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RESPONSE TO THE RIGHT-WING
POPULISM: THE UK CASE**

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EUROPEAN MAINSTREAM PARTIES' STRATEGIES IN RESPONSE TO THE RIGHT-WING POPULISM: THE UK CASE²

The article investigates the questions how and why, the European mainstream responds to the challenge of the right-wing populist parties (RPP), by analyzing the UK case. Using a mixed methodological approach, which includes the theoretical tools of historical institutionalism, Down's classification of the mainstream's strategies and Heinze's approach to analyzing the factors of its choice, we survey the strategic responses of the UK political mainstream (Conservatives and Labour), towards RPP (UK Independence Party). Findings suggest that the political mainstream could move from exclusion strategies, to predominantly inclusion strategies. In the UK case – cooptation of UKIP's policy positions with political and legal isolation. Transit to these strategies takes place under the influence of the electoral and ideological development of UKIP, the salience of migration issues, strategies of other mainstream parties and the historical conditions that define available options and shape the selection process, in the UK – party-based Euroscepticism.

Keywords: European mainstream parties, right-wing populism, political strategies, Euroscepticism, UK.

JEL Classification: Z.

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Introduction

The contemporary European political process, is characterised by an increased level of fragmentation, due to the unresolved problem of a democratic deficit at a national and European level. The growing gap between the traditional political parties (mainstream) and the European voters, forms a vacuum that the “political alternative” parties and movements (regionalists/separatists, greens, left and right populists), try to fill. The right-wing populist parties (RPP) became the most successful new party family in Europe over the last quarter of a century, (Painter, 2013: 9) and changed the European political landscape.

The conceptual core of right-wing populism includes anti-elitism (Mudde, 2014; Greven, 2016), Euroscepticism (Pirro et al., 2018; Vasilopoulou, 2018; Kneuer, 2018; Szöcsik and Polyakova, 2018) and anti-pluralism (Woodak et al., 2013; Miller, 2016; Painter, 2013; Taggart, 2012), which threaten, not only the mainstream parties' political subjectivity, but the future of European integration project and institutions and principles of European democracy. In this situation, academic debate about the political mainstream's responds to the new multi-faced challenges seems to be relevant.

The main purpose of this article is to answer the questions *how* and *why*, the European political mainstream responds to the challenge of the RPP, with a UK case study. The United Kingdom is a specific case of interaction between mainstream and RPP, which characterized by unique political conditions and features: (1) the United Kingdom's majoritarian democracy, perhaps protects the mainstream to a greater extent than elsewhere (Painter, 2013: 51); (2) lack of strong and stable challengers from the right flank did not prevent the significant growth of RPP's influence in 2004–2016. The analysis of the UK case aims to deepen the understanding of European mainstream responses to RPP, especially in the conditions being not typical for other European countries institutional features of Westminster system.

Accordingly, the main questions of this article are the following ones: what strategies does UK political mainstream choose and implement in response to UKIP? What factors influence the transit from one type of strategy to another, and is there a “history matter” in this process?

This article makes two main substantive contributions. Firstly, the practical realisation of the mainstream's response shows, that in reality it may be more composite and variable than it looks, in the theoretical classifications of scholars. The political mainstream could combine inclusion and exclusion strategies. Secondly, we provide the mix methodological approach. Using the conceptualisation of political strategies, by Down's, to define the content of the UK mainstream's strategies, and the Heinze's approach to explain the factors of its choice, we will

take into account that the interaction between mainstream and RPP, does not pass out of time and space, but depends on historical conditions. Historical institutionalism (HI) used in research about parties' development, competition and adaptation other time (Galvin, 2016). Instruments of HI, allows analyzing of strategies of the UK mainstream, taking into account dynamics and continuity, with particular attention to cause and effect relationships in its development.

This paper has been divided into two parts. The first one deals with existing approach to the analysis and classification of political strategies of European mainstream, to the new political challenges. The second part attempts to conceptualise the strategies of the UK political mainstream towards RPP, factors that underlie its choice and content.

Mainstream parties' strategies towards RPP: attempts of theorizing

Taking into account the multifaceted character of RPP and, as a consequence, different approaches to its conceptualization, in this article we use the ideational approach to defining RPP, which is dominant among party scholars (March, 2017: 284). This approach means that populism is a 'thin-centred' ideology 'that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde, 2004: 543). Hence, populism in its right variation, uses nationalism (Rydgren, 2007), or in a narrow sense nativism (Mudde, 2007; Guia, 2016), to defend the "pure people" and their "heartland" (Taggart, 2000). Subsequently understanding RPP as an ideology, reveals the anti-system conceptual characters of RPP, which are crucial for relationships between mainstream and RPP.

Theoretical understanding of the process how mainstream political actors respond to the challenge of niche, extremists or right-wing populist parties (Downs, 2001; Downs, 2002; Art, 2007; Bale, 2010; Goodwin, 2011; De Lange, 2012; Fallend and Heinisch, 2016; Carvalho, 2017; Heinze, 2018), is characterised by differences in theoretical approaches, and empirical material. The common feature of these works, is predominantly focused on the parties as the main institutions, in the selection and realisation of strategies to counter the new challenge. Notwithstanding, the influence on the process of choosing and implementing a strategy, may have non-political (civic society, media), and foreign actors, EU-structures (Fallend and Heinisch, 2016: 330–336; Goodwin, 2011:27), the head of the state (Cappocia, 2001:439) and Constitutional Court (Fallend, Heinisch, 2016: 333–334). Scholars try to take into account the difference in the political strategies of the center-right and center-left parties, which is based on the electoral positions and ideological differences (Heinze, 2018; Bale, 2003, 2010). Finally, EU

and immigration issues, which right-wing populists are pushing into the political agenda, put them in the center of the research focus.

In the most general sense, mainstream parties could engage and disengage (Downs, 2001:26), include or exclude (Goodwin, 2011:23) RPP. By analyzing the interaction between mainstream and RPP in European countries, W. Downs defines five types of mainstream parties' strategies: *ignoring*, *political or legal isolation*, *cooptation*, and *collaboration* (2001: 24–28). Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, analyzing different cases from Latin America to Europe, suggested a resembling classification: *isolation*, *confrontation*, *adaptation*, and *socialization* (2012: 213-214). Bale (2010), by analyzing the changing social-democratic parties' positions on immigration issues in Northern Europe, in the context of growing RPP influence, proposed *hold*, *defuse* and *adopt* mainstream's strategies. Goodwin, by analyzing the European cases, highlights *exclusion*, *defusing*, *adoption*, *principle*, *engagement* and *interaction* as possible strategic answers (2011: 24–27).

Given the variety of attempts to classify the mainstream's strategies in academic literature, we will take the W. Downs' classification as a baseline to reveal the essence of each of the possible strategies. Moreover, in some cases we will try to combine it with the classifications of other scholars.

Strategies of ignoring, aim to delegitimize opponents and their policy positions. As a “do nothing” strategy” (Downs, 2001: 26), it is a logical first mainstream's response to the RPP challenge. Correlating with the others conceptual approaches, one of the ways to realise the ignore strategy is “defusing” (Bale, 2010:413), or “decreasing” salience of the issue (Goodwin, 2011: 23), which is manifested by RPP. It is not a ‘do nothing strategy’, but it delegitimizes the RPP's policy, in the context that it pays attention to insignificant problems.

The electoral success of RPP, and growing agenda-setting abilities in European countries, make it difficult to ignore RPP in the party competition process. Besides, ignoring the RPP also means that the mainstream ignored any new problems in political debates. These problems demonstrate the “weakest points”, which have created the largest gap between mainstream parties and voters. So ignoring the RPP challenge is only widening the gap between the mainstream and voters.

Strategy of isolation implies political and/or legal restriction of RPP. Political isolation involves the formation of a broad anti-extremist block, or “grand coalition”, as a “sanitary cordon” around right-wing populists at the electoral, legislative, and executive levels. “Sanitary cordon”, as well as the strategy of ignoring, demands a high level of coordinated actions between mainstream parties. A fail in the “sanitary cordon” strategy may result in, as Cappocia argued, mainstream parties being temptation to defect from the center, in order to regain the votes that

they are losing to extremists (2001: 438), especially center-right parties (Szöcsik and Polyakova, 2018).

Mutual attraction of mainstream parties and the formation of the “grand coalition” in response to RPP, is more likely if there are more extremists in parliament (Cappocia, 2001:438–439). Germany’s case proves this assumption. The formation of the “grand coalition” between Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and Social Democratic Party as a result of the 2017 elections, was stimulated by the fact that Alternative for Germany (AfD) formed a third faction in the Bundestag (94 from 709). A similar situation occurred during the elections to the House of Representatives in the Netherlands in 2017, when mainstream parties (Peoples party of Freedom and Democracy, Christian Democratic Appeal and “Democrats 66”), with the support of small parties (Christian Union), formed a coalition, thereby blocking the right-wing populist Freedom Party, which formed the second largest faction (20 seats from 150). Examples of Austria and Norway, where substantial factions of RPP lead to coalitions between center-right parties and RPP (although in Austria the governing of the “grand coalition” was an established practice), mean that it is not only the scale of the faction that determines the shift of the center-right from the choice of “grand coalition”, to coalition with RPP.

Legal isolation means restricting the RPP by “outlawing the party completely, raising thresholds for representation in electoral laws, and restricting voice are among the options available” (Downs, 2001:27). In the European context was the example of the legislative prohibition of anti-system parties – Act on the Suppression of Racism, which allows to prohibit “Flemish Block” in Belgium (Downs, 2002: 40–41). Moreover, the fact that electoral systems’ proportionality degree has a direct impact on the representation of the RPP in parliament, makes it an effective instrument of isolation. Especially in situations, where a government is based on support of a “grand coalition”, or one of the mainstream parties. The 5% thresholds in Germany’s elections, didn’t allow the AfD to be elected in the Bundestag in 2013. Majority electoral systems in United Kingdom and France do not allow RPP to convert votes into seats. In the 2015 elections UKIP had 12.6% votes but only one seat in the House of Commons. In the 2017 elections, National Front had 13.2% in the first round of elections, 8.75% in the second and only 8 seats among 577 members of the National Assembly.

The isolation or, in other words, “ostracism” (van Spanje, 2017) strategy suggests a “*confrontation*” (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012: 213) with RPP in parliament and beyond. The confrontation can be realised through the “*hold*” (Bale, 2010:412–413) or “*principle*” (Goodwin, 2016:24) – defending the mainstream's policy position. In addition, if the process of “*de-demonisation*” or “*demarcation*” of RPP with traditional radical right parties and movements (Rothwell, 2017), and presenting themselves as respectable political forces was successful, the

effectiveness of isolating and demonising the RPP by the political mainstream, can bring the opposite effect in increasing the public support of RPP (Art, 2007: 335; van Spanje, 2017: 10–11).

Co-optation strategy (Downs, 2001:27) can also be called adaptation (Kaltwasser and Mudde, 2012: 213). It is important that this strategy legitimates RPP's policy positions, but not the RPP itself. W. Downs implies under cooptation, adaption the RPP's policy positions; first of all, on EU and migration issues. Cappocia, analyzing the political process in European states during the interwar period, includes cooptation of the party elites or party members of extremist parties (2001: 451). The Cappocia's approach, from our point of view, looks secondary compared to the co-optation of policy positions.

We would like to emphasize separately, that co-optation of policy positions of the RPP, can be realized in two types. *Indirect cooptation* means recapturing the policy space lost by a party's shift to the middle (Krell et al., 2018: 145) and *direct cooptation* – directly borrowing elements of the political program of RPP.

On the one hand, as the European political process demonstrated, when mainstream parties coopt the RPP's policy elements, they could decrease electoral support of RPP, for example, UKIP lost 10.8% between the 2015 and 2017 elections, after the Conservative government held a referendum on EU membership. Moreover, the cooptation of policy positions, stimulates the intraparty division in RPP between fundamental and more moderate wings, with regard to the future direction of the party, and its development. This is evident in the case of UKIP, where ex-leader N. Farage called for the creation of a new “Brexit party”, in response to the UKIP's shift to the radical right camp, after the unsuccessful 2017 elections.

On the other hand, the cooptation strategy legitimises the far-right agenda, especially for nativist anti-migrant and anti-EU positions (Szöcsik and Polyakova, 2018) and erodes the boundaries between RPP and the political mainstream. The strategy of the cooptation, creates conditions for two counter and intersecting processes: “mainstreamisation” the RPP and the “populist contamination” (Rydgren, 2005) of the political mainstream's discourse.

Strategy of collaboration (Downs, 2001:27-28) or a strategy of socialization (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012: 214) is aimed not only to legitimize policy positions, but engage RPP in cooperation. As considered by Downs, collaboration in the electoral arena is a result of a successful collaboration at the legislative, and executive levels, which results in “electoral cartels” (Downs, 2002: 39). The possibilities of legislative cooperation, to a large extent, depends on the size of the RPP's faction, and the balance of power in the representative body. The legislative coalition is expressed by supporting the government's bills, such as the Danish People's Party in the 2000s. Bright examples of executive collaboration, are two coalitions in

Austria between the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), and Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) in 2000-2005 and since 2017. As de Lange (2012) states, it's easier for the centrist party in coalition with RPP, to deradicalise its program and stimulate intra party division. The intra party division was demonstrated by the first coalition in Austria, where a split in the FPÖ led to the collapse of the coalition and early elections. We can see this effect of deradicalisation of RPP in the second coalition between ÖVP and FPÖ.

Mutual influence and interaction, between mainstream and RPP, created in the framework of the strategy of collaboration, suggests more noticeable possible consequences for the political system, than in the case of cooptation strategy. Collaboration may urge, not only "mainstreamisation" of RPP, but the formation of a two-block party system with the creation of a center-right coalition (Bale, 2003). We can add that similar results can be achieved in the case of collaboration at an electoral and legislative level. The degree of the mainstream's 'populist contamination' and deradicalisation of RPP's rhetoric and policy positions, or intraparty division in the case of collaboration, will be relatively higher than with any other strategy.

The content of the reviewed strategies, shows that differences in the mainstream parties' ideological stance, are manifested more in the case of inclusive rather than exclusive strategies. It is more likely for center-right parties to move away from the strategy of the exclusion of RPP, to the cooptation, based on the ideological and programmatic proximity between center-right and RPP. This is certainly true in the case of the interaction between the Conservative Party and UKIP, which has been characterised by scholars as "symbiotic relations" (Bale, 2018), or a "multifaceted connection", based on "similar issue positions, a common discourse and, in particular, a shared history" (Alexandre-Collier, 2018: 205). It is quite amazing that in some cases, center-right parties can be closer to the right flank than RPP. This can be illustrated briefly by the fact that the election manifesto of Bavarian CSU in 2013, was leaning more to the right than AfD (Arzheimer, 2015: 544).

In this context, as Bale (2010) identified, European social democrats have three choices: increase the salience of issues traditionally "owned" by the right; appeal to working class voters who traditionally support the center left; and facilitate the formation of center-right governments. Nevertheless, the European political process reduces the available options in the answer to this challenge. The activity of RPP, in the struggle for the voices of low-skilled workers, as one of the most sensitive social groups to the migration issues (which is characterized by the growing salience), and the possibility of a coalition between the center-right and RPP, force the center-left parties to choose the first option – shifting to the right on the EU and immigration issues – and so, go over to the inclusive strategies too, most often in the form of indirect cooptation.

Due to there being a great variety of possible mainstream responses towards the right-wing populist challengers, each strategy carries opportunities and risks for mainstream parties. According to this, mainstream parties' strategies choice, depends on a complex of individual-level, party-level, and system-level factors (Downs, 2001: 28). Keeping in this article the focus on the party dimension, not only RPP themselves influence the choice of strategy of mainstream, but all parties (see Bale, 2010). This thesis was taken into account by Heinze in her analysis. She highlights several factors in the mainstream parties' strategy choice: strategies of other mainstream parties, electoral and ideological development of RPP, public attitudes to the migration issue, and election results (Heinze, 2018: 291–292). Researcher examined this approach by analyzing empirical material of North European countries, and made a conclusion that all factors in general, and each individually, but in different degrees, had a correlation with the transition of mainstream parties from exclusion to inclusion strategies.

Despite the existing attempts of the theoretical understanding of strategies' choice and classifications, the topic of *what* strategies and *why*, the mainstream choice and realization, is far from being investigated. The answer to the question “*what?*”, does not cover the possibility of the mainstream to combine different types of strategies in the face of RPP challenge. When we answer the question *Why*, do we need to take into account the fact that the choice of strategies is not out of time and space? And if we argue that “history matters” in strategies' choice, can we trace and reveal the impulse of previously created institutions and party genesis in choosing strategies, and what tools allow us to do it?

Method and case selection

Based on result of previous research, we combine Downs' classification to define the content of UK political mainstream strategies, and Heinze's approach to explain why these strategies were chosen with the common theoretical framework of historical institutionalism. It seems justified that political events in a historical context have direct consequences for today's politics (Steinmo, 2008). If positions and decisions of the political actors are based on previous experience, it looks logical, that the experience of the German “grand coalition” in 1966–1969, 2005–2009 and 2013–2017 and the marginalized position of far right political organizations in post-war history were the historical condition for the new “grand coalition” in 2017-2018 in response to the electoral growth of AfD. At the same time in Austria the experience of the coalition between center-right and RPP in 2000–2007, which Bale named the “unceremonious cannabalisation” of RPP by the mainstream (2003:85), and traditionally the strong right-wing culture in the country made possible a new reiteration of the coalition between ÖVP and FPÖ after the 2017 elections.

This methodological approach is used to analyse the UK specific case of the interaction between the mainstream (Conservative and Labour Parties) and RPP – UK Independence Party, whose programmatic positions and rhetoric contain a fusion of anti-system, anti-pluralistic and Eurosceptic elements³. The specific character of the British case is characterised not only by Westminster political system, but a strong and stable political tradition of Euroscepticism, which became part of mainstream politics (Bale, 2013; Watts and Bale, 2018) and shaped competition among parties.

Euroscepticism as an “antecedent condition” for strategy choice in the UK case

To extend the answer to the question *what* and *why* mainstream chooses, we need to analyse the role of Euroscepticism in the UK case as an “antecedent condition” for strategy choice. “Antecedent condition” is a tool of HI, which shapes the choices and changes that emerge during the critical junctures in causally significant ways (Slater and Simmons, 2010: 887). It is important that post-critical juncture “divergence” is driven by antecedent conditions rather than by decisions and events that take place during the “critical juncture” (Cappocia, 2016).

Keeping the focus on the party dimension, we note that British Euroscepticism as “a particular manifestation of a school of sceptical thought about the value of Britain's involvement with moves towards supranational European integration” (Forster, 2002: 2) has deep roots (but being of different degrees and reasons) in both mainstream parties. In general, the situational and pragmatic approach in European affairs and the pluralism of opinions about European integration characterises the UK political establishment. Neither the policy of Harold Wilson (1964–1970 and 1974–1976), nor Edward Heath (1970–1974), nor James Callaghan (1976–1979) brought in the early years of interaction with the European Economic Community a clear understanding of the step of joining the EEC. The first national referendum on EEC membership in 1975 voted for the status-quo (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2015).

A pragmatic approach in implementing European politics leads to the presence of both Eurosceptic and Euro-optimistic segments within both main parties, although in the 1980s the political base of British Euroscepticism has moved from left to right (The Economist, 2016). The process of extending EU regulations on the labour market and social sphere led to the

³ We do not take into account another player on the right flank – the British National Party, because it's closer to the traditional right-wing radical party family, who using not only nativist, but racist agenda.

“crystallization” of Conservatives as the primary Eurosceptic party. It was most clearly manifested in Margaret Thatcher’s Bruges speech in 1988 against a “European super state” (Thatcher...) and then, in the contexts of “politisation” of European integration after the Maastricht Treaty, intensified in the post-Thatcherite era, almost completely supplanting Euro-optimists from party structures. Labour, under Neil Kinnock, embraced a social Europe (Helm, 2016). Later, Tony Blair’s pro-European “New Labour” ratified the Lisbon Treaty and promoted a referendum on the accession of Britain to the Euro zone.

In the 2000s the growing salience of the "Europe question" due to ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and the Eurozone crisis (Clark et al., 2017: 113–122) became one of the most relevant problems for the British public – only 22% British people trusted the EU (Eurobarometer, 2009). In the 2010s, it also seeded the organized “hard Euroscepticism” (UKIP), in domestic politics (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2015).

The structural conditions expressed in the long-standing and persistent political tradition of Euroscepticism, shared in varying degrees by the elites and society, shaped UK party politics. Firstly, if party strategies are determined not only by external dynamics (strategies of RPP and other mainstream parties) (Galvin, 2016: 313), but also internal ones, it is important that Euroscepticism indicated the presence of Eurosceptic segments in both mainstream parties. The activity of the “hard Eurosceptic” right wing in the period of David Cameron’s “soft Eurosceptic” leadership was one factor which stimulated the co-opting of elements of UKIP’s policy positions. In 2011, right-wing conservative backbenchers were able to collect 100,000 signatures on a petition on a referendum on the country’s membership in the EU and submit a Bill in the House of Commons. Despite the impression that Labour is pro-European and Conservative anti-European, there remain some deeply skeptical Labour MPs (Aspinwall, 2003: 28). As Eurosceptic MP and member of “Labour Leave” campaign Kate Hoey declared, Eurosceptics “not only in the right flank of politics” and “the Labour Party traditionally had a skeptical view of the European institutions” (Hoey, 2015). Eurosceptics in the ranks of the Labour Party, who, like Jeremy Corbyn for example, voted against Britain’s membership in the EEC in 1975, were an internal stimulus to support the Britain’s withdrawal from the EU in principle.

Secondly, mainstream parties, paid attention to their previous experience, used the weapon of the referendum as an instrument in the intra- and inter-party struggle. The idea of an EU membership referendum did not come from nothing. The EEC referendum in 1973 not only solved the problem of legitimizing the UK’s joining among British people, but also overcame the inner-party opposition in the Labour camp. The idea of a referendum on rejecting further European integration was considered by the leader of the opposition M. Howard in 2005 (Jones,

2004); the Lisbon Treaty Referendum announced by his successor D. Cameron in 2007; T. Blair as Prime-Minister did not rule out the idea of having a referendum about joining the single currency. The possibility of playing the “referendum card” remained one of the options available to political actors in the face of increasing external context and based on previous experience.

Finally, as parties form their expectations based on the past, we need to take into account that the strong Eurosceptic orientation of the Conservative party's leadership allowed it to dominate the right flank and ignore the episodic and unstable attempts to challenge Tories from the right (for example, the Referendum Party in 1997)⁴. But situation changed. With the rise of the institutional expression of Euroscepticism – UKIP in 2004–2016 during the David Cameron's leadership – the Tories moved to the usual line that allowed them to dominate the right flank by having a “hard position” on EU issues. Moreover, the ideological and programmatic proximity of the Tories and UKIP as an “offshoot” of the Conservative Party (Alexandre-Collier, 2018: 211), supposed a limited effect of the ignoring challengers from the right flank.

Thus, it should be noted that the Eurosceptic legacy as a “default setting” in UK party politics is not a monocausal explanation of the subsequent mainstream's strategy choice. The impact of party-based Eurosceptic tradition provided mainstream, to a large extent, with the access to the predominantly inclusion strategies in the situation of “critical juncture”. “Critical juncture” in the theory of HI has been characterized by two main conditions: it is a choice of two or more alternatives, which implies almost impossible return to the initial point after “critical juncture”, when multiple alternatives were still available (Mahoney, 2001: 113). Actors make a choice during “critical juncture” and these choices become part of the institutions and structures that persist for a long time (Mahoney, 2001).

In the context of our research – European election 2014 was a “critical juncture” in the UK political development, when mainstream gives strategic answers to RPP, which will be embedded in institutions without any possibility to turn back. At that moment, despite the available alternatives, both mainstream parties moved to similar and, to a certain degree, synchronized predominantly inclusion strategies, which could not be reverse to exclusion strategies, because, as Heinze argued, when mainstream adopted some kind of engage or inclusion strategy, it can not easily have been revers (2018:303). Moreover, if choices in the situation of “critical juncture” have long-term legacies and reinforced itself (the process of “path dependence”), the EU membership referendum as an implementation of UKIP policy positions caused not only the conceptual crisis of RPP, but the “unexpected consequences” in policy outcomes for the mainstream itself and UK's institutional development (“Brexit”).

⁴ In addition, the “first-past-to-post” electoral system was a serious institutional obstacle for the new challengers.

In the following part of the article we will define the correlation between factors of UK mainstream strategy choice on “party-level” (the electoral results and ideological development of UKIP, the strategies of other mainstream factors, and the salience of the migration issue), which was approved by Heinze. These factors are becoming more important and have a cumulative effect on strategies' choice in the situation of “critical juncture”. Finally, we will summarize the content of UK mainstream political strategies.

Factors for the mainstream parties' choice of strategies

The *salience of the migration issue* against the background of the process of decolonization in the second half of 20th century was also a sensitive topic for British society as we can see in the example of Enoch Powell's “Rivers of Blood” speech, which was assessed by the political establishment as marginal, but had a social response among the working class. Much later, “New Labor's” migration policy and the second EU enlargement, led to the increasing salience of this issue. From 1997 to 2010 UK population increased by around 3.2 million as a direct result of foreign migrants (Whitehead, 2011). This process intensified in the context of the Eurozone crisis and the Refugee crisis. As a result, immigration and the NHS are tied as the most important issues facing the country, but Brexit and immigration are seen as the single biggest issues for the British public (Ipsos Mori, 2016). This is reflected in political debate: the Conservative party exploited its historical ‘ownership’ of the immigration issue as a strategic push for power (Dennison and Goodwin, 2015). This was the cause for not only the Conservatives, but also for Labour to shift to the right on the migration issue (Bale, 2014).

Ideological development of the UK Independence Party. UKIP was created in 1993 on the base of a cross-party Anti-Federalist League in response to the ratification of Maastricht Treaty. In reaction to the Eurozone crisis and the Conservatives' shift to the center under first years of David Cameron's leadership (2005-2007), the party has undergone an ideological evolution from a single-issue party of “hard Euroscepticism” to populist, anti-migrant and anti-Westminster” (Bale, 2018; Ford and Goodwin, 2014). As the party's manifesto of 2010 says, “while withdrawal from the European Union political superstate is central to UKIP's message, the party has a full range of policies that have helped it grow to become Britain's fourth largest political party” (UKIP, 2010: 2). As Driver argued, “ideologically the party combines old-style liberal commitments to free markets, limited government and individual freedom with a conservative appeal to normally Conservative-supportive middle class voters” (2011: 147). It is important that UKIP realized its attempt to “de-demonise” or present itself as a respectable political force by distancing itself from right-wing radicalism: the party's constitution bans former BNP members

from joining UKIP (Hunt, 2014). Moreover, UKIP rejected an electoral pact with BNP before the European election of 2009 (BBC, 2008).

Against the backdrop of a favorable external environment, the anti-immigration orientation of UKIP is becoming more distinct. Solving the migration issue, in the logic of UKIP, would be the result of the country's withdrawal from the EU. UKIP, in a populist manner “speaking for the silent majority” (Hall, 2014), planned to restore control over national borders and “end uncontrolled migration”.

UKIP showed the most impressive *electoral results* in the European elections: 2nd place in 2009 (15.6%) and 1st place in 2014 (26.6%). UKIP was able to convert its growing support to the general election result in 2015. The party won 12.6% of vote and the shift from the 2010 elections was about 11%. However, in the House of Commons the party took only one seat thanks to the “first-past-to-post” electoral system.

The election of 2015 made it clear that UKIP was a threat not only to the Conservatives, but also to the Labour Party as well. Like the National Rally in France, UKIP is on the road to be a ‘Proletariat party’, weakening Labour’s position among low-skilled workers. As ‘The Guardian’ wrote, “UKIP surged in seats with large concentrations of poorer, white working-class English nationalists, many of whom sympathized with Labour’s economic message but not the people delivering it” (Ford, 2015). Nigel Farage’s party was third in this socio-demographic category, receiving 19% of the votes, the Labour and Conservatives received 32% each (BBC, 2015).

The strategies of the Conservative and Labour parties. In the 1990-early 2000s the electoral performance of UKIP allowed the main parties to apply ignore or “do nothing” strategy. The Conservative's “hard line” on the EU and migration issues to a significant degree caused the electoral weakness of the UKIP (see Bale, 2018). The mainstream parties moved in different directions: “New Labour” moved to the center in an attempt to combine a market economy and improved social services, meanwhile the Conservatives, unable to overcome the Thatcher legacy and hard positions on the EU and migration, was far from the center ground of British politics. In 2006, new party leader David Cameron attempted to realise the party's shift to the center of UK politics by decreasing the salience of the EU and migration issues in conservative discourse and programs. The Conservatives combined ignoring and the *demonization* of UKIP as “closet racists” (Lyons, 2006).

In 2007-2009, the pressure of the right wing of the party forced the Tory leadership to move to the *indirect cooptation* strategy to “recapture the policy space” between the Conservatives and UKIP, which had been lost in previous years. The leader of the opposition declared a “cast iron” pledge to hold a referendum on the Lisbon treaty and promised to join the

European people's party in the European parliament after the 2009 Euro elections. At that time the Labour party continued to ignore RPP, except sporadically using the anti-immigrant slogans of far right BNP – “British jobs for British workers” to retained low-skilled workers.

After the 2010 elections, the Conservatives, despite a coalition agreement with the pro-European Lib-Dems, continue to collaborate with UKIP on EU and immigration issues. Since 2013, as a reaction to UKIP’s electoral growth, the Conservatives turned to cooptation by *directly* using policy elements, primarily an in/out referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union on the new conditions, if the Tories won the 2015 elections.

The Labour party denied the necessity of a referendum, but also shifted to the right in the form of *indirect cooptation* (after European election 2014 as the “critical juncture”), which was fixed in their 2015 election manifesto. The party promised to legislate for a “lock” that guarantees no transfer of powers from Britain to the EU without an in/out referendum, secure reforms to immigration and welfare rules on the EU level and promised make “stronger” border controls to tackle illegal immigration and “smarter” targets to reduce low-skilled migration (Labour, 2015).

The Conservatives and Labour combined the cooptation with “sanitary cordon” around the UKIP on the electoral, legislative and executive levels to prevent the erosion between the mainstream and RPP. Despite calling for an electoral pact between the Tories and UKIP among conservative backbenchers (BBC, 2014), the opportunity of a coalition with RPP was consistently rejected by the Tory leadership for the reason that “UKIP wants not to work with conservatives in tandem, but to destroy the Conservative party” (Graham, 2014). A favourable factor for the “sanitary cordon” is the “first-past-to-post” electoral system, which did not allow UKIP to form a significant parliamentary faction. Both the Conservatives and Labour showed interest in preserving the election system, which suggests that it was an element of institutional isolation.

Results: explaining the strategy choice and realization

This article tried to answer the question, *what* strategies and *why* the political mainstream chose in response to the challenge of RPP, by using a mixed methodological approach and empirical material from the UK case. The results articulate inferences about the content of mainstream strategies and the factors of their choice.

The importance of historical “antecedent conditions” and “critical junctures” for strategies’ choice has been approved by the UK case. The available options for strategies’ choice were deeply influenced by Euroscepticism as “antecedent conditions”, which opened access to

predominantly inclusion strategies towards RPP during the “critical juncture” – European election 2014.

The practical realisation of political strategies is more composite and variable than theoretical classifications. The political mainstream could not only transition from exclusion to inclusion strategies, but combine them. British mainstream parties chose and realized co-opting political strategies with elements of political and legal isolation. The Conservatives used the direct cooptation of elements of UKIP policy – a referendum on the country's membership in the EU. In the case of Labour there was cooptation as a “reduction of space” in policy positions between them and RPP on European and immigration issues. Political isolation occurred in the form of non-cooperation with RPP. Mainstream parties did not institutionalise the “sanitary cordon” in the form of a “grand coalition” as in Germany, thanks to the electoral system, which in 2015 blocked the formation of a substantial UKIP faction in the House of Commons (an element of legal isolation). Meanwhile the proportionality of the electoral system at the regional level suggests that UKIP will be able to show coalition potential, especially in the National Assembly for Wales (after 2016 regional elections party had 7 seats out of 60). It may affect the sustainability of the “sanitary cordon” at the regional level.

Tab. 1. Conservative and Labour strategies 2005-2018

Period	Conservatives	Labour
2005-2007	Ignoring	Ignoring
2007-2013	Indirect cooptation + “sanitary cordon” + legal isolation	Predominantly ignoring
2013-2014	Direct cooptation + “sanitary cordon” + legal isolation	Predominantly ignoring
Since 2014	Direct cooptation + “sanitary cordon” + legal isolation	Indirect cooptation + “sanitary cordon” + legal isolation

The transition of mainstream parties from exclusion to predominantly inclusion strategies occurred under the influence of a complex of factors. The impact of the increased importance of migration issues on the choice of mainstream engagement strategies was verified. In the wake of

the external challenges, the problem became the second most important among British society, so the political mainstream made a shift to the right.

The ideological development of UKIP from a “single-issue” “hard Eurosceptic” party to a RPP with an anti-immigrant and anti-Westminster orientation and a populist logic was one more factor in the mainstream’s strategy choice, especially for the Conservative party, which considering this issue as their “own” in the Thatcherite and post-Thatcherite era. The electoral results of UKIP showed that the party was attracting not only the most Eurosceptical voters of the Conservative Party and those who have no trust its leadership, but was also posing a threat to Labour's position among the working class. As a result, first the Conservatives and then the Labour party moved away from exclusion strategies.

The Conservative party, proceeding from the ideological affinity with UKIP and position of governing party, was the first to switch to cooptation. This move also had an impetus for the Labour Party, which chose a similar strategy after the European election 2014 results. Parties implemented similar strategies with differences in the degree of the cooptation, but coordinated in the creation of a “sanitary cordon” around the RPP. The maintaining political and legal isolation of RPP suggests the interdependence between mainstream parties.

Conclusion and Discussion

Extending the answer to the question of *how* and *why* the mainstream responds towards RPP, we have approved the hypothesis that the mainstream’s transition from the exclusive to predominantly inclusive strategies towards RPP, happens under the influence of complex of factors, including historical conditions. It is significant that the mainstream could not only move from exclusion to inclusion, but choose complex strategies. As the analysis of UK case shows, antecedent conditions took place in this choice, but it is not the monocausal explanation.

Mainstream may coopt RPP's policy positions to neutralize their opponents (De Lange, 2012; Bale, 2018), but reacting to antisystem, anti-elitist, and Eurosceptical nature of RPP, the chosen political strategies have effects that carry the same threats. “Critical junctures” (in UK case it was transit to predominantly inclusion strategies of both mainstream parties after 2014 Euro elections) may uncover situations in which the institutional outcome does not reflect the preferences of any specific actor, nor even falls within the “winset” of the institutional preferences of any one set of actors” (Tsebelis and Yataganas, 2002). In this context, “Brexit” as “unexpected consequence” is not the purpose of the strategies of any of the mainstream parties, but became a side effect of the chosen strategies as the continued radicalization of Conservative Party (Alexandre-Collier, 2016: 216).

According to this, further investigation of some aspects of strategies choice looks perspective. Firstly, the diversity of national cases in Europe, in which the RPP themes are represented, are very wide and require further research using a comparative case study in choices of strategies, its effects and differences, historical conditions, which suggest different outcomes. Secondly, further development of historical institutionalism' tools in mainstream's strategies analysis. The situation of “critical juncture” and “path dependence” process in strategy's realization could answer the question why mainstream parties can not change its strategies clashed with “unexpected consequences”. The HI also has a potential to define the role of timing and sequence of political events while choosing and implementing strategies in different national cases.

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