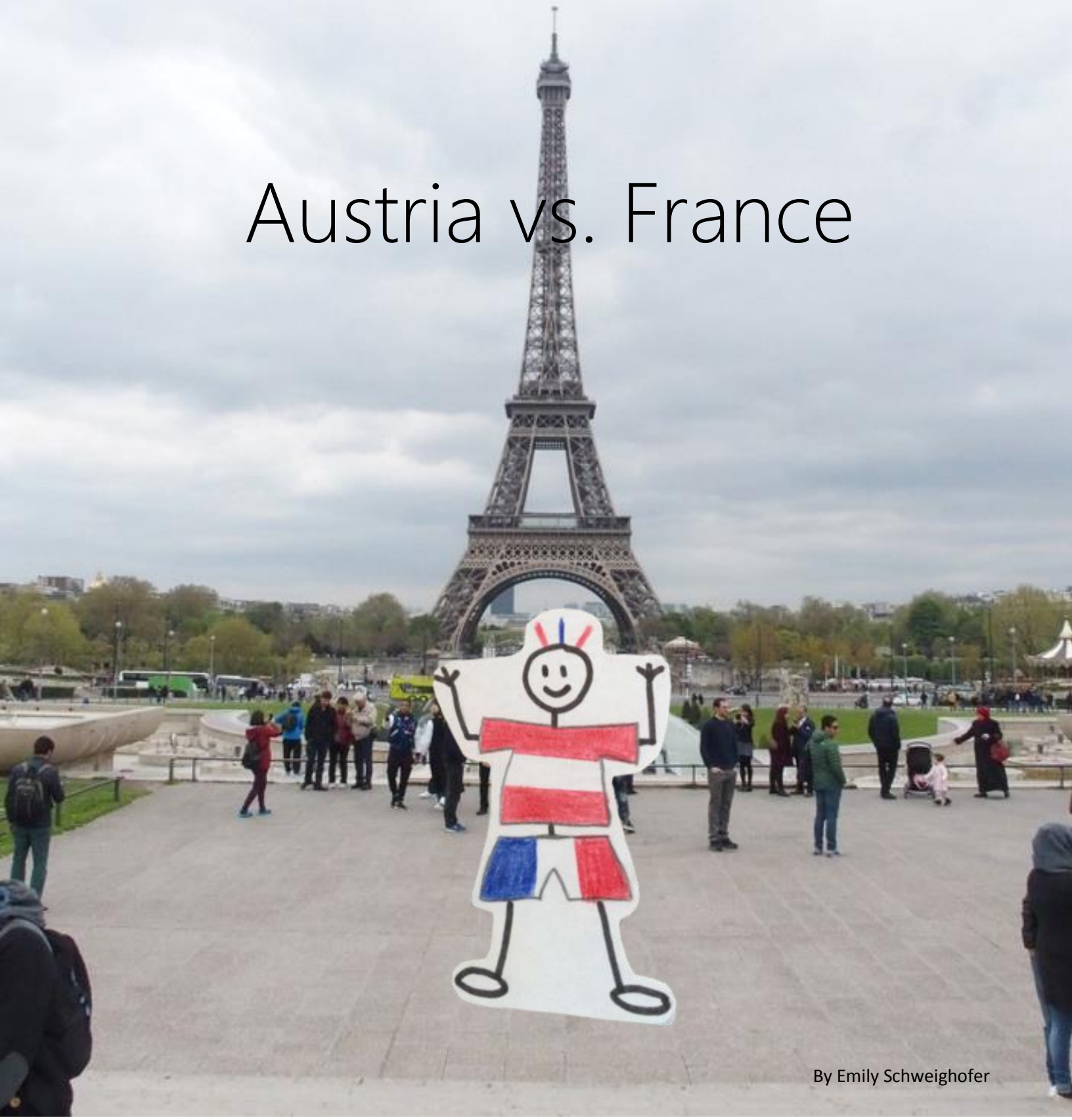


Eric's Transcultural Experiences

Austria vs. France



Eric in Graz



A few weeks ago Eric, an exchange student from France, visited my family. He was amazed by many things in Austria but let me tell you everything from the beginning...



First of all, Eric was not used to the food we eat here and how we eat. Once he asked why we pour this dark-green oil over our salad. We told him that it was made of pumpkin seeds and it would taste delicious but I think he didn't quite understand.

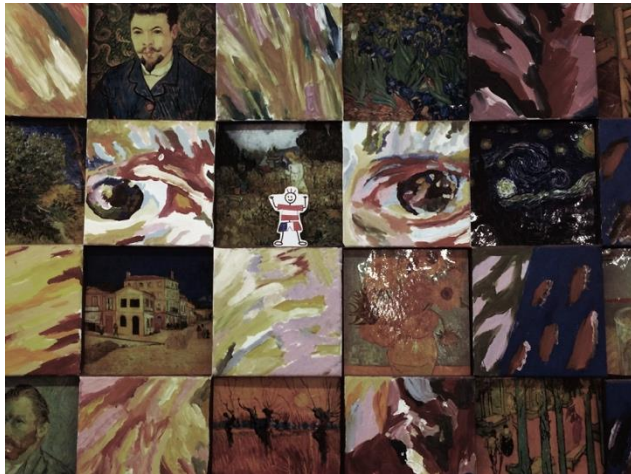
Eric actually was very enthusiastic about the traditional "Sachertorte". Once he tried it, he would want more and more. When we asked him he said that he'd never eaten anything as delicious before. But he was kind of confused that we would eat dessert and drink coffee right after the main meal.

To Eric many regional products like Styrian "Speck" and "Grammelschmalz" were new but he tried them. He didn't really react but I think he didn't like it a lot after we told him what it was made of.



One day we made a trip to Hallstatt, but the only thing that fascinated him besides the salt mine were the numerous cuckoo clocks in the souvenir shops. He just stood in front of one and refused to move on. In the end I bought one for him and put it into his room. I saw how he redecorated the cuckoo...





On the first day of school I showed him around. At first, he was perplexed when we entered the schoolyard. There were peacocks standing in the grass – shouting and making their wheels. He had never seen those animals in a school so he was kind of anxious. Furthermore, he was amazed by all the art pieces that were exhibited in the school building. For example, he rode a flying dragon, visited a bookworm, sat between a man's eyes and wondered about a deformed bike.



He even found the fire extinguisher interesting. Maybe they are different from the ones they use...

In the break I bought Eric a snack from the school cafeteria and even I can tell that he was amazed by the huge variety offered (thanks to Gerti ^^).

I think that the school system in his home-country is different because he wondered why school ended so early and hardly anybody ate in a dining hall.



Right now Eric is in France, in Rennes to report me from the cultural differences there. Read on to find out about the life there.



Eric in France

When Eric was in France he noticed a lot of things that were new to him. When we ate our breakfast he wanted to have a plate for his bread. Here in Rennes we don't use plates for the "*petit-déjeuner*"! We cut our bread and spread butter on the bread directly on the table. In general, the breakfast was quite new and confusing for him. For example, he wondered about how we drink our tea. He said that at home they would drink their tea out of a cup instead of a bowl and that they would never dip the bread into the tea.

Another thing he told me was that we only eat baguette (in general white bread). It seems like in Austria they mainly eat whole-grain bread.

Eric also perceived that the dishes in restaurants are not spiced in the same way as in his home country. He even told me that he ordered a "mousse au chocolat" and in the end it was salted.



In Paris he noticed that there were a lot of little shops, cafes and bakeries, instead of supermarket chains. On the other hand, he told me that in Rennes he only saw one big supermarket chain (*Carrefour*).

When Eric came to school with me he asked me whether we had no Muslims at school. I had to explain to him that in France your religion is not wanted in public space because everyone, no matter what religion, is equal and shouldn't show the signs of their beliefs. School is considered as a public space – that means that the women are not allowed to wear a headscarf, and also other signs of your personal beliefs are not wanted to be seen. That's why they don't teach religion as a school subject.

It was also new to Eric that the students usually go to the teachers' classrooms. He thought that every class had its own room and the teachers would come to them. He told me that it is the other way around in Austria.

The thing that bothered Eric the most was that everybody smoked. I know that tobacco is not allowed under the age of 18 but half of the students that are 16 smoke regularly. And the teachers don't mind! They can even smoke in the school yard.

Eric was actually really scared of all the huge demonstrations against the new working law. He said that he had never seen such big demonstrations that take place regularly. When he walked through the streets afterwards he was shocked about all the vandalism (Graffiti on the shop windows, broken glass, garbage cans on fire,...). The readiness of the population to use violence is startling.

Eric told me that he really enjoyed to discover the city and that he would definitely come back to visit me. I'm already looking forward to seeing my new friend again!

