European Digital Sovereignty

Block 3, 2023-2024

16th February, 2024

Table of contents

References   9

List of Tables

1   Course details

> Course information
>
> - Course title: **European Digital Sovereignty**
> - Course code: **6024195FER**
> - Course session: **Block 3, 2023-2024**
> - Course convenor: **Jamal Shahin**
> - Caliweb link
> - Canvas link
>
> Contact details for Jamal Shahin
> - Location: Pleinlaan 5
> - Office hours: immediately after class and by appointment
> - Phone: 0032474 48 09 74 (SMS/WhatsApp only)
> - Email: jamal.shahin@vub.be
> - WWW: https://researchportal.vub.be/en/persons/jamal-shahin
>
> Read and re-read this syllabus very carefully.
>
> Please use Canvas' messaging system for queries about the course; resend unanswered messages after four days.
>
> **Many questions can be more efficiently dealt with in person (or by re-reading this course manual or the student handbook!).**

1.1   Content and educational objectives

1.1.1   Content

'The Digital' has become a central aspect of our societies and economies. This course examines the impact of this phenomenon on the construction of Europe, speirifically in terms of 'European Digital Sovereignty'. It will enable students to ask questions about fundamental aspects of EU policymaking and institution building, by looking at digital policies as a lens through which we address the shaping of Europe, both inside and outside its borders. The course critically reflects on this digital turn, through analysis of core digital policies that have emerged over time. This policy analysis will be supported by an exploration of how to deal with this transformation from both a theoretical and methodological perspective, relying on a solid basis of insititutionalist approaches. The course reflects on the turn to a 'geopolitical' European Commission in the field of digital governance. We shall cut across economic, security and 'value-based' issues. The course starts with an historical analysis of the European approach to policymaking in the digital sphere, and continues by looking at prospects for future governance of network, communications, and digital technologies.

1.1.2 Educational objectives

At the end of this course, we hope that you will have interdisciplinary knowledge and understanding of:

- selected state of the art theory, concepts, research and scientific debates on the European Union and its digital policies, specifically with the transition to digital sovereignhood in mind.
- the international aspects of EU digital policymaking
- the competence of the EU in this field, nd how this is distributed across the different EU institutions

2 Method of instruction

We shall meet in plenary session at the allotted times mentioned in the schedule summary. Additional meetings may be organised: you will be asked to participate on a 'best-effort' principle.

Sessions last for approximately three hours, and will generally consist of a one-hour lecture, one hour of group work, and one hour of Q&A and discussion. **Please bring a device (tablet, laptop) that is connected to the Internet** to our meetings in order to participate fully in the lectures. Each lecture will provide a context to the given policy document, and will discuss the policy document in detail. During the sessions, we also discuss the required reading(s).

We are all expected to participate actively in the classroom, both before and during the sessions. We shall make use of a diversity of methods to encourage participation (jigsaws, reflections on news items, flipping the classroom, *et cetera*).

3 Expectations

3.1 Basic knowledge anbd motivation

We expect you to have a basic knowledge of European integration and the institutions of the European Union. Students have a clear and strong interest in the academic and policy debates on the European Union, and specifically in the field of digital policy. If you feel uncomfortable with the workings of the European Union's institutions, you can consult the books mentioned in the EuroMaster Student Handbook or in the core courses of this programme.

3.2 Time

As oone of your specialisation courses, the course requires you allocate 50% of your study time to this course. This includes preparation for and participation in the meetings and completing the assignments. The amount of effort may vary from week to week, but we try to ensure that the workload is spread throughout the course.

3.3 Participation

Session preparation, attendance and participation are vitally important. Your degree of preparation and participation is noted. Absence, or failing to prepare the material requested will influence your grade negatively. Contact time will focus on engaging in discussion and development of your own ideas. Given the nature of the course, *participation is required in all the meetings mentioned in the course schedule*.

3.4 Reading

A link to the required literature for each session is provided in the respective module in Canvas.

You must have a good working knowledge of EUR-lex, the European Union's legislative portal, and the equivalent database in the European Parliament, the EP legislative train. You must also look for alternative literature, and should keep an eye on news sources in the specific EU digital policy space, for example Euractiv's Tech Newsletter. For a comprehensive list of databases available at the university, check here. As a matter of courtesy to your peers and the course convenor, please upload any additional material you find to the specific folder in our EuroMaster zotero group.

In addition to the required readings and the preparatory tasks for each session, you should read a pertinent selection of literature from the reference list. You should choose texts that are relevant to your research objectives.

3.5 Assignments

The assignments checklist provides a summary of the work to be submitted during the course. It goes without saying that you should be thinking about *all your assignments* from the start of the course.

4 Course evaluation

Students are requested by email to anonymously evaluate their courses when the University sends out requests for evaluation forms. Please do complete the course evaluation, as the EuroMaster Board uses the results to improve the education in your programme. You can fill in the form at the VUB's student evaluation portal.

Your feedback is crucial, and helps us build better courses. Be critical during your course evaluation, but also be to the point, polite, and constructive. Finally, ask yourself: could I use this feedback myself?

However, you should not feel as though you have to wait until the end of the course in order to voice any issues that you may have. The course convenor invites you to engage either prior or immediately after our sessions, or via canvas messaging to discuss any concerns.

5 Assessment

5.1 Results and feedback

As all assignments will be graded on Canvas, you will be able to see the grading and comments on the asssignments there. You have the right to receive timely feedback on your submissions, which is provided to you as soon as possible, and at least five working days before the resit. Should you require further feedback, please do not hesitate to reach out to the course convenor.

An average of 10 is the minimum grade you need to pass the course. Lower grades on one deliverable may be compensated by higher grades on others.

5.2 Resits and incomplete course submissions

Deliverable results lapse after the end of the semester in which the final mark was awarded. If you do not complete a course in one semester, you will have to retake the course at a later opportunity, thereby incurring additional fees.

The course convenor cannot offer a new exam to students who miss an exam due to illness or other impediment. Resits are designed to provide for such circumstances. Resits are therefore not intended to always allow students two opportunities to sit an exam.

Resits are only available for individual submissions. In case of a resit, the last grade counts as the final grade. The individual paper resit will be a rewritten version of the paper, deadline to be determined by the course convenor. **Individual papers that are submitted late count as resits.**

5.3   Writing conventions and fraud

You are expected to inform yourself of standard academic procedures for citing and referencing: coherence and consistency is most important. Please feel free to use your preferred referencing standard (MLA, APA, Chicago, Harvard, etc.). Work will be downgraded for language, spelling, and grammatical errors when and where this obfuscates meaning or understanding. Please double check before submitting. You are expected to be familiar with the University's code of conduct and rules on plagiarism, which are explained in the EuroMaster Student Handbook. **For more information on understanding what constitutes plagiarism, see the relevant section of the VUB's** Teaching and Examination Regulations.

6   Work to be submitted during the course

To pass the course, you are expected to submit several pieces of work. It is important to note the following requirements for essays and other papers (D1, D2, D3):

- PDF format, A4, fully justified paragraphs, with single line spacing and page numbers clearly identified. Your documents should also be proofread. The following information should be clearly marked on the front page of the submission:
  - student number
  - course title and academic year
  - assignment name
  - date of actual submission (regardless of the deadline)

- All assignments are submitted via Canvas: **documents submitted through email will be deleted.**

- These requirements do not apply to other deliverables for the course.

6.1   High-level lecture summary (D1)

You are required to submit a short document summarising one of the high-level lectures that you will attend. These will be published as 'policy briefs' on the Brussels School of Governance website, and are supposed to provide your insights on the speaker's assertions, as well as fact-checking and critical reflections on what has been discussed during the event.

In your lecture summary, you should:

1. outline the issues at stake, showing an awareness of the political (and technical) challenges
2. map out the different interests, and explain which actors are active in the area
3. explain the different policy options available to the EU institutions, based on the lecture and other primary sources (including policy documents, speeches, and 'grey' literature)
4. make reflections on the specific policy solutions proposed by the speakers.

> **!** Assessment criteria high-level lecture summary
>
> - quality of the description of the issue at stake
> - understanding and presentation of the key actors ("stakeholders") present in those debates
> - (critical) assessment of contemporary policy options, including analysis of policy direction and intention expressed during the lecture (with reference to other sources)
> - clarity and feasibility of your reflections

6.2 Case study exercise (D2)

You are required to submit a case study exercise on a piece of contemporary policy discussions. We shall discuss how to formulate this in our sessions.

> **❗ Assessment criteria case study exercise**
>
> - Mapping of stakeholders and their interests (both inside and outside the EU institutions)
> - Knowledge and presentation of the policy issue at stake (including historical analysis)
> - Outline of the challenges at stake
> - Quality of your reflections on potential outcomes and consquences.
> - Awareness of the policy process (a description of where the policy issue is in the 'legislative train')

This is not *per se* an academic text, but more an opportunity to show your skills as persuasive writers and ingenuous researchers. References and a bibliography are nevertheless required.

6.3 Individual paper (D3)

You will write a short individual research paper about a specific research topic related to a central theme in the course. This research paper should be based on literature and primary sources.

In this paper, you will address the turn in the EU's digital policy, related to one of the cases explored in the course. You are expected to refer to the academic and policy literature covered, but are also required to search for your own sources. Your paper can draw upon your previous experience. For example, you can carry out a historical analysis of a theme, or relate your question to contemporary EU integration literature. Papers that carry out cross-sectoral analysis are also welcome (e.g. sustainability and digital policy, or security and digital policy).

> **Note**
>
> Please add additional sources you find to our Zotero library, in the respective folder ("European Digital Sovereignty").

You will be required to provide a short (one page) summary of your plans for your paper (D0.3) by the deadline identified in the assignments checklist. You will receive feedback from the lecturer and your peers through canvas. The summary should cover:

1. The main research question
2. The major policies you address
3. The main literature you seek to review.

This can be in bullet point form.

> **❗ Assessment criteria individual paper**
>
> - accurate synthesis and comprehensive review of existing secondary literature
> - formulation of a feasible research question
> - critical engagement with both primary and secondary sources
> - the clarity of presentation (style, language, formatting, et cetera)

6.4 3,2,1s (Ds4.1-4.6)

After every lecture, you are required to submit a short note which includes: three things you learnt, two things you found interesting, and one question you still have: this will not be graded, but is a

required submission, to be delivered the same day as the lecture. We shall use these to stimulate discussion during the following session.

6.5 Checklist

Table 1: Assignments checklist

Item	Weight	Date due	Length
D1: high level lecture summary	15%	31/05/24 5pm	1 page
D2: case study exercise - group work	35%	31/05/24 5pm	3000 words
D0.3: individual paper proposal	P/F	08/03/24 5pm	1 page
D3: individual paper	50%	02/04/24 5pm	2500 words
D4.1-4.6: 3,2,1s	P/F	after every lecture	bullet pts

Please stick to the maximum lengths mentioned (there is a ±10% margin)! The word count mentioned includes your bibliography.

7 Course overview by week

The following table provides a summary of sessions and activities. All classes take place between 18h and 21h. You will be split into working groups in our first plenary session.

Table 2: Course schedule

#	Date	Theme	Policy document
#1		no meeting	
#2	16 February	The Early Years	COM(79)650
#3	19 February	eEurope and digital enthusiasm	COM(99)687 and Gore(1994)
#4	23 February	Europe's 'coming of age': Digital Sovereignty I	JOIN(2021)14
#5	1 March	Europe's maturity: Digital Sovereignty II	n/a
#6	15 March	Geopolitics I: standardisation	COM(2022)31
#7	22 March	Geopolitics II: Supply chains: critical raw materials and chips	COM(2023)160; COM(2022)45

Additional (public) sessions will be organised, as part of the course and you are **strongly recommended** to participate in those, but they will be arranged with shorter notice.

7.0.1 Session locations

Please check the EuroMaster Schedule for the location of our meetings.

7.1 Session 1

No lectures will be held for the first session (due to lecturer illness).

7.2   Session 2: Introduction - The Early Years

We shall introduce the course, go through the course manual, and provide a background to EU digital policy in recent decades, with a reflection on the shift from coal and steel to bits and bytes.

We shall form groups for the group work activities.

Recommended reading (after the lecture):

- COM(79)650
- Shahin, J. (2006). A european history of the internet. *Science & Public Policy (SPP)*, *33*(9), 681–693. http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/beech/spp/2006/00000033/00000009/art00005
- Shahin, J. (2022). Coping with new technologies. In Anand Menon & Simon Usherwood (Eds.), *State of the European Union*. UACES. https://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/UKIN-State-of-the-EU-Report-1.pdf

7.3   Session 3: eEurope and digital enthusiasm

The Lisbon Strategy and the eEurope initiatives were European policy responses to a broader policy shift that was starting to impact liberal democracies around the world. This also happened at the time of the so-called 'dot com boom'. This session will revisit this period, looking back with hindsight to this enthusiasm, but also looking at today's challenges through those lenses from yesterday.

Required reading (jigsaw):

- Group 1: European Commission (1999). *eEurope: An information society for all. Communication on a commission initiative for the special european council of lisbon, 23 and 24 march 2000. COM (99) 687 final, 8 december 1999* (EU Commission - COM Document COM(1999) 687 final). European Commission. http://aei.pitt.edu/3532/, Gore, A. (1994). *Remarks prepared for delivery by vice-president al gore*. ITU.
- Group 2: ?
- Group 3: Kofler, A. (1998). Digital europe 1998: Policies, technological development and implementation of the emerging information society. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, *11*(1), 53–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.1998.9968551

7.4   Session 4: Europe's 'coming of age': Digital Sovereignty I

After a discussion about the conceptual elements of the policy discourse, we will examine a number of cases where the EU promotes 'digital sovereignty'. The EU-US Trade and Technology Council, the EU-Japan Digital Partnership, and several concerete policy objectives in the domains of standardisation and cybersecurity will be examined.

Required reading:

- JOIN(2021)14 final
- ?

7.5   Session 5: Europe's maturity: Digital Sovereignty II

We shall look at how digital sovereignty plays out in the broader context of global political tensions, and how the EU develops its role as a 'digital empire'.

Required reading (jigsaw):

- Group 1: Pohle, J., & Thiel, T. (2020). Digital sovereignty. *Internet Policy Review*, *9*(4), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.14763/2020.4.1532
- Group 2: Glasze, G., Cattaruzza, A., Douzet, F., Dammann, F., Bertran, M.-G., Bômont, C., Braun, M., Danet, D., Desforges, A., Géry, A., Grumbach, S., Hummel, P., Limonier, K., Münßinger, M., Nicolai, F., Pétiniaud, L., Winkler, J., & Zanin, C. (2023). Contested spatialities

of digital sovereignty. *Geopolitics*, *28*(2), 919–958. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2022.2050
070
- Group 3: Monsees, L., & Lambach, D. (2022). Digital sovereignty, geopolitical imaginaries, and
the reproduction of european identity. *European Security*, *31*(3), 377–394. https://doi.org/10.1
080/09662839.2022.2101883

7.6   Session 6: Geopolitics I: standardisation

We shall focus on standardisation in this lecture, and continue our understanding of different inter-
pretations of digital sovereignty in this context.

- COM(2022)31

Required reading (jigsaw):

- Group 1: ?
- Group 2: Couture, S., & Toupin, S. (2019). What does the notion of "sovereignty" mean when
referring to the digital? *New Media & Society*, *21*(10), 2305–2322. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461
444819865984
- Group 3: Musiani, F. (2022). *Infrastructuring* digital sovereignty: A research agenda for an
infrastructure-based sociology of digital self-determination practices. *Information, Communica-
tion & Society*, *25*(6), 785–800. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2022.2049850

7.7   Session 7: Geopolitics II: Supply chains: critical raw materials and chips

We will further develop our understanding of the geopolitics of the EU's digital policy, with a look at
how the EU manages 'complex interdependence', specifically in the field of supply chains for critical
raw materials and semiconductors.

Required reading:

- COM(2023)160
- COM(2022)45
- Selection of literature proposed by the group, to be circulated four days before class.

References

Here is a complete list of readings for the course. This is also available in the respective Zotero folder.

Glasze, G., Cattaruzza, A., Douzet, F., Dammann, F., Bertran, M.-G., Bômont, C., Braun, M., Danet,
D., Desforges, A., Géry, A., Grumbach, S., Hummel, P., Limonier, K., Münßinger, M., Nicolai, F.,
Pétiniaud, L., Winkler, J., & Zanin, C. (2023). Contested spatialities of digital sovereignty. *Geopol-
itics*, *28*(2), 919–958. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2022.2050070

Monsees, L., & Lambach, D. (2022). Digital sovereignty, geopolitical imaginaries, and the reproduc-
tion of european identity. *European Security*, *31*(3), 377–394. https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2
022.2101883

Musiani, F. (2022). *Infrastructuring* digital sovereignty: A research agenda for an infrastructure-based
sociology of digital self-determination practices. *Information, Communication & Society*, *25*(6),
785–800. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2022.2049850

Shahin, J. (2022). Coping with new technologies. In Anand Menon & Simon Usherwood (Eds.), *State
of the European Union*. UACES. https://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/UKIN-State-
of-the-EU-Report-1.pdf

Pohle, J., & Thiel, T. (2020). Digital sovereignty. *Internet Policy Review*, *9*(4), 1–19. https://doi.org/10
.14763/2020.4.1532

Couture, S., & Toupin, S. (2019). What does the notion of "sovereignty" mean when referring to the
digital? *New Media & Society*, *21*(10), 2305–2322. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819865984

Shahin, J. (2006). A european history of the internet. *Science & Public Policy (SPP)*, *33*(9), 681–693. http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/beech/spp/2006/00000033/00000009/art00005

European Commission. (1999). *eEurope: An information society for all. Communication on a commission initiative for the special european council of lisbon, 23 and 24 march 2000. COM (99) 687 final, 8 december 1999* (EU Commission - COM Document COM(1999) 687 final). European Commission. http://aei.pitt.edu/3532/

Kofler, A. (1998). Digital europe 1998: Policies, technological development and implementation of the emerging information society. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, *11*(1), 53–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.1998.9968551

Gore, A. (1994). *Remarks prepared for delivery by vice-president al gore*. ITU.