



STUDY PROGRAMME(S)

(1) EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies

(2) Transatlantic Affairs

ACADEMIC YEAR

2026-2027

SEMESTER

2

COURSE TITLE

Digital Diplomacy and the European Union: Global Governance, Geopolitics and Diplomatic Practice

COURSE PROFESSOR(S)

Sorina TELEANU

COURSE ASSISTANT(S)

Jacopo GIRAUDO

NATURE OF COURSE (COMPULSORY, OPTIONAL, ELECTIVE)

(1) Optional course

(2) Elective course

ECTS CREDITS

4.5

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

English

1. COURSE OBJECTIVES

The internet, artificial intelligence (AI), and other digital technologies are impacting economies and societies worldwide, promising to help advance sustainable development, while also posing a wide range of governance challenges. These technologies have not only become central themes in global governance and international relations, but they are also regarded as geopolitical resources, as illustrated by the intensifying tech competition between nations and regions.

Against this backdrop, how is the EU positioning itself in digital geopolitics? With digital governance issues such as cybersecurity, privacy, data flows, and AI governance high on the diplomatic agenda, what is the bloc's contribution to these global debates? And to what extent are the EU's internal regulatory efforts in the digital realm (e.g. the General Data Protection Regulation, the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act, the AI Act, the Chips Act) shaping these debates? What policies, initiatives, and tools are at the core of the Union's digital diplomacy and foreign policy efforts? What is – or could be – setting the EU's approach to digital governance and diplomacy apart from those of other major players such as China and the United States? And how are digital issues reflected in the EU's bilateral and multilateral relations?

This optional course unpacks these and related questions by focusing on the external dimensions of the Union's digital policies and its role in global digital governance and geopolitics. It will further explore the use of digital technologies as tools for diplomacy, and discuss the skills, capacities, and knowledge that diplomats need to be equipped with to stay ahead of the curve in a rapidly changing digital landscape. Also included in the course will be various exercises (simulations, exploration of AI tools, etc.) designed to train skills for the practice of diplomacy.

Overall, the course is built on the notion of a digital transformation of diplomacy in three main areas: changes in the (geo)political, social, and economic environment in which diplomacy is conducted; the emergence of new policy topics in diplomatic negotiations; and the use of digital tools in the practice of diplomacy. Lectures, discussions, and exercises will explore these three dimensions in the context of the EU's digital diplomacy goals and activities.

Generative AI will be used as a pedagogical tool. As part of the simulation exercise, students will experiment with DiploAI, a custom-made generative AI tool for diplomatic use, to unpack complex digital policy topics and help them prepare for and contribute to the negotiation. In doing so, students will gain insights into how AI tools can be integrated into diplomatic practice, explore the strengths and weaknesses of such tools, and critically assess their effectiveness.

2. LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course objectives tie in with the following learning outcomes of the programme **EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies**:

- 1.1 The graduate masters the most important theoretical approaches and concepts of International Relations, EU Studies and Diplomacy Studies relevant for the analysis of the role of the European Union in international affairs.
- 1.2 The graduate can describe, explain and illustrate the current state of scientific research in the field of EU external relations in a broad sense and is able to critically assess the results of this research.
- 1.4 The graduate has acquired insights into the political, legal and economic aspects of EU external action and can use these insights to contextualise and interpret new developments.
- 1.5 The graduate is able to incorporate knowledge and understanding of various fields of EU external action and of different related disciplines (such as Political Science, International Relations, Law, Economics) at the interface between EU affairs and world politics.
- 2.1 The graduate can approach the field of national, European and international diplomacy analytically by assessing the challenges in this domain with an open mind for diversity and for complex situations.
- 2.2 The graduate has the ability to critically reflect upon problems in international and European affairs, to adopt well-informed points of view and to communicate them effectively orally and in writing, whether working independently or in a team.
- 2.3 The graduate can independently formulate a research question within the field of European affairs, find, select and critically assess relevant sources, answer the question using typical concepts and methods and present the research results in line with the ethical rules of the discipline.
- 2.4 The graduate is capable of processing a large amount of information within a short period of time and to work efficiently and effectively through planning, organising, setting priorities and meeting deadlines.
- 2.5 The graduate has the intellectual maturity and skills to function responsibly and autonomously in a professional context at national, European or international level and the capacity of suggesting possible action that contributes to problem-solving in a creative way.
- 2.6 The graduate can apply the acquired skills in the analysis and conduct of multifaceted (international) negotiations, both independently and in diverse and multicultural teams.
- 3.4 The graduate has acquired specific professional skills relevant to the practice of EU external action but also transferable to many other fields in the public and private sector.

The course objectives tie in with the following learning outcomes of the programme **Transatlantic Affairs**:

- 1.1 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.



- 1.2 The graduate can identify, interpret and critically 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.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 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.
- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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

- Session 1: Global digital governance and EU digital diplomacy
- Session 2: Global digital geopolitics and the roles of the EU, China, and the US: Overview and case studies in standard-setting and relations with Africa (comparative analysis)
- Session 3: The EU's position in the global digital economy: Goals and challenges
- Session 4: A human-rights-based approach to digital technologies
- Session 5: AI tools for diplomatic activities: From theory to practice
- Session 6: Governing artificial intelligence: Chances for a global compromise?
- Session 7: Cybersecurity and cybercrime: Elements of EU foreign and security policy and EU contributions to global processes
- Session 8: Practicing digital diplomacy: Negotiation skills

Please refer to the intranet course page for access to the full course outline.

4. TEACHING METHOD

- Interactive lectures
- Individual research paper
- Group project: simulation exercise

Please refer to the intranet course page for access to further information and instructions.



5. COURSE MATERIAL

Please refer to the intranet course page for access to the detailed reading list (required and supplementary readings) and the slides.

6. EVALUATION

Students will be assessed on the basis of:

- A group project: simulation exercise (20%) to which the 'open use' of generative AI (as per art. 38 *Study Regulations*) applies
- An individual paper (30%) to which the 'open use' of generative AI (as per art. 38 *Study Regulations*) applies
- A final oral examination, with closed-book preparation time (50%)

In the case of an excused absence to the oral exam, a written closed-book exam of 2 hours will be organised in the next examination session.

In case of a second-session resit exam, the exam will also be written (closed-book, 2h) and will count for 100% of the mark.