

Opening speech from Prof. Takis Tridimas at the Inaugural Conference of the Luxembourg Centre for European Law on 10 October 2025

Your excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you with enormous pleasure and some trepidation to the inaugural conference of the Luxembourg Centre for European Law. It is a great honour to have you here and we are very grateful that you have taken the time to join us.

The Centre

The Centre was established in 2024 as the successor to the Max Planck Institute for Procedural Law. Its mission is to further the study of European law and contribute to its development. We aspire to be one of the citadels of European law discourse.

The objectives of the Centre are the following:

- to produce outstanding scholarship;
- to contribute to the development of European law and to law reform;
- to provide a forum for informed debate;
- to foster the academic study of European law.

The primary focus of the Centre is the law of the European Union. The development of EU integration and the legal system which underpins it have provided a fruitful ground, indeed an inexhaustive mine, for research by law scholars and social scientists. The study of EU law is not only of great theoretical interest but also of huge practical importance. EU law affects virtually every area of national law and represents the greatest source of law reform for Member States. It is also influential in shaping global regulatory trends.

The remit of the Centre encompasses all fields of European Union law. We have identified the following as priority areas:

- EU constitutional law, judicial protection, and EU governance;

- The external relations of the EU, including foreign policy and defence;
- Nature and sustainability;
- The regulation of digital markets and artificial intelligence;
- EMU and financial regulation.

These areas have been selected, for three reasons. First, they are of great theoretical and practical importance; secondly, they are areas where the EU has made a particular contribution or areas that expose the fault lines of possible structural changes; thirdly, they align with and advance the University's mission and priorities.

The above areas will guide the activities of the Centre but we recognize that it takes time to build expertise. We also acknowledge that, as the world moves, new areas come to the fore. There is no grand plan of European integration. Geopolitical forces, which are often unpredictable, dictate new priorities and our interests will adjust accordingly. Furthermore, the identification of the above fields is without prejudice to our willingness to embrace excellence in the broader universe of European law. By way of example, the Centre is now cooperating very closely and acts as host to the Association of European Competition Law judges which has moved its headquarters from London to Luxembourg.

We are also acutely aware that European law is richer than European Union Law. The European Convention of Human Rights, comparative law, legal theory and the history of European law, offer vast scope for academic enquiry. We have already attracted some funding and plan projects with German and US universities in those fields.

In a nutshell, the Centre's remit is a broad one. We are an inclusive scholarly community open to embracing and fostering high quality cutting edge research.

The Centre encourages the study of transversal themes, namely topics that transcend specific areas of regulation and can contribute to the development of scholarship in various fields. These include, for example, rights and constitutionalism, the values of the EU, the effectiveness of EU law, and the role of supra-national courts in resolving conflicts.

We value both doctrinal and inter-disciplinary research, acknowledging that they are addressed to different audiences. Our main priority is to produce outstanding original scholarship. The Centre aspires to appeal to broad constituencies including the scholarly community, policy makers, courts and the civil society. It serves Luxembourg by contributing to its development as a centre of academic excellence. It contributes to European society by engaging with the major issues of European law and policy. It has global resonance by producing impactful, cutting-edge research.

The mission of the Centre is to carry out both theoretical and applied research. It aims at promoting debate with a view to enhancing the understanding of contemporary problems faced by society and contributing to their resolution. It takes advantage of its location in Luxembourg, a global financial centre, which hosts the Court of Justice of the European Union and many other European institutions.

The Centre currently has 26 academic members of staff, already making it one of the largest centres of European law in the world. It has a director, 2 professors, 5 post-doctoral fellows, 1 research specialist, 10 doctoral candidates, and 8 librarians who manage its specialist library.

An active recruitment strategy is in place. An associate professor, three post doctoral researchers, and four doctoral students will join the Centre in the academic year 2025-2026. A further expansion is planned for 2026-2027.

In addition, the Centre welcomes a number of senior academics and doctoral researchers every year.

EU law scholarship

The academic study of EU law is a very competitive field. There are two reasons for this.

First, it attracts scholars from many countries representing diverse legal systems. Whilst the academic study of a national legal system is carried out principally by jurists of a single jurisdiction, EU law discourse is more difficult to own.

Secondly, European integration has given rise to a new legal order. This new system of law has evolved often at dizzying speeds and mutated in unexpected ways providing a rich mine for scholars.

The end result is that European law is one of the most thriving areas of study in Universities world-wide. A crowded environment sets the stage for an enriching and unparalleled exchange of ideas and is the breeding ground for originality. But it also makes our task, to try and become one of the main reference points for EU law scholarship, an arduous one. It requires effort, time and resources. I am very grateful to Minister Stéphanie Obertin, Minister for Digitalisation, Research and Higher Education, Professor Kreisel, the Rector of the University, and to Yves Elsen, President of the Conseil de Gouvernance, for their unfailing support.

European law scholarship is also quite fragmented. The interests and methodology of a German jurist are not necessarily the same as those of a French one or a common lawyer. We believe that the study of European law should be guided by openness and we will strive to bridge national interests and traditions.

Geopolitical developments in recent years have posed unprecedented challenges to the rule of law. They make it essential that Europe stands united. As Ben Franklin put it at the signing of the US Declaration of Independence, “We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.” The same applies to Europe.

In the last decade, European democracies have faced a host of political, economic and legal challenges, some of them unprecedented. These have included a heightened terrorist threat, the eurozone crisis, migration, the covid pandemic, environmental decline, a rise in political extremism and illiberal populism, and war. It is indicative that *Our World in Data*, an independent research organization that classifies countries in four groups, liberal democracies, electoral democracies, electoral autocracies, and closed autocracies, has identified a retreat in democracy. Similar conclusions are drawn by the V-Dem Institute Report and the Freedom House Report.

As we complete the first quarter of this century, there is international instability, democratic decline, and less respect, indeed grave breaches, of international law. It is imperative that the European Union and its institutions remain important actors in guaranteeing peace, democracy, and the rule of law.

Today's conference

This brings me to the theme of today's conference.

The conference will provide a forum for the discussion of the meaning and role of EU values in contemporary Europe and beyond. In recent years, Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) has acquired wide resonance in EU law, both in academic and institutional circles. Crucially, it has given rise to some of the most important judgments ever delivered by the Court of Justice.

The conference brings together distinguished speakers to provide a political, judicial, institutional, and scholarly perspective of EU values and of their possible role in shaping EU law and integration. From the prism of EU values, it seeks to assess some of the key challenges facing the EU and, more broadly, Europe, and the role of law and the courts in confronting them.

The conference thus reflects the mission and remit of the Centre.

Our aim is that this gathering will become an annual event and that we will have the opportunity to welcome you many more times.

Your excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you, once more, for being here.