

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, welcome back to this last session in our Student Hub Live event for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, where we're discussing Brexit. Now, you're very lucky because I have two fabulous guests for you. And we've been wondering what's going on agreeing, that there is total chaos.

So let me introduce you to Richard Heffernan and Eleni Andreouli. Richard is from our politics department, and Eleni is from psychology.

So Richard, we've got some questions here which we'd like people to ask on about aspects of life that they feel will be most affected by the EU, and whether friends and family have particular understandings about how Brexit might impact or be useful for understanding things in the arts and social sciences, and also whether or not we think we should have a second referendum. Richard, what's going to happen?

**RICHARD**

**HEFFERNAN:**

Well, I've left my crystal ball at home. So because I think we need a crystal ball. At the moment, it's all very unclear. I mean, we voted to leave. We enacted Article 50, which means that by the end of March 2019, we will leave. And we negotiated with our European partners, to use the phrase, last December, that we will have a transitional period of 21 months after that. So on the 31st of December 2020, we will officially have left.

And so what we're now in the process of negotiating is what trade arrangements and what continuing association we have with what we know as the EU 27, which is the EU 28 minus us. So at the moment, we're on a schedule to leave. I mean, there is a timetable that is now legally enforceable.

If we don't come to an agreement about what relationship we have, then on the 31st of December 2020, we leave and we operate on the basis of what are called WTO, World Trade Organisation, rules. But between then and now, there's a lot of negotiations. It's in many ways a leap in the dark.

There were lots of people who want us to stay. There are also people who want us to leave. And of course we had the definitive referendum, in which the British people, when asked, said that they would vote. They did vote by 52% to 40% on a 75% turnout, mandating the parliament to take us out.

So at the moment, we're leaving. But it's fraught with difficulty. There is a transitional period. So we will be leaving officially as of now on the 32nd of December 2020.

**KAREN FOLEY:** You mentioned the idea of a schedule. And we've talked today about how some decisions have or haven't been made, et cetera. To what extent, in your opinion, then, is this schedule on track?

**RICHARD HEFFERNAN:** Well, it is on track. I mean, this is the process. I mean, it may come off track. The wheels may fall off the bus. The thing about European Union negotiations is they're always last minute brinkmanship. They usually discuss under the surface, quietly, privately, briefing positively and negatively through the press, through the media. There are a cacophony of voices, but there'll eventually be a European Council, which will take three days, which will then hammer out the final agreement.

That's what happened last December, when we agreed what bill we will pay, some \$39 billion pounds we will pay as part of our exiting, in terms of meeting our financial obligations. We've agreed the relationship that citizens of the EU will have who live here in the UK and UK citizens living in the EU 27. That's all been agreed.

And what we're now talking about is the trade relationships. There's all sorts of options there. Do we stay in the single currency? Excuse me. Do we stay in the single market? Do we stay in the customs union? Do we stay in some form of customs union? We talk about all various models, and these have all been deliberated.

Parliament will eventually have to adjudicate on the deal that the government cuts with Europe. And who knows what they think, because there are people in Parliament who don't want us to leave. The House of Lords has a Remain majority. The House of Commons, a majority of MPs in 2016 voted to stay, to remain. Some 70%.

So there's a lot of work going on and a lot of disputation. Because ultimately, there is a minority of people who think we should stay, come what may. And they have great positions within the state. And the government is not best placed to deal with these difficult questions, because the competence of the cabinet is called into question by both Brexiteer and Remainer alike.

So it's a very problematic process, but it's still on track. But it may be derailed at any moment, probably later rather than sooner.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So whilst we're in this sort of new terrain and very much unknown, we do know that there is this last minute panic, and that things will happen in that sort of way in terms of how that negotiation might happen at the very last minute.

**RICHARD HEFFERNAN:** Well, that's the way it's worked previously in the European Union. It's not a very good way of doing business, pulling all-nighters.

**KAREN FOLEY:** But it is something that we can, I guess, say that that's a common thing, so not to panic too much in that sense.

**RICHARD HEFFERNAN:** Well, yeah, no. At the moment, the process is serious negotiation. The worry that one should be panicking about is how fair and frank and free are the negotiations. My concern as a citizen is that I think there is an element of opinion within the European Union, the so-called Eurocrats in and around the European Commission, who want to punish Britain for leaving in order to stop other people from following down that path.

And I don't think you get a good deal for Europe or for Britain in that regard. I'm also very worried about the competence of the government, the prime minister in particular. Citizens have all sorts of concerns. I mean, it is a leap in the dark. And at the moment, we're looking around and preparing to-- well, we're halfway. We've already started to leap. We're in midair, and we don't know where we'll end.

**KAREN FOLEY:** OK. People have been voting on our widget about whether we should have a second referendum. You can keep voting on that as we discuss. There's plenty to pick up on, and I do want to pick up on a lot of what you've said, Richard. But Eleni, I'd like to ask you before we do that, just to focus on the other sort of side of the discussion, which is around this area of identity. And I wonder if you can tell us whether you think that British voting to leave means that we're in the process of becoming non-European?

**ELENI ANDREOULI:** I mean, that's a very, very complicated question. I mean, what it means to be European, what it means to be non-European, and is Europe the same as the EU? I mean, one could argue, and many people have, that we can be part of Europe culturally but not institutionally in terms of being part of the European Union.

But I think it is true that the Brexit vote and the whole debate around it and the history leading to it shows Britain's Euroskeptic attitude, which of course has been heavily researched in the social sciences. And of course it does show a certain reluctance to identify with the EU, at least

from a large part of the British population.

Not everyone. I mean, we have to acknowledge that there are nuances and there are complexes in the ways that different parts of the population think about Europe, how they identify with Europe or not, and how they think that Britain relates to European identities.

And of course this has brought up all sorts of other identity-related questions, like Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth. That's now in discussion. Britain's relationship with other parts of the world outside of the EU and outside of the Commonwealth, for example, the US.

So I think the issue of identity is very, very important. And I think we should keep in mind for all those kind of different political projects that are in conflict around Brexit, that are being negotiated also to another level represent conflicts about the meaning of what it means to be British in 2018, 2019, and so on, and its relationship with the world.

**KAREN FOLEY:** We talked earlier today about different ways of looking at the categorization of Leave-Remain, and that place was quite a key way of doing that, but equally, it's not necessarily the most useful and there were lots of subtle nuances. I wonder, Eleni, if you could talk about the way that you're cutting that sort of cloth, in terms of how you're looking at people. It's not just young versus old, et cetera, and how that might then relate to politics in terms of who is doing what and how that's all playing into who we are?

**ELENI ANDREOULI:** Yeah, I mean, that is a good question. It is not just young versus old. It's not just a question of urban versus rural. I mean, many dichotomies have been proposed. Educated, not as educated. Middle class versus working class. White versus ethnic minority.

So all these categories, they do play a part in how people have voted. I mean, it has been proposed that older people, less educated, more working class people from more rural parts of the country, in England, particularly have voted to leave more so than remain.

But I think it's not always useful to fall back into binaries between Leave and Remain, working class versus middle class, and so on and so forth. I mean, there are other studies that paint a more complicated picture. So we need to look at the nuances, and we need to appreciate that people are not either/or, for or against the euro.

I've done some qualitative research using focus groups. And you can see that people who voted both Remain and people who voted Leave, they all have arguments for and against the

European Union. So people are not as simple as we usually think of them. People have a more complicated view of the European Union. So yeah, that's pretty much-- I haven't given you a straight answer, but again, the answer is, it's complicated and we need to consider yeah, the complexes and nuances of people's perspectives towards Europe.

**KAREN FOLEY:** But isn't it interesting that, to some extent, even though those sorts of binaries have shifted, still, nonetheless we're talking in those terms?

**RICHARD HEFFERNAN:** Well, I mean, I personally think that an objection to the European Union is not an objection to Europe per se.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah.

**RICHARD HEFFERNAN:** I mean, there's sizable minorities in all of the EU 27, particularly in Germany, and also in France. I mean, in France, in the first ballot of the presidential election, the majority-- the plurality voted for parties that were critical of Europe and were in favour of leaving the euro. Which is a key feature of the French political economy.

So I mean, when we were reluctant to join the EU's predecessors in '51 and '58 and talked about it as a national conversation between 1971 and '75, I mean, we had a referendum on staying in having just joined, largely because the elite were divided in the case of the Labour Party, which was then in government.

There was a sizable number of people voting then who were described as "Little Englanders," that thought the world ended at Dover and didn't want Johnny Foreigner, to use the phrase that was common at the time, determining our affairs.

I mean, that group, they are very little, very few Little Englanders left. There was always going to be some xenophobia, but it's a dying rationale in terms of explaining the vote for Brexit. I think everybody sees themselves as European to some extent.

And every member state that's joined the European project have always joined for altruistic reasons. I mean, for self-interested reasons. The Germans want to improve Germany, and then improve the collectivity of Europe. We're no different. And we've had a difference of opinion and particularly within the Conservative Party. Although Labour, historically, was the more Euroskeptic of the parties back in the day.

So I don't buy into this notion that it's a repudiation of Europe. People will still be going to

Benidorm and still be going on holiday, and people will be still visiting. And I think we're culturally much more closer than we've ever been, and I see no-- I think that will deepen and enrichen.

I do think that a European Union that is imposed upon people could threaten people's notions of a collective identity within this continent. And I don't think anybody has a say on that. I think it's a reaction to a union, a political union, that people either support reluctantly or oppose for a variety of reasons.

It's not the most popular institution. If you had a referendum in June 2016, "Do you think the European Union works for Britain," I suspect 75% of people who had voted, they'd say that it didn't.

And then if Dave had done that, Cameron had done that, we could then have had a proper negotiation to improve the terms of our membership, which wasn't, in my opinion, working for Britain. And then we could have had a much better outcome than we've had, which is a bit of a dog's dinner, in which, ultimately, I think nobody's going to be satisfied with whatever arrangement is made.

**KAREN FOLEY:** But the important thing right now is, I guess, you're saying there are some very real issues and concerns. But yet, we're in such a dynamic, fast-moving pace that we need to somehow have a narrative. We need to make some sense of who we are, and who us and them, et cetera, are, so that we can move forward. And part of that is creating new political identities, and also part of it is cultural and personal identities also, in the case of "where do I fit in the world?"

**ELENI ANDREOULI:** Yeah, I think we do lack-- I mean, I agree with you in terms of the lack of capacity of the current government to propose-- well, to handle the negotiations to start with, and propose a vision that speaks to people. Pretty much, I mean we see people are now quite polarised. We see that the major political parties are unable to have-- well, pretty much to construct a narrative that speaks to both people that voted Leave and people that voted Remain in a way that is overarching.

So I think political leadership is very, very important. I'm not quite sure how they're going to solve that. But definitely we cannot stick-- I don't think we could stay with the Remain versus Leave kind of dichotomy. We need a narrative that goes beyond that.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Because it's not helpful. Like you say, it as a dichotomy. And actually you've pointed at the

idea of leadership. How important is that, and is that a way of solving things in terms of political leadership moving forward and taking us into this new terrain?

**RICHARD  
HEFFERNAN:**

Well, it's essential. I mean, the British side is weak in terms of the negotiation. I have a high regard for David Davis, but I think within the cabinet, there is a strong division. Mrs. May is a weak reed. I mean, I wouldn't want her negotiating-- I don't think she's able to clean my car, let alone lead Britain into-- I don't have a car--

[LAUGHTER]

Leading Britain into a negotiation of this type. I think that the Conservative government's ambition is to remain in office until 2020, when the next election-- 2022, whenever the next election is. Yeah, 2022.

And I think to that end they will fudge. But they can't say now, because that will damage them. Because the majority of Tory MPs now are in favour of getting on with Brexit and negotiating it. And there's a minority of Remain conservative MPs who will deny the government a majority that takes us out. A small majority, but the government has a small majority.

So that's the thing that concerns me most of all. It's not leaving or staying. It's the way in which we leave. And I think we are on track to leave badly. I actually think the hard Brexit, outside of the single currency, which we've never been in, outside of the single market, outside of the customs union, is better than a halfway house, and is different-- the same as the status quo. Not leaving at all.

I think that a fudge is the worst of all possible outcomes, and I think that's what's coming. And I think that will make people despondent. I think governments are obliged to discharge instructions given by electors. The Irish Republic is today voting on liberalising their abortion law. And if the Irish people decide by a majority that they want to liberalise their abortion law, the government has to act.

The government then says, "Oh, we can have a transition period and we're going to wait six or seven years under the status quo," I think that hacks people of quite rightly. So my biggest concern is the inability of the political class, two rotten parties, useless to the core, in my opinion, to actually help take the country through.

Plus, I'm also fearful of the vengeful Eurocrats, who want to punish Britain in order to prevent others from reforming a union which doesn't work and stopping other people from leaving a

union that they might not like.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So your argument, really, is around competency. But if we were looking at leadership, there's obviously the ability to do the job, but also there's the ability to lead and to get people onside. And part of that will depend, obviously, on a leader, but also part of that will depend on the mood of the nation to follow, which can be nicely teed up, I guess, in terms of who that nation is. How can we collectively create an identity, when, as you say, we're on these dichotomies at the moment, which aren't very helpful.

I don't actually know how we might come together and do that. There's been so much work in psychology on how groups of people can come together. Can we use any of that?

**ELENI ANDREOULI:** Well, yeah. I mean, leadership theory, we have so much work in leadership theory. I think I agree with Richard. I mean, the inability of the current government to lead the negotiation and the fact that they are driven by a short term political interest, basically wanting to get re-elected, that is quite obvious. That means that they cannot build a vision which British citizens can believe in. And hence, they are not able to act as leaders.

Well, and now we do need strong leaders. And I think partly why Jeremy Corbyn has been a bit more successful than what people had expected him to be was because he seemed to go beyond that, beyond the kind of short term political kind of interests. And he seemed to build a bigger narrative.

Of course, again, he wasn't as successful as he could have been in terms of actually having a majority, but the fact that the mainstream political movements do not seem to speak to the people's interests but rather to their own party's interests is a major problem. And of course, that means that they cannot build an identity that people can, unquote, own to.

And yeah, so I would agree 100% that the leadership theories from psychology would be very, very useful. And maybe they should actually read up on them if they want to get in touch with the public a little bit more. Yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:** But Richard, do you think that's possible? Do you think that it is a case of the politics? Is it a case of the very difficult terrain? Or is it a case of the people in charge of the leadership? Do you think if someone else could step in, we could have this sorted in an entirely different way?

**RICHARD** Well, I have little faith in Mrs. May, but I have less faith in Jeremy Corbyn. In terms of leading

**HEFFERNAN:** us forward, I think he would be worse. One of the key features of the vote to leave in 2016 was a repudiation of the political class. The whole political class, every single party, told us to stay. A majority, 70% of MPs told us to stay. The CBI told us to stay. The BBC, "The Guardian," everyone told us to stay and people voted to leave.

And that was, of course, a vote on the merits. I rejected the idea that people are stupid and vote foolishly. People are able to make judgement. It may be a mistaken judgement, but it's their judgement. But it was a repudiation of the political class. We've seen this. I mean, the French socialists ran the Elysee Palace, got 6% at the last election. Nothing to do with their candidate, but the people didn't want the Socialists, the label.

And I think that people are very disaffected from the political class, and there's a crisis of representation. And I think that plays in. And I think that can only be reinforced by an inability to deliver on an instruction to leave and the coming fudge. I think that everyone will be unhappy. The people who want to remain and the people who want to leave. And then there will be a middle. People will just say, "Oh, let's suck it up."

But I have no faith in our political class. I think it's unfit for purpose. I think that's widely recognised. It's partly why Trump got elected, because people, whatever Trump's deficiencies, they didn't like the professional opportunity alternative of Mrs. Clinton.

**ELENI** Yeah, and it was the same in Italy.

**ANDREOULI:**

**RICHARD** Yeah, totally. Absolutely, yeah.

**HEFFERNAN:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** One of the comments before was about whether we should just put party politics aside and just try and focus on Brexit.

**RICHARD** But you can't.

**HEFFERNAN:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, yeah, this was the consensus, but what a nice idea. Let's go and see whether we can pick anything else up, David and Joan.

**DAVID:** There's been lots and lots of comment about the closeness of the vote, and in the wider context of democracy, and comments about Teresa May, is she the right person? And more

things about the compromise aspect of Brexit, which is bringing this to full circle, really, isn't it?

**JOAN:** Yeah, kind of. More comments about is it causing more polarisation and how that reflects, I think, worldwide as well, which is your comments on Trump. It certainly is a really active conversation here. We're trying to get it back to having people think about what will happen post-Brexit and what are going to be some of the biggest issues after we leave. But really, we just keep coming back to the main issue here being talked about. Was the vote fair, and what does it mean to have it be such a small margin?

**RICHARD HEFFERNAN:** Well, there's a majority in favour of it. There's only a plurality ever in favour of the election of a government. I mean, Mr. Blair's landslide in May 1997 was achieved on a 44% of the vote of a 70% turnout. So Mr. Blair's third parliamentary majority, only about 22% of the actual available vote voted for him.

So referenda by their nature are kind of messy, and unpleasant, and difficult. And in Britain, we don't have a tradition of them. We've only ever had three national referenda ever. And it's a big question. We were asked because the political class was divided and because Cameron thought that he would simply win a majority to stay and put to bed the issue of unhappiness with Europe.

But I think unhappiness with Europe is something that is broader than the 52% of people who voted. I mean, the European Union isn't fit for purpose. You wouldn't invent it now. It does some brilliant things and it does some bad things. And I think that reform of it seems to be off the agenda. So a lot of people voted to leave simply because they thought that it's irreformable.

I mean, freedom of movement doesn't work for a country like Britain in the way that it was envisaged. That's not a hostility to intra-EU migration. On the contrary, it's a valuable part, and it will continue. And one of the beautiful statistics was that 70% of Leave people, on a reliable poll, thought that everybody who is here should stay. You know, which is very encouraging. Even higher now, I think.

**ELENI ANDREOULI:** That's true, but the reasons that people voted to leave are quite complex, and not all of them have to do with the European Union.

**RICHARD HEFFERNAN:** No, no. I agree.

**ELENI ANDREOULI:** Some of it has to do with dissatisfaction with the political establishment in this country. But also in terms of polarisation, the referendum in itself is a polarising instrument. It asks a yes or no question, and it divides politicians. It divides politics into yes and no camps. And then the population necessarily get divided into a Remainer or a Leaver.

So I mean, there's a lot of discussion about whether we should have a second referendum and whether referenda are the right way of exercising democracy and getting people, getting citizens to participate. I mean, one could argue that it's not an appropriate form of participation, just because it doesn't really allow for dialogue and reflection.

It just allows for this yes or no answer and a snapshot answer in that particular point in time. So there's an issue there about whether that really does represent the democratic will of the people or whether it does not.

And I think we should keep in mind, and we should always be sceptical of people saying that, "Oh, the people have voted." First of all, not everyone voted the same way, and we have a substantial minority of 48% that voted to remain. And secondly, I don't think that the people can be The People, as if it's a one thing entity, can be so easily represented by a number, 52% voting Leave.

So I think we should try and treat the citizens of this country and every country as if they are thinkers, not just a yes or no.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, exactly. And that whole Leave-Remain, I mean, we've been asking people today. 2/3 of people said that they would like a second referendum. So Richard, could I ask for your thoughts on that at the end? I mean, two years on and we're still discussing whether or not we should have, shouldn't have a second referendum and that sort of polarisation very much on people's minds as well. So briefly, your final thoughts, please.

**RICHARD HEFFERNAN:** Well, I mean, that is out of kilter with folk in the country, who largely don't want a second referendum. If we are to have one, it'll be because of political elite who want us to remain, want to use that as the mechanism to get us to stay in. It's not likely at the moment, but we can't rule anything out. We've learnt that in terms of studying politics recently.

I mean, politics is always-- what was it Churchill said? It's the least possible system of government but better than all the others. Or something like that. I can't remember my Churchill quote.

And one thing you don't get, it's about making a choice, not pursuing a preference. I mean, so when you go and cast a ballot, you're never invited "none of the above." That would be the one reform I would have. "Do you want to vote Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Scottish Nationalist?" "None of the above." And to record that.

Citizens can then go and say "I don't want any." So forget about votes at 16. That would be a real-- none of the above. And if none of the above get over 50%, you rerun the election with different candidates. We need to broaden our candidate appeal.

So anything is possible about a second referendum. I do think it would be a decision taken by the political class to get us to stay in. And I think that would disaffect people who want us to leave. And I think that would call into question the kind of representative nature of our parliament, because ultimately, referenda, although they are imperfect, they basically have to decide something. You can't rerun them.

Although there is a tradition in European Union politics of doing that. Republic of Ireland have had to rerun referenda when they took a decision that the government didn't like and that Europe objected to. But they should decide things. And it has decided, and it's up to the people negotiating our exit to get an exit that works for us and works for them.

And it's in everybody's interest to make that happen. But politics is such that that's probably not likely at this stage.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Richard and Eleni, thank you so much. I think we can conclude from that that the referendum means many, many different things. And no matter what, it is ultimately a vote for change.

David and Joan, thank you so much for facilitating all the conversations on the hot desk today. Would you like to say goodbye?

**JOHN:** Thank you very much, Karen. We really enjoyed it. Some great contributions from everybody. And thank you to everybody who's posted and who's been following it.

**JOAN:** Thank you. I think it's been a really compelling discussion. And one of the things we were talking about is, there's not enough depth of discussion. And I'd say we've certainly achieved it here. So I want to thank everybody for that.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant. Well, thank you both, and thank you for tuning in. This is going to be available on

Catch Up, if you joined us later. And this afternoon, we have some more Student Hub Live. We're going to be focusing on all things exams. So you can join us from 1:00 for that session, 1:00 till 3:00. And if you can't make it again, that will be available on Catch Up. Some very interesting things on psychology, sport, science, and stress, and biology, and making a plan for exams.

So that'll be both entertaining and informative, whether you've got an exam or not. You can visit the Student Hub Live website for more information. And the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences are going to be showcasing new modules on the 14th of June. So do join us then, but you can find out all about those future events on the Student Hub Live website.

Send us an email if you'd like to let us know what you've enjoyed and if you've got any ideas for future shows to [studenthub@open.ac.uk](mailto:studenthub@open.ac.uk). Thank you very much for attending. I hope you've enjoyed the show. We'll see you soon.

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