

## **Why study European Studies in times of crisis?**

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Since the referendum on the Brexit on 23 June, the European Union (EU) is receiving full media attention. The message in the entire spectrum of traditional and social media is very mixed, and differs between countries, age groups and social layers of the European population. For some this is the signal that the European project, as started in the 1950s, is coming to an end or should at least be undone from its more federal ambitions. For others this is the moment to try to seize the opportunity to move ahead with a group of more like-minded countries and stimulate cooperation even further. What the impact of the Brexit referendum will be is still very much unknown. It remains to be seen how (and some even argue 'if') the United Kingdom will step out of the EU, what the finally negotiated terms and conditions will be, and what impact this will have on the domestic situation in the UK, on the future development of European integration, and even on the worldwide economic situation and international cooperation.

As some future, and current, students might start wondering what their future will look like, having finished a BA program on European Studies at times of a European Union in crisis, this article has the aim to highlight why studying ES has become ever more relevant. And some of you might want to use this to convince worrying parents, or help them understand what this program actually is about.

As a start, it is crucial to highlight that European Studies is not European *Union* Studies. The programme goes beyond the process of European integration as such, and aims to analyse problems and issues occurring on the European continent from a wider perspective. It does so from an interdisciplinary approach. From the perspective of political science, international relations, history, law, economics, cultural studies and sociology, this programme aims to train young professionals who are able to understand, analyse and tackle problems occurring in the current European society from various perspectives. Due to growing globalisation and increasing complexity of the society, (policy) problems are becoming increasingly transboundary. They do not only cross geographical borders, but also policy borders. The ongoing refugee crisis is a typical example. From an economic perspective, the refugee crisis is mainly a cost-benefit problem: what is the economic impact of increasing or decreasing immigration numbers on the national and European economy? Cultural scientists will stress the impact of religious and cultural fault-lines on the attitude and behaviour of both immigrants as well as the European civil society on potential integration problems. From an international relations perspective, the problem lies more in the disturbed balance of power between different regions in the world, and the nature of the conflict in Syria impacting on immigration flows and terrorist activity. In sum, different sectoral or disciplinary perspectives highlight different parts of the wider problem. This example illustrates that in order to be able to understand, analyse, and potentially solve such a

problem, we need to approach it from different disciplinary perspectives. The same applies to the Brexit and its potential consequences. Whatever the near future of the European integration project will look like, one thing is clear: society needs generalists who are capable of identifying, understanding, describing, explaining, and ideally also solving, topical problems from an interdisciplinary perspective. And this is, in a nutshell, the core underlying ambition of the BA European Studies at Maastricht University.

But what better way to try to express this, then by listening to what BA ES alumni have to state about the relevance and added value of studying European Studies at times of an EU in crisis, and by learning where they ended up after studying this programme.

- “Dear current and future students, you ask yourself why to study European Studies (any longer)? Because the EU is more than just two letters. Europe in general and the EU in particular is so multi-faceted that you need to understand and study its past and present to understand how to improve it in the future. For me, the most interesting about European Studies was to learn the path of a trial and tribulation that Europe had behind it before it was even possible to found the EU. I also learnt to think critically and to start questioning politics, which is essential to understand the real politics that is going on today. And no worries about your prospects after the studies! Probably most of us were unsure how to define a suitable Master or a job with this interdisciplinary studies. However, it is great to have this flexibility. Actually, what I have experienced on the job market is that companies are more and more interested in graduates from interdisciplinary studies. These students do not only have a diverse knowledge but they are also able to acquire new knowledge in a short period of time because this is what you are taught during your studies. And beside your soft skills, flexibility is THE characteristic companies are looking for today. All alumni I am still in touch with have pretty diverse jobs that range from consultants, to lawyers, to marketing experts or to project manager at NGOs. In the end, it is up to you what you would like to do! In any case, European Studies offers a good basis.” (Fleur, alumna)
- “I would definitely recommend this programme. It has given me great career opportunities. Currently I am working for former EU Commissioner Neelie Kroes and this has opened a lot of doors for me. Having this knowledge about the EU in general is essential. In September I will even start my job, working for the Dutch Embassy in Lisbon, which without this programme would not have been possible. You learn far more than just the structure of the EU, the layer of economics and politics will be essential wherever your career path takes you.” (Leonie, alumna)
- “ES graduates usually end up in the most heterogeneous tracks you could imagine. Friends of mine who did the ES Bachelor are now doing a Master in European Law, Environmental Science, Public Health, and I'm doing one in Business Administration. Although my Master has not much to do with ES content wise, I'm super happy I studied ES because I learned very essential skills, like research & writing or how to moderate a group meeting. These skills are

demanded not only in political fields but also in the economy. Also I would have probably never dared to study business if I had not taken the economics courses in the ES bachelor and developed a passion for it.” (Grigori, alumnus)

- “First of all, just because the UK will leave, the EU will not break down, it will change and that is good because it is not perfect, and if you look outside Europe, other regional unions (African Union and ASEAN) are actually moving slowly towards the direction of the EU. It is European Studies not European Union Studies and you will learn much more than how the EU works. You will learn about political sciences, economics, history, etc. in general using the EU to explain and provide examples. I agree you can do anything after ES; it will provide you with valuable skills, not just facts. I have studied at very good universities in France, Hong Kong, South Korea and China but Maastricht stands out with its special teaching method (PBL), internationality, and especially its instructors and professors: They really care about you! You will meet awesome, diverse and fascinating people from all over the world (not just Europe!) who will brighten classroom discussions and become your friends. I also have to say that Maastricht University has an amazing reputation in Europe and even outside, which will open many doors while looking for jobs and Alumni are everywhere. From my year I know people who ended up in consulting, political foundations, national governments, foreign service, law related jobs and of course in Brussels doing various things and all kinds of things, all over the place. It will depend how and on what you specialise within ES but also through internships, study abroad and your master’s degree. I am currently living in China but I will soon join the EU bubble in Brussels as a Commission trainee, for my field energy politics the EU is more relevant than ever for common energy security, stability of supply and of course sustainable energy.” (Saskia, alumna)
- “The strength of ES lies in its inter- and multidisciplinary approach. After the BA I went on to pursue a M.Sc. in Public Policy and currently I am involved in evaluating health policies of the Netherlands (as an external PhD at UM). Part of why I was chosen for this job is that I had a background in combining multiple policy domains and perspectives. Even if the Union were to implode, the lessons learnt throughout the BA curriculum are still valuable, but perhaps more importantly; usable!” (Maarten, alumnus)
- “In my first tutorial of the first course (Idea of Europe) of my BA ES in 2012, Professor Labrie asked us whether we seriously think the EU will collapse. The question of the time - which is still out there by the way - was: Grexit?! Now, I answered with yes to his question. I said yes, because I was a bit provocative. Look at it this way. If you are occupied by these sort of questions then ES BA is probably the perfect study programme for you. You will have 3 years’ time to discuss all possible questions on the EU. After all, studying is about questioning. Now after having finished my BA I will say no to this (sort of) question. Do you seriously think the EU will collapse as a consequence of the Brexit referendum? I think, I could write a book about why it will not. And this is thanks to my studies.

So, if you start your BA ES this year, you will have amazingly thrilling questions for the time of your studies that you will discuss with professors, tutors, fellow students, your parents, your siblings, your neighbours. I promise you the question will still be there when you graduate. Your answers, and your capacity to answer, will be beyond your imagination as you have it now.” (Konstantin, alumnus)