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European Politics

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This class will deal with the political dynamics of a European Union (EU) that has been successfully muddling through many crises in the past. Yet the EU is now confronted with a range of issues that may take it to a point where questions of survival are at stake.

Some of these issues may have already reached a terminal solution before the class starts in August. The British voters may decide on 23 June of this year that the UK will leave the EU (the so-called Brexit). The consequences of this decision, however, may not only affect the future of the EU but the UK itself. Scotland and Wales may decide in subsequent referenda that they want to stay in the EU and therefore want to leave the UK. This potential break-up of the UK will have unforeseen consequences for the role a shrunken England will play in European and global politics.

As disastrous as the possible Brexit will be, the problems connected with the continued influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees from war-torn Syria, Iraq and other countries in the Middle East and sub-Sahara Africa are potentially even more catastrophic. So far Angela Merkel's Germany has accepted more than a million refugees and managed to take care of them. Yet growing hostile, xenophobic attitudes and the formation of a right wing political movement (AfD) demonstrate that there are limits to this welcome of refugees. Merkel's spontaneous invitation to the refugees was not supported by most of the countries of the EU. Her attempt to create a mechanism to fairly distribute refugees across the EU failed and was replaced with a questionable EU deal with Turkey to set up camps in Turkey that would pre-screen asylum seekers.

The resistance Merkel encountered in the rest of the EU had a lot to do with the rising nationalist and racist parties in many EU countries and the fears of so-called Islamization. Resentment of the primarily Islamic refugees fed a political culture of hate and resentment. We will discuss the rise of right wing populism in France, Scandinavia, Poland and other former communist countries in Eastern Europe.

In addition to these crisis phenomena, we will cover the institutional structure of the EU and its fragile constitutional make-up. We will look at the success of the European welfare state in the areas of health care, free public education, paid vacation, etc. We will openly discuss all the problems the EU is confronted with. Yet we will also pursue the success story of the EU as a political union that has managed to peacefully unite almost all the countries of the continent.

The major text is: Kathleen R. McNamara, *The Politics of Everyday Europe. Constructing Authority in the European Union*, Oxford University Press 2015.