Brexit, Grexit and the Chronicle of a Failed Identity
Construction Foretold: Prof. Xenia Chrysochoou (Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, Greece)

In this presentation firstly I will draw on mine and others’ previous research on European identity construction in order to present the early signs of why the Brexit should not come as a surprise. I will try to give evidence why the failure to build an overarching European identity was foretold.

Building on three important theories of social psychology, namely Social Representations Theory, Social Identity Theory and Minority Influence, I will argue that the project underlying European Identity, although initially appealing to some, could not serve large parts of populations and therefore, in times of economic crisis, was not functional for them. Because European Unification did not overcome, or at least diminish considerably, the structural asymmetries within and between countries, political system’s failed promises brought discontent and people disengaged from it.

Bringing evidence from studies in Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal and the UK, I will try to argue that identification with Europe was instrumental and therefore dis-identification, in times of crisis, was inevitable. Moreover, from research in Greece, in the aftermath of the electoral rise of Golden Dawn, I will argue that “betrayed believers of the system” are keener to embrace conservative beliefs and radical actions and therefore more open to be influenced by extreme-right wing and populist discourses.