

ECTS CARD

STUDY PROGRAMME

1. POL
2. MATA-POL

ACADEMIC YEAR

2026-2027

SEMESTER

Second

COURSE TITLE

**Member States and the EU: National Narratives, Domestic Politics,
National Institutions and the EU System**

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COURSE PROFESSOR

Hussein KASSIM

COURSE ASSISTANT

Harm VAN DE PLASSCHE

NATURE OF COURSE (COMPULSORY, OPTIONAL)

Optional

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

English

ECTS CREDITS

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1. COURSE OBJECTIVE

What do member states want from EU membership, and how have they been affected by it? How do they communicate their views to the EU and to their publics? What role do they play in EU governance? How does the EU accommodate differences between member states, and with what effect? This course aims to enable students to develop an advanced understanding of EU membership, its implications and its effects, and an overview of how member states interact with the EU. It examines how member states understand membership, how they attempt to shape the direction of the EU and the decisions it takes, and their role in the EU system. It looks at how they are empowered and constrained, by EU membership, and how opportunities and constraints vary between policy domains. The course, which draws mainly from political science, but includes elements of public policy and public administration, is targeted at students interested in debates about membership of the EU and its impact, and the differences between member states. It covers theoretical debates, looks at the main frameworks and concepts applied in the study of EU-member state relations, and evaluates evidence drawn from multiple perspectives. The course will encourage students to develop a detailed analytic understanding of member state-EU interaction, the ability to critically assess the theories, models and concepts applied in the study of EU member states, and advanced knowledge of the EU as a multilevel system.

Although member states are the building blocks of the EU and their influence is intensely debated, the meaning of EU membership and the multiple aspects of EU member state interaction are rarely approached systematically. The aim of this course is to enable students to develop an advanced understanding and overview of the inter-relationship between the EU and the member states. It explores why European states committed themselves to the EU or its predecessor organizations, how participation fits with their conception of nationhood, and how they view membership. It investigates member states as actors in the EU system, and the EU's domestic impact, and it considers the differences (historical, institutional, political, policy) between member states and their significance. The



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course, which draws mainly from political science, but includes elements of public policy and public administration, is targeted at students interested in debates about the influence of member states in the EU, and the significance and consequences of EU membership. Adopting a theoretically reflective, but empirically informed approach that incorporates diverse perspectives, the course will encourage students to develop a detailed analytic and understanding of member state-EU interaction, the ability to critically assess the theories, models and concepts applied in the study of EU member states, and advanced knowledge of the EU as a multilevel system.

2. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who complete the course successfully will be able:

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Students who complete the course successfully will be able to:

- critically evaluate the main theories, models and concepts applied in the study of the member states and the EU;
 - demonstrate an advanced understanding of the debates concerning the relationship between the member states and the EU, the EU as a domestic political issue, and member states as actors in the EU political system;
 - demonstrate advanced empirical knowledge of member state-EU interaction, the role of member states in EU processes, and how member states manage their relationship with the EU; and
 - compare how countries view EU membership, attempt to influence EU outputs and outcomes, and approach and manage their responsibilities as EU member states.
- Students have a general knowledge of the main components of the EU political system: institutions, actors, decision-making procedures, competences and policies.
 - Students comprehend the disciplinary knowledge and theories specific to EU studies.
 - Students possess an in-depth knowledge of fundamental aspects of the EU political system (institutions, actors, policies etc.).
 - Students develop a concrete understanding of the logics of policy-making and negotiations within the EU political system, thanks to simulation exercises and the drafting of policy papers.
 - Students can communicate in both French and English in an academic or professional context.
 - Students can recognize, contextualize, explain, and interpret political, societal and economic phenomena in European integration. They can assess events, governance problems and political crises.
 - Students can analyse the process and actors of EU policy making at different levels of governance and can reflect on potential developments.
 - Students can transform a complex problem into a research question, mobilize theories, develop a research design, and conduct empirical work to provide solutions in an analytical and balanced way.
 - Students can flexibly apply theories and analytical frameworks from different disciplinary perspectives to the main issues of EU politics and policies.
 - Students can communicate clearly and effectively, through oral presentations or written documents, to different kinds of audiences.

MATA

Knowledge:

- Theoretical mastery:** The graduate demonstrates advanced and critical mastery of the principal theoretical approaches and analytical concepts in their disciplinary focus (International Relations and Diplomacy Studies, Political Science, Regional Studies) or interdisciplinary focus and can apply them to the analysis of transatlantic affairs.
- Command of the scientific state of the art:** The graduate can identify, interpret and critically



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assess the current state of academic research on transatlantic affairs and can situate them within broader scholarly debates, in line with their (inter-) disciplinary focus.

- **Comparative political institutional knowledge:** The graduate possesses in depth and comparative knowledge of the political systems of the European Union and the United States, including their institutional structures, policy making processes, and core internal and external policies, and can analyse their interactions in a transatlantic context.
- **Historical and contextual understanding:** The graduate can contextualise and interpret contemporary transatlantic developments by integrating historical, political, legal and economic perspectives, and can meaningfully explain how past dynamics shape current policy choices, debates and institutional frameworks.
- **Integrative, multi perspective knowledge:** The graduate can synthesise and integrate insights from multiple disciplines relevant to transatlantic affairs (e.g., International Relations, Political Science, Regional Studies or an interdisciplinary focus) and can adopt and compare both European and U.S. perspectives in analysing and evaluating transatlantic issues
- **Analysis of relative geopolitical standing of the EU and/or US:** The graduate can analyse developments within Europe and/or the US that impact their relative geopolitical standing, thereby influencing EU and/or US interests relevant to transatlantic affairs.
- **Assessment on capacity to act in transatlantic affairs:** The graduate acquires a nuanced perspective of internal political, economic, and/or social pressures and how they may impact, either directly or indirectly, the transatlantic relationship and the capacity of the transatlantic partners to act in accordance with the needs of the transatlantic partnership.

Skills:

- **Analytical openness:** The graduate can analyse transatlantic affairs in a broad and multidisciplinary manner, assessing challenges in this domain with intellectual openness, sensitivity to diversity of perspectives, and the ability to understand and navigate complex and ambiguous situations.
- **Critical reflection, argumentation, and communication:** The graduate is able to critically reflect on a wide range of issues in transatlantic affairs, to develop well informed and evidence based points of view, and to communicate these effectively, both orally and in writing, when working independently or collaboratively.
- **Research design:** The graduate can independently transform complex transatlantic issues into a clear and feasible research question, find and evaluate relevant sources in line with their (inter-) disciplinary focus, apply appropriate concepts and methods, and present research results in accordance with the ethical standards of the field.
- **Information processing, analysis, and problem-solving:** The graduate is capable of rapidly processing large volumes of information, critically analysing (inter-)discipline relevant sources, and proposing creative, feasible, and analytically grounded solutions to problems within the field of transatlantic affairs.
- **Professional autonomy, organisational skills, and intercultural competence:** The graduate has the intellectual maturity and professional skills to function autonomously and responsibly in national or international professional environments—particularly in transatlantic contexts—by planning and organising work effectively, setting priorities, meeting deadlines, cooperating across cultural and disciplinary boundaries, and building professional networks.

3. COURSE CONTENTS

1. EU member states

- What does it mean to be a member state?
- How has EU membership been conceptualised?

2. The meanings of membership: comparing national EU narratives



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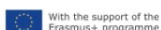


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- What are the motivations for joining the EU, and how do they differ between member countries and across times?
- What are the implications for European states and for the EU?
- 3. Member states as actors
 - Do France and Germany dictate the EU's course?
 - Who are the winners and losers in the Council and European Council?
- 4. Managing EU membership
 - What structures and procedures do member states have in place for managing their interaction with the EU?
 - Why are some countries more effective than others in communicating and advancing their positions?
- 5. EU administration
 - What role do member states play in the implementation and enforcement of EU policy?
 - How does the quality of national administrations affect the capacity of the EU to apply policy decisions?
- 6. EU in domestic politics
 - Is the EU a cleavage in national party systems?
 - Is public opinion in the member states a constraint on the EU?
- 7. EU policy and the member states
 - How does the EU's policy impact differ between sectors?
 - How do EU policy choices constrain national policy making, and what are the consequences for the accountability of national politicians to their electorates?
- 8. Differentiated integration: challenges and choices
 - Are attempts to accommodate national differences counter-productive?
 - Is further differentiation at the EU level desirable or necessary?
- The meaning of EU membership: comparing national understandings
 - Comparing national EU narratives
 - Official and societal perspectives
- 1. Theorising member states and the EU
 - From 'grand theories' of integration to theorizing member states as actors to the middle-range
 - Key concepts and perspectives, and their limits
- 1. The EU as a domestic political issue
 - The EU as a cleavage in national party systems and public opinion
 - Forms of Euroscepticism across the member states
- 1. Member states in EU decision-making
 - Opportunities, responsibilities and obligations on the input and output side and beyond
 - How do member states manage their relations with the EU?
- 1. E pluribus unum? National models and common policies
 - From national models and approaches to EU policy and action
 - Economic, social, cultural, and geopolitical differences in policy outlook
- 1. The EU and national institutions
 - National parliaments and the EU
 - Sub-national actors and the 'Europe of the regions'
- 1. Implementation and compliance
 - The challenge of administrative federalism
 - Assessing new approaches to EU policy implementation
- 1. Trends and overview
 - Internal differentiation: past and present
 - Internal differentiation: the EU's future?

4. TEACHING METHOD(S)



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The course uses a variety of formats including lectures, group work, and individual oral presentations that combine active and passive learning. It ~~will-is based~~ mainly ~~be-based~~ on guided readings and discussion. The approach is comparative and particular emphasis is placed on using case studies to test ~~or-and~~ evaluate theoretical claims and other arguments. Topics are staggered between lectures and seminars to allow time to complete preparatory reading.

5. COURSE MATERIAL*

There is no single text or textbook for the course, but the following will be useful for several of the themes:

Bulmer, S. and Lequesne, C. (eds.) (-2020). *The European Union and the member states*. Oxford University Press.

Kassim, H. and Schout, A. (eds.) (2025). *National Government Narratives of the EU: 'Official Stories' of Belonging*. Springer Nature.

Zielonka, J., (2007). *Europe as empire: The nature of the enlarged European Union*. Oxford University Press.

Kaeding, M., Pollak, J. and Schmidt, P. (eds.) (-2020). *Euroscepticism and the Future of Europe: Views from the Capitals*. Springer Nature.

Kaeding, M., Pollak, J., & Schmidt, P. (2018). *The future of Europe: views from the capitals*. Palgrave Macmillan

Bickerton, C.J., (2012). *European integration: From nation-states to member states*. Oxford University Press.

Bickerton, C.J., Hodson, D. and Puetter, U. (eds.) (2015). *The new intergovernmentalism: States and supranational actors in the post-Maastricht era*. Oxford University Press.

Schimmelfennig, F. and T. Winzen (2020). *Ever Looser Union?: Differentiated European Integration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fabbrini, S. (2019) *Alternative Governance Models: "Hard Core" in a Differentiated Europe*. Comparative European Politics 17(2): 278-293.

Zielonka, J. (2014) *Is the EU Doomed?*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Heffler, C., Neuhold, C., Rozenberg, O. and Smith, J. eds. (-2015). *The Palgrave handbook of national parliaments and the European Union* (p. 792). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

~~Bulmer, S. and Lequesne, C. eds., 2020. *The European Union and the member states*. Oxford University Press.~~

~~Laurson, F. (ed) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/>~~

~~Heffler, C., Neuhold, C., Rozenberg, O. and Smith, J. eds., 2015. *The Palgrave handbook of national parliaments and the European Union* (p. 792). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.~~

~~Heidbreder, E. and Kassim, H. eds. (in progress) *Revisiting National EU Policy Coordination after Lisbon and in an era of crisis*~~

~~Fabbrini, S. (2019) *Alternative Governance Models: "Hard Core" in a Differentiated Europe*. Comparative European Politics 17(2): 278-293.~~

~~Schimmelfennig, F. and T. Winzen (2020). *Ever Looser Union?: Differentiated European Integration*.~~

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~~Zielonka, J. (2014) *Is the EU Doomed?*, Cambridge: Polity Press.~~ ~~Laursen, F. (ed) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/>~~

6. EVALUATION

Students will be assessed by the following combination of methods:

- written examination (closed book) 50 %;
- an oral presentation of no more than 15 minutes responding to a given seminar question and opening the discussion on it 15 %;
- essay 25 %; and
- active class participation 10 %. Students are expected to come ~~prepared~~ to class having read ~~and prepared to discuss~~ the essential reading material.

Plagiarism: In line with Section 4.4 of the College Study Regulation 2024-2025 "[i]t follows that plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion and the falsification of data are all prohibited." Any written work submitted by a student shall be assessed on its originality as well as the depth and breadth of research undertaken. All cases of plagiarism, self-plagiarism or falsification of data within the meaning set out within the mentioned Study Regulation will result in the application of penalties, as defined by article 40 thereof.

Artificial Intelligence: Artificial Intelligence: Pursuant to Articles 38 and subsequent provisions of the College of Europe Study Regulations 2025–2026, the category of permitted generative AI (genAI) use for the present course is open use. Students may employ genAI tools at all stages of the work process, including brainstorming, literature screening, data organisation, analysis, interpretation, argument generation, and drafting of text, provided that any use is transparently acknowledged in accordance with the department's referencing guidelines.

The non-generative use of AI tools, such as for spell-checking, reference style management, or information searches, remains by default permitted for all course work and the Master's thesis.

Students bear full responsibility for the entirety of the content they submit, irrespective of the tools used, and must ensure compliance with College regulations on academic integrity, data protection, and intellectual property. Violations of proper AI use, including failures to acknowledge genAI assistance, shall constitute academic misconduct and will be sanctioned in line with Articles 39a, 39b, ECTS CARD and 40 of the Academic Regulations on plagiarism, falsification of data, and related infringements.

7. Course updates

Beyond routine updating of material to reflect recent developments, new publications and responses to student feedback, two main changes:

1. Streamlining to simplify recommendations for reading.
2. Some re-working of topics to give the course greater coherence

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8. Assessment at second attempt

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