Institutional Reform of the European Union (NRW debattiert Europa)

Winter Semester 2026/27

Instructor:	Helena Heberer	**Time:**	Thu 14:00 – 15.30
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Office Hours: By appointment.

Course description: This seminar discusses current reform proposals and related research on institutional reforms in the European Union in a highly interactive manner. Students will join a team and participate in seminar debates, arguing for or against a particular reform proposal. Finally, after the pre-debates in the class, a group of students will be chosen to represent the course in the state-wide debating competition "NRW debattiert Europa" event and debate the future of the EU with other student teams from across NRW. While the seminar debates will be held in English, the final debates during the competition will be held in German and English. Students will complete the seminar by writing a term paper related to politics in the European Union.

Course objectives:

- Develop capacity to understand and critically reflect on the main debates related to the study of the EU's institutional framework
- Develop oral presentation and debate skills
- Develop skills to work in a team
- Learn how to write an academic paper

Course requirements: This is a highly interactive seminar. Students are expected to bring an open mind and be open to engage with state-of-the-art political science literature to inform their debate arguments and be ready to join a debating team. By participating in the class, you declare your willingness to participate in the final NRW debattiert Europa event either by being chosen as a debate participant or a team supporter/audience member. Students will be evaluated on the basis of the following components:

1. Group project (25%)
   Each student will be assigned to a team during the first meeting. Each team will consist of 3 members. The task will be to argue either for or against a pre-determined reform proposal. Your responsibility as a team is to prepare, in writing, three 7-minute speeches (approx. 1,000 words each) either for or against this proposal (depending on whether you are in the pro or contra group). The three speeches need to be cumulative and build upon each other. In other words, the first speech should make an opening argument, whereas the second should elaborate on some specific aspects or provide additional arguments, while the third one should make a convincing closing argument. Each team will debate with the opposing side in class in the following format: Speech 1 Pro, followed by speech 1 Contra, followed by speech 2 Pro, speech 2 Contra, speech 3 Pro, and speech 3 Contra. Each speech cannot last longer than seven minutes. Speakers 2 and 3 can (and should) also address any arguments made by the opposing side. Each group will furthermore receive credits for participating with questions/interruptions in the other debates. After each debate, the class will vote for a winning team.

2. Constructive feedback on speeches (10%)
   Each team will provide three specific suggestions on how to improve the speeches of the other teams in writing after the specific debate.

3. Participation in NRW debattiert (10%)
   Depending on course size, either all participants will debate in the NRW debattiert event in Duisburg, or the teams with the most points will represent the class. In this case, all *other* course participants will be assigned to one of the debate teams and help re-write the speeches. Everyone is expected to attend the NRW debate event itself. The teams will prepare by simulating the debate one week prior in class.

4. Final paper (55%)
   Each student will write a final paper (8-10 pages, 1.5 line spacing, limit excluding references/figures/tables), to be handed in on March 19. here are two options for the final paper:
   Option 1 - Research Design: The research design should outline an empirical study related to politics in the EU. The research design should describe your puzzle/research question, working hypotheses, state of the art, and the methods and data you would collect and use. For instance, you could conceive of a research design which aims a replication and extension of one of the studies in the reading list (published in a peer-reviewed journal).
   Option 2 - Empirical Paper: If you have a dataset that you would like to analyze, your paper could implement an empirical study related to politics in the EU using a quantitative research design with this existing dataset. An actual replication and extension of an existing study is a possible option.

4. Course Material:
Readings will be available as electronic articles through Ilias.

5. Course outline (SCHEDULE MAY BE UPDATED BEFORE START OF TERM):

Session 1 15.10.2026
Introduction
Allocation of students to debate teams
Readings:

- NRW debattiert Europa Competition Rules
- Final Report of the Conference of the Future of Europe, May 2022
- Tsebelis, George. 2012. From the European Convention to the Lisbon Agreement and Beyond: A Veto Player Analysis" In Finke, König, Proksch, and Tsebelis: Reforming the European Union: Realizing the Impossible, Princeton University Press.
- Devuyst, Youri. 2012. "The Constitutional and Lisbon Treaties" in Jones, Menon, and Weatherill (eds) The Oxford Handbook of the European Union.
- König, Thomas. 2018. "Still the century of intergovernmentalism? Partisan ideology, two-level bargains and technocratic governance in the post-Maastricht era." JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 56(6), 1240-1262.

Session 2 22.10.2026
Topic 1: Introduction
Readings: TBA

Session 3	29.10.2026 Topic 1: Debate Debate topic: Die Präsidentin oder der Präsident der Europäischen Kommission sollte künftig direkt von den Bürgerinnen und Bürgern der Europäischen Union gewählt werden. Team 1: Pro, Team 2: Con
	No sessions on 5, 12, and 19 November.
Session 4	26.11.2026 Topic 2: Introduction Readings: TBA
Session 5	03.12.2026 Topic 2: Debate Debate topic: Zukünftige EU-Mitgliedstaaten sollten grundsätzlich kein Vetorecht im Rat erhalten. Team 3: Pro, Team 4: Con
Session 6	10.12.2026 Topic 3: Introduction Readings: TBA
Session 7	17.12.2026 Topic 3: Debate Debate topic: Die Europäische Union sollte Asylverfahren künftig grundsätzlich in Drittstaaten durchführen. Team 5: Pro, Team 6: Con
	Christmas Break.
Session 8	07.01.2027 Practice Simulation 1
Session 9	14.01.2027 Practice Simulation 2
	January 21: NRW debattiert Europa event, Duisburg (11 - 17.30)
Session 10	28.01.2027 Debate debriefing and conclusion