



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?



**Wednesday 20 May 2015, 18.00 - 20:00**

Open University – London

Venue: The Open University in London, 1-11 Hawley Crescent, Camden Town, London, NW1 8NP

Maps and Directions: <http://bit.ly/1QmFWC1>

This keynote is part of the CCIG Lecture series *Being on the line: citizenship, identities and governance in times of crises*. In this lecture series, leading CCIG researchers put social sciences on the line. We examine its limits, rework old concepts and develop new ideas and methods to draw out possibilities for critique, social justice and positive social change in times of crises. This lecture will be given by Dr Kesi Mahendran (Lecturer in Social Psychology and Director of the CCIG Enactments Programme).

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

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“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 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 participants, irrespective of their own sexuality, mention sexual tolerance as a feature of the European Union project? Did the participants regard themselves as European? 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 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:**

18:00-18:15 Introduction – Jef Huysmans

18:15 -19:00 ***Public perspectives on the Europe Union. Introducing the dialogical citizen in the European public sphere***

Kesi Mahendran (Open University)

19:00-19:40 ***Panel Debate – Could the public decide the UK's relationship with the European Union?***

Molly Andrews (University of East London – Professor of Political Psychology and author of the book 'Shaping History – Narratives of Political Change'.

Niccolo Milanese (Chair of European Alternatives)

Chair: Jef Huysmans

19:40-20:00 ***Plenary – questions and opinions from the audience***

RSVP: To register please visit the CCIG website <http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/events/ccig-lecture-series-kesi-mahendran-on-a-uk-referendum-on-europe-could-the-public-decide>

and complete the registration fields. If you have any queries please contact Sarah Batt, Research Secretary,

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