Europe is facing an unprecedented crisis that, according to some observers, threatens not only some of its most emblematic features of the European Union, such as the euro, but the existence of the organizations that has guaranteed peace, stability and progress during the last half a century. This is nothing new, though. History records show that the EU has been facing frequent challenges and in all occasions has been successful in overcoming problems and offering solutions to its citizens. The EU is the most successful experience in voluntary inter-state relations. No member has asked to leave, while a dozen of candidates are aiming at membership; no community policy has returned to state sovereignty; the EU itself is the point of reference, if not the outright model, for any scheme in regional integration. However, times are turbulent and the EU has not been immune to the impact of the global environment since the end of the Cold War.
Born from the devastation of World War II, the European Union has become one of the most complex and effective international organizations and the most developed of the inter-state cooperation and integration systems in history. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, it has had a historic opportunity to obliterate the remaining dividing lines and make Europe “whole and free.” In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the EU has gone through various processes, such as the most important enlargement of its history, institutional reform and the task of drafting a Constitutional Treaty, while searching for a place in the world as a collective entity and through some of its most leading state actors.

The processes of European integration, governance and politics have been the object of extensive study and theory proposals. The dual tasks of deepening and widening have presented the European Union with daunting challenges that put its governing ability to the test. Even when it aims to assume pan-European parameters, the Union must address age-old issues such as extreme European diversity, nationalism, racism and inequality that have persisted in the age of globalization.

This course is intended as a review to provide understanding of the European Union’s most significant historical stages, its government treaties, its institutions and most important policies, as well as controversial issues. The introductory focus will be on the content, development, and reform of the institutions and the evolution of the common policies. These have been adapted over the years to reflect the consistent evolution of the institution within a changing European context. The need for reform was recognized even before the prospect of enlargement loomed large, since policy development and implementation involve a complex interplay of factors such as domestic politics and institutional dynamics.

The seminar will also examine social problems within the European Union that have significant political and policy implications. The increasing volume of transnational and transborder interactions have brought about a slew of alarming tendencies, such as violence and discrimination. These have fueled public debates on issues ranging from identity and belonging to immigration and asylum policies. Awareness and recognition of these problems is an integral part of a comprehensive understanding of the workings and complexity of the European Union. The course will end with sessions dedicated to the development of a common foreign and security policy as a sign of autonomous collective identity.

The course will be conducted in the format of a practical seminar. Guess speakers will anchor weekly topics and students will frequently be asked to present selective short reports and participatory interventions. Heavy use of media readings will supplement basic think-tank and scholarly readings.

The agenda will be kept sufficiently open to shift the schedule according to pressing developments (the Fall of 2012 is predicted to be full of events) and availability of guest speakers.

Sufficient print materials will be provided free of charge and a number of on-line sources will be recommended for background consultation for every session.

10 issues

1. 100 years (1914-2014): War and Peace in Europe
2. European Identity: Europe, European Union, Europeans

3. Culture: Sports, Arts, Literature in Europe

4. The economy: the euro

5. France and Germany: the odd and irreplaceable couple?

6. The UK: in or out?

7. Spain: from boom to bust?

8. The Mediterranean: the cradle and soft belly of Europe

9. The United States: the special Atlantic ally?

10. The model of the EU: regional integration