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PUBLICATIONS

Green Wedge Tracker – Monitoring climate conversations

As part of the Green Wedge Project, the Green Wedge Tracker gives you a monthly overview of the social media climate conversation in 8 European countries.

September 2021

- This may be the first time that the European Green Deal (EGD) agenda has been somewhat associated to national reactions. This is mainly due to the energy crisis and the growing realisation of the potential impact of EGD on energy.
- The current energy shortage and price increases, combined with the EGD implementation (#fitfor55 launched in July) has raised questions and concerns in every country on the energy mix strategy, on the social and economic impact of the European climate strategy on people.
- In the context of the IPCC report and the summer floods (see our Summer Tracker below), the German federal election represented a first real test for the Green Party and results have been disappointing.

Most Popular Hashtags



- As mentioned in the **Summer Tracker** (see below), #FitFor55 is (and will likely continue to be) one of the main topic discussed as part of the EGD conversation.
- In combination with the State of Union speech (#SOTEU) by **Ursula von der Leyen** on 15/07, the #NewEuropeanBauhaus frequently as a rallying cry for the designing of a more sustainable European way of life more in line with the EGD (sustainability of public spaces, buildings...)

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- The EGD in **Spain** has been associated with science events #NIGHTspain #Mscanight.

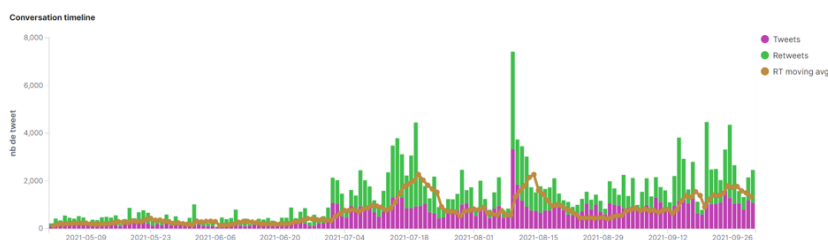
The Conversation in Numbers

- **24%** of the EGD conversation happened in Spanish last month – but it didn't focus on the Green Deal. But it did provide visibility for the EGD by promoting a range of EU science events to raise awareness on climate and sustainability issues under the hashtags #NIGHTspain #Mscanight.
- In the days around the #SOTEU, between **40-90%** of the conversation happened within the European Union political bubble creating a great congratulatory echo chamber!

National Discussions to Watch

POLAND

Increased engagement on climate policy – driven by concerns over the social injustice of EU measures



- Before July this year, climate was merely a discussion amongst many on Polish social media. However, if we look at the monthly average in September there is much more engagement on these topics than during the previous months of July and August that saw peaks especially around extreme weather events and the IPCC report. The new interest in climate (by way of the #Fitfor55 plan) has been driven by social justice concerns.
- Although political circles in Poland (including the Prime Minister) theoretically express support for environmental action and #Fitfor55, general public opinion visible on social media is that it is a mad plan concocted by the EU. All participants insist on the heavy burden it would place on the population (the "unjustified social and economic cost" that citizens will pay with their money using the words of Beata Szydło). The message that is brought home by politicians is that the EU doesn't care about citizens and that there is little concrete funding to alleviate the burden on Polish people.

Polexit – Will energy be the last straw for Poland?

- This month the Polish social media conversation around climate seems to be driven by a deep sense of unfairness concerning what is viewed as the treatment 'inflicted upon' the Polish people by the EU. The current energy discussion could be the tipping point in an already extremely fraught relationship. Online the conversation is that of a persecuted Poland – unfairly singled out: Why is the discussion on lignite mining focused on Poland and its financial penalty when Germany produces twice as much lignite as Poland? Why should the Turow coal plant be shut when Germany and other countries rely on coal in today's crisis? Why should Polish people pay for this electricity price spike and various EU-imposed environmental taxes when it has the means to be energy independent/sovereign? And why make everyone believe that renewables are the panacea by turning a blind eye to the lack of sustainability of renewable infrastructure? These are the conversations happening in Poland this month with a particularly virulent and confrontational rhetoric of war, of imposition and of dictated rules by the EU and Germany. We will continue to monitor these threatening conversations as well as the associated surge in #Polexit.

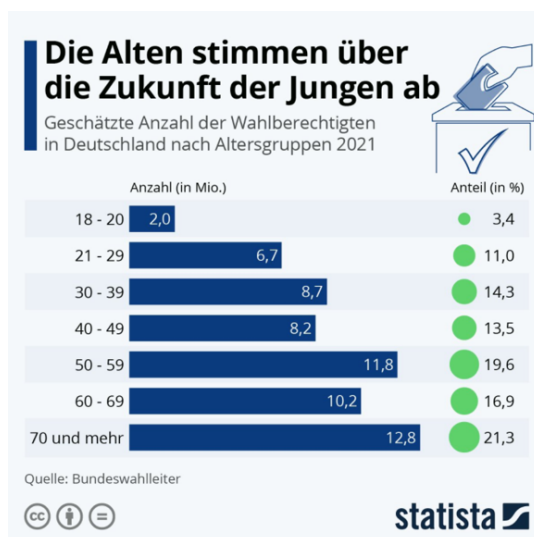
GERMANY

#MemeOfTheMonth



Age is important in an election

- On the 24/09, 2 days before the German federal election, a global climate strike was organised by the youth group Fridays For Future in 1,800 cities. The strike gathered large number of people in Germany including more than 100,000 people in Berlin.
- However, the call for the youth to support green ideas didn't come across as strongly in the final election results given that close to 60% of electors were above 50 years old. The growing generational divide among German electors could be the last impediment for climate actions.



Whose Science?

Science is still used by both the left and the right in Germany to legitimize and justify their arguments. While the SPD and CDU are accused of failing to listen to science and not acting fast enough to address climate change (not moving forward on #coalexit for instance); the Greens are also criticized for not following science in their opposition to nuclear, CCS and waiting for technological progresses in the path towards Net-Zero.

FRANCE

The French right against the Greens and renewables

- During the Green party Presidential election primaries held in September, Green politicians were discredited for being 'ideologically driven' and attacked violently as #escrologie (crookecology). Right-wing supporters used the hashtag to highlight Green inconsistencies and paradoxes: for instance the perceived negative impact of having Green mayors on the visual deterioration of the city (#SaccageParis). Right-wing supporters also claim to

support real environmentalism through their respect for nature and French “patrimoine” (heritage). This narrative fits with the growing criticism of wind turbines led by author and journalist Stephane Bern or by nationalist politicians such as Nicolas Dupont Aignan (already highlighted) in our May Tracker (see below). Their argument is that wind power is a non-renewable energy given its impact on the rural landscape, on ecosystems and on rural communities. Some have also raised the issue of the impact of electric cars on biodiversity due to poor recycling of some of the parts (such as the batteries).



Comforted in the choice of nuclear energy

- The electricity shortage and the rising price across Europe has added another string to the bow of nuclear lobbies and supporters and comforted France in its strategic choice (France gets 70% of its electricity from nuclear). This opinion has been given further credibility with the former spokesperson of Extinction Rebellion, Zion Lights, now supporting nuclear as part of a necessary solution for a successful transition. She has funded a think tank called Emergency Reactor to push forward this view. French President Macron is also increasingly vocal about it.
- In the current context, an energy mix that includes nuclear has been positively received and endorsed in multiple countries and contrasted with the German approach that is currently under heavy stress – and criticism.

ITALY

A Minister for Ecological Transition against the transition?

- Despite hopes that action on environmental and climate policy would pick up following the creation of an Ecological Transition ministry under Draghi, the Minister himself, Cingolani, is seen as one of the main obstacles to progress in this field. Cingolani was quoted as saying “The world is full of radical chic environmentalists and extremist, ideological environmentalists: they are worse than the climate catastrophe towards which

we are heading." This declaration made at the conference Italia Viva on 2/09 triggered aghast reactions. His statement also included a reconsideration of the nuclear development option, and doubts about the development of electric cars. His talk, aside from offending climate activists, was also taken as no more than an attempt to protect industry – and especially car industry – interests. This raising concerns from NGOs that PNRR funds will be used for less-than-Green projects.

CZECH REPUBLIC

A complicated parliamentary election and a simplistic climate discussion



*The monthly tracker is brought to you by our Climate & Protest Programme Director Cloé Ragot.
See you next month !*

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