

Course report: EU External Trade Relations Law and Policy, 15 ECT, Spring term 2022, B Period, JU348A and JU348B

Generally speaking this course was much appreciated by the cohort of Swedish and exchange students. They engaged in legal studies at advanced level and explored the interrelations between public international law, EU internal market law and the domestic legal systems in the Member States. Since the EU Member States have conferred much powers to negotiate and conclude international agreements to the EU institutions they develop a common ground for international relations. Within the scope of far reaching international trade and investment agreements the leeway for a country such as Sweden to determine its own policy on privatisation of for instance schools and public care is actually very limited, which is a fact that is often forgotten in political debates. For many students the course in an eye-opener and a source of inspiration to further specialisation. A good understanding of the Union rules and procedures is important for anyone who wants to try the wings and work with the “big questions” of our times be it as a diplomat or as an expert in law relating to for instance the environment, trade, transportation, energy or digitalisation. Most students were active during the seminars and the collaboration in the study groups worked overall very well. Almost all students succeeded to write a good essay and peer-review. Some students experienced a steep learning curve that was on occasion perceived to be too challenging. Most teaching and learning activities (“TLA:s”) were on campus, but because of the pandemic some of the TLA:s, such as individual feed-back on draft essays, were held via Zoom. We often get very positive response from the students and we experienced many rewarding discussions and spontaneous comments in favour of the course also during the spring 2022. However, the response from the 11 students that handed in a course evaluation form was more mixed than even before, albeit a majority of the respondents indicated at least a 4 in most replies. Although most students passed the written exam with a good result two questions were perceived to be off-target and the critique of the exam is reflected also in the course evaluation form. We will look into this and make sure that only knowledge in core areas of the course are examined.

It crystallises from course evaluations and spontaneous feedback from students that the strength of the course is that it provides a deep understanding of what the Union is and knowledge about how external actions and internal sources of EU law interrelate and take effect in the Member States. Furthermore, the study of EU law leads into questions about legal methodologies and legal philosophy which is much appreciated. Many students also appreciate the structure of the course, with most of the teaching and learning activities in the beginning, a written exam after six weeks, and four weeks devoted to the writing of an essay and a peer-review. However, some students perceive the first part as being intensive. Indeed, the topic is broad and much knowledge that is examined is obtained at lectures and seminars. A weakness of the course is that those who lag behind from the start and miss several teaching and learning activities have difficulties to catch up. It is not possible to pass the course by reading a book and write an exam. We will as mentioned attend to the critique regarding the written exam 2022 and calibrate the questions more.

In an overall assessment of the course 2022, the results show that the intended learning outcomes were met and that most students were satisfied. It is rewarding for us to see how students from different countries engage with this advanced topic, develop legal skills and work together towards excellence during the course. Indeed, those who put a shoulder to it often get a good result. We look forward to explore the EU legal framework in relation to the “big questions” 2023.

Welcome to join us 2023!