

Geopolitics and the securitization of global trade

Semester:	Spring Semester- FS 2026
Root Number:	495407
ECTS:	3
Lecturer:	Manfred Elsig, Fernando Martin Espejo, Isabelle Van Damme, Leandro Urbano, Cristian Rodriguez-Chiffelle
Dates:	13 to 17 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, Switzerland, and online on Zoom

Course Description

This course addresses two overlapping trends in trade and investment policy. First, the increasing geopolitical tensions and the underlying trends towards managing markets. Second, the growing use of trade policy to address national and economic security concerns or objectives. It brings together a variety of both disciplinary perspectives (law, economics, political science) but also provides insights from theory and practice. Importantly, it provides a comprehensive overview of current trends and challenges and critically reflects on how governments and firms may need to strategically position themselves going forward.

Lecturers

Manfred Elsig

Manfred Elsig is Professor of International Relations, Managing Director and Director of Research of the World Trade Institute of the University of Bern. From 2013-2017 he was the Director of the NCCR Trade Regulation. He studied at the universities of Bern and Bordeaux and earned a degree in political science. He worked from 1997 to 1999 at the Swiss Federal Office for Foreign Economic Affairs. He later joined the Political Science Institute at the University of Zurich and received his PhD (Dr Phil) in 2002 with a dissertation on European Union trade policy. From 2002 to 2004 he worked for UBS financial services group and as a personal advisor to the Minister of Economy of Canton Zürich. In 2004-2005 he was a teaching fellow at the International Relations Department at the London School of Economics and Political Science. From 2005 to 2009 he worked as a post-doc fellow at the World Trade Institute and at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. From 2009 to 2013 he was an Assistant Professor at the World Trade Institute.

His research focuses primarily on the politics of international trade, regional trade agreements, European trade policy, international organisations, US–EU relations, and private actors in global politics. He has published in international peer-reviewed journals including *International Studies Quarterly*, *European Journal of International Relations*, *European Union Politics*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Review of International Organizations*, *Review of International Political Economy*, and *World Trade Review*. He has been visiting lecturer/visiting professor at the University of Zurich, the University of Geneva, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and the Thunderbird School of Global Management. His courses include international political economy (IPE), international relations theories, international institutions, globalisation and European integration, and research methods.

Fernando Martin

Fernando Martin is Head of Analytics at Global Trade Alert and a Geopolitical Strategist at IMD Business School, where he advises firms and policymakers on how industrial policy, trade policy and geopolitics reshape competitive dynamics across global markets. With over five years of experience translating policy shocks into concrete business implications, he has authored more than 25 policy briefs and peer-reviewed publications on industrial and trade policy. He has contributed to major international reports, including *Industrial Policy since the Great Financial Crisis* (IMF, 2025), *The Return of Industrial Policy in Data* (The World Economy, 2024), and *Trust, Ties, and Talent* (IADB, in press). He manages the New Industrial Policy Observatory, tracking state interventions in industrial and trade policy since 2009. A regular speaker at institutions such as the OECD, WTO Public Forum, European Commission, ADB, Peterson Institute, he also lectures at leading academic centers including the World Trade Institute, the European University Institute, and ESADE. His analysis contributes to public debate through Substack and LinkedIn and has been cited by the Wall Street Journal, the Financial Times, VoxEU/CEPR, East Asia Forum, and in the WTO Director-General's Annual Trade Review. He holds a PhD in Business Economics from KU Leuven, an MSc in Political Economy of Europe from the LSE, and a BSc in Economics from UC3M

Isabelle Van Damme

Isabelle Van Damme is a Professor of International Economic Law and Director of Studies at the World Trade Institute and the University of Bern, and of counsel at Van Bael & Bellis. She also serves as the Executive Vice-President of the Society of International Economic Law and teaches EU trade law and policy at the College of Europe in Bruges.

Previously, Isabelle was a Partner at Van Bael & Bellis, with a practice covering WTO law, EU law and public international law. She has represented States and individuals before various courts and tribunals, including the CJEU, FTA panels, WTO panels and the Appellate Body. Isabelle has also served as a référendaire in the chambers of Advocate General Sharpston at the CJEU, worked at a Geneva-based US law firm specialised in WTO litigation and taught at the University of Cambridge. Other work experience includes an internship at the WTO Appellate Body Secretariat and working as an Legal Liaison Officer at the United Nations Secretariat (Legal Affairs, Codification Division). Her main publications include *Treaty Interpretation by the WTO Appellate Body* (OUP), *EU Foreign Subsidies Regulation* (Concurrences), and *A Commentary on the WTO Anti-Dumping Agreement* (CUP). She is also co-editor of the first and second editions

of *The Oxford Handbook of International Trade Law* (OUP). She holds degrees from the University of Ghent (Bachelor of Law, Master of Laws), Georgetown University Law Center (LL.M.) and the University of Cambridge (Ph.D. in Law).

As a partner at Van Bael & Bellis, she advised private sector clients (of Van Bael & Bellis) on sanctions and export control compliance and implementation, applied for requests for authorisation under EU sanctions legislation, on behalf of industry, in various EU Member States, represented parties before the Belgian courts in challenging refusals to grant authorisations under EU sanctions legislation, and offered trainings to judges of EU Members States as part of DG FISMA's training modules on EU sanctions legislation. Moreover, she has also acted as lead counsel, for the complainant, in *Russia – Measures Concerning Traffic in Transit* (DS512), the first WTO dispute in which the essential security exception clause in Article XXI of the GATT 1994 was interpreted and applied.

Dr. Van Damme is included in the European Union's "List of Candidates for Appointment as Arbitrators and TSD Experts". She was recently elected as a Foreign Member of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts.

Cristian Rodriguez-Chiffelle

Cristián Rodríguez-Chiffelle is Partner and Director at Boston Consulting Group, specializing in trade, foreign direct investment, and geopolitics, and an academic associate at Harvard University's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, where he was a visiting scholar 2020-2024. Previously, he served as CEO of InvestChile, a ministerial-level appointment leading the Nation's foreign investment promotion agency, and priorly led international trade and investment policy at the World Economic Forum for five years. As a trade diplomat, he negotiated Chile's free trade agreements - including the Trans-Pacific Partnership – and represented Chile before international organizations. He holds an LL.B from the University of Concepción, an LL.M from Harvard Law School, and an MPA from Harvard Kennedy School. Cristian is the editor of "The Elgar Companion to the World Trade Organization" (Edward Elgar, 2024), a 50-chapter effort distilling current affairs affecting international trade with a focus on facilitation, digitalization, and geopolitical tensions.

Leandro Urbano

Leandro J. Urbano is an industrial business strategy and economic growth expert based in Lima, Peru, where he founded Frontera Venture Partners, a pioneering platform driving industrial development through private equity investments and strategic projects. He is an Adjunct Professor on Industrial Strategy at Esade Business School in Spain. Previously, he served as Expert Consultant at Boston Consulting Group's Geopolitics, Trade and Investment team in Washington DC. Over his BCG career, he conducted over 30 projects with companies and investors cross industrial goods verticals (natural resources, forestry, advanced materials, green technologies, manufacturing, aerospace & defense, space, transportation & logistics, infrastructure), and governments in industrial ecosystems development, innovation and investment attraction, across Europe, the US, Latin America and Southeast Asia. He co-authored flagship BCG perspectives on future geopolitical scenarios, global trade and investment shifts, and geo-economic opportunities in the Global South. He is trained at Harvard University, Kennedy

School of Government (MPA/ID), and business administration & finance at Esade Business School (BBA).

Learning Objectives

- To understand concepts related to geopolitics and the securitization of trade
- To understand the evolution of the role of security in trade policy over time
- To map current trends and future scenarios
- To understand legal developments in relation to national security objectives and using sanctions and export control measures
- To understand the economics underlying above trends
- To understand the business perspectives and roles of governments

Assessment WTI

- Students' knowledge will be assessed on the basis of a take home exam which needs to be completed on an individual basis.
- The assessment should be submitted before 17 July at 17h00 (CET) to masters.wti@unibe.ch

Course Overview

Date	Day	Time	Topic
13 July	Monday	09h00 12:00	Concepts and history / Manfred Elsig
		14:00 16:00	Making sense of Trump's trade policy / Manfred Elsig
14 July	Tuesday	09h00 12:00	The Economics of national security measures / Fernando Martin Espejo
		14:00 16:00	Mapping national security-related measures: The Global Trade Alert database / Fernando Martin Espejo
15 July	Wednesday	09h00 12:00	National Security in Law / Isabelle Van Damme
		14:00 16:00	The Law and Practice of Sanctions & Export Control / Isabelle Van Damme
16 July	Thursday	09h00 12:00	Firm perspectives in navigating geopolitics/ Cristian Rodriguez-Chiffelle
		14:00 16:00	Building scenarios for the future / Leandro Urbano
17 July	Friday	17:00	Submission of Assessment