



The Open  
University

**CCIG** Citizenship • Identities • Governance  
a centre of research excellence at the Open University

# A UK referendum on Europe: could the public decide?



**Thursday 4 June 2015, 12.00 - 15:00**

Venue: UNISON, Douglas House, 60, Belford Road, Edinburgh, EH4 3UQ

## **CCIG/Open University in Scotland – Knowledge Exchange Forum**

“The European idea is empty. It has neither the transcendence of Messianic ideologies nor the immanence of concrete patriotism. It was created by intellectuals, and that fact accounts at once for its genuine appeal to the mind and its feeble echo in the heart” explained Raymond Aron in 1954. Since then the European Union has done little to shake off this perception of a remote technocratic project. Social psychologists have spent decades investigated how people make decisions in conditions of uncertainty. Given what we know about how susceptible to influence we are - is it rather risky for the public to decide on the UK’s relationship with the European Union. Perhaps this relationship is the very sort of relationship which requires state leadership to decide what is in the best interests of the country as suggested by the former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in April.

If such a case is accepted what issues does this raise for the democratic accountability of the European Union project? Kesi Mahendran and Ima Jackson will draw from evidence where citizens, both migrant and non-migrant, have been presented with stimulus materials and asked whether they consider themselves to be citizens of the European Union. Challenging arguments around ‘democratic deficit’ their responses provide clear sighted evidence for a future referendum on the UK and the EU. Citizen responses in such conditions can become more nuanced, relating to narrative identifications which quickly go beyond Eurosceptic or Europhile. What comes into play when the majority of our participants, irrespective of their own sexuality, mention sexual tolerance as a feature of the

European project? Did participants regard themselves as European? Are the Scottish more pro-European than the rest of the UK as is popularly assumed? Do Ireland and Sweden make useful small country comparators for Scotland? How can London's exceptionalism be explained?

The event provides a valuable opportunity to debate these questions and to explore social psychological research around how 'we the public' debate the big political questions of the day. A panel of people engaged with issues relating to citizen rights, the European Union and political subjectivity will debate the evidence and assess – whether the public could decide. Come and join the debate.

## **Programme:**

- 12:00-12:40                      Registration & Buffet Lunch
- 12:40-13.20                      ***Public perspectives on the Europe Union. Introducing the dialogical citizen in the European public sphere***
- Kesi Mahendran (Director of Enactments Programme, Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance, Open University)
- 13.20-13.50                      ***Is there evidence that the public in Ireland and Scotland share views on belonging, mobility and the European Union?***
- Ima Jackson (Lecturer School of Health and Life Sciences, Glasgow Caledonian University)
- 13.50-14.40                      ***Panel Debate – Could the public decide the UK's relationship with the European Union?***
- Christina Boswell (Edinburgh University)  
    Alison Cairns (SCVO)  
    Henri Krishna (CPAG in Scotland)  
    Maggie Lennon (The Bridges Programme)
- 14:40-15:00                      ***Plenary – questions and opinions from the audience***

RSVP: To register please visit the CCIG website <http://bit.ly/1ArypgF>  
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