

The informal construction of Europe

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Edited volume by Lennaert van Heumen and Mechthild Roos: *The Informal Construction of Europe* (Contemporary European Studies Series, Routledge (with UACES), 2019) – RSIEAblog

by Mechthild Roos

Muddled Brexit negotiations, disputed international trade relations, nationalist claims of a European top-level conspiracy: today's European Union (EU) faces internal and external turmoil. To overcome the manifold issues challenging the EU's functioning and self-understanding, European actors frequently have to resort to informal strategies of problem-solving. The reason is that formal procedures and Treaty provisions have proven insufficient or simply inefficient to remedy such unheard-of developments. Consequently, representatives meet behind closed doors, create new roles, strike non-binding deals, exert moral pressure. It seems as if the EU currently undergoes a period shaped by an abundance of informality.

The new volume 'The Informal Construction of Europe', lately published by Routledge in the [Contemporary European Studies Series](#) (together with [UACES](#)), demonstrates that informality has been an inherent dimension of European integration throughout its history. Whilst treaties and laws constitute the formal fundaments, informal action on the European intergovernmental, supranational and transnational stage has often been a necessary precondition for concerted action leading to agreements and political change. The contributions to this edited volume show that this applies not only to the EU and its predecessor, the European Communities (EC), but also to other international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the Western European Union, or the G7. Some chapters deal with informal aspects of decision-making procedures in these various fora. Others analyse the everyday policy coordination in European institutions, which builds to a significant extent on informal practices. Some chapters examine the evolution and discussion of ideas in non-formalised circles prior to the formalisation and institutionalisation of decision-making at European level. Presenting a wide range of cases of informality in European integration from the 1940s to the aftermath of the Lisbon Treaty (2007, in force 2009), this volume provides an in-depth understanding of the importance of informality in the history of European integration over the last 80 years.

In so doing, the volume contributes to filling a significant gap in European studies: the informal dimensions of European integration have as yet received limited academic attention despite their historical and contemporary importance. History and political science studies on European integration alike were for a long time characterised by a focus on national interests, national actors and their official archives, and analysed European institutions merely with regard to what Treaties, laws and formal agreements provided. That resulted in the informal dimensions of European integration being at best fragmentarily understood in many areas. Despite the rising interest e.g. in 'informal governance' in the EU from a political science perspective, and recent new approaches in historical research on European integration, such as network analysis and Europeanisation, 'informality' has thus far rarely been a central or coherent topic of especially historical research on European integration. This volume aims to fill this lacuna by showing how 'informality' has impacted European integration history and the functioning of the EC/EU as well as other European organisations in a variety of ways.

The volume addresses scholars from different disciplines studying the process of European integration, notably from history, political science, and international relations. As a key to the different analysed case studies, the introduction to the volume provides a definition of informality that can be applied across disciplinary borders. This introduction, as well as the book's second chapter on the conceptualisation of studying informality, offer advice on how to systematically approach informal action in European integration from a research perspective, how to delimit informal from formal action, where to look for it, and where to find source material on the seemingly invisible and ungraspable. By combining a number of different theoretical and methodological approaches, the introductory chapters and the different contributions to the volume offer a key to scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds to uncover and analyse the role, functioning and importance of informal procedures in European integration.

The contributions to this edited volume were discussed in and revised following an intensive three-day conference organised by the editors as members of the steering committee of the History of European Integration Research Society ([HEIRS](#)). This conference could not have taken place without the generous financial support of the University of Luxembourg's [Robert Schuman Institute of European Affairs](#), as well as of the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History ([C2DH](#)) and the Research Unit [IPSE](#), for which the editors are very grateful.

The volume 'The Informal Construction of Europe', edited by Lennaert van Heumen and Mechthild Roos, published by Routledge 2019, is available here: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Informal-Construction-of-Europe/Heumen-Roos/p/book/9780815351450>.