As part of the Center for European and Mediterranean Studies’ (CEMS) Eastern European Workshop, Dr. Madigan Fichter presented her work on Islamic student activists in Sarajevo between 1970 and 1975. Dr. Fichter is a Visiting Assistant Professor at CEMS. She specializes in issues of nationalism and popular culture in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

“My attention was drawn to this subject by an old Reuters news article about a student strike at Sarajevo’s Gazi Husrev-Bey Madrassa in January 1972,” said Fichter as she introduced her topic. She said that, like most other rebellious youth of Sarajevo at the time, the students of Gazi Husrev-Bey were making similar demands for a modernized curriculum and a less authoritarian structure. However, apart from these more general demands, they were also calling for a modernized form of Islam, better suited for the modern world. Thus, the students were simultaneously a part of Yugoslavia’s secular student movements and one of the early participants in Bosnia’s early “Islamic revival.”

Dr. Fichter pointed to the fact that her research was drawn from of the articles in Zem zem, which was a journal compiled by the student activists of the Gazi Husrev-Bey Madrassa. Its articles showed that the activism moved beyond communism, and included nationalist and religious sentiments. In terms of demands for better employment opportunities, a responsive state apparatus, and an interest in anti-colonial politics, the students of the Madrassa shared similar goals to those of the Yugoslav youth of the period. As far as their demands for Islamic revival was concerned, they were neither completely passive, nor extremely radical. They wanted an updated form of Islam that promoted greater religiosity, but at the same time that was comfortable being a part of the modern world and tolerant of other beliefs and thoughts.

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The Madrassa was established in 1537 and enrollment at the institution grew steadily during the socialist years, particularly between 1950 and 1975. The increased interest in Islamic education was due to both, global and domestic factors. The movement demanding a religious identity was partially a reaction against official efforts to de-emphasize the Islamic aspects of Muslim heritage. At the same time, Bosnians who had gone abroad to pursue higher education in Islamic theology were bringing with them new ideas of how to reinvigorate Islam. What should also be remembered is that this Islamic revivalism was taking place in the context of Yugoslavia's remarkably vocal student protests on political issues like the Vietnam War, racism and so on.

"Although the literature on Yugoslavia's student movement has entirely omitted Islamic activism, I see this as an important connection to make," said Fichter. She said that it made us aware of the complexities involved in Yugoslav's student movements and forced us to understand political Islam in Yugoslavia as a continuation of rebellious student activism, rather than an import from abroad.

Fichter went on to discuss the activities and goals of the student activists. She said that one of the foremost goals of the contributors of Zem zem was to increase readership and make people familiar with the basic practices and principles of the religion. Another important function was to educate the readers on the historical contributions of Muslims, in particular Bosnian Muslims. Writers called out for reconciliation of religion and science, thereby promoting more openness to technological advances. The student activists were also interested in promoting the idea of an Islam that was tolerant of and compatible with all other religions. Efforts were made to connect the students of the Madrassa with the wider Muslim world.

Fichter explained how the secular and Islamic students shared a focus on several topics. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the anti-colonial struggle, and fight against global racism were seen as common struggles. “However, Zem zem’s interpretation diverged from the era’s relatively standard student support for Third World revolutionary politics in pointing to Islam as a major source of inspiration,” said Fichter.

“While Zem zem was, in one sense, the vehicle for students and teachers to think through and advocate a new and more modern form of Islam, it was also a product of the student body, and therefore reflected a number of the less spiritual concerns of those at the Madrassa,” said Fichter. It was also a space for students to publish poems, short stories, articles about their school trips, and so on. Articles in the journal also pointed to a growing friction between the students and the Madrassa authorities. Some of these issues were specifically Islamic, while others had a more secular context. Frustrations at the Madrassa came to a head in January 1972 when students went on a strike. Ultimately, the Islamic leadership did recognize that some steps needed to be taken to address students’ complaints.

“In blending the more standard concerns about student rights and Third World revolutionary politics with a unique interest in strengthening religious observance and rejuvenating Islam, the madrassa’s students compel a re-evaluation of Yugoslavia’s student and Islamic movements,” said Fichter as she concluded her presentation.

Greece and “The West”—A Historical Perspective

NYU: April 22
Katherine Whittaker

IOANNIS Stefanidis gave a talk on April 22 entitled “Modern Greece and the West,” a particularly important topic given Greece's current financial situation and its tenuous relationship with the European Union and the west as a whole.

The talk was arranged chronologically, starting with the origins of Greek culture in the Roman times. He mentioned Nicos Boromos, a Marxist who had traced the origins of the modern Greek nation. Stefanidis said that the word “Greek” was imposed upon what was essentially a Roman culture. The inhabitants at the time “defined themselves as Romans,” said Stefanidis, and he said this created questions of legitimacy. The word griotski was also used by the Slavs, which was actually an insult of sorts.

An important defining factor of eastern and western cultures was religion: the Catholic West versus the Orthodox East. Stefanidis used a quote to illustrate the extent of the religious distinctions—“Better the turban of a Turk than the tiara of a Pope.”

The “enlightened nation” of the 1770s created new attitudes towards religion and the West. For instance, Kosmas the Aetolian stated that under the Ottomans, schools should only read scriptures. In the 1840’s, Papoulakos preached a “return to true faith,” or the Greek orthodoxy.

At this point, Stefanidis defined the “western model” as “a political and historical type of state which has proved more or less successful.” They surplus both city states and empires, they have enough resources to withstand war and they provide security for citizens. “Western” states also can be characterized by secularization, accountability, and representative government.

Moving forward in time, Stefanidis brought up the war of independence, which he defined as a war between new and old Greeks, or, as he said, “it was almost between the West and the East.” He said that this created a cultural dualism, dividing those who wanted to modernize, or were pro-west, and the traditionalists.

In 1910, Ion Dragoumis stated a goal of reaching “a new East, an Eastern state or Eastern federation of nation states within which the heterogeneous Eastern community can live autonomously.” Stefanidis then talked about the connection the Greeks felt towards the Russians, and mentioned that Russia was viewed as Greece’s “cultural twin.”

Stefanidis listed three additional historians and philosophers who were early Euroskeptics. The first, Dedopoulos,
stated his fear of becoming servants to Europe. Papanoutsos was concerned about becoming slaves of culture, a concept that was not fully explained or defined, and the third, Papandreou, was afraid of Greece losing its identity.

From there, Stefanidis talked about the stereotypes of Greece that had been promoted across the west. There is the idea of the Greek as the victim of the powerful, and then the Greek as the greedy lender. Finally, there is the Greek as the troublemaker. It seems that all of these could be associated with the current dialogue surrounding the events in Greece and the financial crisis.

He concluded his presentation with a series of charts that displayed data indicating the connection the Greek public feels with the west and the European Union. These charts demonstrated trends over time, and that the public has felt gradually less connected with the European Union and Europe as a whole, instead choosing to identify as “Mediterranean.”

NyU: April 24
Kavitha Surana

On Friday nights NYU students interested in European issues often gather for informal drinks at one of the many happy hours events hosted by student groups, like the graduate students in European and Mediterranean Studies, the Institute of French Studies, or the European Association. There, they have a chance to unwind and exchange ideas about their classes and papers.

On Friday, April 24, the GSAS European Association, an organization run by students from Europe in the Politics and International Relations programs, began their happy hour with an informative discussion. They held a short student panel to analyze recent and upcoming elections in Greece, Spain and the United Kingdom. Lynn Edmonds, a journalism and Africana master’s student of Greek heritage, presented on Syriza’s recent win in Greece. James Lees, a British graduate student in the International Relations department, presented on the UK’s upcoming elections. Eduard Cabré Romans, an Urban Planning graduate student at NYU’s Wagner School of Public Service, presented on his native country, Spain. Elia Francesco Nigris, an Italian master’s student in the Department of Politics, moderated the panel.

Each began their presentation by explaining the electoral system in their respective countries and then launched into an analysis of recent circumstances or predictions. Greece’s elections happened in January and Syriza, a new far-left party led by Alexis Tsipras, managed to win by a strong margin, barely falling short of an absolute majority.

“Since 2012, there’s been a lot of tumult and political changes in who is leading, and that’s definitely been tied up with economic issues,” Edmonds explained. “This was first time since 1974, when democracy was restored in Greece, that a far-left party won and that one of the main two parties didn’t win.”

She said that since Syria was less than one percentage point away from an absolute majority, they had to form a coalition and chose the Independent Greeks party as their partner.

Nigris questioned this: “About the Independent Greeks, they are a center-right slash right party, and they formed a coalition with a center-left slash left party which is usually very strange,” he said. “Why do you think that happened? What united them?”

Edmonds responded that they were united by their anti-bailout and slight anti-capitalist stances. But she cautioned that they were not anti-Euro.

Next, Lees began to discuss the upcoming British elections, which will be held on May 7. He reminded the group that the UK has a “first-past-the-post” system, which means that whoever wins the most votes wins the position. The two main parties in the race are the Conservatives, led by the current Prime Minister David Cameron, and the Labour Party, led by Ed Miliband. Lees said that even though Miliband doesn't have a very commanding presence, he seems like he could be a good leader.

Nigris asked Lees to explain why analysts are predicting that the Conservatives may win the majority of seats, but it’s more likely that Ed Miliband of the Labour Party could end up forming the government and become the prime minister.

“It kind of changes day to day, but no one party is going to win over 300 seats, that’s pretty clear from the polls,” Lees responded. He said that the Conservatives and the Labour Party are likely to win about 275 seats each. If the Conservatives were to get more seats, they would then have the option to try to form a coalition government, like the current situation, where they joined with the Liberal Democrats. However, Lees said that the Liberal Democrats had suffered from the coalition. “They are not really liked in the UK at the moment,” he said. “They didn’t do much as part of the coalition government. Their leader is seen as a complete failure. They now have less chance than UKIP.”

Upon Lees’ mention of UKIP, the UK’s rising far-right, anti-European Union party, Nigris interrupted. “Let’s talk about UKIP and Nigel Farange, the leader—can he form a government with David Cameron? He has suggested it,” Nigris said.

“He cannot,” Lees said, emphatically. “One of the things that people are a bit worried about is the Conservatives not getting enough seats in parliament, so people are worried they would join together to form a coalition government.” UKIP currently has 10 percent support in polls and is the third largest party across the UK, he said, but stipulated that the support is very regional and focused. “What will likely happen is that support won't turn into 10 percent of seats in parliament,” Lees said. “Right now projections show they're only...
Mariano Rajoy, with the People’s Party, won the previous national elections by the biggest majority ever, he said. His victory was in reaction to the economic crisis and pressure coming from the European institutions to force Spain to make reforms and pay its debt.

However, in the European elections held in May 2014, for the first time a new party entered the picture because the European parliament electoral system allows smaller parties to get seats more easily. Podemos, a new antiestablishment party, won five seats, which was an unexpected victory. Podemos, a new antiestablishment party, won five seats, which was an unexpected victory. “Now, since then they have been in all the public debates and people have seen them as a possible solution and feasible political movement that could eventually reach power,” Cabrés Romans said.

Nigris asked about similarities between Syriza and Podemos, or other protest movements across Europe, mentioning the Five Star movement in Italy or the National Front in France.

“It’s the result of the same tensions happening in all these countries, and each country has its own way of responding,” Cabrés Romans mused. “If I had to choose one of those as the broader political movement similar to Podemos I would choose Syriza probably, but I do think they have been shifting to a much more central position… I think they see that Syriza is suffering from some of the promises that they made, and they don’t want to go through that.”

“So do you think there is eventually a possibility to form a coalition with the Spanish Socialist Party? Or another party?” Nigris asked.

Cabrés Romans said he thought this would be a possible outcome, though difficult to discern at the moment. “Podemos doesn’t want people to think that they might eventually support one of the existing parties because they are antiestablishment,” he said. He said they definitely wouldn’t openly support the idea of forming a coalition government, but the polls show that they won’t reach national majority, so it could be a possibility, though most polls still indicate that the People’s Party might be the biggest party in parliament even if they will lose many seats. Cabrés Romans said that another new party, Ciudadanos, a more liberal-ambiguous movement, has been receiving a lot of attention and may also play a relevant role, perhaps in supporting Mariano Rajoy.

Next, the panel opened for discussion. Students debated issues like the impact of immigration on shaping the current elections and the rise of far-right parties across Europe. They also tried to parse the particular features and benefits of different types of electoral systems and whether or not a first-past-the-post system might help or hurt far-right parties. After a lively 45 minute talk, Nigris adjourned the panel and invited the room to continue more informally over wine and snacks.
Slavoj Žižek Talks About Greece and Syriza

NYU: April 14
Katherine Whittaker

It is incredibly difficult to listen to Slavoj Žižek without allowing his personality to obscure what may be utter brilliance and innovative thought on the state of Europe, particularly Greece. He is less instantly recognizable in the United States, but in Europe Žižek is the rock-star version of a philosopher. In a talk given at NYU and hosted by the NYU Hellenic Studies department on April 14, Žižek spoke about the importance of Syriza, a left-wing political party currently represented by Alexis Tsipras, in his talk entitled Syriza: A New Name for Freedom.

Immediately, the talk became more about himself than Greece. Right after he took the podium, he promptly corrected a statement made in the introduction that he is no longer asked to contribute to the The New York Times and The Guardian. An audience member wearing only a ragged piece of brown cloth around his waist and a plastic animal mask rushed the stage, pushing Žižek out of the way. He spoke into the microphone and although his words were indecipherable, not in Greek or English, they were clearly emphatic. The protestor was pulled from the stage, and Žižek moved back to the podium.

Perhaps this had surprised him so much that he was unable to move. Or perhaps he was listening, although he said that he did not know what the protestor was saying. In any case, he did not make any moves towards the intruder. But as he regained his composure, he immediately stated that he would like for the man to return so he could “fuck him up the ass.” The audience of the nearly-packed auditorium, for the most part, seemed to find this extremely funny.

This set the tone for a large portion of the rest of his talk, which centered on obscenities and dirty jokes, even referring to one of the organizers as a “corporate fucker,” which, again, was met with a large degree of laughter by the crowd.

It is difficult to follow Žižek and he knows it. He forewarned the audience that he may go off on a tangent because he likes to listen to himself talk. He even went so far as to invite the crowd to cut him off if his tangents took him too far off topic. This never happened, although maybe it should have. The beginning of his discussion on Syriza focused on a variety of issues, such as racism and the “white man’s burden,” which, according to Žižek, implies the misguided idea that “we are responsible” when other countries struggle. He said that instead, the idea should be that “you are free to join our corruption.”

He talked about traditional power structures. Power is typically conveyed through a symbol, he explained. A king “appears as a king because we treat him as one. The power is condensed in the insignia.” In contrast, modern democratic society no longer requires insignia to demonstrate power; “(rulers) are common people like you.” Empathy and recognition as equals are what legitimate them. Or as Žižek declared, the public will say, “I know very well you are a miserable, weak guy like me, and because of this, I will follow you.”

His next point was on cynicism and fetishism, which he connected to Snowden and the impact the NSA leaks had on the public. But Žižek didn’t get into the protection of privacy debate. He said the public and media obsession with the case was a fetish. According to him, this information was not new, and yet by having it publicly relayed to the public, it became a fetish, something that the public could not let go of even though they had known this on some level prior to the leaks. He compared this to adultery, using the example of a husband and wife, where the husband pretends everything is fine while the wife is sleeping around and the husband pretends everything is fine while it is hidden.

From here, he moved on to strikes and workers. He said to strike is an extreme privilege because those who are not lawyers or doctors cannot do so, since they run the risk of being fired. This led him to question the idea of freedom, asking two main questions: Are we free? And if so, freedom for whom, to do what?

At this point, I stopped writing for a period of time. My notes drift off in the middle of the word “excess” as he talked about the “explosion of personal human freedoms” that are presumably preventing radical change. He had been speaking for an hour, and very little had been said. I was debating whether to stay or leave when he finally mentioned Syriza for the first time, in talking about the meaning of democracy. Žižek defines democracy as not only a freedom of choice, but a freedom to “connectively restructure and redefine the very social texture that ultimately decides what choices we do have.” For Žižek, this means a total overhaul of the current social system’s makeup.

There’s an excess of personal freedoms, concluded the Slovak philosopher. The idea that only the current power and economic structure can allow for personal freedoms is wrong, he tried to argue, while criticizing the United States. Žižek advocated for “a global world power strong enough to overturn the interest of capital.” Is Syriza going to be this new power that overturns the Western-imposed status quo? He hinted at that, but never really backed his assertion. Instead he talked about his friendship with Yanis Varoufakis, the
Finance Minister of Greece—as he put it, “the butt or target of my most vulgar jokes.”

While Syriza is certainly revolutionary, Žižek argued, it cannot be considered on the same level as social measures taken 50 or 60 years ago. “You ask for radical revolution, and you guarantee that nothing will change,” said Žižek. To Žižek, there needs to be some kind of follow-up on the request for revolution, which is a second step that seems to be missing from past attempts at large-scale change. He even said people are laughing at Syriza, but he did not believe this could be a reason to discredit their aims. “The important thing is to start the process,” he said.

In what he called the “dark part of the talk,” Žižek mentioned austerity and its ineffectiveness in Greece. Syriza’s promise is “go with us and you will at least get some money back,” he said, and they have been critical of the west, especially Germany. His main critique seemed to be that other countries have been able to get away with more than Greece can.

This could have been Žižek’s opportunity to delve into the current political situation and a description of Greece’s needs within the context of the European Union, but he did not talk about this. He also didn’t mention what the real benefit of radical change through Syriza to the working class could be, and how quickly these benefits will be felt. Žižek’s arguments were broad statements followed by somehow-connected examples that, in many cases, were not even Europe-centered; the lecture felt scattered and disorganized. As it happens with some rock-stars, it seemed that he was there more to fulfill his own narcissistic aspirations than to deliver a critique on Syriza’s potential benefits. Perhaps if you are a huge fan of his persona, this was a great opportunity to be able to tell your grandkids in the future, “I was there.” But if you came to learn something from what is supposed to be one of the greatest philosophers of the 21st century, you probably left empty-handed, or at least with a lot of ideas that are hardly grounded in reality.

Columbia University Discusses the Art of Drawing Borders

Columbia: April 7
Adrija Roychowdhury

THE European Institute at Columbia, along with the Heyman Center for the Humanities and the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empires, brought together a panel to discuss the politics involved in historical and present-day border making and conflicts. The panel consisted of Charles K. Armstrong, Sagi Schaefer, and George Gavrilis. The aim of the discussion was to identify the local contexts of bordering rather than placing them as part of a larger global process.

Focusing on the formation of the Iron Curtain in Germany, Sagi Schaefer talked about how the communal ties leading up to 1945 were not easily broken through the process of border making. That was done only over time through negotiations. Most of the border passed through rural peripheries. “Looking at rural bordering helps understand the length and pace of border formations,” said Schaefer. He described the case of the village Kella and spoke about how nothing remained the same after 1952, when the village was faced with tremendous party pressure. Each person had to choose a side. However, border crossing was not that difficult until the 1970s.

Schaefer went on to focus on collectivization. He said that collectivization was, in fact, partial until 1952. Private farmers worked well through the 1950s. Relations between the state agencies and farmers were crucial to the task of bordering. State agencies had to gain better control of the land. Collectives and bordering supported each other. Deportations left a lot of land in the hands of the state. The state could force the farmers to collectivize on this land. After 1953, the state decreased its pressure to collectivize. This was partly due to Stalin’s death. But the main reason was the lack of agricultural work on the land. The pressure on the state was so intense that it had to lean in favor of the farmers. A compromise was reached where small and medium-sized farm owners maintained symbolic status of collectives, but legally had private ownership. This was no longer possible after the 1960s. Plans to fortify the border followed the Berlin wall collapse. This entailed huge expenses. Collectives that received land had to work under strict regulations. By the 1960s, collectivization
had not been completed, but all the land on the border had been collectivized. Collectives formed significant agents of border control. “The history of Berlin overshadows the different histories of the rural borders,” concluded Schaefer.

Charles Armstrong discussed the cases of Korea and East Asia and decided to move away from a Euro-centric model of division. “It is preferable to compare the cases of Korea and East Asia with Palestine and Kashmir, rather than with the European countries,” said Armstrong. The key struggle here was not the Cold War. Rather, it was the incomplete struggle of the sovereign in the postcolonial times. Similarly, the end of the Cold War did not lead to the reunification of China, Korea or Vietnam.

Armstrong said that partition is best described as the incompatibility of two nation states. Korea, China and Vietnam were divided more by internal conflict as a result of internal civil war in a way that Germany never was. “Partition is externally imposed but with time becomes domestic,” said Armstrong. Separation is not just by external forces but by everyday practices. He went on to briefly describe the partition of China, Korea and Vietnam, and then concluded by saying that it is a paradox to see the Cold War as the driving force for all these divisions rather seeing East Asia individually.

George Gavrilis took the discussion into the future by focusing on Ukraine and the Islamic State. He said that there is a fear in the public sphere that borders would no longer be the same as in the 21st century. He said that the reality is that such predictions are not new. Similar predictions were made after the collapse of the Soviet Union for Turkey and Macedonia. Yet these borders have remained functional, if not stable.

Gavrilis said that one of the reasons for this fear is greater global instability. He gave the example of Turkey and Russia. In Turkey, riots occurred in Antarkia following rumors about whether Turkey should be returned to Syria. Riots were fueled by fears of the fact that borders were about to change. Similarly, polls in Russia showed that majority of the population were in favor of re-bordering.

The second point Gavrilis made was that the cost of creating new nations through border violations is very high. “Re-bordering is not that easy because states have other ways of increasing their internal status. Crimea was an exceptional case, but it is not easy to deal with sanctions for many years,” said Gavrilis.

Gavrilis concluded by saying that the issue is still about border control. Even if borders are violated, states have to make decisions about managing the borders they have. It is not an issue of capacity, of poverty, or even security threats. One of the things that matters immensely is how border security involving local communities is managed. “Relations with local communities is very important in border policing. This is the aspect in which countries like Ukraine and Iraq failed,” said Gavrilis.

Discussion with Threesis Finalist—Emily Tchir

NYU: April 27
Katherine Whittaker

NEW York University’s Threesis challenge provides graduate students across all disciplines with the opportunity to practice presenting their thesis topics in three minutes to a general audience. This year, the competition took place on April 11, 2015, and the European Studies department sent four students, including Emily Tchir, who placed into the final rounds. I got the chance to talk to the busy Ms. Tchir about her project and her experiences working on her thesis through the Threesis program.

Katie Whittaker (KW): Can you describe your thesis project?
Emily Tchir (ET): My thesis project is a historical and sociological snapshot into the Second Polish Republic’s rebuilt school system, specifically focused on the public and private Krakow schools. We know that schools create citizens, as even here in the US we have classes on good citizenship, but after World War I, Poland had to rebuild its entire identity. The most logical way of doing this was through elementary education, and through teachers, textbooks, literature etc. It was Poland, during this time, that created one of the strongest educational systems, complete with new curricula, grades, and teacher reforms. Additionally, I track how the communities accept this new identity, as their children learn to be Polish and yet their parents maintain connection to the previous regimes.

KW: How did you choose this topic?
ET: I was always very interested in Polish history, more so when I went into high school and saw how little was written about Poland and even how at times, the textbooks contained incorrect information. As a teacher, I still see the misinformation about Poland, and through that set out to change it. Everyone is familiar with World War I and World War II, and write off the Interwar Period as a simple “rebuilding” period. Couple that with misunderstanding in regards to why we didn’t see the nation of Poland on the map for about 100 years, and there came my topic!

KW: When did you find out you were accepted for the Threesis?
ET: Well, I applied back on February 6th, not really expecting to get into the first round. I thought it would be whittled down from all the applicants, but it seems that everyone who applies and follows the first 2 or 3 steps automatically gets in. I got a confirmation email about 2 weeks later and from there participation and continuation is on you, so if you want to continue, you must follow the steps. From what we were told, 121 students applied, 72 completed the mandated steps (i.e. going to a mentorship meeting and sending in slides by the due dates). On April 10th was the qualifying round, where we then moved down to 12 finalists, and by that same evening I found out I made it to the final Threesis round. It’s surprisingly simple to get to the qualifying rounds, it just meant staying on top of all the long emails they sent about upcoming due dates.
KW: How did you feel about participating in the project?

ET: To be very honest, not enthusiastic. I think my fellow MA students would describe me as critical and sarcastic. It was something that CEMS required of us to apply for, so I feel like by some “Law of Requirement” anything you have to do, you almost need to dislike. As the competition progressed, it became very obvious that this was not a thesis competition, but instead a public speaking competition which was to just touch on your thesis work. That was the most frustrating, having to take all your hard work and bring it down to a dog and pony show for the 6th grade understanding level. It was cool to get to the next rounds, but I don’t think I would ever do it again.

KW: What kinds of things did you have to do to prepare for the final presentation?

ET: I know some people kept writing speeches, kept rehearsing them, trying to memorize each and every noun and pronoun. I was most focused on making sure I remembered my two or three key points, and my conclusion. So each time I practiced, it was a little different, but I think it was better, because I didn’t freak out about missing a line or mixing up sentence order. I could allow myself to go with the flow. Something I had to really practice was to slow down. When I get nervous, I race through speeches, learning to breathe and enunciate was key.

KW: What was the final like? How many people did you compete with?

ET: The final was nerve wracking. I dislike having to talk at people, I prefer to talk and move with my audience (or classroom) reactions. I will admit, behind the scenes it was not very organized. We would be told and practice one action, like getting onto stage and getting off, and then we never got off the stage. I competed with 11 other students, and I was number 8, so it gave me some time to gauge the audience and the three panelists. I did not expect the panelists to be asking such heavy and academic questions. Throughout this entire process we got more “fluffy” questions or feedback and then “WHAM” you got a really tough question that you had to answer on the spot. My questions didn’t really focus on my actual topic, and were actually not even in my realm of studies so trying to pull together a strong answer was so scary!

KW: How did you feel when you were announced as a finalist?

ET: To be honest, I thought one of my other fellow CEMS colleagues was going to win. Her topic was so interesting, fun and easy to relate to, and compared to an education study on Poland, I thought there was no way I’d get through. When they called my name, I think my reaction fell to the “oh no” spectrum. My CEMS colleagues had a good chuckle about that! My next thought leaned to “well, now I have to call out of work for tomorrow” and then finally went to “what did I just get into”.

KW: What advice would you give to future Threesis participants?

ET: Don’t go into this competition thinking you’ll wow people with data and numbers, you want to make it interesting (humor always helps) but also vague. You are trying to capture the attention of people who know nothing about your topic, but also sound smart and like you know what you doing. I practiced on 6th, 7th and 8th grade students, who gave good feedback, so if you can, think at that level of interest and information level. Lastly, just go for it. I was the first one to grab the mike off the stand because I didn’t feel like it’s “me” to stand there spelling bee style.

KW: Has it shaped your project in any way?

ET: Truly, it hasn’t. I think being a part of the CEMS one-year Master’s program, you come in with ideas of where you will go with your topic. It does help, after hours of research, to be able to step away and remind yourself, on the very simple level, of what is the big picture that you are trying to do, because it is easy to get lost. For History or Humanities, I think it’s easier to do this competition because you already deal with people and if you do data collection, you have to be able to explain to others what you are doing.
Catalonia Brings its Crossroads to Columbia

Columbia: April 8
Kavitha Sirana

On April 8, a packed audience greeted Artur Mas, the President of the Generalitat of Catalonia, as he prepared to speak at Columbia University about the merits of Catalonian independence. Mas has been a prominent member of Catalonia’s independence movement from Spain for decades and has served as the region’s president since 2010.

He was introduced by Xavier Sala-i-Martin, a professor of economics at Columbia and a fellow Catalan. Sala-i-Martin described recent Catalan demonstrations, including a human chain created on September 11, 2012, consisting of 1.5 million Catalans and stretching from the border of France to Valencia. He said that if the chain had started at Columbia University, it would have arrived at Niagara Falls, Canada.

“Why did all these people demonstrate?” he asked. “They demanded the right to decide their own future. To decide if they wanted to continue to belong to Spain.” He likened Catalonia’s independence movement to the United States’ movement 140 years ago, but emphasized that it was completely peaceful. He also compared the struggle between Catalonia and Spain to the struggle between David and Goliath—and then flipped this on its head. “Malcolm Gladwell tells us the battle between David and Goliath is not as it at first appears to be,” he said. “David is not as weak as people think, and Goliath is not as strong as people think.” With that, he introduced Artur Mas.

Mas began by providing a brief summary of Catalonia’s history. He traced Catalonia’s culture to the 9th century, when it became a self-governing principality, and said that it had developed its own language, laws and government by the 10th century. “Catalonia has one of the oldest constitutions in Europe,” he said. “The government is called the Generalitat and was created in the 14th century to limit the power of the monarchy and to collect taxes.”

He outlined three main historical factors that separated Catalonia from Spain. First, Catalonia’s national political and cultural identity, “forged in the middle ages.” Second, the early industrial revolution, which Mas said was “carried out by Catalan entrepreneurs in the 18th and 19th centuries, while the rest of Spain was basically a land of farmers and peasants.” Third, he situated Catalonia’s cultural identity into the globalized world and said that large influxes of immigration during the 20th century, when people from all over Spain and Europe came to the region for jobs, also influenced Catalan identity. “This has continued until today to the point where 16.7 percent of our population comes from immigration,” Mas said. He said many people came from other EU countries as well as Pakistan, China, Morocco, Bolivia, and Ecuador. “They have all been welcome and integrated into our multicultural society, making a huge contribution to our economy,” he said.

“We have never been a financial power or a military power, nor can we dominate demographically,” Mas said. “Our power and survival have come through creativity and capacity to work hard.” He then outlined some challenges Catalonia faced over the past 400 years.

In the 20th century, he pointed to Franco’s “cruel and systematic attempt at cultural annihilation.” During this period, all of Catalonia’s regional powers were removed, the Catalan government went into exile, and the Catalan language was made illegal.

Once Franco’s 40-year dictatorship ended, Mas explained, Catalonia had a tacit agreement with the newly-democratic Spanish state, including two overarching goals. “One, the desire to democratize, Europeanize and modernize Spain, and the second goal was more self-government with the necessary tools of managing Catalonia’s own development,” he said.

Mas said the first goal was achieved when Spain became a member of the European Union. But the second goal of Catalan self-government is still out of reach. “As a matter of fact, we can talk about a strong process of recentralization of powers, taking advantage of the economic crisis and the absolute majority of the ruling party in Spain,” he said. “In the end, it is this lack of genuine autonomy, the inability to govern our own affairs, which has worn down the support for the current settlement and set the stage for the growth of the current self-determination movement.”

He added that, to Catalans, self-government means “having the competencies to protect and nurture our cultural patrimony and our centuries-old language.” Even though Catalan is theoretically specifically protected by the Spanish constitution, one cannot address a Spanish government institution in any language other than Spanish. Additionally, Catalan is not an official language in the European Union because Spain hasn’t requested it.

“We would ask you to remember this is our own language and culture in our own land,” Mas said. “A language, I daresay, only exists because Catalans have tenaciously fought to keep it alive over the centuries, in spite of Spanish institutions.”

Mas laid out a vision for the future of an independent Catalonia. He wants
to make Barcelona a top container port in Europe and turn the Barcelona airport into a truly transnational hub, on par with Frankfurt and Milan. He also said Catalonia dreamed of implementing industrial policy and university reform itself. But he said the region was restrained from making these choices.

“Right now, we do not have control or competencies over our airport, the state still has a monopoly over our ports as well, ditto on industrial policy and the university system,” he said. “Our highly restricted regional government leaves minimal room for anything that America would recognize as real autonomy or real self-government.”

Next he offered some context on the recent self-determination movement and Catalonia’s plans for the near future. He said that political analysts point to 2010 as the tipping point for Catalonia’s independence movement, when Spain’s constitutional court ruled crucial portions of Catalonia’s statute of autonomy as unconstitutional, even though it had already been approved by both the Spanish parliament and the Catalan parliament and by a huge majority of Catalonia’s citizens in a referendum.

“Many Catalans felt deeply betrayed - they had played by the rules and in good faith,” Mas said. “The court’s decision put an end to any speculation of Catalonia’s progressing within Spain. The constitutional agreement of 1977 where we were to have self-rule in exchange for loyalty to Spain was deeply shattered.” This led to a million people demonstrating on the street of Catalonia with the slogan ‘We are a nation, we decide.’ Mas emphasized that the demonstrations began on a grassroots level.

Mas said the Catalans felt they couldn’t resign themselves to the situation and that trying to change the Spanish constitution would be nearly impossible since the current Spanish government said they would block any attempt in this regard. They felt the only option was independence, though he said calling an independent referendum had been a last resort.

“Mariano Rajoy [Spain’s Prime Minister] simply refuses to talk about it with me or anybody else,” Mas said. Prior to calling elections we have tried every legal and political option to get a referendum.” Last year they held a referendum on November 9, 2014 using volunteers instead of civil servants. Even though, according to Mas, the Spanish government employed various measures to prevent the participatory process, like having the constitutional court suspended and pressuring school directors to not open polling stations, 2.3 million Catalans still managed to vote, and 80% voted in favor of independence.

But, since the Spanish government still refuses to allow a legal referendum, Mas said he will move to another last resort option: calling early regional elections and using them as a plebiscite on independence. “Parties in favor of independence will share a common platform item, making clear that if you vote for them you are in favor of entering a transitional period to independence after the vote,” he said.

Finally, Mas described what an independent Catalonia would look like, beyond the basic democratic structure. He said it would be the 16th most populous European Union country. “We would be good neighbors, reliable allies and a net contributor to the European budget,” he said. “Our commitment to a just and peaceful world stems from our history, our principals and our aspirations. We are eager to contribute to Europe, united under the EU umbrella, working with and through the united nationals system to make such vision a reality.”

When Mas finished his speech, the room erupted with enthusiastic applause. But not everybody agreed with his vision for Catalonia. Following his speech, Jose Moya, professor of History at Barnard College, offered a critique of Catalonia’s independence movements and helped moderate many critical questions from the audience.

“The President said that Catalonia is the richest region in Spain,” Moya began. “I mean, that, in a sense, fits into a pattern which I would say is the nationalism of the privileged, rather than the oppressed. That is, the nationalism of the rich.” He compared this to Slovenia and the Czech Republic in the Balkans.

“That is, the richest regions in a union feel like they would be better off without subsidizing the poorer regions. It would be as if California and Massachusetts would want to secede. They would be better off, and Alabama and Missouri would be better off,” he said.

Moya also spoke about the politics of language, mentioning that Catalan speakers have traditionally been more concentrated in the upper and middle classes of Catalonia, while Spanish speakers are over-concentrated in the working and lower middle classes. He pointed to statistics, gathered by Catalonia’s regional government, that 47 percent of their region claim Spanish as their language and 37 percent claim Catalan.

He argued the David and Goliath metaphor applied more to imposing Catalan on a population that might prefer to learn more widely-spoken Spanish. “The debates in the Catalan parliament are in Catalan. Primary education has to be in Catalan. Public TV is in Catalan,” he said. “There is a David and Goliath story here, I guess, but it is more of a privileged group, both politically and economically and socially, imposing its will over people who have less political and economic power,” he said. “I mean, that’s one way of seeing it.”

Other audience members, many hailing from different regions of Spain or part of the Catalan diaspora, eagerly debated the merits of independence with Mas. Some were confused why Catalan would think secession and further fragmentation would be in its best interests in an increasingly globalized world. Another compared the situation in Ukraine and the American Civil War with Catalan’s peaceful process. It remains to be seen whether Catalonia will succeed in gaining independence from Spain but it’s clear the debate will not go away any time soon.
NYU Students Organize an International Forum on Ukraine

NYU: April 29
Amanda Islambouli

On Wednesday, April 29th, two Ukrainian students organized a forum on the current situation in Ukraine entitled, “Ukraine Finding its Way.” The aim of this discussion was to show that Ukraine is a strong and proud country. Maryna Prykhodko, a sophomore in the Global Liberal Studies Program, and her friend, Anastasiya Oleksiyenko, of NYU Abu Dhabi, brought together four panelists to discuss this issue. The four panelists had diverse backgrounds, experience, and viewpoints, but each one argued that Ukraine might prosper in the current crisis.

Professor Hirokai Kuromiya of Indiana University, a scholar and writer on the Ukrainian region of Donbas, which borders Russia, was the first to speak. He began with contesting a popular misconception that the region has always been a “troublemaker,” an identity he believes was unjustly earned. As a result of his research and travel experience in the region, he thinks that the perceived Russian separatism was more of an imposed movement than an intrinsic one. In his opinion, Russian separatists that existed prior to the current conflict, already small in number, had a change of heart upon seeing the level of violence perpetrated by the Russian side. On the whole, Professor Kuromiya found that people of the Donbas region reject the notion of a “Ukraine for Ukrainians only,” and are more likely to demand a “Ukraine for everyone.”

Professor Kuromiya pointed out that there are many regions of Ukraine that speak both Russian and Ukrainian. However, Professor Yuri Sheychuk of Columbia University explained that this was a result of forceful imposition of the Russian language. Yuri Sheychuk, a linguist, a Ukrainian professor, and the developer of a series of Ukrainian textbooks for English speakers, enumerated the ways in which Russia has imposed Russian language in Ukraine and lowered the quality of Ukrainian. Professor Sheychuk pointed out that the loss of Ukrainian language and discrimination against Ukrainian speakers has historically and presently been a major source of discontent and a pressing issue for social movements. Examples of such discrimination included denying children education, prohibiting publishing of literature, television, mass media and the like in their mother tongue. Instead, Russian has been imposed in all of these spheres, and has been presented as a more cultured and sophisticated language, in what Sheychuk termed a “coercive bilingualism.”

The issues do not stop there: Russian powers even attack the language from within. As a result of their killing or defunding linguists, dissolving the national institute for linguistic integrity, and introducing slang or foreign words into the Ukrainian language, quality of the language has been degraded to the point where many young people no longer speak Ukrainian or speak it improperly. Professor Sheychuk insisted that the current war has also been waged in the sphere of culture, with the Ukrainian language being one of the victims. Sheychuk is among those who believe that Ukrainian is dying, and is also among those fighting to keep it alive.

The third speaker, Ayla Bakali, only introduced the final speaker. However, being the US Representative of the Indigenous Crimean Tatar Mejlis (as well as an NYU alumnus), she is very active and passionate about minority rights and regularly participates in pro-Ukrainian advocacy. She cited that Russia has broken the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People with regards to Crimean Tatars, and that the UN has been an important means of Ukrainian support and advocacy. Her description of the deportation of Crimean Tatars set the stage for the fourth speaker, Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, Refat Chubarov.

The Chairman was elected to the Ukrainian parliament, but shortly after, when the conflict began, he was banned from Crimea and is now serving as a prominent pro-Ukrainian advocate at the UN. In his speech, he asked the audience to picture themselves as a Crimean Tatar, exiled from their land, discriminated against, oppressed, and persecuted. His powerful story made the audience realize what being a Tatar is like, and why he and many other Tatars believe in the power of The Hague, the EU, and other international agencies in bringing justice to Ukraine.

When asked about the future of Ukraine, all panelists agreed on one point: unity is essential. The three main speakers also believed that Ukraine, though in need of outside help, would only thrive when it is strengthened from within. Politically, economically, and even militarily, Ukraine is in need of some advancement, they agree. However, according to these panelists and the student organizers, the potential for cultural solidarity, unity, and civilian empowerment is and will continue to be of utmost importance in Ukraine.
UPCOMING EVENTS

—New York University—

CENTER FOR EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES
285 Mercer St., 7th floor
All events take place at the center unless otherwise noted
212.998.3838
cems.as.nyu.edu

MONDAY, May 4 at 12:30 PM
Workshop: “Rules, Persons, and Society: John Rawls Before A Theory of Justice” with Katrina Forrester
(Queen Mary University).

FRIDAY, May 8 at 4:30 PM

LA MAISON FRANÇAISE
16 Washington Mews
All events take place at the Maison unless otherwise noted
212.998.8750
nyu.edu/maisonfrancaise

MONDAY, May 4 at 7:00 PM

WEDNESDAY, May 6 at 7:00 PM
Translation Night: An evening of new translation by the students of NYU’s French Department M.A. program in Literary Translation.

FRIDAY, May 8 at 12:00 PM
Festival: “PEN World Voices Festival: The Literary Mews.”

FRIDAY, May 8 at 4:00 PM
Discussion: “Reading Between the Lines/Languages: Moroccan Poetry in Text, Translation, and Performance,” with Idriss Aissa (poet), Driss Mesnaoui (poet), Omar Berrada (Writer/Translator, Dar Al-Mamun), Alexander Elinson (Hunter College), and Deborah Kapchan (NYU). At The Richard Etinghausen Library, Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies at 50 Washington Square South, NYU.

KING JUAN CARLOS I OF SPAIN CENTER
53 Washington Square South
All events take place at the Center unless otherwise noted.
212.998.3650
nyu.edu/pages/kjc

No events listed for May.

GLUCKSMAN IRELAND HOUSE
1 Washington Mews
All events take place at the House unless otherwise noted
212.998.3950
www.irelandshouse.fas.nyu.edu

MONDAY, May 4 at 7:00 PM

FRIDAY, May 8 at 12:00 PM

FRIDAY, May 8 at 3:00 PM
Music: “PEN World Voices Festival: Dan Neely and Company Perform Traditional Irish Tunes.”

FRIDAY, May 8 at 5:00 PM
Book Talk: “Novelist Cormac James launches The Surfacing,” with Cormac James (author) and John P. Waters (NYU).

FRIDAY, May 8 at 8:00 PM

SUNDAY, May 10 at 7:00 PM
Book Talk: “Anne Enright Launches The Green Road,” at McNally Jackson Bookstore, 52 Prince St.

DEUTSCHES HAUS
42 Washington Mews
All events take place at the Haus unless otherwise noted
212.998.8660
nyu.edu/deutscheshaus

FRIDAY, May 1 at 4:00 PM
Family event: “Torben Kuhlmann: Lindbergh The Tale of a Flying Mouse,” book reading and drawing event, for ages 4 and up. This event is in German.

FRIDAY, May 1 at 6:30 PM
Lecture: “After Hybridity: Grafting as a Concept of Cultural Translation,” by Uwe Wirth (Julius-Liebig-University Gießen).

TUESDAY, May 5 at 6:00 PM
Festival: “MAIFEST in NYC with Germany in NYC,” at Porsche Design SoHo 465 West Broadway. Tickets: $45.00 in advance; $50.00 at the door.

TUESDAY, May 5 at 6:30 PM
Panel: “At the Grassroots: Urban Gardening as Politics,” with Sophie Hochhäusl (Cornell), Andrew Newman (Wayne State University), William LoSasso (La Plaza Cultural Community Garden), and Hillary Angelo (NYU).

FRIDAY, May 8 at 2:00 PM

TUESDAY, May 12 at 6:30 PM
Book Talk: “Brennerova: An Evening with Wolf Haas,” with Wolf Haas (author) and Kevin Vennemann (writer and translator).
FRIDAY, May 15 at 6:30 – FRIDAY, June 19
Exhibition: “Beletage: Reflections of a Window Cleaner,” by Lars Nickel (photographer)

CASA ITALIANA
24 West 12th Street
All events take place at the Casa unless otherwise noted
212.995.4012
nyu.edu/pages/casaitaliana
MONDAY, May 4 at 6:00 PM
Theater: “IN SCENA! Italian Theater Festival: OPENING NIGHT Double-Bill.” Homage to Pasolini with Marco Calvani and Viola del Mare with Isabella Carloni.

TUESDAY, May 5 at 6:30 PM
Discussion: “ADDRESSing Style: Meet the Ambassador of Valentino’s Kingdom,” with Carlos Soura (Valentino Brand Ambassador) and Grazia D’Annunzio (Vogue Italia).

WEDNESDAY, May 6 at 7:00 PM

FRIDAY, May 8 at 6:00 PM
Book Talk: “Pen World Voices Festival: The Passion of Elena Ferrante,” with Ann Goldstein (The New Yorker) and Rebecca Falloff (NYU). Mandatory RSVP.

THE BLINKEN EUROPEAN INSTITUTE
420 West 118th Street, International Affairs Building (IAB), Room 1205
All events take place at the Institute unless otherwise noted
212.854.4618
bei.columbia.edu

THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE
420 West 118th Street, International Affairs Building (IAB), Room 1219
All events take place at the Institute unless otherwise noted
212.854.4623
www.harrimaninstitute.org

THE ITALIAN ACADEMY FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN AMERICA
1161 Amsterdam Avenue
All events take place at the Academy unless otherwise noted
212.854.2306
www.italianacademy.columbia.edu

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212.854.2306
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JORDAN CENTER FOR THE ADVANCED STUDY OF RUSSIA
19 University Place, 2nd Floor
All events take place at the Center unless otherwise noted
212.992.6575
jordanrussiacenter.org

LA MAISON FRANÇAISE
Broadway at West 116th Street, Buell Hall, 2nd Floor
All events take place at Buell Hall unless otherwise noted
212.854.4482
maisonfrancaise.org

THE EUROPEAN UNION STUDIES CENTER
365 Fifth Avenue
All events take place at the Center unless otherwise noted
212.817.2051
euromatters.org/center

FRIDAY, May 8 at 5:00 PM

TUESDAY, May 5 at 5:00 PM
Panel: “Digits & Treasuries: How to Address the Fiscal Challenges of the Digital Economy?,” with Pierre Collin (Université Panthéon-Assas), Martin Collet (Université Panthéon-Assas), and Bernard Harcourt (Columbia).

WEDNESDAY, May 6 at 6:30 PM
Film: “Adieu Berthe, ou L’Enterrement de Mémé (Granny’s Funeral).”

THURSDAY, June 11 - WEDNESDAY, June 12
Workshop: “De-Provincializing Soft Power: A Global-Historical Approach,” with Hisham Aidi (Columbia), Burcu Baykurt (Columbia University), Victoria de Grazia (Columbia, Richard John (Columbia), Thomas Diez (University of Tubingen), Mingjiang Li (Nanyang Technological University), Zhongying Pang (Sun Yat-Sen University), and Jack Snyder (Columbia).

—City University of New York—

THE DEUTSCHES HAUS
420 West 116th Street
All events take place at the Haus unless otherwise noted
212.854.1858
www.columbia.edu/cu/german/dhaus

No events listed for May.

No events listed for May.

No events listed for May.
EUROPE IN APRIL

April 1: Spain announced it will allow undocumented immigrants to access free public healthcare. They had banned this under austerity measures, but this led to a saturation of accident and emergency wards.

April 2: Nine British citizens were arrested trying to cross the Turkish-Syrian border.

April 3: France passed a law making it a criminal offense to employ undernourish women on the catwalk. The law also provides new regulations for indicating when a photograph of a model has been retouched. The day before, France passed a related law banning websites that glorify anorexia.

April 4: France’s far-Right National Front party was accused of taking millions of pounds in loans from Russian bank as “reward” for backing Vladimir Putin on Crimea.

April 5: In one day, Italy rescued three boats carrying 1,500 migrants trying to reach Sicily.

April 6: Spain’s Altamira caves, famed for their prehistoric cave art, will reopen with visits limited to five people once week. The caves were closed in 2002 due to fears for the fragility of the cave paintings.

April 9: In a major rift for France’s far-right National Front party, the leader of the party, Marine Le Pen, asked her father, the party’s honorary president, to step down after he stood by anti-semitic statements.

April 8: According to German police, undocumented immigration to Germany has a reached a record high. They arrested 57,000 undocumented immigrants in 2014, an increase of 75 per cent compared to 2013.

April 10: An Italian man opened fire inside a Milan courthouse during a bankruptcy hearing, killing three people, including a judge.

April 12: Pope Francis described the mass killing of Armenians under Ottoman rule in WW1 as “genocide,” leading the Turkish government to withdraw its envoy to the vatican.

April 13: Günter Grasse, German Nobel prize winner and author of *The Tin Drum*, died at 87.

April 13: Hungary’s far-right *Jobbik* party won its first by-election.

April 15: About 400 people drowned when a migrant ship trying to reach Italy capsized.

April 19: In Finland, the Opposition Centre Party’s technocrat leader Juha Sipila won elections. The Eurosceptic True Finn party came in second.

April 19: Greek’s deputy Prime Minister said the government could hold a referendum vote if finance talks with European institutions break down.

April 19: At least 900 people drowned in a series of migrant ship accidents in the Mediterranean.

April 20: In Greece, a trial against the political leadership of far-right party Golden Dawn began. Most face charges of membership of a criminal organization. Others are accused of murder, conspiracy to murder, possession of weapons and racist violence, and face sentences of up to 20 years if convicted.

April 21: Oskar Groening, a 93-year old former SS accountant of Auschwitz on trial for 300,000 counts of accessory to murder, admits “moral guilt” in German court but did not acknowledge participating in any specific crimes.
April 22: Poland accelerated the process to buy U.S. Patriot missiles, as it keeps its eye on Russian expansion.

April 23: Russia began to deploy more forces near the border of Ukraine.

April 23: The UK’s prime minister David Cameron pledged to send HMS Bulwark and helicopters to try to curtail smuggler gang activity in the Mediterranean.

April 24: World leaders such as Vladimir Putin and François Hollande attended a ceremony in Armenia to mark 100 years since the Armenian massacres.

April 24: The UK’s prime minister David Cameron pledged to send HMS Bulwark and helicopters to try to curtail smuggler gang activity in the Mediterranean.

April 24: German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for new rules to distribute asylum-seekers in Europe, based on the size of countries and strength of economies.

April 24: Italian police said they dismantled an Islamist network that planned to attack the Vatican.

April 26: Mustafa Akinci, a leftist moderate campaigning on a platform of peace, won Turkish-occupied Cyprus’ presidential election.

April 27: German newspapers said documents suggest that Chancellor Angela Merkel knew about U.S. attempts to spy on France as early as 2008.

April 29: In France, a Muslim school girl was sent home for wearing a long skirt deemed “an ostentatious sign of religion.”

April 29: The German constitutional court ruled that Germans have the right to insult the police in general, but not individual officers.
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