



College of Europe  
Collège d'Europe



Natolin

European Political and Governance Studies  
Academic Year: 2019-2020  
Professor: Wolfgang WESSELS Academic  
Assistant: Alexia FAFARA

## OPTIONAL COURSE

### THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL : A REAL WORLD ANALYSIS OF THE LEADERS' INSTITUTION WITH 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 the regular summit 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. *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 a draft conclusions*

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 functions of system- and policy-making. 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. 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 and stabilise the Eurozone as well as to deal with the refugee waves and the Brexit.

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 as such as well as to 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 Schoutheete 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 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 replaces the political arena the intergovernmental bodies of the European Union within the larger EU architecture and explain the Member States' strategies to maintain their leadership over the European integration process. 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? -especially to the EP and the Commission. We will argue that simple answers- e.g. following a simplified intergovernmental reading – are to be discussed.

Individually, this course examines the relative positions of different Member States within the European Council and try to identify the ways in which 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 a German hegemony, are scrutinized, along the role of individual national leaders, such as the German Chancellor.

Conversely, we examine the transformations that the involvement into the European integration process has made on European statehood, and will ask whether national administration, national policy-making has been 'Europeanized', resulting in the emergence of a European administrative space.

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

## I. Course Learning Outcomes

- Students are able to apply a triple 'A' approach: to analyse and assess basic legal procedures and real activities of the European Council as well as to discuss advices for future activities.
- 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 institutions.
- 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 core Europe.
- 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 debates based on preparatory readings. 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 a 'rapporteur' (to write a summary of major results of the debates and present it in the following session). 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: Basic features of this key institution and multiple approaches for understanding role(s) like the 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 2016 – 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
- 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
- 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 on the roles of the institution and Perspectives – especially the Rise and Decline of the European Council in five scenarios – including the potential impacts of Brexit

Real world insights will be delivered by real actors from the Council Secretariat, the European Parliament and/or permanent representation is envisaged.

## **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 presenting a position paper on a topical debate taking place. The topic will be discussed with the professor.

- 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.
- Students must follow the College rules regarding referencing style (available on the Intranet)
- 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, 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 alexia.fafara@coleurope.eu preferably in a Word format, named after your family name, eg. Smith.doc
- 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 Renzi 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 Commission: who is agent and who is principal?
- 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 Anseatic 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

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.

### 2. Debate (20%)

As the course will be interactive students should participate in an active way. Oxford-style debates or simulation games will be organised during the course on specific subjects. Students will be asked to participate in one team (PRO or CON) to defend a specific position using the empirical as well as practical knowledge developed during the course.

### 3. Oral exam (50%)

The exam consists of a discussion with the Professor. The professor will start with questions concerning the paper and then continue with issues of the course as debated during the sessions.

#### **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.

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

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" (35th Edition) and the "Europa von A-Z, Taschenbuch der europäischen Integration" (14th 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. Since 2018 he is a part-time professor at the European University Institute (Florence).

## Bibliography

### Basic texts

De Schoutheete, Philippe, "The European Council: A Formidable Locus of Power", in Hodson, Dermot, Peterson, John (eds), *The Institutions of the European Union*, 4th ed, Oxford University Press, Oxford, January 2017;

Dinan, Desmond, *The European Council in 2017: Overview of Decisions and Discussions*, European Parliamentary Research Service, Brussels, 2018;

Hayes-Renshaw, Fiona, "The Council of Ministers: Conflict, Consensus, and Continuity", in Hodson, Dermot, Peterson, John (eds), *The Institutions of the European Union*, 4th ed, Oxford University Press, Oxford, January 2017;

Müller Gomez, Johannes, Wessels, Wolfgang, Wolter, Johannes, "The European Parliament and the European Council: A Shift in the Balance of Power?", in Costa, Olivier (ed.), *The European Parliament in times of EU crisis*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp 53-76.

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Puetter, Uwe, Fabbrini, Sergio, *Integration without supranationalisation: studying the lead roles of the European Council and the Council in post-Lisbon EU politics*, Journal of European Integration, vol. 38(5), 2016, pp. 481-95.

Van Rompuy, Hermann, *Europe in the Storm. Promise and Prejudice*, Davidsfonds Uitgeverij, Leuven, 2014;

Wolfgang, Wessels, Valant, Peter and Kunstein, Tobias, "The EU Council(s) System and Administrative Fusion", in Bauer, W. Michael, and Trondal, Jarle (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of the European Administrative System*, Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2015, pp. 265-280;

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For further inquiries please consult the website of the Jean Monnet project SUMMIT (Studying the European Council – Mastering and Disseminating Knowledge about a Key Institution):  
<http://www.summit.uni-koeln.de/de/home/>

Further readings will be provided