

PhD course on Cooperation or Confrontation? EU/China Economic Relations in 2026

Semester:	Spring Semester- FS 2026
Root Number:	519562
ECTS:	4
Lecturer:	Prof. dr. Peter Van den Bossche and Prof. dr. DU Ming
Dates:	20 to 24 July 2026
Room:	This a hybrid course. The course will be held on-site at the World Trade Institute, Silva Casa Auditorium, Hallerstrasse 6, Bern, as well as online on Zoom

Course Description

Since 2019, the European Union (EU) officially defines China as a multifaceted partner, economic competitor, and systemic rival. In 2025, it reaffirmed this assessment of its relationship with China, putting more emphasis on the rivalry. There is much, both in terms of politics and economics, that divides, and gives rise to tension between, the EU and China. In recent years, the EU has therefore pursued a policy of 'de-risking' its economic dependencies on China. However, in times in which the United States (US), the EU's former closest ally, forces, through extortion and coercion, the EU to agree to a most unfavourable new trade relation and threatens to annex territory of one of its Member States, the EU may need to reassess its relationship with China. The US is intent on redesigning the international order in its own narrow national interest and has turned its back on international cooperation and the rule of law in international relations. Both the EU and China, on the contrary, still profess their adherence to a rules-based international order and peaceful, mutually beneficial international relations. While this would be most desirable, it is unclear whether the EU and China can be partners in, and global leaders of, an effort to preserve a rules-based international order. What is clear, however, is that for such partnership to be possible, and global leadership to be credible, the EU and China must overcome, or at least mitigate, current disagreements, in particular disagreements on economic issues.

The intensive, five-day course on *Cooperation or Confrontation?: EU/China Economic Relations in 2026*, explores the potential for closer cooperation and the danger of increased confrontation in their bilateral economic relations and the impact thereof on the rest of the world. The course addresses the political and economic drivers of the EU/China economic relations; the rise of unilateralism, 'securization' and extraterritorial reach of the trade and investment policies of the European Union and China; the impact of China's political economy model on EU-China

relations; non-discrimination and market access issues in EU and Chinese economic relations; the EU's de-risking policy; IPR protection and enforcement by China; and the engagement of the EU and China in the WTO. Particular attention goes to EU/China trade in critical minerals, advanced technological goods and related services; the EU's use of trade defence measures against Chinese 'fair' and 'unfair' trade; in- and outbound investment by EU and Chinese companies; digital trade between the EU and China and efforts towards convergence of digital regulation, including regulation on artificial intelligence; the instruments and key drivers of industrial policy of the EU and China; and the reform of international rules on industrial subsidies. The course will conclude with a round table discussion with former senior EU and Chinese officials.

Lecturers

Peter Van den Bossche

Peter Van den Bossche is Chair Professor of International Economic Law and Leading National Scholar at the School of Law, Xi'an Jiaotong University (XJTU), China. He was a member of the Appellate Body of the World Trade Organization from 2009 to 2019 and served as its chairman in 2015. From 2018 to 2024, he was President of the Society of International Economic Law (SIEL); from 2016 to 2024, Director of Studies of the World Trade Institute (WTI), University of Bern, Switzerland; from 1997 to 2001, Counsellor and Acting Director of the Appellate Body Secretariat, WTO; and from 1990-1992, *référéndaire* (law clerk) of Advocate General Walter Van Gerven, European Court of Justice, Luxembourg.

He is a Fellow Emeritus of the WTI, Professor Emeritus at the University of Bern and Maastricht University, the Netherlands, and a visiting professor at the Université de Genève (since 2018), and at LUISS Guido Carli University, Rome (since 2016). He was a visiting professor at the University of Barcelona from 2002 to 2017; the World Trade Institute, Bern, Switzerland from 2002 to 2016; the Academy of International Trade and Investment Law, Macau, China from 2003 to 2013 and 2019; the China-EU School of Law, China University of Political Science and Law, Beijing, China from 2008 to 2014; Trade Policy Training Centre in Africa, Arusha, Tanzania in 2008 and 2013; the College of Europe, Bruges, Belgium from 2010 to 2024; Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne, Australia in 2014; Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador from 2016 to 2020; and Bocconi University, Milan, Italy from 2022 to 2024. In 2023, he was the Tsai Wan-Tsai Distinguished Visiting Professor of International Law at the College of Law of Taiwan National University, Taipei, and in 2010 Fernand Braudel Senior Fellow at the European University Institute, Florence. Van den Bossche is member of the Advisory Board of the *World Trade Review*, the *Journal of International Economic Law*, and the *Journal of World Investment and Trade*. Since 2013, he is also member of the Advisory Board of the WTO Chairs Programme (WCP). Van den Bossche is *inter alia* on the roster of arbitrators for disputes under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). From 2023 to 2025, Van den Bossche served as a panellist in two WTO disputes: *European Union - Stainless Steel Cold-Rolled Flat Products (Indonesia)* (DS616) and *European Union - Biodiesel (Indonesia)* (DS618).

Van den Bossche has a PhD in Law from the European University Institute (EUI), Florence, Italy (1990); and an LL.M. from the University of Michigan Law School, Ann Arbor, United States (1986). Van den Bossche is the author (with Werner Zdouc) of *The Law and Policy of the World Trade Organization*, 5th edition (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 1170 p., and (with Denise Prévost) of *Essentials of WTO Law*, 2nd edition (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 223 p. A Chinese edition of *The Law and Policy of the World Trade Organization*, 世界贸易组织法原理, was published in 2020 by Law Press China, and a Russian translation, Правила и политика Всемирной Торговой Организации, in 2011 by KIRLand.

DU Ming

DU Ming is Professor of Transnational Law and Deputy Dean for Research at Durham Law School in the UK. He is also Co-Director of the Global Policy Institute at Durham University. He was a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Tsinghua University Law School in Beijing, China (2024–2025), Chen An Chair Professor of International Law at Xiamen University Law School (2025), and a Senior International Visiting Scholar at Nanjing University Law School (2025). He is also a long-term Distinguished Visiting Professor at Shanghai Jiao Tong University Koguan Law School in Shanghai, China. He was a recipient of the British Academy Senior Research Fellowship in 2024.

He was raised in China and completed his Chinese legal studies at Tsinghua University School of Law. He holds an LL.M. from Harvard Law School, where he was a Victor and William Fung Fellow, and a DPhil from the University of Oxford Faculty of Law, where he was a Clarendon Scholar. His current research focuses on the theoretical and structural issues of global economic governance (trade, investment, and finance), China's approach to international law, and the development of the rule of law in contemporary China. He has published widely in leading European, US, and Chinese law journals. His recent works include “International Economic Law in the Era of Great Power Rivalry” (Vanderbilt J of Transnational Law, 2024) and “The Crisis and Reconstruction of International Economic Law” (Tsinghua Law Review, 2025, in Chinese).

He is Co-General Editor of the Edward Elgar Chinese Law and Policy Series. He sits on the editorial boards of the *Chinese Journal of International Law*, the *Journal of World Investment & Trade*, *Asia Pacific Law Review*, and the *Chinese Journal of Transnational Law*.

Course certificate and ETCS

Course participants will receive, subject to regular on-site or online presence, a certificate of attendance. Course participants who wish to obtain ECTS must take the home-take assessment. For the assessment students will complete a 4,000-word take-home assessment, due at 17:00 CET on August 2, 2026. Assessments must be submitted by email to phd.wti@unibe.ch Further guidance on the format of the assessment will be provided in class. Answers are expected to draw on the course reading materials – further research is not required.

Course Overview

Date	Day	Time	Topic
20 July	Monday	09:00 12:00	Deeply Entwined but Uneasy at Best: The EU/China Economic Relations / Peter Van den Bossche
		14:00 16:00	A Tale of Precarious Vulnerability: EU-China Trade in Critical Minerals and Advanced Technology Goods / Peter Van den Bossche
21 July	Tuesday	09:00 12:00	The Return of the State? Industrial Policies and Subsidies in China and the EU / DU Ming
		14:00 16:00	The Achilles' Heel: Intellectual Property Protection and Enforcement in China / DU Ming
22 July	Wednesday	09:00 12:00	Finding the "Interface": Special Treatment of Chinese Products in Antidumping and Countervailing Investigations / DU Ming
		14:00 16:00	Is Regulatory Convergence Possible?: EU and Chinese Approaches to Digital Governance / Peter Van den Bossche
23 July	Thursday	09:00 12:00	Market Access vs. Economic Security: Navigating the EU-China Investment Relationship / DU Ming
		14:00 16:00	Roundtable discussion on 'The Future of the International Economic Order and China-EU Economic Relations: Cooperation or Confrontation' / Peter Van den Bossche and DU Ming
24 July	Friday	09:00 16:00	Negotiation simulation exercise: Bridging the Gap / Peter Van den Bossche