analyses or opinions on more profound societal issues. It is in this regard rather unsurprising that there is no institutionalised recognition of migrant communities in the Greek public sphere; access to existing networks is for them virtually closed. When migrants become subjects of public discourses they are criminalised, degraded, or victimised. Their options to make their own stance and to actually "talk back", i.e. to provide counter frames from their particular perspectives, are very limited, since racist groups openly threaten and terrorise migrants who participate in online discourses. However, even in anti-racist discourses migrants are more or less invisible and voiceless; the case study implies that they seldom have active speaker roles as recognised individuals. Grassroots online forums have clear limitations for inclusion in this respect. One reason might be the strategic use of online platforms by anti-racist groups for the distribution of selected information. There seems to be only very little to almost no communicative interaction and political collaboration between anti-racist groups and migrants in the Greek context. This ambiguous situation sets considerable limits to the possibilities for migrants to step out of their invisibility and become actively engaged in debates about their future.

UK. A complex system of "othering" and exclusion in Russian-speaking post-Soviet communities is interwoven with social tensions that lead to conflicts within the transnational digital network of Russian diasporas and their country of origin. The continuing undermining of democracy in Russia is perceived as a threat to their claims of belonging to "European culture"; Russian migrants tend to see this political trend as "non-European", which puts greater distance between both cultural spaces. At the same time their particular understanding of Europe is limited by racialised visions of contemporary Europe that is based on a somewhat homogenous, white

population with shared cultural roots. However, there are tendencies to readjust this perspective of Europe. This seems to be a direct result of being exposed to the "migrant experience" themselves as foreigners in the UK. Though small in numbers, participation in newly emerging social initiatives, accepting inclusion etc. could turn Russian-speaking migrants into active agents of change. The findings of UK case study imply how the same technologies that are mostly used as tools for conflict, and eventually fragmentation, can also help to overcome divides and to build relations among different socio-cultural as well political groups.

The insights and preliminary data yielded through the case studies can also help to inform practically oriented policy recommendations: In the cases of Cyprus and Greece it seems recommendable to seek ways that support migrants in forming and organising their own independent groups; this can help them to communicate their unfiltered perspectives and provide them with access to the public sphere. Programs that place focus on migrant visibility could become the first important steps to enable them with their own agency in public discourse and eventually politics. The overall aim should be to enable them to move from their passive state into more active roles as equal participants that represent their socio-cultural and political interests in migration discourses. An indispensable precondition for the success of such a re-organisation of the representation of migrant groups would be the actual implementation of the freedom of speech. In other words: the respective governmental institutions would have to guarantee the safety of migrant speakers in public discourse. A strict condemnation of racist violence, both physically and discursive, should be demanded from the state in each case. This could prove to be a very difficult task as the general xenophobic sentiment in Cyprus and Greece may paralyse decisive action of the state in this respect. Furthermore, a continuing economic crisis is likely to increase anti-migrant sentiment and may at least significantly impede efforts to implement pro-migrant policies. Nevertheless, repeated demands for an improvement of the situation should be addressed at the respective governments. Anti-racist groups in both countries would also have to review their current communication policies, as they seem to exclude any noteworthy speakers from the migrant community. Instead of enforcing a political representation on them "top-down", the respective NGOs should provide platforms for migrants to represent themselves. The continuing patronization of migrants contributes to their victimization and eventually to their (involuntary) degradation. It almost goes without saying that the other EU member states should provide sufficient assistance for both countries to better cope with the increasing burden of migration and the subsequent integration of new arrivals to European societies.

In the UK, appropriate support for democratic grassroots networks and migrant organisation might stimulate intercultural dialogue and cooperation. The example of the Russian-speaking minority implies that such tendencies exist and start to manifest themselves in concrete social, cultural, and political actions. However, ethno-nationalist and racist perspective are still widely distributed in these discourses as well, which should be countered with explicit condemnations of such views and the deconstruction of stereotypes via information and/or education.

From a more general perspective the different case studies have also shown that ideologically loaded, partly racialised perceptions of Europe, European identity, and therefore European citizenship materialise in public discourses across the continent; especially cultural difference serves as a justification for evaluative statements about migrants and their socio-cultural backgrounds. A transnational open debate about the fundamentals of European identity and EU citizenship may respond to this trend; the EU institutions could also take a clear stance against the racialization of Europe.
As racialization is also strongly linked to gender within the intersectionality framework, it is critical that mechanisms such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) are employed to include immigrants from diverse racial and gender categories in dialogue, consultations as well as policy implementations, especially focusing on the least advantaged women migrants from underdeveloped countries outside Europe (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, Parrenas 2001, Salih 2003, Basch et al. 1994, Glick Schiller and Faist 2010). However, in the current political climate where the EU as such has to justify its very existence and gets constantly undermined by national interests and a complete lack of efficient transnational cooperation, it remains difficult to put such plans into actions. Both the Eurozone crisis and the deeply connected migration crisis have revealed the very limits of internal and external European solidarity. Non-governmental groups and grassroots networks may form alternative agents with direct access to local sites for migration related conflicts.

On a technosocial level, the findings apply methodological steps of cyberconflict theory (Karatzogianni 2006; 2009; 2012a) and simultaneously allow a tentative confirmation of its key hypotheses. Firstly, from a methodological perspective cyberconflict analysis considers three central areas that are deeply connected and in sum shape much of current political discourses on the transnational stage: it provides the tools for conflict analysis, i.e. to map the socio-cultural and political constellations behind a conflict situation and thus to identify the main stakeholders and their targets/agendas. Secondly, it enables to critically analyse the formation of social movements and their utilisation of digital technologies to form networks, share information, construct frames for public issues, and organise political actions both off- as well as offline. Thirdly, it also takes the role of different types of media into account, which are the very foundation of modern public life, i.e. the general public sphere and alternative counter publics. From a cyberconflict perspective, the case studies then show how the Internet serves several political functions at once, including mobilisation via online recruitment, internal and external communication via framing and the distribution of ideologies, and concrete online actions such as hacktivism. Furthermore, social identities and social relations in discourses on migration, ethno-nationalism, and racism are mainly influenced by existing, fixed identities based on specific nationalities, religious affiliations, and ethnicities.
The role and influence of the mass media varies across the analysed countries but can generally be described as “ambiguous”: in the cases of Cyprus and Greece their impact is comparatively strong and biased media outlets seem to actively contribute to a rather negative framing of migrants; these sentiments are picked up and further processed in online spaces, which illustrates how deeply interwoven flows of communication are in highly “mediatised” societies. For the British case study mass media outlets do not seem to be as important as in the other two cases, though this impression cannot be taken as face value. Since especially state-run media in Russia tend to echo official government perspectives, transnational online networks offer real

alternatives for the expression of criticism and counter arguments. In this regard, migrant communities in the UK can benefit from more liberal press regulations that ensure freedom of speech. However, this does not mean that the marginalisation and negative framing of migrants are not a reality in British mass media discourses; to the contrary, in times of an unprecedented influx of migrants to Europe distorted portrayals related to migration also circulate through the British mass media landscape. The 2010 general election campaigns were one crucial instance when the brisance as well as topicality of migration became apparent in British public discourse (Goodhart 2010).

In sum, the review of the case studies on intersectional conflict and dialogue that are part of the MIG@NET research project shows how transnational digital networks affect the formation of public discourses; they reveal what central issues are at the very core of one of the most urgent societal problems European countries have to face in the early 21st century. The European example provides insights into the general socio-cultural dynamics behind the formation of transnational digital networks and the role of Internet technology in particular – as the report concludes (Karatzogianni et al. 2012: 64): 'Resistances seem to be moving towards more networked, rhizomatic and open forms of identification, despite the short- term reliance on nationality, ethnicity, and religion to defend local and regional cultures against globalization' (see Karatzogianni and Robinson 2010).

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