

PS 385: Politics of the European Union

Younghyun Lee

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Department of Political Science

Sample Syllabus (16 weeks)

Revised and updated version of the department's course taught by the instructor in Summer 2024

Instructor: Younghyun Lee
Email: yl78@illinois.edu
Website: www.younghyunlee.com
Class Meetings: Two 75-minute meetings per week
Office Hours: Twice weekly via Zoom and by appointment (sign-up link on Canvas)
Course Site: Canvas (all readings, discussions, and assignments)

Course Description

The European Union is one of the most ambitious political experiments in modern history: twenty-seven states that have voluntarily pooled sovereignty over their markets, their borders, their currencies, and increasingly their security. It is also an organization in permanent contestation. Over the past two decades the EU has weathered a sovereign debt crisis, the arrival of over a million refugees in a single year, the departure of one of its largest member states, a pandemic that closed its internal borders, democratic backsliding within its own membership, and a full-scale war on its doorstep that has revived enlargement and forced hard questions about European defense.

This course helps you untangle the puzzles of the EU: What is it — an international organization, a federation in the making, or something entirely new? How does it actually make decisions, and for whom? Is it democratic enough? And can a union built on the promise of being “united in diversity” hold together under pressure? We combine the practical nuts and bolts of how the EU works with the big political questions about why it exists and where it is going. The course assumes familiarity with basic concepts of political science; prior knowledge of European history is helpful but not required.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to (1) explain the historical development of European integration and apply the major theories to past and current events, (2) describe the EU's main institutions and decision-making procedures, and analyze who wins and loses under them, (3) evaluate competing arguments about the EU's democratic legitimacy, including the “democratic deficit” debate and the rule-of-law crisis, (4) analyze how the EU has responded to its major crises (the euro crisis, migration, Brexit, and the war in Ukraine) and what those responses reveal about how integration advances or stalls, and (5) follow, contextualize, and critically assess current news about European politics.

Course Structure

This is a 3-credit-hour course over 16 weeks and organized into seven content modules. You should expect to dedicate approximately 4-6 hours per week to the course. A course week runs from Monday, 12:00 a.m. to Sunday, 11:55 p.m. (Central Time).

There is no required textbook. All readings — scholarly articles, book chapters, primary documents, and quality journalism — are provided on Canvas at no cost.

Assignments

Reading Quizzes (140 points — 10 per week)

A weekly open-book quiz of 20 questions (40 minutes) tests your understanding of the module's readings. Some questions check comprehension; others ask you to think critically. Complete each quiz by Wednesday, 11:55 p.m.

Discussions (70 points — 5 per week)

Discussions open once you complete the week's quiz. Post an initial response of at least 300 words to the week's discussion question by Friday, 11:55 p.m., then respond substantively (at least 100 words each) to at least two classmates' posts by Sunday, 11:55 p.m. Posts are graded full-credit/no-credit against the rubrics on Canvas. Our discussions follow two norms: engage with others' views in good faith, and support your claims with evidence from the readings or credible reporting — in a course about a union “united in diversity,” learning to argue productively across disagreement is part of the syllabus.

Current Events Paper (100 points — once during the course)

Once during the course, in a week you select via the sign-up sheet (slots are limited and first-come, first-served), you will submit a short paper (500–700 words) identifying the three most significant EU-related news stories of the previous week, presented in order of significance with a clear justification of your ranking criteria. Recommended sources include *Politico Europe*, *Euractiv*, the *Financial Times*, and *The Economist*; the full list is on Canvas. Due Sunday, 11:55 p.m. of your chosen week.

Capstone Paper (180 points, in three components)

The capstone paper (2,400–2,500 words, roughly 8–10 double-spaced pages) asks you to reflect comparatively across the course, drawing on at least five readings listed as required or optional in the syllabus, cited in APA style. It has three components: (1) an outline, due at the end of Week 7 (20 points); (2) a mandatory one-on-one meeting with me during Week 10 to discuss your outline (pass/fail — missing it results in a zero on the paper); and (3) the paper itself, due at the end of Week 16 (160 points).

Attendance (10 points)

Grading

Grade	Points	Grade	Points
A+	490–500	C+	385–399
A	465–489	C	365–384
A-	450–464	C-	350–364
B+	435–449	D+	335–349
B	415–434	D	315–334
B-	400–414	D-	300–314
		F	299 and below

Course Policies

Late Work

If you cannot meet a deadline, contact me before the due date to make arrangements. Otherwise, late work receives a reduction of one-third of a letter grade per day. If you are dealing with an emergency, reach out as early as you can — we will find a solution.

Academic Integrity

All work must be your own and completed in accordance with the University of Illinois Student Code (Article 1, Part 4). You may discuss the material with classmates, but everything you submit must be your own writing. Violations — including plagiarism and unauthorized use of AI tools to generate submitted work — result in penalties up to loss of all credit and referral to the college.

Accommodations

To obtain disability-related academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids, please contact both the instructor and Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible: 1207 S. Oak Street, Champaign, (217) 333-1970, or disability@illinois.edu.

An Inclusive Learning Environment

Students in this course come from many backgrounds — including, often, personal or family histories that intersect with the European politics we study. That diversity of perspective is an asset. I am committed to a virtual classroom where every student is treated with respect and where disagreement is engaged through argument and evidence, never dismissal. If anything in the course inhibits your ability to learn fully, please contact me.

Course Schedule and Readings

All readings are provided on Canvas. *The schedule is subject to minor revision; changes will be announced on Canvas and by email.*

Module 1: History and Theories of European Integration

How did six war-torn states become a union of twenty-seven? We trace integration from the Schuman Declaration through every major treaty and enlargement and study theories of European integration.

Week 1: What is the European Union? Historical Development

- Schuman, Robert. 1950. "The Schuman Declaration" (May 9). Primary document.
- Kenealy, Daniel, John Peterson, and Richard Corbett, eds. *The European Union: How Does It Work?* 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018 (Ch. 2).
- The Treaties of the European Union (official consolidated versions, EUR-Lex).

Week 2: Theories of European Integration

- Haas, Ernst B. 2004 [1958]. *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economic Forces, 1950–1957* (Introduction). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Moravcsik, Andrew. 1993. "Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31(4): 473–524. (Focus on the framework, pp. 473–498.)
- Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks. 2009. "A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus." *British Journal of Political Science* 39(1): 1–23.

Week 3: Enlargement and Brexit

- Schimmelfennig, Frank, and Ulrich Sedelmeier. 2002. "Theorizing EU Enlargement: Research Focus, Hypotheses, and the State of Research." *Journal of European Public Policy* 9(4): 500–528.
- Hobolt, Sara B. 2016. "The Brexit Vote: A Divided Nation, a Divided Continent." *Journal of European Public Policy* 23(9): 1259–1277.
- Tilley, J. and Hobolt, S.B., 2023. Brexit as an identity: Political identities and policy norms. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 56(4), pp.546–552.

Module 2: The Institutions of the European Union

Who governs the EU? We examine the Commission, the European Council, the Council of the EU, the European Parliament, and the Court of Justice. We ask how these institutions represent different interests and share executive, legislative, and judicial authority.

Week 4: The Commission, European Council, and Council of the EU

- European Union. Official institutional profiles: "European Commission," "European Council," and "Council of the European Union."

- Tömmel, Ingeborg. 2014. *The European Union: What It Is and How It Works*, Ch. 4 (“The Core Institutional Structure”). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Week 5: The European Parliament and Legislative Representation

- European Union. “Institutions and Bodies” (official profiles of the European Council, Council of the EU, Commission, Parliament, and Court of Justice)
- Hix, Simon, and Bjørn Høyland. 2011. *The Political System of the European Union*, 3rd ed. (chapters on executive and legislative politics). London: Palgrave.

Module 3: Decision-Making and Elections in the EU

How does a proposal become EU law, and who holds the veto points? We follow the ordinary legislative procedure, then turn to European Parliament elections — long dismissed as “second-order” contests — and what the 2024 elections, with their record far-right gains, tell us about the politicization of Europe.

Week 6: How a proposal becomes EU law

- Tömmel, Ingeborg. 2014. *The European Union: What It Is and How It Works*, Ch. 5-6. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- EUR-Lex: the official database of EU legislative acts (browse one file of your choice)

Week 7: European Parliament elections

- Braun, D. and Schäfer, C., 2022. Issues that mobilize Europe. The role of key policy issues for voter turnout in the 2019 European Parliament election. *European union politics*, 23(1), pp.120-140.
- Reif, Karlheinz, and Hermann Schmitt. 1980. “Nine Second-Order National Elections: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results.” *European Journal of Political Research* 8(1): 3–44. (Focus on the framework.)
- European Parliament. 2024. “2024 European Election Results” (official results portal; analysis packet on Canvas).

Module 4: Democracy, Legitimacy, and the Rule-of-Law Crisis

Is the EU democratic enough? We stage the classic “democratic deficit” debate — then confront its newest and sharpest form: what happens when a member state itself stops being a democracy, and why has the EU struggled to respond?

Week 8: The democratic deficit debate

- Føllesdal, Andreas, and Simon Hix. 2006. “Why There Is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44(3): 533–562.
- Moravcsik, Andrew. 2002. “In Defence of the ‘Democratic Deficit’: Reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40(4): 603–624.

Week 9: Euroscepticism and Democratic Backsliding

- Kelemen, R. Daniel. 2020. “The European Union’s Authoritarian Equilibrium.” *Journal of European Public Policy* 27(3): 481–499.

- De Vries, Catherine E. 2018. *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration* (Ch. 1). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- European Commission: Rule of Law Report (latest edition, country chapters of your choice).

Module 5: Economic Governance

What does it take to build a common market and share a currency? We distinguish the single market from monetary union, examine who benefits from economic integration, and explore disputes over regulation, austerity, and financial solidarity.

Week 10: Single Market

- “The Single Market and the Euro,” curated explainer packet (European Commission and ECB materials on Canvas).
- McCormick, John. 2020. *Understanding the European Union: A Concise Introduction*, 8th ed., Ch. 7 (“Economic Policy”). London: Red Globe Press.

Week 11: Eurozone Crisis

- Jones, Erik, R. Daniel Kelemen, and Sophie Meunier. 2016. “Failing Forward? The Euro Crisis and the Incomplete Nature of European Integration.” *Comparative Political Studies* 49(7): 1010–1034.
- Matthijs, Matthias, and Mark Blyth, eds. 2015. *The Future of the Euro* (Introduction). New York: Oxford University Press.

Module 6: Migration and Borders

Free movement inside, contested borders outside. We examine Schengen, the Common European Asylum System, the 2015–16 refugee crisis, and the 2024 New Pact on Migration and Asylum — and ask how immigration has reshaped party politics and the meaning of European identity.

Week 12: Schengen and the asylum system

- Lavenex, Sandra. 2018. “‘Failing Forward’ Towards Which Europe? Organized Hypocrisy in the Common European Asylum System.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 56(5): 1195–1212.
- Niemann, A. and Zaun, N., 2023. Introduction: EU external migration policy and EU migration governance: introduction. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49(12), pp.2965–2985.
- European Commission. 2024. “The New Pact on Migration and Asylum” (official explainer and fact sheets).

Week 13: Immigration Politics

- Dennison, James, and Andrew Geddes. 2019. “A Rising Tide? The Salience of Immigration and the Rise of Anti-Immigration Political Parties in Western Europe.” *Political Quarterly* 90(1): 107–116.
- Geddes, Andrew, and Peter Scholten. 2016. *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe*, 2nd ed. (chapter on the European Union). London: Sage.

Week 14: Thanksgiving Break *No class meetings*

Module 7: EU as a Global Actor

When can the EU act collectively beyond its borders? We compare its influence through diplomacy, and security policy, then examine how Russia's war against Ukraine has shaped European cooperation. We return to the course's central question: when do shared challenges produce greater integration, and when do they expose its limits?

Week 15: EU Foreign and Defense Policy

- Fiott, Daniel, 2023. In every crisis an opportunity? European Union integration in defence and the War on Ukraine. *Journal of European integration*, 45(3), pp.447-462.
- European External Action Service: "The Common Security and Defense Policy" (official overview).
- Genschel, Philipp. 2022. "Bellicist Integration? The War in Ukraine, the European Union and Core State Powers." *Journal of European Public Policy* 29(12).

Week 16: Final Week