The 13th annual conference of the History of European Integration Research Society (HEIRS) raised the important topic of ‘informality’ in the history of European integration. While the majority of historical or political science research on European integration has focused on the formal institutions and the diplomatic procedures of establishing them, informality has played a crucial role in European integration. While indeed, treaties, laws and EU institutions constitute the formal fundamentals of European integration, informal activities on the European intergovernmental, supranational and transnational stage have often been a necessary precondition for concerted action leading to binding agreements and political change. The theme of this conference invited scholars to elaborate on the role of informality in European integration in various guises. The aim of the conference was to bring together PhD students and several senior researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds ranging from history to political sciences to discuss their research on informality in European integration. The conference was held at the Historical Archives of the European Parliament and the Maison Robert Schuman in Luxembourg and was organized by the HEIRS members MECHTHILD HERZOG (University of Luxembourg) and LENNAERT VAN HEUMEN (Radboud University Nijmegen).

In the conference’s first keynote lecture, N. Piers Ludlow (London School of Economics and Political Science) argued that informality in the European integration process cannot be studied separately from the formal rules and institutions of the EU. The balance between informality and formality in the history of European integration has shifted various times. The 1970s can be characterized as a decade in which informal procedures played a more significant role than during the period from the Single European Act of 1986 to the early 2000s, when several attempts were made to formalize in new treaties several novel rules and institutions of the European Communities. Some of these had been established informally, but lacked a formal basis – a prominent example is the European Council. Ludlow argued that the speed at which international contexts and crises develop often required new ways of action that could frequently not be met by the slow process of adapting formal rules and institutions as provided by the treaties. The option of devising new informal solutions was often deemed a good alternative to answering the pressing need for action.

The presence of informality within the formal institutions of the EU as well as possibilities to study informal governance were addressed in the conference’s second keynote, by Christine Neuhold (Maastricht University). She argued that the definition of informality as used within the political science literature is often not in line with the informal practices within the EU institutions. For instance, a much used partial definition of informality as ‘unwritten rules’ is far from a necessary condition. It is important to note that the line between formality and informality is often blurred. It is therefore important to critically engage with political theories about informality in political science and historical research on the development and functioning of the EU. Neuhold furthermore discussed the importance of membership in – and hence: access to – informal bodies and procedures.

Several presenters at the conference used the concept of informality to study the procedures of EU institutions and reflect upon the way in which informal contacts influenced the workings of these institutions. Others focused instead on informality as a tool to include actors in their research who had previously not been considered as significant, such as NGOs, private organizations and transnational networks. Many of these actors tried to influence the development of European integration or the policies of EC/EU institutions by using informal strategies ranging from argumentative
persuasion to political pressure. Thus, various papers showed how the research of informality can situate the EC/EU and its development within a broader historical context. The conference gave a multifaceted insight into the application of different understandings of informality allowing to study diverse phenomena within European integration, ranging from the study of European integration blueprints in elite networks during the late 1940s to the informal procedures within and between contemporary EU institutions.

**Conference overview:**

**Keynotes**

N. Piers Ludlow (London School of Economics and Political Science): Of treaties, conventions, and habits: how formal integration interacts with informal

Christine Neuhold (Maastricht University): Trying to capture and study the ‘invisible’: Informal governance in the EU

**Panel 1: A Europe at peace – Designs beyond state-run diplomacy**

Yamal Kouli: Intergovernmentalism avant la lettre? – European integration and the nation-state before World War I

Jorrit Steehouder and Clemens Van den Berg: A Wartime Narrative of Hope: the Freiburger Kreis’ 1943 Denkschrift as a Blueprint for Europe

Stephan Laffin: Carlo Sforza, the Politics of Europeanization and Italy’s role post-World War

Milosz Zielinski: Grey eminences and informal governance – Joseph Retinger’s role in the process of European Integration

**Panel 2: The impact of intermediary actors in the EC during the 1960s–1970s**

Lars Lehmann, „The Universities Europe“: Rectors and Vice Chancellors and European Politics in the Post-War Period

Lola Avril: European competition lawyers as intermediaries between the administration and companies: the case of the procedure reform in the 1970’s

Elena Danescu: Ideas, Individuals and Transnational Elite Networks in Shaping: the European Monetary Integration in the 1970s

**Panel 3: How to Europeanise the newcomers – Informal integration in the UK and Spain**

Mathias Haeussler: A ‘converted European’? James Callaghan and the ‘Europeanization’ of British foreign policy in the 1970s

Carlos López Gómez: The appeal and Limitations of Federalism: the European Union of Federalists and the Spanish Transition to Democracy

**Panel 4: The informal construction of Europe beyond the EC in the 1970s–1980s**

Ilaria Zamburlini: Human rights and EC’s development aid policies in the 1970s. The role of the Anti-Slavery Society, the European Movement and Amnesty International in influencing the EC institutions

Andi Shehu: Formalizing Informality: European Role in the Institutionalization Process of the G7 Summits from 1975 to 1979

Sara Venditti: The European defense and the industrial debates: the Western European Union as an informal tool for the European integration during the 1980s

**Panel 5: Informal procedures in the EU’s supranational institutions and networks in the 2000s**

Daniel Schade: Fuzzy roles in EU external relations governance: The difficult construction of EEAS-Commission relations after the Lisbon Treaty


Vladimir Bortun: Arriving late at the party: the tardy cooperation of radical left parties at EU level

Anastasia Mitronatsiou: EU parliamentarization of EU trade policy and CFSP: a growing (in)formal role of the European Parliament

Tagungsbericht „The Informal Construction of Europe“. 13th History of European Integration Research Society Conference.