European Pirate Academy

Handbook 1

EUROPEAN PIRATE ACADEMY

The Pirate Academy Handbook

A Methodology for Teaching (not only) European Legislative Process and Negotiation Through Simulation

Volume 1 of the Pirate Academy Handbook series

The Pirate Academy was made possible by the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament. The Pirate Academy was created by Paul Diegel and David František Wagner for MEP Markéta Gregorová.

This handbook and the revised versions of all scenarios were prepared by David František Wagner.

Chapter 1
What is the Pirate Academy?

The European Pirate Academy is two things at once.

It is a virtual and in-person simulation course on European legislative negotiation. Its goal is to give politically engaged young Europeans a theoretical and practical foundation in how EU legislation is actually negotiated- in a playful and humorous way, but without shying away from reading discussion, and hard institutional detail.

The Academy was created by European Parliament policy-making veterans Paul Diegel and David František Wagner. It ran in association with MEP Markéta Gregorová (Czech Pirate Party, Greens/EFA), whose parliamentary work — security, trade, and digital policy — anchored the scenarios in live political material. Markéta took part in the courses herself; participants met a sitting MEP not as a guest star but as a practitioner inside the machine they were learning to operate.

A cohort of roughly 15–25 participants, recruited from across Europe and aged 18–55, moves through a sequence of online sessions combining lectures, discussions with practitioners, homework essays with individual feedback, and hand-crafted negotiation simulations — culminating in a two-day in-person simulation in Brussels, at the heart of the European Union, including meetings with MEPs and field experts.

The Pirate Academy is also an educational approach to the European policy process, aimed at passing on not only knowledge but also basic skills and intuitions. This handbook documents the methodology so that other educators, civic-education organisations, and political foundations can run the course or adapt its parts. Volume 1

(this volume) covers the pedagogy, course architecture, admissions, facilitation craft assessment, and logistics. Volumes 2–6 are complete, deployment-ready simulation scenarios. Volume 7 is a library of lectures, small activities, and teaching modules.

You do not need to be a Member of the European Parliament to run this course.

Who this handbook is for and how to use it

You need: at least two educators with solid EU-institutional literacy (one can lead content, one facilitation); access to an online platform with breakout capability plus a shared-documents tool; and, for the full experience, the ability to organise a two-day in-person event. The full version of the proposed course asks for approximately 40 hours of work per month from the organising team as a whole, but you might want to run limited versions (for example, removing the homework and feedback would halve the requirements for organisers).

Everything else — scenarios, handouts, reading lists — is in these volumes. At the same time, you may choose to disregard the scenarios, alter them in any way, or apply the teaching principles of the Pirate Academy to a completely different domain of knowledge. This first volume gives you the framework: the principles behind the design and a summary of how we built the whole course. Understand it as the skeleton. The meat is in the other volumes: the scenarios.

Even if you want to run a single scenario rather than the whole course, start here. Each scenario volume opens with a *Running this scenario* quick-start that tells you what you need, but the overall methodology and principles are summarised here.

The handbook and its modules do not come with ready-made presentations of theory. You will be provided with summaries of what the students should already know, concepts of activities, and homework; but since part of the content is in a constant state of change, and the lectures also need to be well fitted to the target group and the guests you will be getting, it would be impossible to create one-size-fits-all working presentations.

Licence and reuse

The Pirate Academy Handbook series is published under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 licence (CC BY-SA 4.0): you may copy, adapt, and build upon the materials, as long as you credit the author and share derivative works under the same licence. One practical note: scenario secrecy (Chapter 2) is a pedagogical practice, not a legal restriction — the licence permits sharing the facilitator guides, but publishing them where your future participants can find them will break your own scenarios.

Chapter 2
Pedagogy: why simulations, and why this kind

The experiential learning cycle

The course is built on an experiential learning approach that combines theoretical understanding with hands-on practice. We alternate between theory (concept lectures and discussions with field professionals) and practice (immersive scenario exercises), and then use reflection to synthesise lessons into concrete skills — following the basic principles posited by David Kolb[1] and John Dewey[2].

Active-learning design is highly engaging. Simulation exercises in education have been shown to spark curiosity and deeper involvement in ways that traditional lectures sometimes fail to do[3]. By putting students in role-play situations where they need to make defensible decisions, simulations let them apply and test theoretical knowledge, which often deepens their understanding of the subtleties of theories and concepts, and draws in students who can be alienated by traditional teaching approaches. The skills being trained are also eminently practical ones: improvisation, negotiation, and preparation under time pressure.

In short: theory sessions provide the intellectual framework, scenario practice provides the experiential context, and guided reflection actively connects the two, leading to higher retention and more transferable learning outcomes.

- [1] Kolb, D. A., Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development (1984).
- [2] Dewey, J., Experience and Education (1938).
- [3] Asal, V. & Blake, E. L., "Creating Simulations for Political Science Education," Journal of Political Science Education (2006).

The limits of the approach

This approach also has real limitations, and it is worth being honest about them. Simulations are heavily simplified; the time pressure may be too stressful for some students; and not all content suits this particular mix. Based on alumni feedback, the approach is very strong at conveying dynamics and processes, building deeper intuitions, teaching students to gather and analyse information under pressure, and providing the lived experience of inhabiting different stakeholders in the process.

It is not a good way to transfer large amounts of domain knowledge, it cannot be fully precise, and it can be genuinely stressful. It also demands relatively high levels of autonomy and self-discipline — which makes it poorly suited to students at the earlier stages of their educational journey.

Scenario secrecy

Experiential design imposes one hard requirement on course transparency: **the moment of surprise**. While most of the syllabus is public, the scenarios themselves work by presenting models and subverting expectations, under limited preparation time. Scenarios must therefore remain secret from participants before the course. The public syllabus announces that a session is a simulation — never what it simulates. Facilitator guides in Volumes 2–6 are internal documents for the same reason: they contain the hidden pressure points, events, and confidential role objectives that make the scenarios work.

The consequentialist model

Most UN- or EP-style simulations concentrate on procedure: drafting speeches, following parliamentary rules, recreating the ritual. That is a valuable exercise, but this course deliberately focuses on **the content of the political conflict.** Scenarios use simplified models of trends, interests, and goals — and become educational tools by giving every stakeholder clear, consequential decisions with a genuinely open range of outcomes.

This principle makes design harder, not easier: for consequences to feel real, they must be realistically achievable inside the scenario. In the JCPOA scenario (Volume 2), we do not set the final version of the Iranian nuclear deal or push participants toward the historical outcome. It depends solely on them which interests prevail, which passages are redlined or amended, and whether any deal is accepted at all. "No agreement" is always a valid outcome — and one of the most instructive.

The approach is supported by recent evidence: political simulations promote not just knowledge and engagement but practical skills (negotiation, collaboration) and empathy for other perspectives[4]. Giving learners agency to drive different outcomes is the key strength of scenario-based learning.

The final step matters most. After each scenario concludes, participants compare their result with the historical outcome and rationalise the differences. This deliberately steps outside the limited logic of the scenario model: participants confront the model's simplifications and the vast complexity of real negotiations. The model is a teaching instrument, not a claim about the world. The debrief makes that explicit, and being able to describe the difference between the model and reality is a key requirement for every student.

This comparison also opens an important teaching opportunity: students must set their result against lived reality and try to spot the principles, differences, and individual steps that led to each outcome. *This thinking in systems* is something we want to encourage in students as much as possible.

[4] Clark, N. & Scherpereel, J. A., "Do Political Science Simulations Promote Knowledge, Engagement, Skills, and Empathy?," Journal of Political Science Education 20(1), 2024, pp. 133–152, https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2023.2204236. The study finds clear gains in knowledge and engagement and promise for skills; effects on empathy are conditional, depending on the strength of the beliefs students bring into the simulation.

Progressive complexity

Scenarios are sequenced so that mechanics build on one another:

- **Tier 1 (JCPOA — the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal):** simple roles, few stakeholders with high internal coherence, intuitive voting, one random external element (US demands). Goal: find a compromise text.
- **Tier 2 (Gas Crisis 2009):** larger cast, delegations with internal role differentiation, qualified-majority voting, a structured output document (draft protocol with bracketed options), timed news injects.
- **Tier 3 (EU Enlargement):** multi-institution process played out over three rounds within a single ~180-minute session, a resource-like tracking mechanic (reform scoreboard), asymmetric actors (candidate states vs. member states vs. institutions).
- **Tier 4 (ETCA and CSA2 — the two draft legislative files negotiated in Volumes 5 and 6):** full legislative trilogue over two days — internal mandate-building, article-by-article negotiation on real draft-law texts, secret individual objectives, scoring, public-pressure mechanics, timed injects with content.

An educator adopting the course should preserve this ordering even when substituting scenarios: participants who have never negotiated a bracketed text should not start in a trilogue.

Fiction, facts, and sourcing

Scenario materials mix three registers, and the handbook keeps them explicitly separated:

1. **Sourced fact** — background sections cite traceable sources or use hedged formulations.

2. **Fictionalised positions** — role handouts assert country and party positions for playability. Every scenario volume carries the standard disclaimer: *"Positions are fictionalised for educational purposes and inspired by, but not identical to, publicly reported positions."*

3. **Pure game mechanics** — scores, action menus, secret cards.

Roles are always **institutional functions, never named living individuals.** Participants play "the French National Representative," not a named minister. Real persons may appear in background context, but nobody plays them.

Chapter 3
Course architecture

The core loop

The course runs on a repeating rhythm:

lecture → simulation → reflection/ homework → (next lecture)

Each element feeds the next. Lectures provide the framework the next simulation will stress-test. Homework forces individual engagement between sessions and gives educators per-participant visibility. Simulations convert knowledge into experience. Structured reflection (both as debrief discussion and as written homework) converts experience into transferable skill — closing the educational cycle.

Standard shape of a Pirate Academy cycle

Phase	What happens	Duration
Outreach & applications	public call, application form	~1 month
Selection	two-rater scoring, cohort assembly	2–3 weeks
Online course	5 sessions, ~180 minutes each	~10 weeks
In-person finale	2-day simulation + programme	2 days

The five online sessions alternate: a lecture-heavy opening session; then a simulation; then a lecture; then a simulation; then a final simulation or synthesis session. Materials and pre-readings go out 3–14 days before each session (scenario factsheets ideally one week before a simulation). Homework is due between sessions and evaluated before the start of the next one.

This timing can be freely replaced with whatever suits your practical needs. One warning: there are good reasons to limit the gap between participants receiving the scenario factsheets and the scenario itself. The twin dangers are some students over-preparing while others lose attention entirely if the gap grows too long.

You can also add lessons, or skip some, to fit your programme. Keep in mind, however, that the in-person meeting is a very much needed finale of the course.

A sample five-session syllabus

One example configuration, consistent with the scenario volumes. Substitute freely — but preserve the tier ordering (Chapter 2).

Session	Focus	Content	Homework due before next session
1	Lecture-heavy opening	Course introduction; the EU institutional triangle; how legislation is actually negotiated; discussion with a practitioner	A — reform / policy proposal
2	Simulation	JCPOA (Tier 1, 2×45′) + debrief	B — post-simulation reflection
3	Lecture	Trilogues and negotiation craft; practitioner discussion; group work generating policy proposals	C — reality-check analysis
4	Simulation	Gas Crisis 2009 (Tier 2) + debrief	B — post-simulation reflection
5	Simulation & synthesis	EU Enlargement (Tier 3, three rounds) + debrief; synthesis of the online phase; briefing for the in-person finale	—

Cohort sizing

Recruit for attrition: **25 participants online, 15 travel to the in-person meeting.** Experience shows some admitted participants never log in; an online cohort of 25 keeps simulations viable even with no-shows, and the online phase then works as a natural qualification round for the limited in-person spots (see participation points, Chapter 6). Scenario casting guides in Volumes 2–6 specify each scenario's playable range and which roles to cut at lower counts.

The scenarios are mostly capped at around 20 roles; some of them can, if needed, be run in parallel groups.

Self-selection by published timeline

Publish the full course timeline — all session dates and the in-person dates — together with the application form. People who cannot attend will not apply. This one habit measurably reduces mid-course attrition.

Platforms

The course has run successfully on videoconference platforms (Jitsi) with collaborative documents, and on **Discord**, which proved particularly suited to simulations: persistent delegation channels double as team-preparation spaces during the week before a scenario, and private channels support confidential negotiation during play. Choose one platform for the whole course; a mid-course platform switch costs more engagement than any feature gain. Whatever the platform, each scenario volume includes a tech checklist.

Chapter 4
Admissions

The five-round funnel

Round 0 — Outreach.

Define the target group and go where it is. Ours: progressive, politically curious Europeans aged 18–55, explicitly not limited to party members. The course requires at least B2 English proficiency; state this in the call. Channels that work for this profile include university political-science and EU-studies associations, party and party-adjacent youth networks, Erasmus and exchange-programme alumni groups, civic-education newsletters, and the host MEP's own communication channels. Publish the full timeline with the call.

Round 1 — Application form (~1 month)

A form measuring motivation and orientation, not expertise (see below). Cut to a longlist (≤40). It is also possible to cut directly to the online cohort here.

Round 2 (optional)

Qualifying assignment with feedback. Applicants prepare a short policy briefing (two pages at most) on a topic chosen from a list; every applicant receives substantive individual feedback regardless of admission. This round is deliberately generous: it gives value to everyone who invested effort, it is the single best predictor of course performance, and it starts the feedback relationship that defines the course. It is, however, time- and work-intensive. Cut to the online cohort (~25).

Alternatively, you can also put only a limited number of edge-case applicants through the test.

Round 3 — Online course.
The five sessions; participation earns points (Chapter 6).

Round 4 — In-person finale.
Top-scoring participants (~15) attend.

Round 5 — Closing of the course.
Collect feedback and reflect on it — the next cohort's design starts here. In practice: a short anonymous end-of-course survey (what worked, what did not, what participants would change), one round of oral feedback at the close of the in-person finale, and a look at your own numbers — attrition per session, homework submission rates, the points distribution. Write down the three changes you will make next time while the cohort is still fresh in your mind. Alumni are also your best recruiters and guest speakers for future editions — keep in touch.

Designing the application form

Ask for four kinds of signal:

1. **Motivation and self-description.** Why this course, prior achievements, goals; one open question that reveals how the applicant thinks, e.g. *"What is one international problem you keep thinking about?"*

2. **Creative questions**. E.g. *"Describe the worst failure of EU policy and how you would fix it."* Complex questions do real work: they are impossible to answer generically and instantly separate engaged applicants from template-fillers. You can also use them to select for a more balanced cohort.

3. **Basic EU-orientation questions.** How the Commission is composed, what qualified-majority voting is, which countries use the euro, what Mercosur is… These questions screen for basic orientation and willingness to look things up, not prior expertise. An applicant who cannot be bothered to search is a worse bet than one who searches well; however, use them sparingly.

4. **Cohort-diversity basics** — age, country, education/occupation, in line with your data-protection obligations (Chapter 7).

Selecting

Two organisers rate every application independently on a 1–10 scale before comparing notes; combined scores produce the ranking, discussion resolves the edges. Two raters is the minimum honest setup — single-rater selection amplifies one person's taste, and blind double scoring surfaces exactly the applications worth arguing about. Keep a ranked waiting list: late drop-outs are common and late additions are routine (design your scenarios so a role can be added or cut a week out — the casting guides account for this).

Chapter 5
Running simulations: the facilitator's craft

This chapter collects the craft knowledge that sits above any single scenario. Each scenario volume applies it with concrete numbers, names, and timings — including the scenario's complete run-sheet in its facilitator guide; this chapter describes the principles those run-sheets apply.

Casting roles

Casting is a pedagogical act, not an administrative one.

- **Rate every role for speaking demand.** Each casting guide marks roles high/medium/low. Participants with lower confidence in English, or who are quieter, get roles that let them contribute through preparation, drafting, and bilateral work rather than plenary performance. This is an accessibility practice: the goal is that every participant has a real path to influencing the outcome. It is equally legitimate to *stretch* a confident participant with a demanding role. Casting difficulty is a dial, not a default.

- **Seed intra-delegation tension.** In multi-member delegations, individual handouts contain confidential objectives that pull against each other (a commercial director who wants the deal vs. a strategy adviser who profits from escalation). This is deliberate design: it keeps large delegations internally alive, prevents delegations from becoming monoliths, and teaches the real lesson that "national positions" are negotiated inside the nation first. The tension is intentionally low in the first scenarios. However, if you cast students who mesh together extremely well as a team, they will naturally drift towards simply working together and omitting the conflicts.

- **Cast friction consciously.** Who is opposite whom matters as much as who plays what.

Injects

Injects (timed news events, ultimatums, leaks) are the facilitator's steering wheel. Principles:

- **Write them in advance, word for word,** with a planned time and a purpose ("re-energise a stalling negotiation," "punish a premature consensus"). Improvised injects risk overburdening the facilitator and falling flat; scripted injects with full text are in every facilitator guide.
- **Ground them.** In historical scenarios, injects follow documented events of the period (sourced in the facilitator guide); in fictional scenarios they follow the scenario's internal logic and are labelled as fiction.
- **Fire them conditionally.** Guides mark injects as fixed-time or conditional ("if a deal seems close before the break, release the leak"). The facilitator's judgment call *is when*, not *what*.
- **Have realistic expectations.** A good inject provokes a reaction and perhaps pushes a student to re-evaluate a specific point. It should not be overwhelming, and it should not completely change the dynamics of the negotiation.

Managing the room

- **Quiet participants:** the facilitator's main in-session job is watching who has not spoken. Tools: bilateral phases (lower threshold than plenary), direct but low-stakes prompts routed through the game ("France, your minister is asked for a comment"), and pre-session casting (above). There is a genuine design problem here: pushing someone to the margin of a negotiation can be a reasonable — and realistic — strategy. The scenarios try to account for this by keeping everybody relevant and building in meaningful *comeback moments*, but a student can still box themselves in. That is one reason the scenarios are kept short, with key voting moments for nearly everybody. Keep in mind that some factions run a much higher risk of being boxed out of the negotiation, and be mindful that the same student is not cast in that kind of role repeatedly.

- **The tap-out:** every simulation announces an out-of-character signal by which any participant can pause or step out, no questions asked. Simulations run on pressure; the tap-out is what makes the pressure safe, and it is announced in the etiquette briefing of every scenario.

- **Etiquette briefing:** each general handout carries diplomacy-and-etiquette rules (in character vs. out of character, no personal attacks). Read them aloud at the start; do not assume they were read.

- **Facilitator neutrality**: the facilitator plays the world (chairs, clocks, injects, rulings) and never wants an outcome. If participants can guess the result you are hoping for, the consequentialist model is broken. Your neutrality should also be used as a vantage point. You are there to observe and make notes on which you can later base personalised or general feedback. Still, keep in mind that students of course notice you and will change their behaviour when you are observing, and it might be beneficial to give them some space, especially in breakout sessions.

When things go wrong

Every failure mode below has happened to somebody. None of them is fatal if you see it early.

- **Deadlock.** First response: nothing. Stalemate is realistic, uncomfortable, and instructive. Sit with it longer than feels polite. If it truly consumes the session, use a scheduled inject or the chair's procedural powers (call a vote, narrow the agenda to one article). And remember: "no agreement" is a valid, debriefable outcome. A failed negotiation often teaches more than a smooth one. The shorter online scenarios are mostly deadlock-resilient: they just end before the stalemate becomes a major problem.

- **Premature consensus.** The opposite disease: everybody agrees by minute twenty because agreeing is socially easier than fighting. This is what conditional injects and confidential objectives are for: release the leak. Remind the players personally that their personal, conflicting goals also matter. If the room still insists on harmony, let them finish early and spend the surplus time on a harder debrief: *what did you trade away to get along?*

- **Rules-lawyering.** A participant discovers the rules reward exploiting their letter over their spirit. Rule zero, stated in every etiquette briefing: the facilitator's ruling is final and follows intent, not wording. Never negotiate rules in-session; note the exploit and fix the scenario afterwards.

- **No-shows on the day.** The casting guide of every scenario lists which roles can be cut, merged, or absorbed by a teammate at short notice. You should never take up a role: it is impossible to both be in the scenario and facilitate it.

- **A participant gets eliminated**. Sidelined by the negotiation dynamic and visibly checked out. Route a task through the game: a bilateral request, a press statement, an instruction from their capital. If the scenario has a comeback moment coming, make sure they reach it.

- **The simulation collapses into comedy.** Humour is a feature of the course — until it dissolves the stakes. Do not fight it head-on. As a low-level reminder, you can respond in-game with consequences (the chair notes the delegation's frivolity is being reported home; the next inject lands harder); however, do not try to reprimand anybody. If that does not help, you might call a short off-game, meta coordination to restore a shared "why we are here and what we are actually trying to do". Students do not respond well to being chastised, but they do respond very fast to reminders that "you are here based on your choice and you want to be here to learn".

- **Out-of-character conflict or real distress.** Pause immediately — this is what the tap-out exists for, and the facilitator can call it too. Name the boundary out loud ("that was an in-character attack that landed out of character"), resolve it outside the room if needed, and resume only when both sides are actually ready. Most common insults in this area go straight to insulting competence/intelligence: and while these have become quite common in real-life politics, they are detrimental to the course.

- **You lose the clock.** Every run-sheet marks which blocks are load-bearing and which can be shortened or dropped. You can cut some of the content and it might be possible to make the debrief a bit shorter, but never skip the debrief completely.

Debriefing

The debrief is not an appendix; it is where the learning happens (Chapter 2). Standard structure, ~15–30 minutes minimum.

1. **Decompression.** One round: how do you feel, what just happened. Let the emotion out before analysis. For most scenarios there will not be much emotion to release, but it is always safer to cover this quickly and take a clear step away from the activity.

2. **Mandatory: shared reality.** Describing the result of the negotiation, how it would translate to the real world, and describing the limits of the simulation. This part does not have to be long, but it needs to be included, and it is important that the facilitator creates a shared reality.

3. **Optional: institutional lessons.** 4–8 prepared questions per scenario (in each volume) connecting the experience to EU-institutional mechanics. The best outcome is that after a few prompts, participants themselves begin describing what they learned or what surprised them — and you work with that. The time right after the simulation is key for creating distance between reality and simulation; at the same time, especially online, there is a limit to how much it can achieve. Most of the reflection happens between sessions, through homework.

4. **Bridge to homework.** The written reflection (Chapter 6) extends the debrief individually. The most useful assignment type asks participants to compare what happened historically (or what the real legislative file says) with the room's outcome, and to explain the differences. This is the step that detaches participants from the model's limits.

Individual scenarios may add steps of their own — scenarios built on hidden information (secret cards, confidential objectives) typically include a *reveal*, specified in their debrief kits. Treat the four steps above as the core, not the whole recipe.

Chapter 6
Homework and assessment

First, words of warning. Homework is a key part of the Pirate Academy teaching cycle. And that asks a lot not only from the students, but also from the organisers of the course. The full experience is a combination of scenarios, lectures, and providing a lot of detailed feedback for the students. The course (and our other teaching endeavours) experimented with different settings, and it seems that the personalised and intense feedback has a great long-term value. However, if you know that you will not be able to provide that kind of feedback, start planning with smaller requirements from the beginning: for example, doing just one assignment in the whole course. It is better to cut down on the requirements from the get-go than to get swamped by assignments you have no real capacity to reply to.

It is also possible to skip homework completely and run the course just as a series of scenarios, hoping that the students will pick up some things themselves: and they will probably still get some value out of the learning, improvisation, negotiations, etc. It will just not be the full intended Pirate Academy package.

The assignment archetypes

This is a short presentation of assignments we used during the course and the thinking behind them. Your course might have different needs.

A. The reform / policy proposal (course opener). *Propose a reform of the EU or its institutions* — maximum two pages.

Prescribed skeleton: Introduction (problem) → Reasoning → Implementation → Timeline → Conclusion.

Teaches: economy of language, structure, institutional feasibility — and allows you to get to know your students much better. Tried and working prompts are:

1. suggest a reform of Parliamentary procedures;
2. what kind of energy policy should the European Union pursue, and why;
3. does the European Union suffer from a "democratic deficit"? If yes, how should it rectify it?

However, even a very wide prompt like "suggest a reform of the European Union" brings in meaningful results. The page limit is the pedagogy — see below.

B. The post-simulation reflection. A three-question template, reusable for any scenario:

1. Compare the simulation result with the real-world result. Who would benefit, who would lose? (½–1 page)
2. What could you have done differently to achieve a better result for your institution? (a few sentences)
3. Take the scenario outcome as the real-world result. How would politics and the economy evolve differently? Provide a simple analysis. (½–1 page)

Question 2 is consistently the most insightful — it forces self-assessment in role, and honest answers there are the best evidence of learning. Question 3 rewards exactly the counterfactual thinking the consequentialist model trains.

C. The reality-check analysis. Participants take the proposals *they themselves* generated in session group work and compare them with actually existing and planned EU strategies, with sources: *Is Europe following "your advice"? Why? Why not? What is actually already happening?* (max 2 pages). This archetype closes the loop between enthusiasm and reality, and is the most demanding of the three.

The reality check works double duty: it refreshes "how things work," and it confronts students with surprises. Every cohort contains a few students convinced they hold the answers the EU needs — who then discover the EU is already pursuing the policy, often with complicated results.

D. Anything else. Homework should not be a static, repeated chore: one of your main tasks as an educator is creating meaningful assignments that you will actually be able to read and give feedback on.

Basic principles:

1. clear deadlines and text limits;
2. well-defined constraints — they are what stimulates creativity;
3. tasks connected to what actually happened in class, or to the stu-dent's own preferences and ideas, will always be both more useful and more resilient to being simply generated by AI.

Sidenote — the realities of AI

Sidenote — the realities of AI

Generative AI has evolved fast and is now very powerful. We decided not to ban its use during the course: we believe it will be a crucial tool, and using AI meaningfully is an important skill in itself. Acknowledging AI, steering students toward uses that enhance their abilities rather than replace their cognitive labour, and designing reasonably AI-resilient tasks is one of the larger challenges of contemporary education.

The baseline policy: AI assistance for editing and research is permitted with a one-line disclosure. Undisclosed AI-generated work is treated as a format violation; however, we need to accept that distinguishing AI work is now extremely difficult and will probably be impossible in the near future. The course works more with the assessment dimensions (novelty, feasibility, self-assessment in role) chosen so that generic AI output scores poorly anyway. A participant who cannot say what they would have done differently in their role has not done the assignment, whoever typed it.

For transparency: The Pirate Academy Handbook was reviewed for grammar, spelling, typographical errors, and formatting consistency using Claude (Anthropic).

Ten tips for designing a course that benefits from AI *(the technology moves fast — treat these as a snapshot, last reviewed August 2026, and re-check them against reality every cycle):*

1. **Require disclosure,** not abstinence. A ban you cannot enforce teaches dishonesty. A disclosure line costs nothing and keeps the conversation open.

2. **Grade the thinking, not the typing.** Weight dimensions no model can fake on the student's behalf: self-assessment in role, positions defended against trade-offs, choices explained.

3. **Anchor tasks in the room.** Assignments built on what happened in *your* simulation — the room's outcome, the student's own group proposals — start from material no AI has seen.

4. **Keep it short**. Page limits make AI padding a liability instead of an advantage — and concision is the skill you wanted to teach anyway.

5. **Ask for positions, not summaries.** Summaries are what AI does best; a defensible opinion with named trade-offs still requires a person who means it.

6. **Make sourcing part of the task**. Require students to say where claims come from and how reliable the source is — this trains exactly the verification skill that AI-generated text makes necessary.

7. **Model good use openly.** Show students how you use AI in your own preparation, and where it fails — as of 2026, even the frontier models still invented regulations or were confident in nonsense about QMV thresholds. Those specific problems will probably be solved by the time you are reading this text, but there will still be better and worse uses of AI tools.

8. **Legitimise the sparring partner.** Preparing a role by arguing against an AI, stress-testing a proposal before submitting it — these uses enhance ability. Say so explicitly, so students do not hide them.

9. **Ban recording**. There are numerous good reasons to ban recording of the session. Privacy is a key reason, but the added pressure of being recorded also pushes students into safer, more basic plays. At the same time, recordings can be easily summarised and scoured by AI, meaning that the analysis of "what happened" can be outsourced from the student completely.

10. **Keep in sync with current developments.** The AI tools are evolving very fast and are getting more and more efficient. The course should show them to students as a tool they can use, not a replacement for their own cognition. For that, you need to stay up to date on what is possible and what is not.

The feedback rubric

Feedback practice across cohorts converged on six dimensions of student work. We can simplify them in the following table.

Dimension	What it measures
1. Format compliance & concision	student respects set page limits and basic formatting requirements
2. Structure	clear problem → proposal → implementation → timeline (or the template given); other reasonable structural requirements might be used
3. Clarity	a reader gets the argument on first pass
4. Novelty	added value beyond restating known positions
5. Institutional feasibility & accuracy	grounded in treaty reality — QMV thresholds, competences, whether treaty change is required; "path of least resistance" solutions are a good example of a student understanding the policy dynamics
6. Sourcing & source awareness	the student knows where their information comes from and how reliable it is

Enforcement philosophy: your role is to support the students' learning journey. That includes providing direct and clear feedback, but it should always be caring and actionable feedback, including suggestions on how to do better. Also, there might not be a clear way to upgrade an assignment: then you should still provide clear praise of what works and nudge students towards other sources, or prompt different angles on how to look at the problem.

The feedback letter method

Every participant receives one consolidated personal feedback letter per assignment round. Treat the following as a list of possible ingredients, not a checklist to complete every time.

- **Structure:** salutation → one section per assignment (headed by assignment name) → prose paragraph each → missing work noted neutrally ("We did not receive your third assignment.") → thanks and signature. Roughly 5–6 numbered points or short paragraphs; 100–300 words per assignment.
- **Tone:** direct, second person, warm but candid. No inflated openings; errors called out plainly.
- **Praise is specific:** quote the participant's own phrases back at them. Generic praise reads as unread work.
- **Feedback is teaching:** the best feedback letters carry substantive information on what is "wrong" — and point clearly to where the student can study more. Only the wildest claims should be refuted directly.
- **Track growth across assignments** ("great growth from the first essay"): it tells participants their trajectory is being watched, which is itself motivating. But do this only when the growth is real, and rarely — over-complimenting devalues positive feedback.

Example of a feedback letter

Below is an anonymised example of a real feedback letter, responding to a single archetype-A assignment (a reform proposal on an EU expulsion procedure). When a round covers several assignments, the letter carries one such section per assignment, as described above.

Dear [Name],

Thank you for your assignment on institutional reform of the EU expulsion procedure. You tackle a genuinely uncomfortable question that most people avoid. A few thoughts:

1. The core observation — that accession requires strict compliance while membership does not — is a strong and well-framed starting point. It is a real asymmetry, and you articulate it clearly.
2. The mechanism design is thoughtful: unanimity minus one, graduated warnings, a fast-track for extreme cases. The unanimity requirement is also its biggest weakness, though: if the EU cannot find unanimity to trigger Article 7 sanctions against a backsliding member (a much lighter step), it is hard to see how expulsion would ever pass. You acknowledge this in your final paragraph, but it deserves mores pace: it is not a timing problem, it is the central political objection to the whole idea. If you want to go deeper on why Article 7 stalls, Kelemen's work on democratic backsliding in the EU is the standard starting point.

3. The Council of Europe comparison is good and well-sourced. Note, though, that Russia's expulsion was politically easy precisely because the situation was extreme and unambiguous. The cases where an EU expulsion mechanism would actually be needed (slow democratic backsliding, selective rule-breaking) are far messier, and that is exactly where "unanimity minus one" would still likely fail.

4. One thing missing: what happens to the expelled state's citizens, single-market commitments, financial obligations, and the EU agencies hosted there? Brexit showed that even a voluntary exit takes years to untangle; an involuntary one would be legally and practically enormous. Even a sentence or two on this would show awareness of the complexity.

5. Nice touch including actual sources. One upgrade: YouTube videos are hard to verify and tend to be secondary retellings; for a topic like this, EPRS briefings or Venice Commission documents give you the same accessibility with far more authority.

All in all, a well-structured and clearly argued proposal on a key topic. The main area to develop is honestly confronting why this is so hard in practice, not just in principle. And one question to keep thinking about: if you had to win the last two votes for expulsion, what would you offer?

[facilitator's signature]

Participation points and the in-person cut

You have accepted more applicants than you have in-person spots. Or you want to make sure that only people participating in the course actually go to the crucial in-person part. We used a simple system to decide who goes: online-phase activity earns points — attendance, homework submitted, simulation participation (roughly 2–3 points per item; a full-participation total around 20). For example, attendance is 1 point; handing in assignments is always at least one point, two for good work on them, three for exceptionally good work.

There is no artificial threshold for the in-person meeting: the top 15 rated students qualify.

You may want a different solution, depending on your organisation's principles and goals. If your in-person venue can accommodate 30 people and you can reasonably run the scenarios for them, you might decide not to cut at all. You might also decide to always cut, because you want to create a shared idea of exclusivity.

Be aware that the cut works differently on different students: some are motivated to higher effort by the threat of not being selected; for others, that pressure was a reason to drop out of the course rather than face perceived failure.

Chapter 7
Logistics and communications

The communication arc

1. **Application acknowledgment & "what comes next"** — decision date, full course dates, in-person dates.

2. **Acceptance / rejection / waiting list.** Rejected applicants are informed of their rejection; some of them are also offered a place on the waiting list. Accepted students get a mail detailing the onboarding. **Onboarding:** join the platform (e.g. Discord invite), set real name and photo[5] by a stated deadline, complete essential readings. The deadline does double duty: it is the first signal of continued interest, and silent admits can be replaced from the waiting list before the course starts.

3. **Per-scenario communications** — role-assignment email (role, delegation, factsheet, prep expectations), pre-session announcement, post-session debrief message. Templates per scenario in Volumes 2–6.

4. **In-person logistics** — save-the-date early, practicals like possible travel-reimbursement rules and required payments in writing, GDPR consent collected before the event.

Data protection

The application and selection process handles personal data (contacts, motivations, evaluators' notes). Practical minimums: collect only what selection needs; keep evaluation sheets access-restricted to the raters; delete or anonymise data of non-admitted applicants after the waiting list expires; and for photo/video at the in-person event, use a written consent

[5] Some students may not want to present their names and photos. Our choice was to allow it as a possible approach — while recognising that communicating with anonymous co-students is genuinely stressful for some participants. Calibrate enforcement to the cohort and your own ethical priors.

form stating controller, purposes, legal basis (consent, Art. 6(1)(a) GDPR), voluntariness, retention period, and any social-media/non-EEA transfer implications.

In-person event notes

Our in-person finale was a two-day trilogue-format simulation (Volumes 5–6) plus a programme around it: meeting MEPs and staff, expert speakers, a tour, and unstructured networking time. The informal parts are not filler; for many participants they are the durable outcome — contacts, and the confidence that the institutions are enterable.

Budget items that surprise first-time organisers: travel reimbursements dominate; room booking inside the Parliament requires an MEP office as host and long lead time; catering and printed materials are minor but non-zero.

Choose your venue early and make sure it suits the scenario's needs and your budget. The venue does not have to be a parliament, but there is a high premium on taking students into places not normally accessible to them.

The in-person event also needs a basic safeguarding setup beyond the in-simulation tap-out: name one organiser as the point of contact for anything that happens outside the game, make sure participants know who it is, and agree in advance how you will handle conflicts, harassment, or a participant in distress — including during the informal evening programme. A short code of conduct sent with the logistics email costs little and sets expectations before anyone needs them.

Chapter 8
Appendices

Recommended reading

We are trying to keep a minimal list of sources here. Most of the domain knowledge lies in the scenarios, and we believe that your course should also reflect your needs and beliefs.

Essential reading (before session 1)

Official EU explainers — deliberately high-school level. This is the basic material we need participants to understand before the first session.

- **How the European Parliament works** — official overview of roles, powers, and daily functioning: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en
- **EU institutions and bodies** — short guide to all institutions and how they interact: https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies_en
- **Council of the EU** — how the Council works and balances with Parliament: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu
- **The ordinary legislative procedure** — the standard EP infographic: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/legislative-procedure/index_en.html

For further reading — trilogues (the course's core procedure)

What is a trilogue? What is its position in the system, how is it carried out, who are the stakeholders, and what are the problems?

- **Reh (2014)** — "Is informal politics undemocratic? Trilogues, early agreements and the selection model of representation," *Journal of European Public Policy* 21(6). Democratic-theory implications of early agreements and trilogues; open-access PDF available via UCL Discovery.
- **Brandsma (2015)** — "Co-decision after Lisbon: The politics of informal trilogues in EU lawmaking," *European Union Politics*. Influential piece on the normalisation of trilogues post-Lisbon. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116515584497
- **Brandsma (2021**) — "Inside the black box of trilogues: introduction to the special issue," *Journal of European Public Policy*. Overview of actors, oversight, and legitimacy debates; useful as a gateway to the entire special issue.
- **De Ruiter (2022)** — "The European Parliament's mandate for trilogues," *Journal of European Public Policy*. How the EP coordinates and grants discretion to its negotiators.

Recommended ambient diet

- **EPRS (European Parliamentary Research Service) briefings** — a large number of publications helpful for understanding processes, mechanics, and basic statistics: https://epthinktank.eu/
- **Standard EU-politics textbooks** (with progressively lower relevance): Simon Hix & Bjørn Høyland, *The Political System of the European Union* (2022, 4th edition); Neill Nugent, *The Government and Politics of the European Union* (2017, 8th edition).
- **Mainstream day-by-day reporting** — Politico Brussels Playbook: https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/

Glossary of game mechanics

Bilateral phase — a negotiation phase in which participants talk in pairs or small groups outside the plenary; a lower-threshold space for quieter participants.

Comeback moment — a scripted point in a scenario (a vote, an inject, a procedural power) that gives a sidelined participant a designed route back into relevance.

Delegation — the group of participants representing one state or institution, often with internally conflicting confidential objectives.

Inject — a timed, scripted in-game event introduced by the facilitator.

Plenary — the full-room phase of a negotiation, chaired in character; the highest-pressure speaking format in a scenario.

Run-sheet — the facilitator's minute-by-minute session plan, included in each scenario's facilitator guide.

Factsheet — participant-facing scenario materials distributed one week ahead.

Secret card / confidential objective — an individual goal unknown to other players, sometimes pulling against the player's own team.

Bracketed text — a draft legal text with open options in brackets, the negotiation's working surface.

Mandate — a position internally agreed by an institution before inter-institutional negotiation.

Tap-out — the out-of-character safety signal.

QMV — qualified-majority voting (55% of member states, 65% of population).

Trilogue (also spelled trialogue) — informal three-way negotiation between Parliament, Council, and Commission.

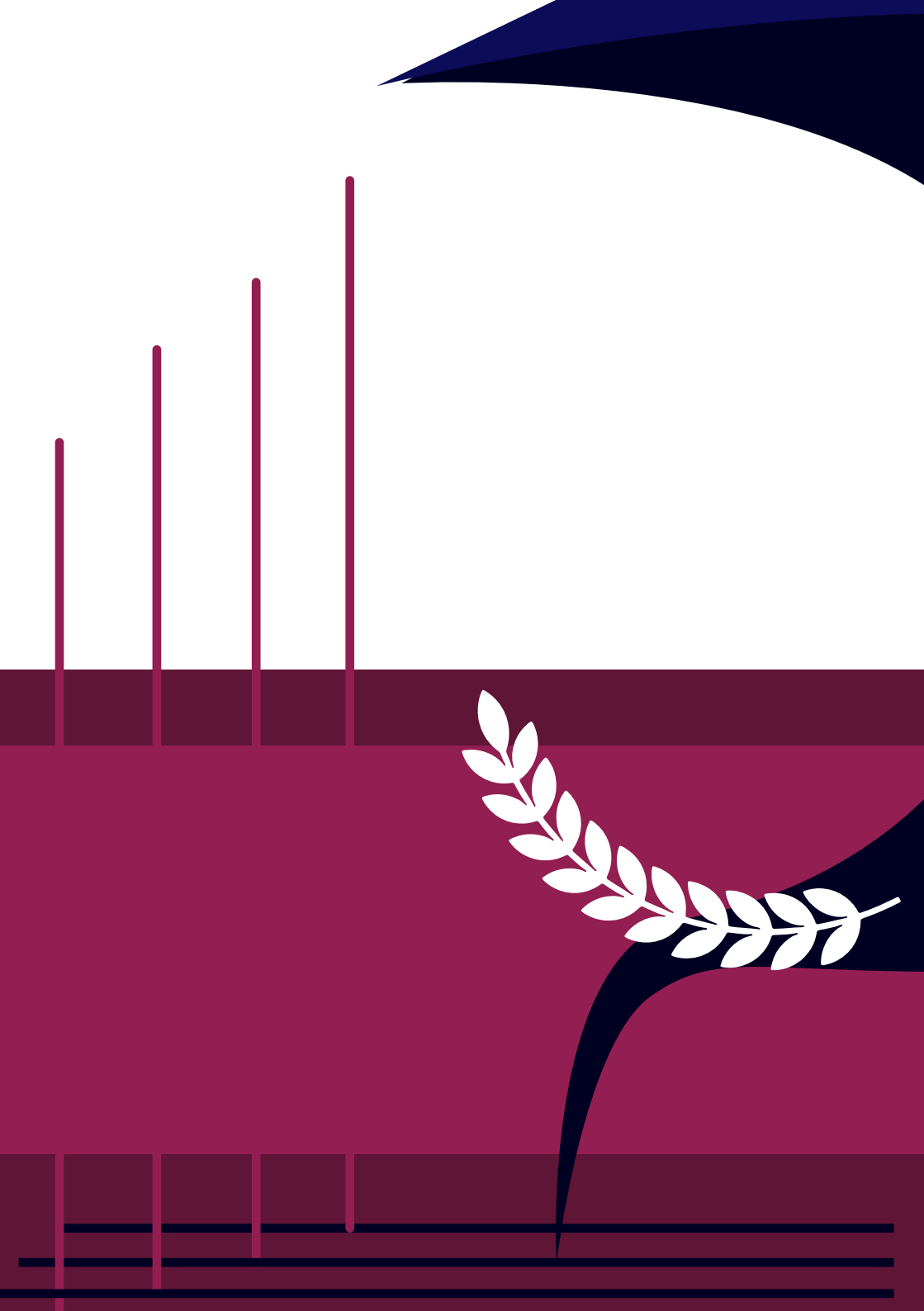
ETCA, CSA2 — the two draft legislative files negotiated in the trilogue scenarios of Volumes 5 and 6.

JCPOA — the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal; the subject of the Volume 2 scenario.

Scenario comparison matrix

	Vol 2 JCPOA	Vol 3 Gas Crisis 2009	Vol 4 EU Enlarge-ment	Vol 5 ETCA	Vol 6 CSA2
Format	online	online	online	in person	in person
Duration	2×45′	intro + 2×45′	~180 min (3 rounds)	2 days	2 days
Participants	~17–22	~20–25	~14–25 (maximalist)	~10–15	~12–14
Complexity tier	1	2	3	4	4
Core mechanics	roles, voting, one random element	delegations, QMV, draft protocol, injects	reform scoreboard, multi-institution	mandates, needs/wants scoring, trilogue	secret cards, 4-column law, timed injects
Output artifact	deal text	signed protocol	enlargement decisions	final act text	final act text

EUROPEAN PIRATE
ACADEMY

THE**GREENS/EFA**
in the **European Parliament**

The Pirate Academy was made possible by the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament.