Syria

Civil war and refugee crisis

In 2011, protests against Bashar al-Assad, Syria's leader, led to a civil war between the government troops and protesters. When Assad used poison gas against the protesters in 2013, 300 people, even civilians, were killed. By this time, the USA joined the conflict and supported the revolting protesters, which had formed the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, which they took as a legal representative for Syria's people. UN (United Nations) peace talks in Geneva failed, as Syrian authorities refuse to discuss a transitional government.

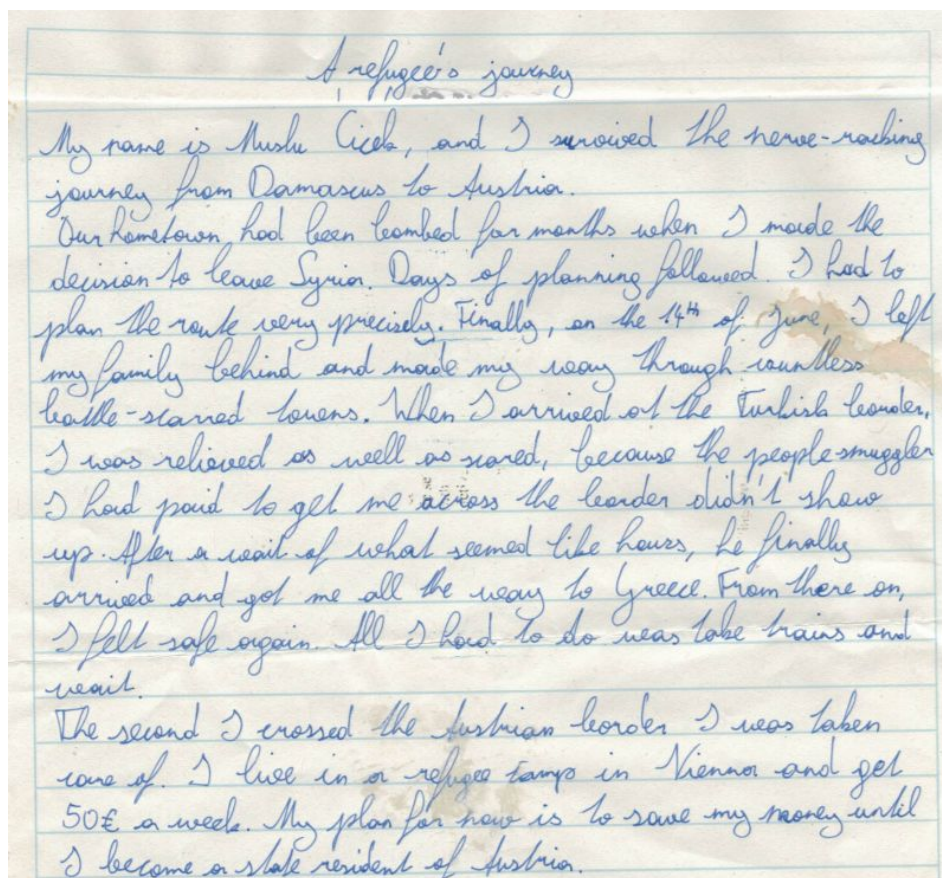In 2014, the USA and five Arab countries started air strikes against the Islamic State, formed by Iraq and Syrian militants, who declared "caliphate" in the territory of Aleppo, a city in the north of Syria.

Shortly after, Russia began to support Assad's government with military engagement. In December 2016, government troops, backed by Russian Air power and Iranian-sponsored militias, recaptured Aleppo. A ceasefire between the government and non-Islamist rebels was enforced.

As Syria seemed to be on their way to peace in January 2017, the Syrian foreign minister called on the country's refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq to return home.

Since 2011, nearly 6 million Syrians fled their country. At first, most of them applied for asylum in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, which are neighbouring countries to Syria.

In 2015, large numbers of refugees fled into the EU, which led to the European Migrant Crisis with long rows of refugees crossing European countries and applying for asylum there. In 2016, 39.000 asylum seekers were registered in Austria. First, the refugees were met with a wave of solidarity – by government and non-government organisations – but soon, borders were shut. Austria now holds one of the strictest asylum laws in Europe.

Muslu Cicek lived in Damascus, the capital of Syria. He fled in 2015, when he was 13 years old. He lives in a refugee camp near Vienna. Read about his journey:
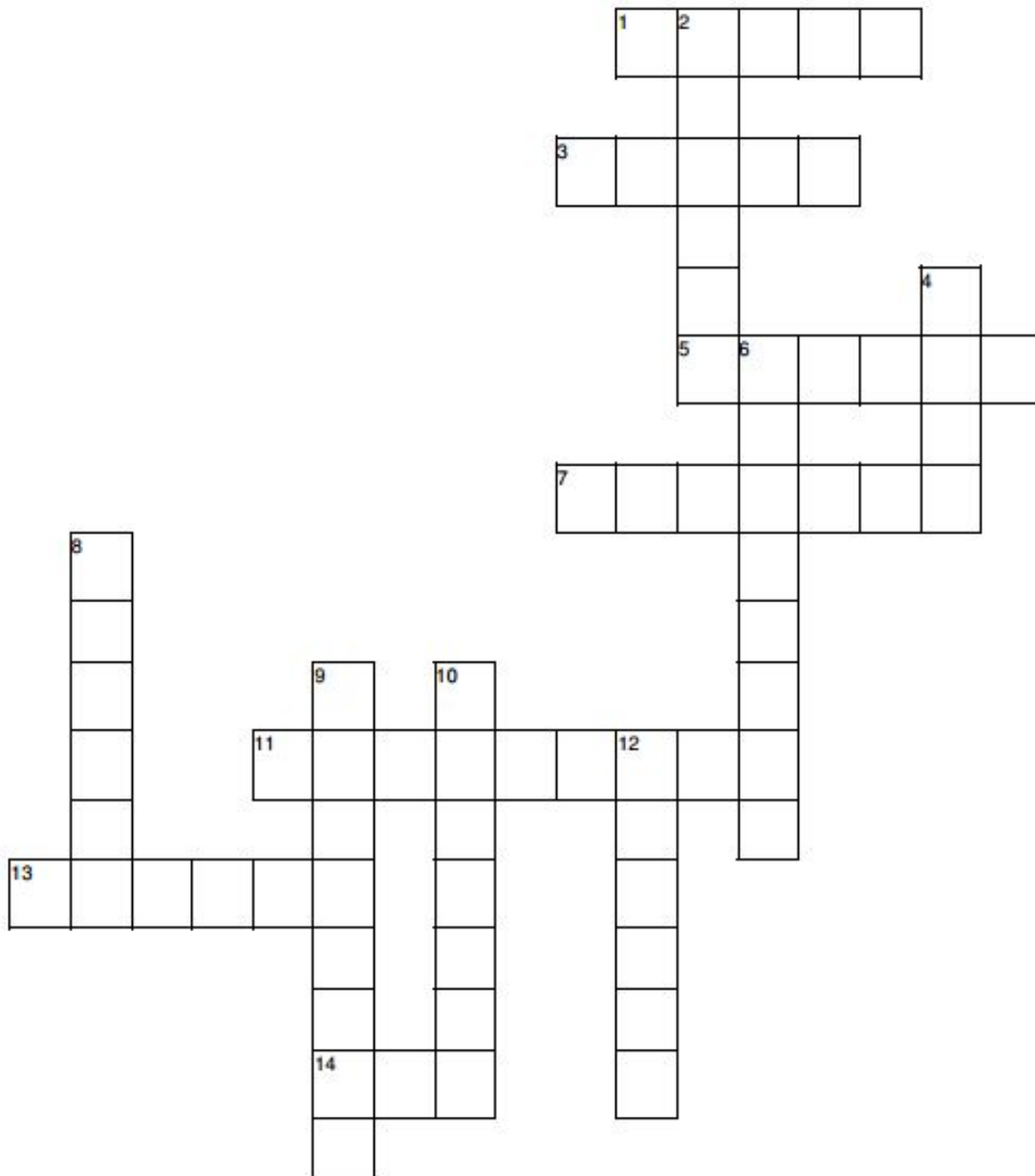

A refugee's journey

My name is Muslu Cicek, and I survived the nerve-racking journey from Damascus to Austria.

Our hometown had been bombed for months when I made the decision to leave Syria. Days of planning followed. I had to plan the route very precisely. Finally, on the 14th of June, I left my family behind and made my way through countless battle-scarred towns. When I arrived on the Turkish border, I was relieved as well as scared, because the people-smuggler I had paid to get me across the border didn't show up. After a wait of what seemed like hours, he finally arrived and got me all the way to Greece. From there on, I felt safe again. All I had to do was take trains and wait.

The second I crossed the Austrian border I was taken care of. I live in a refugee camp in Vienna and get 50€ a week. My plan for now is to save my money until I become a state resident of Austria.

Task 1 (individual work: ☺)
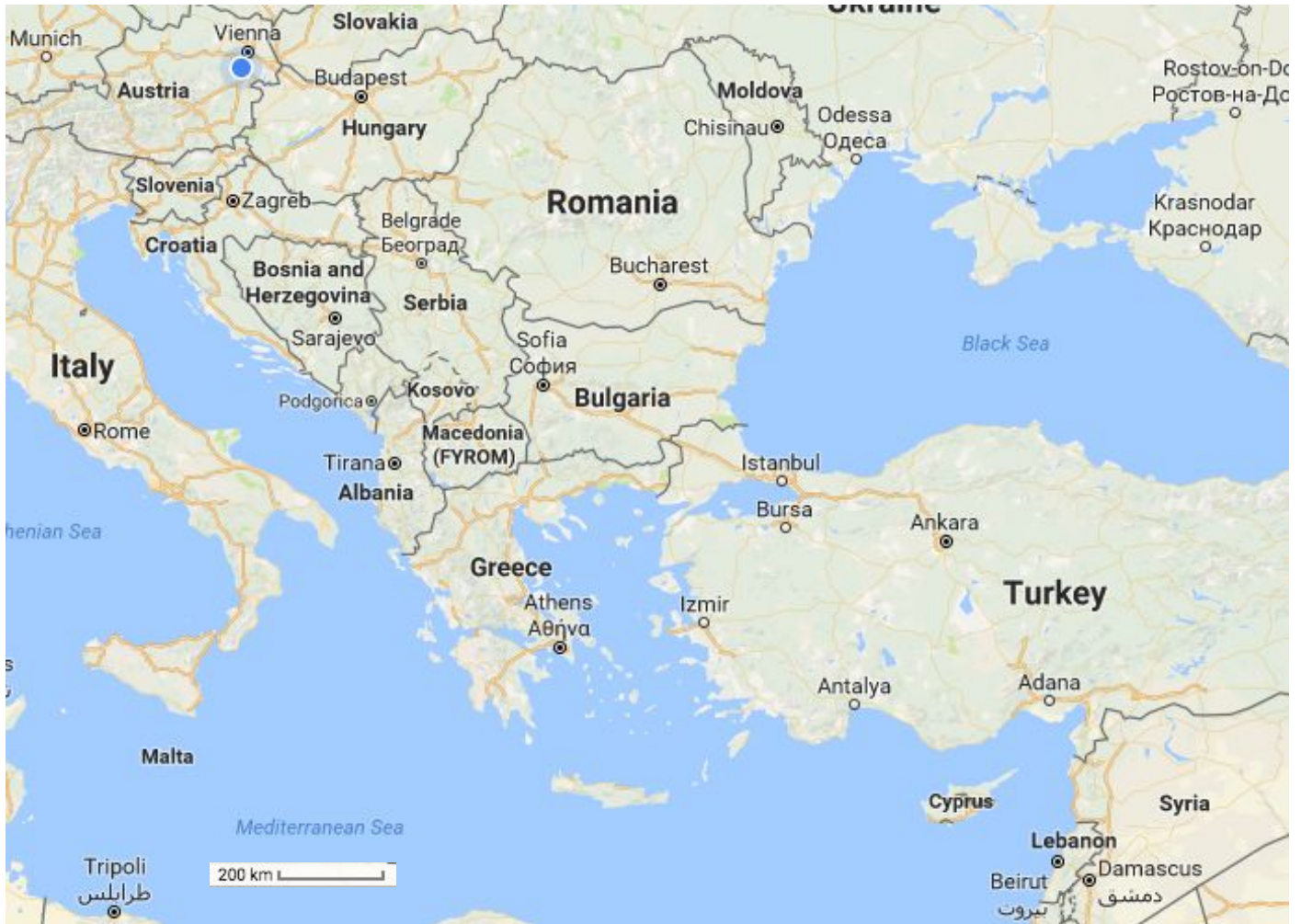## After reading the text, do the crossword:

Across

1. In Europe, Muslu went by
3. The last name of Syria's leader
5. Protection for refugees in another country
7. A person who flees to a foreign country
11. The Islamic State declared the
13. The United Nations peace talks took place in
14. Supporter of the rebels

Down

2. Supporter of Assad
4. The month when Muslu left Syria
6. Someone who helps people crossing borders illegally
8. The first European country Muslu arrived in
9. The capital of Syria
10. Civil persons who fight for money
12. A city in the north of Syria

Task 2 (individual work: ☺)

Muslu fled from Damascus to Vienna. Estimate the distance along the roads (orange lines)!

The distance was approximately _____

Task 3 (individual work: ☺)
On his journey, Muslu crossed different countries. Circle them on the map and cross out those he never crossed in the list below!

Italy   Lebanon   Ukraine   Hungary   Slovenia   Greece   Bulgaria
Moldova   Iraq   Iran   Macedonia   Croatia   Albania   Germany
Kosovo
Serbia   Turkey   Cyprus   Poland   Czech Republic   Bosnia and Herzegovina
Israel

Task 4 (individual work: ☺)

Match the countries and their capitals! Draw lines and add numbers.

1 Croatia	Ankara
2 Turkey	Belgrade
3 Romania	Damascus
4 Serbia	Vienna
5 Greece	Budapest
6 Bulgaria	Athens
7 Hungary	Zagreb
8 Austria	Tirana
9 Syria	Sofia
10 Albania	Bucharest

Task 5 (whole class)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=25bwiSikRsI

Watch the video "What does it mean to be a refugee?" and answer the questions:

How many people have been forced to leave their homes to escape violence around the world?

_____

What is the difference between refugees and internally displaced persons?

_____

To   apply   for   asylum   is
_____

What is the difference between a migrant and a refugee?

_____

Task 6 (pair work: ☺☺)

Find a partner and visit the website

http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32057601
with your mobile device or the classroom computer.

Try to imitate Muslu's route on this website.
Where would Muslu end up?

Then, try to find your own route.
Discuss the options with your partner. Write down your journey:

While choosing the escape routes, list decisions/problems Syrian refugees have to face: