

Transcending traditional teaching: knowing the reality of the European Union at first hand through a course's practical activities

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1. Contextualization of the project

This project is conducted as part of the course on Legal Institutions of the European Union, a basic component of the undergraduate Law degree at the URV, which has an average of 175 enrolled students each academic year. The main aim of the project is to complement the course's theoretical knowledge with a series of practical activities to teach students at first hand how the European Institutions work and explain what tasks they perform. The practical work carried out on this project is divided into compulsory and complementary activities. The complementary activities are voluntary and open to the general public.

The lecturers for this subject are Dr Alfonso Gonzalez Bondia and Adrià Calvet Casajuana, both of whom are lecturers in International Public Law and International Relations in the Department of Public Law at the URV.

The optional, complementary activities, co-organized by the URV Faculty of Legal Sciences and the Europe Direct Office in Tarragona, are the result of the cooperation agreement signed in 2015 by the URV and Tarragona city council, the aim of which is for both institutions to disseminate the reality that is the European Union. Some activities have also received the collaboration of the European Parliament Information Office in Barcelona, the Tarragona office of the Catalan Association of Journalists, and the Museum Café restaurant in Tarragona.

2. Compulsory activities: meeting and putting oneself in the shoes of agents of the European construction process.

During the course, three compulsory practical activities are organized in which the students take on a certain role related to the activities professionals perform in the institutions of the European Union. Only two of these activities (the first one and the third one) are graded. However, although the second activity is not graded, it must be presented in order for the third activity to be graded.

2.1 The title of the first practical activity on this course is: “What do the members of the European Parliament do? Evaluating the activities of the members of the European Parliament elected by the Spanish electoral constituency in the last year”.

The aim of this research project, which is conducted in groups of three, is to introduce students to legal research. The result of the project is the preparation of a document similar to a scientific article.

To help the students carry out the project collaboratively, the application “Writing Space” is used. “Writing Space” is a Wiki tool that enables several people to work on the same document but not necessarily at the same time or in the same place. To help students get used to this tool, they are given instructions on how to use it as well as access to a tutorial on the URV’s Virtual Campus.

To be able to evaluate the students’ individual contributions and their ability to work in a team, they must use the distribution list available for that purpose. This space, called “Communication space for group members”, can be used by students to communicate with their team members as a complement to any face-to-face communication. It can also be used to inform the rest of the group about changes they have made to the project and to justify those changes. Each time students alter the project, therefore, they must send a message to the group. Also, after any meeting held to discuss project-related issues, one member of the group must use this space to upload a brief summary of that meeting (date, time, duration, topics discussed, summary of the agreements made).

The specifications for the project to be submitted are:

- Length: around 40,000 characters including spaces and footnotes, and excluding the bibliography and the appendix.
- The project must follow the formal structure suggested in the instructions. Variations on the different sections can be made if the project requires it (changing the content, adding or removing sections, or creating subsections, etc.).

- ✦ Transcriptions from other people's works or documents are accepted if their source is clearly cited or the text is copied between quotation marks and if it is used only to support the students' own explanations. Otherwise, it will be considered plagiarism and the students will receive a fail as their grade for this project.
- ✦ Bibliographic and documentary references must be cited following the rules of either of the most widely accepted citation systems (UNE 50-104-94 standard or APA style).

The formal structure is as follows:

- ✦ Heading (title, authors, academic institution, and date)
- ✦ Index
- ✦ Introduction (with a brief introduction to the parliament member referred to in the project)
- ✦ Chapter I. Analysis of the quality and quantity of their parliamentary activity.
- ✦ Chapter II. Analysis of their parliamentary activity based on the issues they considered interesting.
- ✦ Chapter III. Analysis of the consistency between their electoral programme and their parliamentary activity.
- ✦ Conclusions. Overall assessment of their parliamentary activity.
- ✦ Bibliography.
- ✦ Annexes (optional).

The project will be evaluated in accordance with a previously published rubric. This rubric will take into account the work students have uploaded to the writing and communication spaces and their performance during the face-to-face sessions held to present and correct the activity. Evaluation will therefore be based on:

- ✦ Writing skills.
- ✦ Interaction with other members of the group.
- ✦ Understanding of the problem raised.
- ✦ Solution to this problem.
- ✦ Reasoned personal reflections.
- ✦ Ability to summarize.
- ✦ Active participation in the case preparation and resolution sessions.

To develop the project we provide students with the electoral manifestoes of the members of the European Parliament, access to the European Parliament's web page with information about the activities of all the members of the European Parliament, and a link to a web page that compares the work of each member from various perspectives.

Finally, the twenty students with the highest grades on this activity are invited by the Catalan members of the European Parliament to travel to Brussels to attend talks on the activities of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Union Council.

2.2 For the second compulsory practical activity, students are required to prepare a legal report on a current issue related to the implementation or creation of European Union rules of law.

Although this is an individual activity, it is not evaluated as part of the student's final grade for this subject. However, it must be completed and students must attend the training and correction sessions for this activity in order to have their third activity evaluated. While not graded, this second activity will be corrected to help students plan their third activity.

Specifications for the legal report:

- ✦ Length: Approximately 2,500 words.
- ✦ Transcriptions from other people's works or documents are accepted if their source is clearly cited or the text is copied between quotation marks and if it is used only to support the students' own explanations. Otherwise, it will be considered plagiarism and the students will receive a fail as their grade for this project.
- ✦ Bibliographic and documentary references must be cited following the rules of either of the most widely accepted citation systems (UNE 50-104-94 standard or APA style).

The aims of this practical activity are to interpret the European Union regulations on a specific case, especially in relation to State legislation, and to identify and apply the jurisprudence of the CJEU (Court of Justice of the European Union) relevant to a specific case.

For example, the second practical activity set during academic year 2015-2016 involved producing a legal report on the compatibility between the Hydrological Plan of the Ebro (PHE) and the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Students assumed the role of a European Union Law specialist from a reputed law firm hired by the PDE (an Ebro defence campaign group) to write a report analysing two main issues: first, the possibility of any infringements of the WFD caused by the conditions of the PHE (indicating which WFD regulations have been breached and why); and second, design a legal strategy to ensure compliance with the WFD employing all the national and European legal instruments available.

To help with the legal report we provide students with access: to the Court of Justice of the European Union's research form; the glossary of the European Union;

Royal Decree 1/2016, of 8th January; a summary of the WFD; follow-up reports of the European Commission on the implementation of the WFD; recordings of the debates at the Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament held in response to numerous petitions against hydrological plans for several Spanish rivers, including one by the PDE against the PHE that took place on 22nd June 2015; and, the document issued on 16th April 2015 by the autonomous government of Catalonia on the PHE with reference to the Ebro Delta.

2.3 For the third compulsory practical activity, students must write a draft ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

The draft ruling should involve a fictitious case of a preliminary ruling pending before the CJEU. Assuming the role of the CJEU judge's legal secretary and following the structure for preliminary rulings, students must write a first draft ruling for the case in which they set out a justified solution to the problem presented to the CJEU by the domestic court.

The specifications for this project are the same as those for the second practical activity.

The project is evaluated in accordance with a previously published rubric, which will evaluate the following aspects:

- ✦ Writing skills.
- ✦ Understanding of the problem.
- ✦ Solution to the problem.
- ✦ Reasoned personal reflections.
- ✦ Ability to summarize.
- ✦ Active participation in the case preparation and resolution sessions.

The aims of this third practical activity are for students to: interpret the European Union's regulations applicable to a specific case, especially in relation to State legislation; identify and apply CJEU jurisprudence relevant to a specific case that the CJEU itself has to solve; and to use the CJEU models of ruling.

As an example, for academic year 2015/2016 we set the following hypothetical case:

Petition of a preliminary ruling presented by the Supreme Court (Spain) on 11th April 2016 (Issue C-13081968/16)

Language of the proceedings: Spanish

Court of Law: Supreme Court of Spain

Parties involved in the main proceeding

Plaintiffs: *Plataforma en Defensa de l'Ebre* (Ebro defence campaign group), DEPANA (league for the defence of natural heritage), and several local entities
Defendant: Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment of Spain
Preliminary matters

As outlined in article 267 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Court of Justice of the European Union is requested to pass sentence on the interpretation of Directive 2000/60/CE of the European Parliament and European Council, of October, 23rd, 2000, which establishes a Community framework for intervention in water policy (WFD), and relates it to Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and to Council Directive 74/409/EEC (succeeded by Directive 2009/147/EC) on the conservation of wild birds, with regard to the impugned regulations of Royal Decree 1/2016 on the ecological flow of the Ebro Delta contained in the Hydrological Plan of the Spanish section of the Ebro Hydrographic Demarcation, in relation to the need to maintain sufficient ecological flow (article 11.3 of the WFD) in order to maintain the long-term functioning of protected ecosystems and human activity associated with the primary sector in the Ebro Delta.

The support materials provided to the students to help them with this third activity are the same as those for the second activity, with the addition of a report (Álvarez Baquerizo, Cristina: “Jurisprudencia del Tribunal de Justicia de la Unión Europea en las Directivas de Aves Silvestres y de Hábitats”, Seo/BirdLife, december 2011) and a recent news item that illustrates the underlying problem (“La PDE, Depana, ayuntamientos, consejos, comarcales y Generalidad abren la lucha jurídica contra el Plan del Ebro” (“The PDE, Depana (league for the defence of natural heritage), town halls, provincial councils and the government of Catalonia commence their legal battle against the Ebro Plan”), *Aguaita.cat*, 10/03/2016).

3. Voluntary complementary activities: another way to approach the European reality through its experts and protagonists.

Other activities on the European Union are also carried out as part of the Legal Institutions of the European Union course. These are made available to students as complementary activities to earn add marks on the practical component of the course. One of the characteristics of all these activities is that they are open to the general public to attend and participate freely. These activities are grouped into three categories

3.1 Attendance at talks and round tables on European Union activities.

Students can raise their grades on the practical component of the course through their voluntary attendance at talks, conferences, colloquiums or round tables. The events in this category are chosen in function of the course objectives by the course leaders, either on their own initiative or in response to students' suggestions. After the event, students are asked to write their critical opinion about the discussion in less than 500 words.

Included in this category during academic year 2015/2016 was the presentation by Amadeu Altafaj, permanent representative of the Generalitat de Catalunya (autonomous government of Catalonia) at the European Union, entitled "Catalunya, a European present and future" given on 19th February 2016 in the assembly hall of the URV's Campus Catalunya. Sr Altafaj described the tasks conducted by the office of the Generalitat at the EU and introduced the agents and ecosystem of entities of the European Union as well as the media and interest groups that exist around the European Union. The conference also described the job opportunities available in this ecosystem and at the end of the event a lively debate was held among the attendees on several topics discussed in the presentation. In total, 77 students enrolled on the course took part in this activity.

3.2 Attendance at the #eurotertulies organized by the Europe Direct Tarragona information centre and the Faculty of Legal Sciences of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV).

The #eurotertulies are a cycle of debates held once a month during the academic year on matters related to the European Union. Each debate revolves around a certain topic on the political, social and economic reality of the European Union. The debate, which is open and informal but also rigorous, begins with an initial presentation by an expert on the subject, which is followed by a discussion with the audience, whose members can express their opinion freely and ask any questions they may have about the topic discussed. The aim of the tertúlia is to inform the public about the European Union in an informal atmosphere that encourages debate and opinion in a climate of knowledge, reasoning and understanding. The venue and time selected for this informal debates are the Museum Café restaurant in Tarragona's historic quarter and 8 o'clock in the evening. The debate is open to the general public but twenty places are reserved for students enrolled on the Legal Institutions of the European Union course.

As an example, the following three #eurotertulies were organized in 2015-2016:

- "The United Kingdom and the European Union: an odd couple", led by Dr Christopher Tulloch, a journalist and lecturer in international journalism

at the UPF (Universitat Pompeu Fabra), on 15th March 2016. Dr Tulloch discussed and answered questions about the difficult relationship that exists between the United Kingdom and the European Union. He also discussed the referendum held to decide whether the United Kingdom should remain in the European Union. In total, 21 students enrolled on the course took part in this activity.

- “International Law and Migration”, held on 20th April 2016 and led by Dr Santiago J. Castellà Surribas, URV lecturer in International Public Law. On this occasion, attendees discussed the refugee and migration crisis currently affecting the European Union from the international regulations perspective. In total, 21 students enrolled on the course took part in this activity.
- “Quo vadis EU?”, held on 5th December 2016 and led by Dr Alfonso Gonzalez Bondia, URV lecturer in European Union Law and by Marta Domènech from the Europe Direct Tarragona information centre. On this occasion, attendees discussed the current state of the European construction process and the challenges involved. In total, 25 students enrolled on the course took part in this activity.

3.3 Attendance and participation at the “European Parliament Week”, which included the third edition of European Parliament Simulation and attendance by Catalan members of the European Parliament.

The Europe Direct Tarragona information centre and the URV’s Faculty of Legal Sciences organize a European Parliament simulation to allow a hundred or so citizens to make their suggestions on topics that affect the competences of the European Union and to meet our European Parliament representatives.

This initiative takes over from the European Parliament Simulation first organized by the Universitat de Girona and the Europe Direct Girona information centre. During the 2015-2016 academic year, the third edition of the European Parliament Simulation was held at the URV’s Campus Catalunya on 4th April 2016.

For this activity, roughly eighty citizens from the Tarragona and Terres de l’Ebre regions (67 of whom were students enrolled on Legal Institutions of the European Union) were evenly divided into different sectorial committees and political groups to play the part of members of the European Parliament. The organisers of the event had previously chosen the topics that each parliamentary commission had to deal with and provided each participant with documentation (e.g. information on the European Parliament, individual dossiers for each parliamentary commission, and the manifestoes of each political group). The activities of this third European

Parliament Simulation were governed by the regulations specially drawn up for the occasion, which divided the activity into three parts: meetings of the Parliamentary Commission, which was responsible for a resolution proposal; meetings of the political groups, which would debate the positions their members would take on the resolution proposals; and a plenary session at which participants would discuss and vote on the resolution proposals.

First, the participants had to choose which parliamentary commission and which political group they would belong to. Each meeting of the parliamentary commissions and political groups were led by a moderator with the aid of a legal consultant, both of whom were part of the organisers' evaluation team. Also, a speaker was chosen from each parliamentary commission and a spokesperson was chosen from each political group.

For this third edition of the European Parliament Simulation, the topics chosen and the organisers of the parliamentary committees were:

Committee: Civil Liberties, Justice and Internal Affairs

Topic: The role of the European Union in the refugee crisis

Legal consultant: Beatriz Irene Felipe Pérez

Moderator: Santiago J. Castellà Surribas

Venue: Sala de Graus (building D1, ground floor)

Committee: Environment, Public Health and Food Security

Topic: The Hydrological Plan of the Ebro Basin

Legal consultant: Antoni Gifreu Font

Moderator: Susana Borrás Petinat

Venue: Sala de Juntes (building D1, first floor)

Committee: Constitutional Affairs

Topic: The role of the European Parliament in international free trade agreements.

Legal consultant: Daniel Iglesias Márquez

Moderator: Adrià Calvet Casajuana

Venue: Room 502 (lecture room building, 5th floor)

Committee: Women's rights and gender equality

Topic: Zero tolerance against gender violence

Legal consultant: Victor Merino Sancho

Moderator: Laura Román Martín

Venue: Seminar room 3 (building D1, 3rd floor)

The moderator of each parliamentary committee is responsible for directing the debate towards a resolution proposal on the topic concerned, while the legal consultant ensures that the content of the debate and proposal are in agreement with the competences of the European institutions. The purpose of this part of the activity is to debate the agreed topics in order to draw up a resolution proposal that should serve as the basis for the work conducted by the political groups and in the plenary session. The legal consultant and committee speaker are responsible for drafting the proposal in the form of a resolution that will later be presented to the political groups to debate and adopt a position. The speaker is also responsible for presenting and defending the resolution at the plenary session.

The political groups then had to meet:

European Christian Democrat Group
Legal consultant: Beatriz Irene Felipe Pérez
Moderator: Santiago J. Castellà Surribas
Venue: Sala de Graus (building D1, ground floor)

European Social Democrat Group
Legal consultant: Antoni Gifreu Font
Moderator: Susana Borrás Pentinat
Venue: Meeting Room (building D1, first floor)

European Left-Green Group
Legal consultant: Daniel Iglesias Márquez
Moderator: Adrià Calvet Casajuana
Venue: Room 502 (lecture room building, 5th floor)

European Liberal Group
Legal consultant: Victor Merino Sancho
Moderator: Laura Román Martín
Venue: Seminar Room 3 (building D1, 3rd floor)

The moderators of the political groups were responsible for leading the group debates towards an agreement on their positions on the four resolutions earlier presented by each parliamentary committee. The legal consultant was responsible for ensuring that the contents of the debate and group positions were in agreement with the competences of the European institutions. Finally, the spokesperson for each political group was responsible for defending the position of his or her group at the plenary session.

The Plenary Session was the final stage of the European Parliament simulation. The session was led by the Plenary Board of the European Parliament, whose members were:

President: Maria Teresa Calvo (director of the Information Office of the European Parliament in Barcelona)

Main legal consultant: Santiago J. Castellà (URV lecturer)

Secretary: Adrià Calvet (URV lecturer)

Secretary's assistant: Natalia Hermoso (fourth-year student of the Degree in Law at the URV).

The president was responsible for leading and directing the plenary session. The legal consultant provided the president with support on any legal questions that arose. The secretary drafted the minutes of the plenary session, including the final agreements reached. The secretary's assistant counted the result of the voting. The Board also ensured that the contents of the debate, the contents of the final agreement proposals, and the voting conformed to current legislation.

During the plenary session the four speakers presented the four resolution proposals drafted by the parliamentary committees within the allotted time established by the regulations. The spokesperson for each political group then outlined their group's political position and proposed their amendments to the resolution proposals.

The president of the plenary session was responsible for directing the session, which comprised the proposed amendments to the resolution proposals of the parliamentary committees, the debates between the spokespersons of the political groups and any members of parliament who requested to speak, and the corresponding voting. The voting was conducted by show of hands once the debate on each resolution proposal had finished. A simple majority was needed to pass the agreements adopted during the plenary session.

The plenary session was open to the general public, so anyone who wanted to could attend even though they had not taken part in the meetings of the parliamentary committees and political groups. The plenary session was also open to the media.

The document with the resolutions that were finally approved at the plenary session of the third edition of the European Parliament Simulation was delivered to the Information Office of the European Parliament in Barcelona and the Catalan members of the European Parliament who took part in another event organized during the same week at the Faculty of Legal Sciences.

The European Parliament Week at the URV ended with an event involving members of the European Parliament, who for just over an hour answered questions posed by members of the audience. This activity was organized by the Information Office of the European Parliament in Barcelona with the collaboration of the URV's

Faculty of Legal Sciences, Europe Direct Tarragona and the Tarragona office of the Catalan Association of Journalists. In total, 77 students enrolled on the Legal Institutions of the European Union course took part in this activity.

The event took place on Friday April 8th 2016 at 12 pm in the Aula Magna in Campus Catalunya. In attendance were the following members of the European Parliament: Francesc Gambús (European People's Party), Ramon Tremosa (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe), and Ernest Maragall (Greens/EFA). The event was chaired by Xavier Graset, presenter of "Més 3/24", a programme aired on Televisió de Catalunya.

The students were given the opportunity to draft their questions for the members of the European Parliament prior to the event. These were handed to the moderator at the start of the activity to be interspersed with questions from the audience.

4. Main conclusions

The project accomplished most of the initial objectives:

- ✦ It enabled students enrolled on the course to work in simulations of situations encountered in the course topics.
- ✦ Classroom activities were combined with out-of-classroom activities. These even included a visit to the European institutions in Brussels.
- ✦ Activities were organized with experts in the field, bureaucrats from European and government institutions, and members of the European Parliament. These activities helped to widen the range of opinions on the topics under discussion.
- ✦ Institutions and entities from outside the URV helped to organise the activities, enriching them with their experience.
- ✦ Many activities, i.e. the complementary ones, were open to the general public. This enabled our students to interact with people from various social spheres and associations in Tarragona and Terres de l'Ebre.

Testimonial

The aims of Europe Direct Tarragona are to make information on the European Union available to every citizen and to encourage every citizen to become active, informed and European in their outlook. We therefore greatly appreciate the opportunity to collaborate on all activities that help to create a space for European debate in the city of Tarragona and its area of influence. We hope to continue collaborating with the URV on research and training, as well as providing assessment, consulting services and technical assistance on all matters pertaining to the law and policies of the European Union that directly affect its citizens.



