The European Union’s External Action and Foreign Policy

Code 574412 · Academic year 2026-2027 · Master’s Degree in Diplomacy and International Organizations

Course details

Type	Elective
Format	In-person
Period	First term
Schedule	Mondays from 11:45 AM to 1:45 PM, exceptional sessions on other times
Language(s)	English
ECTS credits	3.0

Coordination

Dr. Diego Badell
Profesor de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona e investigador asociado

Teachers

Dr. Diego Badell
Profesor de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona e investigador asociado

Guest lecturers

Dr. Adrià Rivera, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
Dr. Claudia Rives, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals
Dr. Oscar Fernández, Maastricht University

Course objectives

The European Union's external relations are one of the raisons d'être of the European integration process. Their evolution over the years has given rise to a complex system of external action, involving multiple actors and endowed with a myriad of instruments for its strategic planning and implementation. Against this backdrop, this course aims to familiarize students with the most advanced theoretical and political debates on the EU's behaviour in the international arena; to examine the EU's external action in its various dimensions (political, economic and security-related); to build theoretical knowledge through the analysis of readings and documents on fundamental aspects of that action; and to assess the instruments of external action through case studies, with special emphasis on their versatility, limits and effectiveness.

With these aims in mind, the course is structured in three main blocks. The first addresses the foundations of European foreign policy: its historical evolution and long-lasting cleavages, its institutional architecture and decision-making processes, the debates on the nature of the EU's power in the international system, and the development of its foreign policy strategies. The second block examines contemporary challenges and key relationships shaping the EU's external action, including the rise of authoritarian populism, the transatlantic relationship, security and defence, and the EU's engagement with China, global health governance and democracy promotion. The third block puts this knowledge into practice through a simulation of the Foreign Affairs Council, in which students negotiate, amend and adopt draft Council Conclusions acting as representatives of EU member states.

Degree learning outcomes

K04 Describe the political analysis tools used in the study of international relations.

K05 Distinguish the instruments and norms intended to maintain international peace and security.

K07 Identify the key actors in international relations.

K10 Explain the role of international organizations in conflict resolution.

K14 Detail the decision-making processes of different international organizations.

K15 Identify the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization.

K16 Mention the most important diplomatic events in history.

K18 Identify the organizational structure of the different institutions of the United Nations system.

H01 Express yourself orally and in writing effectively in Spanish and English, with command of specialized languages in the field of international relations and international law.

H02 Write rigorous documents in the field of international relations and international law.

H0 Analyze the interests of the actors involved in each international context, including all their political, economic, and legal elements.

H04 Use information sources critically and responsibly in diplomacy and international organizations.

K – Knowledge or content

H – Skills or abilities

C - Competences

Module learning outcomes

K18 Identify the main institutional actors and their interinstitutional dynamics in EU decision-making.

K19 List the political deliberation processes of the European Union.

K20 Classify the instruments of the European Union's foreign policy and their application.

K21 Detail the EU's relations with international organizations and other global actors.

H15 Draft position papers on EU policies.

H16 Effectively interpret the processes and common language within the framework of EU institutions.

H17 Use political analysis tools to interpret EU dynamics.

H18 Evaluate the impact of EU decisions on the external relations of Member States.

K – Knowledge or content

H – Skills or abilities

C - Competences

Course schedule

Topic 1: European foreign policy: A contradiction in terms? Long-lasting cleavages and informal cooperation.

Monday, September 28, 2026 · Dr. Diego Badell

European foreign policy at the crossroads of International Relations, European Integration and Foreign Policy: a three-level analysis. European integration and high politics, a contradiction in terms? Cleavages: intergovernmentalism vs. supranationalism (institutional approach), Atlanticism vs. Europeanism (strategic dimension); civilian power vs. military power (identity dimension). Diplomacy and security in the European integration agenda: the emergence of European Political Cooperation (EPC). Language: English

Readings:

- Hill, C., Smith, M and Vanhoonacker, S. 2023. “The European Union in World Politics. An Historical Overview”, in Hill, C., Smith, M and Vanhoonacker, S., International Relations and the European Union, Oxford U.P. (4th edition), pp. 22-44.

Recommended readings:

- Keukeleire, S. and Delreux, T. 2022. “European Integration and Foreign Policy: A Historical Overview”, in Keukeleire, S. and Delreux, T, The Foreign Policy of the European Union, Bloomsbury Academic (3rd edition), pp. 35-60.

Topic 2: Institutions and decision making

Monday, October 5, 2026 · Dr. Diego Badell

The EU's main institutions and their role in EFP. From pre-Lisbon institutional architecture (CFSP/ESDP) to the processes and decision making of EU external action. The role of the HR/VP, the Council and the Commission. Unanimity and its shortfalls. Flexible decision making mechanisms and differentiated integration. Language: English

Readings:

- Morillas, P. 2019. An Ever More Intergovernmental EU? From Foreign and Security Policy to External Action. In: Strategy-Making in the EU. The European Union in International Affairs. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Recommended readings:

- Vanhoonacker, S. 2011. The Institutional Framework. In C. Hill & M. E. Smith (Eds.), International Relations and the European Union (pp. 75–100). Oxford: Oxford University.

Topic 3: The EU as a power

Friday, October 16, 2026 · Dr. Diego Badell

How does the EU wield its power? From being a normative power to evolving into an actor that "speaks the language of power," the European Union has undergone significant transformations. The EU's geopolitical Commission has positioned it as a leader in green and digital power. This shift is reflected in its tools, instruments, and relationships with major global players like the US, China, and Russia. Additionally, the EU faces challenges in the current crisis of the international liberal order, raising questions about its role in multilateralism and its broader influence on the international stage. Language: English

Readings:

- Hyde-Price, A. 2006. ‘Normative’ power Europe: A realist critique. Journal of European Public Policy, 13(2): 217–234.
- Manners, I. 2002. Normative Power Europe: A contradiction in terms. Journal of Common Market Studies, 40(2): 235–258.
- Bradford, Anu 2020. The Brussels Effect: How the European Union Rules the World. Oxford University Press.

Recommended readings:

- Diez, Thomas. 2022. Power transition as a challenge to normative power Europe, in T. B. Knudsen and C. Navari (eds.), Power Transition in the Anarchical Society, Palgrave Studies in International Relations.

Topic 4: The EU's foreign policy strategies

Monday, October 19, 2026 · Dr. Diego Badell

From the European Security Strategy (2003) to the EU Global Strategy (2016): contents, context and evolution of the EU as a foreign policy actor. Changing international environment and strategic cultures of the EU and its member states. Internal crisis and EU strategies. Decision making mechanisms as an example of the evolving nature of the EU foreign policy and

external action system. Does the EU need a new external action strategy(ies) after Ukraine and the pandemic? Language: English

Readings:

- Barbé, E., and Morillas, P. 2019. The EU global strategy: the dynamics of a more politicized and politically integrated foreign policy, Cambridge Review of International Affairs, DOI: 10.1080/09557571.2019.1588227. Open Access.

Recommended readings:

- Juncos, A. E. 2016. Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn? European Security.
- Tocci, N. 2017. Framing the EU global strategy. A stronger Europe in a fragile World (Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan).

Topic 5: The EU and authoritarian populism

Monday, October 26, 2026 · Dr. Diego Badell

According to the EU treaties, the Union's foreign policy is meant to be grounded in core principles such as the promotion of the rule of law, equality, and respect for diversity. However, the rise of authoritarian populism poses an increasing threat to democratic values and institutions. This political current is marked by a polarizing strategy that divides society into a binary of “us” versus “them”. In this session, we will examine to what extent authoritarian populist actors have promoted an illiberal form of Europeanization, particularly in policy areas such as migration and gender equality. Language: English

Readings:

- de Silva, M. 2025. Language-bargaining in the Council of the European Union: meaning negotiations and the concept of gender equality, Journal of European Public Policy,

Recommended readings:

- Michalski, A and Danielson, A. 2021. Overcoming Dissent: Socialization in the EU's Political and Security Committee in a Context of Crises, Journal of Common Market Studies

Topic 6: The EU and the transatlantic relation

Monday, November 2, 2026 , 09:30-11:45 · Dr. Diego Badell

The transatlantic relationship is structured around three interlocking dimensions. First, it explores the normative foundations of the partnership through the New Transatlantic Agenda, which frames EU–US relations as a community of shared values grounded in democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Second, it analyses NATO as a security community, addressing how collective defence and a shared identity among its members have shaped European security architecture and EU–NATO cooperation. Third, it turns to the economic pillar, assessing trade and investment ties as the material backbone of transatlantic interdependence. Language: English

Readings:

- Badell, D. (2026). Estados Unidos y las relaciones transatlanticas. En Barbé, E & Soler, Ed (Eds), Las Relaciones Internacionales de la UE, Tecnos.

Recommended readings:

- Morgenstern-Pomorski, J., Guay, T., & Smith, M. (2024). The European Union and the United States: Competition, convergence and crisis in the global arena (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.

Topic 7: The EU and security.

Monday, November 9, 2026 · Dr. Diego Badell

The European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is a key framework for addressing security challenges and promoting stability. Established under the Treaty of Lisbon, it enables the EU to undertake crisis management, peacekeeping, and humanitarian missions. Key initiatives include Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) for enhanced defense collaboration and the European Defence Fund (EDF) for research and innovation. Recent developments, like the 2022 Strategic Compass, aim to strengthen EU strategic autonomy amid evolving threats, including hybrid warfare and geopolitical tensions. Language: English

Readings:

- Haroche, P. (2020). Supranationalism strikes back: a neofunctionalist account of the European Defence Fund. Journal of European Public Policy, 27(6), 853–872.

Recommended readings:

- Hakansson, c. (2023). The New Role of the European Commission in the EU's Security and Defence Architecture: entrepreneurship, crisis and integration Malmo University Press

Topic 8: The EU's foreign policy towards China

Monday, November 16, 2026 · Dr. Claudia Rives

The EU-China relationship is framed by the European Commission's 2019 strategy paper, EU-China –A Strategic Outlook, which defines China as a cooperation partner, economic competitor, and systemic rival. Language: English

Readings:

- Rives Casanova, C., & Andrione-Moylan, A. (2025). Geopolitics through the back door? EU perceptions of Chinese strategic narratives. European Politics and Society, 1–13.

Recommended readings:

- Cottey, A. (2021). The European Union and China: Partnership in changing times. En L. Ferreira-Pereira et al. (Eds.), The European Union's strategic partnerships (pp. 221–244). Palgrave Macmillan.

Topic 9: The EU and global health

Monday, November 23, 2026 · Dr. Oscar Fernández

The European Union plays a significant role in global health, balancing regional health policies with international cooperation. The EU's health policy primarily supports member states through coordination, funding, and regulation, as health is a national competence under EU treaties. Globally, the EU contributes through development aid, strategic documents like the Global Health Strategy (2022), and support for organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO). Language: English

Readings:

- Bergner (2023). The role of the European Union in global health: The EU's self-perception(s) within the COVID-19 pandemic, Health Policy, 127, pp. 5-11

Recommended readings:

- Oscar Fernández. (2025). The European Union's Global Health Actorness: A Research Agenda for a New Age of Pandemics, JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 63(3), pp. 1008-1021.

Topic 10: The EU and democracy promotion

Monday, November 30, 2026 · Dr. Adrià Rivera

The European Union (EU) promotes democracy globally through its foreign policy, funding, and diplomacy. Key tools include the Enlargement and Neighborhood Policies that encourage democratic reforms in candidate and neighboring countries. The EU integrates democracy into trade agreements and development aid, emphasizing free elections, independent media, and rule of law. Language: English

Readings:

- Rafaella del Sarto (2016), Normative Empire Europe: The European Union, its Borderlands, and the 'Arab Spring', JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 54:2, 215-232.

Recommended readings:

- Helene Sjursen (2023), Rethinking liberal order: the EU and the quest for global justice, International Affairs, 99:6, 2203-2220.

Topic 11: The Foreign Affairs Council (WEEK 11 & 12) (Seminar)

Friday, December 11, 2026 , 09:30-11:45 · Dr. Diego Badell

This class takes the form of a simulation of Foreign Affairs Council negotiations. Acting as representatives of EU member states, students are expected to negotiate, amend, and ultimately approve or reject draft a Council Conclusions. Language: English

Readings:

- Dür, A., Mateo, G., & Thomas, D. C. (2010). Negotiation theory and the EU: the state of the art. Journal of European Public Policy, 17(5), 613–618.

Recommended readings:

- Elgström, O., & Jönsson, C. (2000). Negotiation in the European Union: bargaining or problem-solving? Journal of European Public Policy, 7(5), 684–704.

Topic 12: The Foreign Affairs Council (WEEK 11 & 12) (Seminar)

Friday, December 11, 2026 , 11:45-13:45 · Dr. Diego Badell

This class takes the form of a simulation of Foreign Affairs Council negotiations. Acting as representatives of EU member states, students are expected to negotiate, amend, and ultimately approve or reject draft a Council Conclusions. Language: English

Readings:

- Dür, A., Mateo, G., & Thomas, D. C. (2010). Negotiation theory and the EU: the state of the art. Journal of European Public Policy, 17(5), 613–618.

Recommended readings:

- Elgström, O., & Jönsson, C. (2000). Negotiation in the European Union: bargaining or problem-solving? Journal of European Public Policy, 7(5), 684–704.

Prior knowledge / requirements

RELATION TO OTHER MASTER'S COURSES

No enrollment restrictions. This course is part of the Master's module "The European Union as International Actor", together with "Institutions and Decision-making in the European Union. The European Civil Service".

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Those students from alternative undergraduate studies than those specified in the foundational re the Master's must have been enrolled in the following “Pre-Program Training Courses”:

- Introduction to International Law and International Organizations (1 ECTS).
- Introduction to International Relations and International Politics (1 ECTS).
- Introduction to Global Economy and Trade (1 ETCS).

Teaching methodology

This course is mainly structured through in-class activities organized around theoretical sessions and a seminar. The theoretical sessions are taught through the teacher's explanation of the thematical schedule above, offering as well methodological guidelines for the independent development of the contents by the students.

The seminar sessions will serve to deepen specific aspects of the topics covered through discussion and resolution of issues raised by the texts indicated in the program. Students must get prepared prior to each session following the precise instructions that will be provided to them.

Assessment system

This course offers two evaluation options: comprehensive evaluation or continuous evaluation. Students must select their preferred option within the deadlines set by CEI regulations by submitting a form available at the affiliated center's secretary's office. A minimum attendance of 80% of the sessions is mandatory for both evaluation types.

Under the continuous evaluation system, the final grade is composed of two equally weighted components: 50% from continuous assessment activities (such as class participation, reading exams and simulations) and 50% from a final exam. In order to pass the course, students must obtain a minimum grade of 5 out of 10 in both blocks. Additionally, attendance and active participation will be taken into account and may positively influence the final grade.

For a comprehensive evaluation, the final grade consists of a written exam (50%) and an oral exam (50%). The oral exam will take place after the written exam.

For justified absences from an assessed activity, the instructor may, at their discretion, offer an alternative assessment opportunity or exclude it from the final grade calculation. Unjustified absences for assessed activities will result in a grade of 0/10.

Class participation (%) 10

Reading exam (%) 20

Simulation (%) 20

Final exam (%) 50

Total % 100

Resit / re-assessment

In the case of continuous evaluation, the retake option applies only to the final exam. For comprehensive evaluation, both the written and oral exams may be retaken if the grade in either is below 5 out of 10.

If the grade obtained in the reassessment is lower than the grade from the regular assessment, the higher of the two will be retained.

Type of activity (%)

Continuous evalation, retake exam: oral exam

Comprehensive evaluation, retake: oral and written exam

Workload

Total hours	75
Lecture/practical hours	25
Supervised work hours	25
Independent work hours	25

Core bibliography

- Barbé Izuel, E. y Soler, E. (2026). Las relaciones internacionales de la Unión Europea. Tecnos
- J. BORRELL, European Foreign Policy in Times of Covid-19, Luxembourg: European Union External Action, 2021 [Especially Chapters 3 & 4].
- S. GSTÖHL & S. SCHUNZ, The External Action of the European Union. Concepts, Approaches, Theories, London: Red Globe Press, 2021.
- C. HILL, M. SMITH & S. VANHOONACKER, International Relations and the EU, 4th ed., 2023, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- K. E. JORGENSEN et al. (eds.) The SAGE Handbook of European Foreign Policy, London: SAGE, 2015.
- Keukeleire, S., & Delreux, T. (2022). The foreign policy of the European Union (3.ª ed.). Bloomsbury.