

## Book Review

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### **WRITING THE RULES FOR EUROPE – EXPERTS, CARTELS, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

*Authors: Wolfram Kaiser and Johan Schot*

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## Abstract

The book offers shrewd insights into the underlying technological structures of European integration. Its analysis commences in the 1850s rather than the 1950s; this offers a new perspective that shows how a new elite of experts which grew out of industrialization carried out plans for closer European collaboration.

## Keywords

European integration; experts; cartels; international organization

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In *Writing the Rules for Europe* technology is seen as a major force for world change but also for the progress of European integration. This is not a surprise, as the book forms part of the 'Making Europe: Technology and Transformations 1850-2000' Series, launched by the Foundation for the History of Technology at Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands. Kaiser and Schot offer a view on European history through a technological rather than military lens. The analytical approach is that of history providing a positive narrative of European integration: '(...) recent European history is as much about building connections across frontiers as it is about playing out conflicts between nation states.' (x) The series editors make the fundamental point that technology is not sterile, rather that it is a process of human activity.

For the editors, 1850 – no later – marks the beginning of 'The Long Twentieth Century' and 1990-2000 – no earlier – its end. This period is characterized by globalization, of which Europeanization is a major factor. This book shows that new technologies, such as the digital revolution have played an important role in such shifting power relations in the world. The who, when, how and why are the driving questions of the historical analysis. Research networks are, naturally, one example of such European collaboration, which has led to a globalized Europe that looks quite different today from

what was imagined in the founding period. Such networks of knowledge and expertise are seen as the bedrock of European integration. Only on a basis of common rules for industry and the resulting standardization could the economic and political integration in the post-war period be successful. Hence, 1945 was not the 'zero-hour' (15). Kaiser and Schot accentuate what has happened before, and make a clear connection with older underlying structures, which made possible the success of post-war European integration (294).

Major infrastructure projects, such as motorways in the 1930s and space infrastructure today are perceived as the 'motor' of European integration and effectively also as the glue that holds Europe together. This also extends to the implementation of policies that now give full meaning to the European Union: '(...) focusing on organizations, committees, and experts making rules for Europe allows us to write a transnational history of how this continent has to some extent been governed jointly even in the hey-day of the nation-state and in times of national or ideological conflicts.' (9) Consequently, the definition of 'Europe' must remain fuzzy. The purpose of the book is to highlight the different meanings the notion of Europe could bear, e.g. 'as an ambition, a problem, a necessity, a stepping stone, a last resort, a response to America, a background factor, or an unintended consequence.' (11)

The technical expert became important as an agent of integration, setting common standards so that the new technologies could be brought to all corners of Europe. Expertise permeated multiple fields, from radio transmission to the railway network. The world exhibitions of technological advancement of 1851 in London and 1855 in Paris provided forums of progress where the new European elite of inventors, engineers, explorers and entrepreneurs met to pool and exchange ideas. In economic terms, the case for free trade also began to win much wider acceptance in this period, against the old mercantilist tradition. Education was transformed through new schools training technical and administrative elites, such as the *Grandes Écoles* in France, which offered innovative alternatives to law and theology as the traditional disciplines of higher education. Experts were important for Europeanization because their expertise and elitist training earned them a degree of political trust. Eventually, their belief in the power of logic and their influence would bring about the institutionalization of Europe.

The Telegraph Union is a good example of the way in which experts believed in the power of logic and how it would create a material between the European peoples through the ether. As with the European Union today, such 'societies' have a diffusing effect, i.e. they become norm setters and their rules are adopted even by outsiders for this very reason. Again, like the EU, integration started in very specific areas but spilled over into other areas and led towards a comprehensive institutional structure for the whole of Europe.

The early post-war years of European integration followed the same internationalist, technocratic and sectoral but, at the same time, deep-reaching integration logic. Most of the experts, working in post-war European institutions, had knowledge of pre-war technical societies and often shared their behavioral pattern. 'The first new dimension was the EU's explicit federalist normative thrust, and the second its new legal design which was to foster this federalist agenda. As a result, with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC), making rules for Europe became intimately linked to the idea of European political integration.' (104) In parallel, national governments conceived investment plans for their industries, such as the Monnet Plan in France, with the purpose of rebuilding and modernizing their economies.

A European economic recovery plan came in the form of the Marshall Plan. This book demonstrates nicely that the European steel industry was a strong candidate for technical and political integration, because steel was the material of the future, the substance of progress and growth, but also, sadly,

the raw material of armed conflict. However, experts were limited in their freedom to act within the ECSC. The political objectives of Franco-German reconciliation and the creation of the European Communities became more important than setting technical standards, i.e. what became the 'ever closer union.' (257) However, Monnet as head of the ECSC, nurtured, older ideas stemming from enlightenment and the age of reason. Rational argument was supposed to lead to the best solution for Europeans. Monnet associated politics with failure and blockage and he was not alone in that in the post-war period, particularly in France and Germany where the national political system had failed its citizens during the Second World War. He saw rational argument and transnationally-shared objectives as the way forward for Europe.

This rational ethos often stood in stark contrast to power politics as played out in national parliaments, which lacked an international perspective and often got embroiled in nationalist squabbles. Moreover, Franco-German cooperation and attempts to create a 'supranational' Europe politicized 'core Europe' integration beyond the functional goals of earlier specialized transnational or international organizations.' (266) A good example of this politicization is the political objective of the ECSC 'to contribute to transnational social integration through European-level investments' (267). The EU, therefore, seems to represent an evolution from well-established functionalist technocratic organizations to a political union. '(...) driven by political leadership, shaped by business and legal elites and expertise, and fostered by legal integration, the creation of a customs union and later, internal market, crucially allowed the EU to deepen its integration and draw nearby countries into its orbit, extending both its functional and spatial scope.' (274)

Overall, to start with the analysis of European integration in the 1850s rather than the 1950s brings a refreshingly new perspective. It shows that the roots of European integration go further back, effectively carried by a new elite of experts which grew out of the industrialization. The argument that technology formed society is very different from the idealist political European integration effort of the inter-war period. Many studies have been done on Aristide Briand or Walter Rathenau, who led European integration efforts in France and Germany during the interwar year. There are fewer contributions on telecommunication or railway engineers, with a comparable focus on integration. *Writing the Rules for Europe* provides this rather neglected perspective. It is easy to read, but at the same time offers shrewd insights into the underlying technological structures of European integration, which should be valuable to scholars and the general public alike.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

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Palgrave MacMillan, 2014

ISBN: 978-0-230-30807-7, 396 pages + index