

Course title:	The European Union in the 21st Century: Internal and External Challenges
Instructor:	Dr. Ulrich Brückner
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Track:	B-Track
Language of instruction:	English
Contact hours:	48 (6 per day)
ECTS credits:	6
Prerequisites:	Students should be able to speak and read English at the upper intermediate level (B2) or higher.

Course description

The course will introduce the basics of the European Union and describe and explain the processes of widening and deepening of this unique political entity. This will cover an overview of European Union history, its evolution in economic and political terms as well as of its institutional structure up to today. Since the EU in its current political structure is more than an international organization but less than a federal state it brings up a number of questions that we try to answer by using state philosophy, constitutional and legal theory, but also concepts of international relations.

Internal politics and policies, for example the decision-making process, the balance of power, questions about identity and democracy in this new system of governance will be discussed. We study the causes and effects of the war in Ukraine on the European Union, its geopolitical dimension and how it affects policies and relations with neighbours and other parts of the world. Particularly important aspects include the impact on security, public finances and the domestic discourse on political priorities. We will analyze the state of transatlantic relations under Trump and how the EU is dealing with China's and Russia's alternative models of governance. We will discuss migration and the EU's transformation into a fossil-free economy.

There is a broad canon of European topics to dive into. If students express specific interests in other topics or case studies, sessions can be adjusted. The interdisciplinary structure of this course poses an excellent opportunity for students to share a classroom with others from different academic disciplines and benefit from their perspectives, while also giving them the room to pursue topics of special interest. This can lead to an emphasis on the economic dimension of European integration, other times more space is given to external relations or European law issues, and in other years special emphasis is put on questions of identity and cultural aspects. Oral presentations are customized according to the individual background and interests of students.

The morning sessions consist of lectures, literature-based discussions and oral presentations from working groups. After lunch the course will visit various institutions in Germany's political center. Students will have the chance to discuss the topics from the morning sessions with international experts from political institutions, embassies and think tanks.

Student profile

The course is designed for students with different academic backgrounds and a general interest in Europe. There are no special prerequisites for the course. Students from different countries, academic levels and backgrounds who are generally interested in European integration will benefit from each other in an intercultural and interdisciplinary learning process.

Former classes consisted of regular students and practitioners such as civil servants, communication experts, young politicians and even members of parliaments.

The course does not require special knowledge about European politics, law, history or culture, but participants should be interested in more than just their field of specialization.

In-class participation, especially in the discussions with experts, is essential for the course success and plays an important role in grading.

Course requirements

Attendance; active participation in the seminar's discussions and discussions with experts; oral presentation of a certain subject, final in-class exam.

Required language skills

The language of instruction is English. Language proficiency on an advanced intermediate level (B2) is a prerequisite for participation. For orientation purposes, you can assess your language skills here (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52>

Attendance

Each class consists of six teaching modules (45 minutes each). If you miss 6 modules (unexcused), your final course grade will drop by one grade. Coming more than 20 minutes late counts as one missed module (this also applies to excursion days). If you come late to class six times (up to 20 minutes) your entire course grade will also drop by one grade. If you miss 14 modules or more (unexcused), you will fail the class. Excused absences, such as those with medical documentation, do not count toward these totals.

Grading

Participation:	40%,
Oral presentations:	30%,
Final exam:	30%

Readings

A digital reader will be provided.

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Tuesday, July 21, 2026	The state of European Integration Excursion to a German Federal Ministry
Friday, July 24, 2026	Institutions and Decision-Making / Germany in the EU Excursion to the European House
Tuesday, July 28, 2026	Europe's response to global polycrises Excursion to a NGO
Friday, July 31, 2026	The End of the West as we knew it: The EU in a changing world Excursion to a think tank
Tuesday, August 4, 2026	Identity, Euroscepticism and Populism Excursion to the German Federal Foreign Office
Friday, August 7, 2026	The EU and further enlargement: Relations with candidate countries and the UK Excursion to a Lobbying Agency
Tuesday, August 11, 2026	Immigration and Asylum Policy / Demographic Trends Excursion to an Embassy
Friday, August 14, 2026	The Future of Europe Final discussion / exam FUBiS Farewell Ceremony

*Field trips are subject to change depending on the availability of appointments and speakers. On field trip days, class hours may be adjusted.