
SustainEUorPlanet – Jean Monnet Chair Project

presents

SustainEUorPlanet Seminar Series in Bologna

The WTO Dispute Settlement System and Its Reform Process An EU Perspective

Lecturer

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within the activities of the Excellent University Departments Project, funded by the
Italian Ministry of University and Research*

*The views that will be set out during these lectures are those of the visiting researcher and do not
necessarily reflect the official position of any EU Institution*

“From GATT to the WTO and Its Dispute Settlement System”, 25 November 2025,
h. 15-17, Aula 3, Via Zamboni 22, Bologna

**“A New Geopolitical Reality and Criticisms of the WTO Dispute Settlement
System”**, 26 November 2025, h. 15-17, Aula 3, Via Zamboni 22, Bologna

“The Open Crisis of the WTO Dispute Settlement System”, 1st December 2025, h.
15-17, Aula 3, Via Zamboni 22, Bologna

“From Dispute Settlement Reform to Broader WTO Reform”, 2nd December 2025,
h. 15-17, Aula 4, Via Zamboni 22, Bologna

Introductory Remarks and Discussant

Prof. Elisa Baroncini

University of Bologna

SustainEUorPlanet Jean Monnet Chair

The event is organised as part of the activities of the Visiting Researcher at the Department of Legal Studies of the University of Bologna Davide Grespan within the activities of the Excellent University Departments Project, funded by the Italian Ministry of Instruction, University and Research, and of the activities of SustainEUorPlanet – Jean Monnet Chair Project, co-financed by the European Union. For information about the seminar, please contact: alessandra.quarta5@unibo.it

Abstract of the course: The course *The WTO Dispute Settlement System and Its Reform – An EU Perspective* offers a comprehensive overview of the evolution, current challenges, and prospective reforms of the World Trade Organization’s dispute settlement mechanism. Across four lessons of two hours each, participants will first explore the transformation from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to the WTO, its expanded scope, institutional framework, and the creation of the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) and the foundational legal principle of the WTO, illustrated through case studies. The second session situates the DSU within today’s shifting geopolitical landscape, addressing criticisms—particularly from the United States—and delving into contentious issues such as judicial overreach and the national security exception. In the third session, the focus shifts to the “open crisis” stemming from the Appellate Body’s paralysis, the phenomenon of “appealing into the void,” and Members reaction to that crisis such as the institutionalisation of alternative Dispute Settlement mechanisms like the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA). The final session examines ongoing reform initiatives of the Dispute Settlement system, their political context, and how they fit into broader WTO reform efforts, with attention to developments ahead of the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference in 2026. This course combines legal analysis, policy discussion, and case-based learning to provide a practical and strategic understanding from an EU perspective.

Synopsis of the lectures:

Lecture One: From GATT to the WTO and Its Dispute Settlement System

This session will trace the transformation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) into the World Trade Organization (WTO). Unlike the GATT, which had limited membership, scope (trade in goods), and a minimal institutional framework, the WTO was established as a fully-fledged international organization with global reach and a far broader mandate. We will examine the WTO’s objectives, functions, and agreements, and revisit the foundational legal principles of the international trade order as set out in the first three articles of the GATT. We will then provide an overview of the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU), highlighting how it differs from the GATT dispute settlement system. We will discuss the system’s success in both quantitative and qualitative terms, and examine how WTO adjudicators have gradually integrated sustainable development considerations into trade adjudication.

Case studies: DS472 Brazil — Taxation (EU) (MFN and National Treatment) and DS56 Argentina — Textiles and Apparel (schedules of concessions), DS600 EU and Certain Member States — Palm Oil (Malaysia).

Lecture Two: A New Geopolitical Reality and Criticisms of the WTO Dispute Settlement System

In this session, we will place the dispute settlement system in the broader context of shifting geopolitical dynamics and their implications for global trade. Particular attention will be paid to the growing dissatisfaction of the United States with the WTO, and especially its dispute settlement function. The session will conclude with a discussion of the legal debate surrounding the national security exception.

Case studies: DS453 Argentina — Financial Services (judicial overreach), DS379 US — Anti-Dumping and Countervailing Duties (China) (the “public body” issue) and DS597 US — Origin Marking (Hong Kong, China) (national security).

Lecture Three: The Open Crisis of the WTO Dispute Settlement System

Here we will examine how mounting frustrations led to the paralysis of the Appellate Body, including the practice of “appealing into the void.” We will also look at alternative arrangements, such as the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA), that some WTO Members have adopted to preserve a two-tier system.

Case studies: DS592 Indonesia — Raw Materials, DS618 EU — Countervailing Duties on Biodiesel (Indonesia) (appeal into the void), and DS591 Colombia — Frozen Fries (MPIA).

Lecture Four: From Dispute Settlement Reform to Broader WTO Reform

The final lecture will focus on a detailed review of the ongoing initiatives to reform the dispute settlement system, situating them within the broader context of WTO reform. We will consider recent shifts in US trade policy, reactions from other WTO members, and the prospects for meaningful reform in the lead-up to the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference in March 2026.

Avv. Davide Grespan: Davide Grespan studied law at the university of Bologna (1995) and Oxford (2001). He succeeded the bar exam in Italy (1998) and worked for a few years in different law firms in Bologna and Rome. In 1999 he worked in Luxembourg in the cabinet of Professor Mengozzi, at the time judge of the Court of First Instance, and also as a free-lance translator for the Court of Justice. In 2001 he joined the European Commission, in DG Competition. Later he moved to DG Trade. From 2008 to 2022 he worked in the Legal Service of the European Commission, and in this role he built an impressive record as litigator before the EU courts, the WTO judicial bodies, and international arbitrators. From September 2022 he is the legal advisor to the Permanent Mission of the EU to the WTO. He published several articles on legal matters and contributed to several works on State aid law and WTO law in English and Italian.

SustainEUorPlanet: The Jean Monnet Chair Project, coordinated by Professor [Elisa Baroncini](#), proposes an interdisciplinary and critical analysis of the EU's international policies and legal frameworks directed to economic and social fairness, respect for the environment, access to clean energy and essential goods, while looking for security to overcome geopolitical tensions and asymmetries. SustainEUorPlanet has a twofold purpose. On one side, it offers a set of activities envisaging the promotion of a ruling and academic class of excellence, involving EU, national and international civil servants, politicians, NGOs, local businesses and public administration. On the other side, SustainEUorPlanet shows the leading role of the EU as a global actor in constantly promoting a sustainable agenda for trade, environment, energy and climate policies, highlighting the importance of economic operators' accountability and the relevance that EU citizens can have in shaping and enforcing EU's external tools through participation and transparency. Likewise, the Project focuses on political security policies in world economy. More information available on the Project's [website](#) and on [LinkedIn](#).