World Geography Packet #2 (April 14-May 4)

Europe’s Cultural Geography

This packet consists of 6 readings with questions for each. The reading topics include Europe’s historical cultures, contemporary cultures, historic issues, contemporary issues, future issues, and the Corona Virus in Europe. You should plan to do the following:

**Week 1:**
Readings 1 & 2 and questions

**Week 2:**
Readings 3 & 4 and questions

**Week 3:**
Reading 5 & 6 and questions

European Geography

Europe is the second-smallest continent. The name Europe, or *Europa*, is believed to be of Greek origin, as it is the name of a princess in Greek mythology. The name Europe may also come from combining the Greek roots *eur-* (wide) and *-op* (seeing) to form the phrase “wide-gazing.”

Europe is often described as a “peninsula of peninsulas.” A peninsula is a piece of land surrounded by water on three sides. Europe is a peninsula of the Eurasian supercontinent and is bordered by the Arctic Ocean to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and the Mediterranean, Black, and Caspian seas to the south.

Europe’s main peninsulas are the Iberian, Italian, and Balkan, located in southern Europe, and the Scandinavian and Jutland, located in northern Europe. The link between these peninsulas has made Europe a dominant economic, social, and cultural force throughout recorded history.

Today, Europe is home to the citizens of 47 countries.

Cultural Geography

Europe has a long history of human development and is considered the birthplace of Western Civilization. Today, this cultural wealth is used to solidify the European Community and is exported to the rest of the world as one of the continent’s greatest global assets.

Historic Cultures

Indigenous cultures shaped, and were shaped by, the varied geography of Europe. Physical features, weather-related phenomena, and local resources had a deep impact on how historic European cultures prospered, interacted, and believed their world worked.
The geography and climate of the Mediterranean region, for example, directly influenced Greek mythology. Most Greek gods and goddesses are representations of the active physical elements that made up the local landscape. The volcanoes of Lemnos, an island in the Mediterranean, and Mount Etna, on the island of Sicily, were believed to be the forges of Hephaestus, the Greek god of fire. Ancient Greeks also believed reigning gods imprisoned lesser gods underneath the volcanoes. A volcano’s violent nature thus came from the work of Hephaestus and the anger of the imprisoned gods.

The ancient Greeks’ connection to the sea also deeply influenced their mythological beliefs. Greece’s many earthquakes, and the tsunamis they caused, were connected to the sea godPoseidon, known as the “Earth Shaker.” Cults and temples centered on Poseidon were built throughout the Aegean and Mediterranean seas as a means of appeasing the god.

As maritime trade and exploration developed in the region, winds and currents connected to Poseidon became important in Greek mythology. The gods could both reward and punish travelers and traders with favorable or unfavorable sea conditions. This is a main theme of The Odyssey, an epic poem written by Homer, in which these key elements of the sea both help and hurt the hero.

Other cultures developed around the unique resources at their disposal. The Sami culture of Scandinavia, for example, was deeply connected to the indigenous reindeer herds of the Arctic. The Sami followed and cared for these herds during their grazing cycle. During the harsh winter, the Sami ate all parts of the animal. They created clothing and tents out of reindeer hides, sewing together the cloth with twine made from the animal’s tendons.

Reindeer were also the Sami’s main method of transporting goods during their nomadic journeys. These journeys varied in length, depending on the migration patterns of specific reindeer herds. Some reindeer herds have a home range of up to 5,000 square kilometers (1,930 square miles).

Reindeer herding is still an important aspect of Sami culture, which continues to thrive in northern Scandinavia and Russia’s Kola Peninsula.

Distinct physical features had a lasting impact on how European cultures communicated with each other. With its central European location but geographic remoteness, the Alps region developed into a unique crossroads for Europe’s dominant languages, and a refuge for its archaic languages. This linguistic diversity is present in the Alpine regions of many contemporary European countries today.

Switzerland, for example, has four official languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansch. During the Middle Ages, dominant European powers conquered the strategically important mountain territory of the Alps. Around 400 CE, a Germanic tribe invaded present-day northern Switzerland. Today, this is the German-speaking region of the country.

Around this same time, Roman conquerors took over present-day southern Switzerland. Latin, the language of Rome, evolved into French in the western region, and Italian in the south. Because of their remoteness, however, all these regions have distinct dialects that differ slightly from their parent language. Swiss-Italian is distinguishable from Italian.
Romansch, an endangered language, is also derived from Latin. Fewer than a million people are fluent in Romansch. The language survives in Switzerland because of the remote location of its native speakers.

Reading #2

Contemporary Cultures

Europe’s rich and diverse cultural heritage continues to flourish today. With such a large number of nationalities compacted into such a small area, Europe strongly supports individual cultural identities and products.

The European Capitals of Culture program, started in 1985, has become one of Europe’s most important and high-profile cultural events. The goals of the program are local, regional, and global. The program highlights Europe’s rich cultural diversity, celebrates its cultural ties, and brings people of different European backgrounds together. The program has provided a lasting economic boost to cities and regions, raised their international profiles, and enhanced their images in the eyes of their own inhabitants.

Each year, two or three cities are chosen to produce a year-long program of cultural events. This program must not only highlight the city’s unique cultural heritage, but also feature new events that unite a range of cultural practices from across Europe. All of the events must come together under a common theme or themes. One Capital of Culture of 2011, Turku, Finland, focused on culture’s positive influence on health and well-being. Many of its events encouraged community involvement and civic engagement. Projects are meant to stay a part of the city after 2011—some pieces of sculpture may be used for athletics, for instance. Turku officials hope to inspire other European countries to undertake similar projects.

Europe also strengthens ties between its diverse peoples and cultures by supporting multilingual education. The European Union has 23 official languages, and the continent has more than 60 indigenous languages. Flourishing immigrant communities are bringing in new languages to the continent, including Arabic, Hindi, and Mandarin.

A 2006 European study showed that 53 percent of respondents could speak a second language, while 28 percent could speak two foreign languages. The study also showed that only 8 percent of respondents considered language-learning unimportant.

The European Union has adopted a multilingual language policy with the goal that everyone should be able to speak at least two languages in addition to their own. By supporting this policy, the European Union hopes it will strengthen social, educational, professional, and economic ties in Europe and make the continent more competitive in global markets.

Europe’s cultural products also help unify the region. Certain countries and regions have even developed
an identity or “branding” focused on specific products and exports.

Scandinavian design, for instance, is primarily focused on fashion and home wares. It is characterized by simple, minimalist design and low-cost mass production. Important Scandinavian companies focused on designed products include Electrolux, which makes home electronics, and Ikea and H&M, famous around the world for inexpensive but well-designed home furnishings and clothing, respectively.

Italian fashion is also an important cultural export. The city of Milan is regarded as a major fashion capital, hosting an international fashion week twice a year. The city is home to the headquarters of luxury brands such as Valentino, Gucci, Versace, and Prada. Milan is also home to important European fashion magazines, such as Grazia, Vogue Italia, and Vera.

German automotive design has a global reputation for excellence and prestige. Automobile companies such as BMW, Mercedes, and Audi are known throughout the world for creating cars with dynamic designs and an engaging driving experience. The country is also home to a number of outstanding schools for automotive design, such as the Hochschule Esslingen and Hochschule Pforzheim.

Reading #3

Political Geography

Europe’s long history and economic progress have been shaped by its political geography. Political geography is the internal and external relationships between governments, citizens, and territories. Early Europeans, in fact, shaped global ideas of citizenship and government. These ideas have been tested during times of peace and military conflict, and continue to be redefined today.

Historic Issues
Europe’s early political history can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome, both of which profoundly affected how Western civilizations govern their territories and citizens.

Described as the birthplace of democracy, ancient Greece revolved around the polis, or city-state. City-states were unique in that they were governed not by a hereditary ruler, but by a political body that represented its citizens. This idea of citizenship—of being connected to and having a voice in your community—became the basic building block of democracy. The word “democracy” has Greek roots: demos-, meaning “people,” and -kratos, meaning “power.” Prominent Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Plato, discussed democratic ideals in their writings. Philosophers and politicians have used these writings to uphold and defend the democratic tradition ever since.

Roman civilization had a major influence on Western concepts of law, government, and the military. At its largest, Rome controlled approximately 6.5 million square kilometers (2.5 million square miles) of land.

The Roman approach to conquering and controlling territory is often considered to be the basis of
Western imperialism. Imperialism is a policy of extending a nation’s power and influence through diplomacy or military force. Imperialism is a policy that has been used throughout history, most notably by European powers and the United States. Other political institutions of Rome persist throughout Europe and former European colonies. Some of these concepts include the idea of an elected Senate and the stationing of military troops outside a country’s home region.

World War I and World War II dramatically affected the political geography of Europe. World War I (1914-1918) left about 16 million people dead. The Central Powers (led by the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire) fell to the forces of the Allied Powers (led by the United Kingdom, France, and the Russian Empire). By the end of the war, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires collapsed and broke into a dozen separate nations. Borders between existing nations, such as Poland and Russia, were entirely redrawn.

World War II (1939-1945) left about 43 million Europeans dead, including about 6 million who died in the Holocaust. The Holocaust was the mass murder of Jews under the Nazi regime. World War II also left more than 40 million refugees, contributed to the independence of European colonies throughout the world, and devastated the urban infrastructure of many European cities.

As a result of the devastation of World War II, Western Europe’s leadership in global politics diminished. The United States began to lead the Western world, while the Soviet Union, with its capital in the Eastern European city of Moscow, Russia, led the so-called Eastern Bloc. The relationship between the United States, with a free-market economy, and the Soviet Union, with a communist economy, was known as the Cold War.

The “Iron Curtain” represents Europe’s political geography during the Cold War. The Iron Curtain was an ideological boundary that divided Europe into two blocs—Western countries influenced by the United States, and Eastern countries influenced by the Soviet Union. International economic and military organizations developed on either side of the Iron Curtain. The United States and the Soviet Union built up huge nuclear arsenals, with many missiles aimed at targets throughout Europe.

The Iron Curtain took on the physical shape of border defenses, walls, and limited diplomacy. The nation of Germany was divided in two. In fact, the most famous symbol of the Iron Curtain was the Berlin Wall, which divided the East German city of Berlin into western and eastern-controlled parts.

The economic and political demise of the Soviet Union led to the end of the Iron Curtain in the late 1980s. During this time, a number of anti-communist revolutions swept central and eastern Europe. These revolutions eventually lead to the end of the Cold War, symbolized by the falling of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

**Reading #4**

*Contemporary Issues*

Europe is now broadly defined in the context of the European Union (EU), an economic and political
body officially created by the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. The EU works to create a unified structure for social, environmental, military, and economic policies of its member states.

Today, the European Union is composed of 27 member states, with new members mainly coming from central and Eastern Europe. The financial and diplomatic success of the EU has led to its rapid growth across the continent.

The euro is one of the strongest currencies in the world. The euro is the second-most popular currency (behind the American dollar) and is used daily by more than 320 million people. Nations that use the euro as a unit of currency are called the “Eurozone.”

Leadership of the EU, split among different branches and institutions, is a working model of international cooperation. The EU accepts few candidates: member states must maintain a stable, democratic form of government, a free-market economy, and commitment to the rule of law.

The rapid growth of the European Union, however, has caused a number of administrative and political tensions. Critics believe the process of attaining EU membership is too difficult for Europe’s developing economies. Strict EU regulations place a heavy burden on developing countries to compete with their more developed neighbors.

The global financial crisis, which began around 2008, has caused these tensions to elevate dramatically. The financial crisis is defined by debt and high unemployment. The European Union created a $957 billion “rescue package” for the EU economy, primarily for countries that had unsustainable debt rates. These countries included Greece, Ireland, Spain, and Portugal. This rescue package has caused tensions to rise between economically competitive countries and the indebted countries that they are helping to rescue. Indebted countries must now deal with strict budgets and declining incomes while more financially stable countries are forcing taxpayers to help fund the financial rescue.

The status of immigrants is also a source of tension and debate in Europe. Historically, Europe has been a center of immigration. The European Union has established the Schengen Area—a zone where Europeans can travel from country to country without having to show their passports. The financial crisis, along with concerns about immigrants’ connections to terrorism and religious extremism, has caused Europe to develop a more guarded approach to immigration. Some critics argue these attitudes are xenophobic. Xenophobia is an intense dislike or fear of people from other places or cultures.

Two events demonstrate this debate. In 2005, the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published 12 cartoons featuring Islamic subjects. The political cartoons sought to engage in the debate surrounding Muslim extremism. Many Muslim organizations, however, saw the cartoons as bigoted, racist, and insulting. Protests developed across the Muslim world, and demonstrators set fire to Danish embassies in Lebanon, Iran, and Syria. These events had a devastating effect on Denmark’s reputation as a progressive and welcoming country. The debate surrounding the cartoons also intensified strained relations between the Islamic world and the West.

In 2010, the French government dismantled illegal immigrant camps throughout France. These camps
were mostly populated by Roma, also called Gypsies. Roma are a people and culture native to central and Eastern Europe. In the face of an economic crisis, EU citizens of poorer member countries, such as the Roma of Bulgaria and Romania, often migrate to more developed EU countries in search of work. Developed countries, however, are also facing economic challenges. These nations do not feel an obligation to accept illegal immigrants, seeing them as both a threat and a burden.

Supporters of the crackdown want to stop illegal immigration. Critics argue the move was racist.

**Reading #5**

**Future Issues**

An important predictor of Europe’s political and economic future is its efforts to minimize the effects of climate change.

Europe is often seen as a world leader in environmentally friendly technologies and legislation. The 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference was held in Copenhagen, Denmark. As part of an international agreement signed at the conference, all 27 member states of the European Union agreed to reduce carbon emissions by 20 percent by 2020 (from 1990 levels).

The EU also notified the UN of a “conditional offer to increase this cut to 30 percent, provided that other major emitters agree to take on their fair share of a global reduction effort.” This conditional offer illustrates the tension that was present at the conference between developed countries’ high carbon emissions and developing countries’ low or rising carbon use. In fact, many developing nations argued that the Copenhagen Accord was drafted by a small group of powerful countries and unfairly disadvantages poorer countries, many of which are expected to suffer the worst effects of climate change.

The ageing of Europe’s population is also expected to dramatically affect the continent’s social, political, and financial future. The overall population of Europe is set to drop from roughly 590 million to 542 million by 2050. The proportion of people older than 65 will grow from 16 percent to 28 percent. These projected changes will have two major effects: There will be a smaller work force to create a dynamic and industrious economy, and governments and citizens will have to care for more elderly people.

These changes will affect different regions of Europe in different ways. A study completed by the Berlin Institute for Population and Development found that Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, western Germany, Switzerland, Slovenia, Austria, and France have the best prospects of supporting vibrant and economically successful societies. Many of the most socially and economically powerful elements of these societies will be led by immigrants.

Developing countries, such as those in eastern and southern Europe, are expected to bear the worst of the depopulation trend. Among the struggling economies that may suffer from carbon emission limits are Romania, Bulgaria, and Moldova.

Thus, it seems that Europe’s historic disparities between north and south, west and east, will continue
to widen in the future. Enacting regional social policies and economic legislation, especially through bodies like the European Union, may help curb that trend.

**Reading #6**


**The Corona Virus in Europe**

**UK PM hospitalised as parliament shutdown until 21 April**

UK PM Boris Johnson, who tested positive for coronavirus on Friday (27 March), was hospitalised after he was found to have ‘persistent coronavirus symptoms’ on Sunday (5 April). In keeping with the guidance, the Prime Minister is self-at home but is continuing to lead the government’s response to coronavirus.

**A struggling health system**

On Sunday (23 March), the government’s medical advisors have warned that the spike in confirmed cases and deaths is likely to continue over the next two weeks. The government’s deputy chief medical adviser, Dr Jenny Harries, said that around 12% of adult critical care beds in hospitals in England are currently occupied by patients with the virus.

In a televised address, the PM said a “huge national effort” has been needed to halt the spread, adding the warning that “there will come a moment when no health service in the world could possibly cope because there won’t be enough ventilators, enough intensive care beds, enough doctors and nurses”.

**Stay home**

Johnson finished the speech by urging the British public to stay at home in this moment of “national emergency” in order to “protect our NHS and save lives.” The move comes after the government warned on Sunday (23 March) that they would have to impose stricter rules on movement if people continue to flout guidelines on social distancing.

All pubs, restaurants and cafes have been told to close but the government is concerned that too many people are not observing the rules of keeping at least two metres away from others, as Britons flocked to the coast and public parks at the weekend.

**‘Unprecedented’ economic plan**

In a press conference on Friday (20 March) evening, UK Prime Minister said the government would support the British people in a way “never done before.”
Prime Minister Boris Johnson outlined the government’s economic rescue plan, with Chancellor Rishi Sunak saying the economic intervention is “unprecedented” in the history of the British state and will be one of the most “comprehensive in the world.”

The government’s new package dubbed the “coronavirus job retention scheme” is designed to protect workers and their employers. The government has committed help pay wages, for the first time in UK history.

Johnson also said that he is strengthening the measures taken on Monday (17 March) and has now ordered all pubs, bars, restaurants, and cafes to close.

65,000 retired doctors and nurses will be asked to return to the NHS to help tackle the coronavirus outbreak as part of a new law published Thursday (19 March).

The move is one of a series of emergency measures included in the new bill. On Thursday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson sounded an optimistic tone, expressing hope that the UK would be able to ‘turn the tide’ against coronavirus within the next three months.

The government has also announced that it has imported 2.6 million face masks and 10,000 bottles of hand sanitiser in the last 24 hours.

**Johnson puts UK in lockdown in Coronavirus U-turn**

Prime Minister Boris Johnson performed a dramatic U-turn on Monday (16 March) and put the UK on lockdown to curb the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic, dropping his controversial ‘herd immunity’ approach and following the lead of continental Europe.

**A succession of ‘U-turns’**

UK schools have closed on Friday (20 March) until further notice, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has announced, as his government continues to ramp up its response to the coronavirus crisis. The move announced on Thursday is the latest of a series of dramatic U-turns by the UK government this week. Johnson added that exams in May and June would be cancelled and warned that children should not be close proximity to elderly people, who are most at risk from the coronavirus.

On Monday (16 March), Johnson put the UK on lockdown to curb the spread of the pandemic, dropping his controversial ‘herd immunity’ approach. The government then unveiled on Tuesday (17 March) its own bailout programme to protect “jobs, incomes and business” worth £350 billion (€400 billion).

**A ‘wartime’ government**
Boris Johnson’s government will “act like any wartime government” and do “whatever it takes”, Chancellor Rishi Sunak told reporters at a press conference on Tuesday (17 March) as he launched the plans. He described them as “government intervention in the economy that would have been unimaginable just a few weeks ago.”

**Panic buying**
In the meantime, supermarkets and shops have urged Britons to exercise discipline when buying supplies of food and other household essentials.
The British Retail Consortium (BRC) issued a statement today (15 March) calling on British consumers to stop panic buying. “We understand your concerns, but buying more than is needed can sometimes mean that others will be left without. There is enough for everyone if we all work together,” the consortium said in a statement. “Together we can make sure we are looking out for family, friends, neighbors,” it added.

**Italy prepares the ‘phase two’ as contagion curve begins its glide path**
If the number of cases will keep declining in the next days, some selected businesses could slowly resume their activities as from next Tuesday, while people could be allowed to get out of self-isolation starting from 4 May.
“The contagion curve has begun its glide path, so the number of deaths,” said the president of the National Institute of Health Silvio Brusaferro.

“But we have to be very careful with phase 2: if we miss the timing, we go back to lockdown and start again,” said Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio in a TV interview.

**As of Tuesday (6 April), the total number of infected people reached 135,586, while the death toll climbed to 17,127, with a daily increase of 603**

“The emergency is not over, we still have difficult months ahead of us,” Speranza said.

**Efforts continue**
Italy’s government has issued a new decree to extend the current lockdown in force in the country until 13 April.
“If we started to ease the measures, all the efforts would be in vain,” explained prime minister Giuseppe Conte in a press conference.

Italy has reached or is close to the peak of infections, according to the leading technical-scientific body of the Italian National Health Service.
“Even though the number of infected people is decreasing, we must not frustrate the efforts made so far,” Italy’s PM commented.

School
No student in Italy will flunk this year thanks to a decree the Education Ministry is drafting. Even students with an insufficient grade average (5 or below which corresponds to C or below) will successfully complete their class.
For students attending the last year of high school, there will be no written final test but a single oral exam. And if health reasons so require, the final examination could also be carried out online.

“Huge” loss of GDP
The research unit of the business association Confindustria released a report saying that the loss of GDP in the first half of 2020 will be “huge”, with a cumulative fall in the first two quarters of around -10%.
Assuming the overcoming of the acute phase of the emergency at the end of May, the estimate for growth forecast will be of -6% for 2020.

New measures, new stimulus
Italy’s government will extend the restrictive measures currently into force at least until Easter (12 April), Italy’s Health Minister Roberto Speranza said. The government is also preparing another stimulus package for mid-April.
“At least another €25 billion will be allocated, but I hope we can have even more resources available,” said Minister for relations with the Parliament Federico D’Incà.

Meantime, President Donald Trump announced in a press conference that the US will send medical equipment and other aid for $100 million to Italy. On twitter, Italy’s PM Giuseppe Conte thanked Trump, saying that together with him, Italy will defeat the virus.”

Health professionals
Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, Italian health professionals have been paying a high price. 94 doctors and 26 nurses have died due to the virus.
“The data concerning our profession is worse than those recorded in China, which stopped at 3,300 infected doctors and 23 deaths,” said Filippo Anelli of the national federation of doctors, in a letter published in the British Medical Journal.

This would have been largely avoidable if healthcare workers had been properly informed and equipped with adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves, disposable gowns and protective visors, says the letter.