



## OPTIONAL COURSE

### THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL: A REAL WORLD ANALYSIS OF THE LEADERS' INSTITUTION THROUGH PRACTICAL EXERCISES AND INSIGHTS

#### I. Objectives (following a quadruple 'A' approach):

##### a. Analysing

- i. how the European Council has evolved over several decades, both in legal words like in the real world
- ii. how it exercises power inside the EU institutional architecture and
- iii. how power is distributed within this club of European leaders

##### b. Assessing strong and weak features of

- i. its performance in several central areas of public policies and
- ii. its procedures and patterns of getting to consensual agreements and/or to decide by
- iii. limits of qualified majority voting (QMV)

##### c. Advising

- i. how the performance (efficiency and effectiveness) as well as
- ii. democratic legitimacy of these institutions could be improved

##### d. Acting: Learning professional skills

- i. Simulating a summit
- ii. Preparing policy papers like a draft conclusion

The European Council is an intriguing institution to study. It is both fascinating as frustrating. From the early summits onwards, the Heads of State or Government prepared and concluded many history-making decisions that shaped the Union's constitutional and geographic architecture. Since its creation in 1974, the European Council has regularly exercised major system- and policy-making functions. In this institution, national leaders have agreed on treaty

revisions, on accession agreements and have also acted as the ultimate decision-makers on a state-like agenda of public policies, including the EU's external action. The European Council's activities, agreements and acts have thus dealt with the most contested issues of Europe's history from the 1970s onwards. Since 2008, the 'Union's highest executive leaders' (Van Rompuy 2012) have once more increased the institution's authority, using it to react to global financial crises, stabilise the Eurozone, deal with refugee waves, the Brexit; the COVID-19 pandemic and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

A closer look at the European Council's functioning and performance leads to a stimulating and controversial debate on the nature and impact of the institution itself. At the same time, this body is key to analysing the institutional architecture and political dynamics of the EU system and discussing the overall finalité of the multi-level polity. Political leaders and academics alike have described the European Council as the 'supreme political authority of the EU' (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006; see also Giscard d'Estaing 2003) or as the 'informal centre of the big, strategic decisions' (Van Rompuy 2010: 4; see also Tindemans 1975: 14). Some have even proposed the label 'European government' (cf. Fischer 2000 ; see also Monnet 1976 : 592; Gillissen 2011: 105-123), which acts as the 'principal decision-maker' (De Schoutete and Micossi: 2013: 1) and disposes of an 'overall political leadership on all EU affairs' (Piris 2010: 208.). With the leader's agenda (from 2017) the members of the European Council have again claimed their role in the institutional architecture of the EU system. The European Council also plays a significant part in the debate on the development of a 'post democratic executive federalism' (Habermas 2012: 12). As relevant as this key institution is, we have fewer studies than on other EU bodies (e.g. EP, Commission and Court). Also theoretical approaches to explain the evolution of this institution are already stimulating but in many ways still limited.

This course thus takes a specific interest in the role of this key institution. With the quadruple 'A' approach, it pursues a course strategy for debating its evidence-based role in regard to several theoretical and normative approaches.

Collectively, the course will place the European Council within the larger EU architecture and its balance of power. We will explain the Member States' strategies to maintain their leadership over the European integration process. With this aim, it will look at the role of the European Council through significant moments of the history of European integration and, more specifically, on the role of the European Council as crisis management in the Corona pandemic and the war in Ukraine. How do Member states exercise leadership over the EU architecture? What are the relations between the European Council and the other EU institutions and national administrations (particularly EP and Commission)? In assessing the balance of power within the EU's architecture with the European Council as a key institution we will argue that the traditional dichotomy between a simplified intergovernmental and supranational reading are to be discussed.

Individually, this course examines the relative positions of different Member States within the European Council and tries to identify how national officials make use of this system to reach outcomes in line with their preferences. Claims such as the existence of a 'Directoire' of large Member States, especially of a Franco-German leadership or even of German hegemony, are scrutinised, along with the role of individual national leaders, such as the German Chancellor as well as the impact of national elections on the European leadership (e.g. the case 'Post-Merkel epoch').

Conversely, we examine the fundamental transformations that the involvement of national leaders has made on European statehood.

Thanks to the **interactive** teaching method, the debates and simulation games, and the discussions with practitioners and experts, students will be able to exercise and adapt presentation, analytical and writing skills that will prove to be an asset for their future professional careers.

## II. Course Learning Outcomes

- Students are able to apply a quadruple 'A' approach: to analyse and assess basic legal procedures and real activities of the European Council as well as to discuss advice for futures activities and practicing future professional skills.
- For analysing, students are able to use and discuss the main conceptual and theoretical approaches to studying the European integration process. For this, students are able to identify major factors for understanding in theoretical terms the architecture of the Lisbon Treaty with a focus on models for the European Council as a key institution.
- Students are able to apply their insights to the current and future strategies to shape the future of the European Union, different variations of flexibility and possible scenarios for a European 'finalité'.
- To give advice, students are able to identify and use relevant official documents by EU actors such as reports or strategy papers.
- Students are able to develop presentation, writing and analytical skills useful in their professional career.

## III. Course

### Coursework

The professor has an **interactive** way of teaching, and the course will allow for intensive group discussions based on preparatory readings. A schedule is provided before the course begins, and the designated students are expected to prepare for each class by reading the required readings (a specific bibliography will be provided to the students). For each session one student will be asked to act as an 'expert' to guide our discussion along with the professor. More details will be provided.

During the course students have to deliver a written assignment where they are expected to analyze relevant institutional and political trends in the European Council relying also on the main theories discussed during the course or deliver a practical work like drafting a conclusion for the European Council or drafting policy briefs. Oxford style debates or situation games will be organized on topic suggested by the professor and the students themselves.

The course will be taught over blocks:

Block 1: The Political and Academic relevance: Challenges on the political agenda and basic features of this key institution and multiple approaches for understanding role(s) like

the Presidency model, the Council model and the Fusion model; a survey on current academic approaches

**Block 2:** The Pre-History and History of the European Council: from the fifties to 2022 – generations of leaders and the institutional trajectory; the evolution of the leaders' summits

**Block 3:** The performance of the European Council in central areas of the EU procedures and policies: the role as constitutional architect in treaty revisions, accession and the Brexit as well as gouvernement économique, the European voice for external action, and practicing pre-constitutional and pre-legislative functions in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice; managing crises: the Eurozone and the migration challenge, the Corona crisis and the war in Ukraine

**Block 4:** Shifting the institutional balance towards a horizontal fusion: the relations with the other institutions inside the EU architecture; the Spitzenkandidaten procedure: experiences and future of an experiment; the impact of crises on the institutional balance

**Block 5:** Inside the European Council: the dynamics and constraints of decision making – QMV, the puzzle of consensus formation; the administrative infrastructure; new and old cleavages and coalitions: east vs west, prosperous vs less prosperous members

**Block 6:** Conclusions and Perspectives – especially the Rise and Decline of the European Council in five scenarios

The topic for a respective simulation game will be selected in class and is planned for the middle part of the course

The course also envisages to deliver real world insights by real actors from the Council Secretariat, the European Parliament and/or permanent representations.

## **Assessment**

There will be three components of course assessment

### 1. Written assignment (30%)

- Students are supposed to write an individual short assignment on a specific issue on the research agenda on the European Council or on a recent or forthcoming topical debate. Students can write an academic paper or a policy paper. The latter should concern a current political issue and students should provide recommendations as well as address a non-academic audience. At the same time, the policy paper should be linked to the course content and students have to disclose the knowledge they have acquired. The topic will be discussed with the professor. See below the list of topics as

suggestion. Own proposals are welcome. Papers should be of **2700 - 3300** words. All footnotes must be included in the word count, but annexes, cover page, table of contents, abstract and bibliography are excluded. Tables should be in word format and will be counted as part of the word count. Graphs can be in pdf or image format.

- Rules regarding referencing/plagiarism applying to the thesis also apply to the essays/papers. Any written work submitted by a student is assessed on its originality as well as the depth and breadth of research undertaken. (It follows that plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion and the falsification of data are all prohibited.) No written work (even if it is not strictly academic e.g. policy brief, memo, etc.) can consist of assembling existing texts, unless the sources used are clearly indicated. If an exercise does not provide for the possibility of indicating sources, verbatim reproduction of an existing document is prohibited.
- Papers must be written in the language of the course.
- Paper should contain: a cover page (title of the paper, student's name, word count), table of contents, a short abstract of max. 200 words, and a bibliography.
- Topics will be agreed upon with the Professor.
- The deadline for paper submission will be communicated to the students at the beginning of the course.
- Papers should be sent to [miguel.gomessilva@coleurope.eu](mailto:miguel.gomessilva@coleurope.eu) in a Word format, named after your family name (eg. Smith.doc). Papers can only be submitted once. Only the first version received will be corrected.
- Penalties:
  - a) *Regarding the non-respect of the word limit:* 1 point will be subtracted from the mark that would have been awarded for every 100 words (or part thereof) either below 2700 words or above 3300 words.
  - b) *Regarding late submissions:* for every 24 hours of delay, or part thereof, after the specified submission deadline, 2 points will be deducted from the final mark of the paper.

Possible examples of paper topics:

- The future role(s) of the European Council – in different scenarios
- The European Council and the Commission: who is the principal and who is the agent?
- Vision(s) of Europe by European leaders (Merkel, Macron, Juncker, Tusk and others)
- The leaders' agenda: its purpose and limits
- The elective role of the European Council in procedures for the EU's top positions in 2019
- The European Council as driver for more integration
- The European Council and the Council as the guardians of the national sovereignty

- The European Council and the Court – who has the final authority?
- The European Council and the ECB: rising powers
- The European Council and the Council in differentiated/flexible forms of integration
- The European Council and the Council: perspectives for the CFSP and the PESCO
- The European Council and the Council as actors in the EMU governance
- The legitimacy battle between the European Council and the EP
- The Spitzenkandidaten Procedure
- One hat for the Commission and the European Council presidency
- Power battle(s) within the European Council: Franco-German leadership, German hegemony or a new trio as directoire.
- The QMV: more than a myth?
- A big, double hat for the President of the Commission and the President of the European Council
- The EUCO political agenda: key priorities and possible developments
- Political coalitions in the EUCO: from Visegrad to the Hanseatic League
- The role of the EUCO in the financial and migration crises
- The EUCO: between national and European interests
- Then EEAS and the EUCO: who leads the European foreign policy?
- The European Council: an engine of the European integration?
- Lobbying in the European Council
- Transparency in the working procedure of the EUCO
- The long nights of the EUCO: an analysis of the agenda of the meetings of the European Leaders
- The European Council as manager of the Corona crisis
- After the July Budget Summit- the European Council has moved the integration into a new stage?
- The European Council has rescued the nation state
- Proposals to amend the Lisbon Treaty provisions on the European Council
- The European Council is the driver for the Union's fusion process
- The European Council destroys the original institutional balance of the Union's architecture
- The European Council is only relevant for high politics
- Draft a policy paper for the new German chancellor to explain his/her role in the European Council
- Draft a policy paper for the President of the Commission which changes she should pursue in an intergovernmental conference for a Treaty revision on the legal provisions dealing with the European Council
- Draft a policy paper for the President of the European Council suggesting him changes in the procedures for crisis management

If possible, each student will present a short version of the paper (ten minutes maximum) with a subsequent discussion. Depending on the topic, students might present their papers in a group debate. These activities will be delivered if compatible with the overall course planning.

## 2. Debate & Simulation game (20%)

As the course will be **interactive**, students should participate in an active way. A simulation game will be organised during the course on a specific subject. Students will be asked to simulate participating in a session of the EUCO, representing different EU leaders and their positions in the discussed topic. The criteria for evaluation will be based on their knowledge on their country or institution and their negotiation strategies. Additionally, the experts will present the topic at the beginning of and during each session. Experts should send a brief outline to the academic assistant *at least two days* before of the session.

## 3. Oral exam (50%)

The exam consists of a discussion with the Professor. The professor will start with questions concerning the paper (see above) and then continue with issues of the course as debated during the sessions.<sup>1</sup>

### **Assessment at second attempt**

During the second examination session the course is assessed 100% on the basis of a written resit exam.

### **Note on Master theses**

Students wishing to prepare a Master Thesis dealing with the subjects of the course such as the European Council, can do this in the framework of Prof. Wessels' Research Seminar (EU's International Role and External Action : ENP, Turkey, Russia, the EU's Architecture, CFSP, CSDP, EEAS, EU's Power).

## **Biographical Note**

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels, born in 1948, studied Economics and Political Science at the University of Cologne and in the USA. Since 1981 he is Visiting Professor at the College of Europe, Bruges and Natolin. He was Director of the Institut für Europäische Politik in Bonn (1973-1993) and Head of the Department of Political and Administrative Studies at the College of Europe in Bruges (1980-1996). From 1994 till 2016 he held a Jean-Monnet-Chair at personam at the University of Cologne. Since 2016 he is Director of the Centre for Turkey and EU Studies (CETEUS) at the University of Cologne. He held the Chaire Européenne at Sciences Po Paris (1999) and was Jean Monnet Visiting Professor at the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute in Florence (2000). He was also a member of the high level group of the European Commission for the reform of the CFSP and for the revision of the Treaty of Maastricht (1995-1997). Moreover, he was the Chairperson of the Executive Board of the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP, Berlin) and was the Chairperson of the Executive Board of the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA, Brussels till 2016). Since 2010 he is Vice-President of the German consortium for the foundation of the

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<sup>1</sup> The evaluation modalities of the final exam may be subject to adaptations in function of the evolution of the sanitary situation

Turkish-German University, Istanbul. He is involved in several research and teaching networks such as THESEUS, PADEMIA, FEUTURE TRACK.

In 2007 he was awarded the Jean Monnet medal in gold for lifelong learning. In 2011 he was awarded an Ad personam Jean Monnet Chair and the UACES Award for Lifetime Achievement in Contemporary European Studies. In 2015 he was awarded with the "Universitätspreis Forschung" by the University of Cologne for his excellence in research and in 2016 with the Vision for Europe Award of the Prague European Summit..

Prof. Wessels is co-editor of the "Jahrbuch der Europäischen Union" (40th Edition) and the "Europa von A-Z, Taschenbuch der europäischen Integration" (15th Edition) and has published widely in leading Journals and edited volumes. Prof. Wessels has published a book on the European Council with Palgrave in 2016, along with a book on the European Council as a Crisis Manager (with L. Schramm and T. Kunstein) and a recent article on the European legacy of Angela Merkel (with L. Schramm).

Since 2018 he is a part-time professor at the European University Institute (Florence). His research and teaching priorities are the role(s) of the European Council (see the TRACK project) and the relations between the EU and Turkey (see the CETEUS website). Prof. Wessels has become honorary chairman of the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) in Berlin in 2019.

## **Bibliography<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> This bibliography has been put together by the Professor. The formatting of the references does not necessarily correspond to the referencing rules applicable in the Department.

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For further inquiries please consult:

- [Jean Monnet project SUMMIT](#) (Studying the European Council – Mastering and Disseminating Knowledge about a Key Institution):
- [TRACK \(Teaching and research on the European Council as key institution\) project](#)
- Valuable information and insight are provided by the [EPRS](#)