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## THE ROOTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF EUROSKEPTICISM: AN EVALUATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM INDEPENDENCE PARTY

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**ABSTRACT.** This article examines the causes and consequences of Euroskepticism through a study of the United Kingdom Independence Party. Based on an analysis of UKIP's election campaigns, policies and performance, the article examines the roots of UKIP and its, potential, consequences for the British political system. The article argues that UKIP provides an example of Euroskepticism as the "politics of opposition." The party remains at the fringes of the political system and its leadership is prepared to use misrepresentation and populist rhetoric in an attempt to secure support. The party, nevertheless, cannot be completely dismissed as a marginal force. Its roots lie in the general popular and elite antipathy towards the European Union and it has shown itself capable of attracting considerable electoral support in European Parliament elections. It also has the potential to influence the policies of the major political parties.

Keywords: Euroskepticism, political parties, Europe, Britain

### 1. Introduction

Across the European Union (EU) there has been a prominent and increasingly studied rise in critical attitudes towards integration. While criticism of European integration has always existed to varying extents in different states, the two decades since the debates surrounding the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty have witnessed a more widespread and vocal skepticism about the benefits of the European Union. This skepticism was evident in the 2005 referendums in France and the Netherlands that saw the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty and in the 2008 Irish referendum rejection of the Lisbon Treaty. It has also been evident in the rise of Euroskeptical political parties and existing, often populist, parties adopting Euroskeptical positions as part

of their political platform. In many EU member states, these political parties enjoyed significant electoral success in both the 2004 and 2009 European Parliamentary elections. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), for example, which was established in 1994 with the avowed goal of removing the United Kingdom from the European Union, returned 13 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in the 2009 elections and placed second, ahead of the governing Labor Party.

Alongside the development of critical attitudes towards the European Union have come academic studies attempting to understand and explain the causes and possible implications of Euroskepticism (see, for example, Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008; Forster 2002; McLaren 2006; Taylor 2008). Diversity exists within this literature. Some commentators argue that Euroskepticism is a reflection of the maturation of the European Union's political system, with criticism developing as citizens become more aware of the policy decisions made at the EU level (see Hix 2008). Others, including some national leaders and governing parties, suggest that many critics do not fully understand what they are criticizing (see "Who Cares about Europe" 2008). A different view is that Euroskeptical attitudes are frequently adopted by political parties at the fringes of their national political systems as part of the "politics of opposition" (see Mair 2001; Sitter 2001). There is also diversity evident in analyses of the potential consequences of Euroskepticism. Some scholars see Euroskepticism as being marginal to existing party systems (Harmsen and Spiering 2004, 31–32; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008a) while others see it as a potential party realigning issue (Kriesi 2007).

This article analyzes the question of the causes and consequences of Euroskepticism in one national context through a focus on the United Kingdom Independence Party's policies, its election campaign platforms (particularly its 2009 European Parliament election platform and 2010 general election platform), its leadership, and its election results. The intention is to explain the roots of UKIP's criticism of the European Union and its place within the United Kingdom. This analysis leads to a second line of questioning relating to the potential consequences of UKIP's existence. The article examines first whether UKIP represents an extremist, and potentially negative, force in British politics. Second, the article examines whether UKIP has the potential, in itself or as a representative of a new cleavage, to transform the British party system.

## **2. Euroskepticism**

### *What is Euroskepticism?*

Various studies indicate that the "permissive consensus" representing widespread, if not deeply felt, popular support for the development of integration in Europe has declined over the past two decades and been replaced by a

more prominent and vocal opposition to the European Union (see Hix 2008; Milner 2000; Taggart 1998). What is also apparent is that there is great diversity within this criticism and opposition (see Harmsen and Spiering 2004; Mair 2007; Forster 2002; Spiering 2004). This diversity is evident in so far as opposition to the European integration comes from political forces from both the right and the left, even within the same country. The focus of the opposition is also diverse and depends in part on the country in which the criticism is voiced. In some cases, critics advocate the abolition of the integration project or withdrawal from the project for the country in which they are based. Taggart and Szczerbiak label this type of criticism as “Hard Euroskepticism” (2008b), which they identify as: “principled opposition to the EU and European integration [which] can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived” (2008b, 7).

Other critics direct their opposition against specific EU policies, policy outcomes or institutional features and seek to reform the EU rather than abolish the entire project. Taggart and Szczerbiak label this type of criticism “Soft Euroskepticism” (2008b).

The focus of this article is on “Hard Euroskepticism.” Even within this type of critical perspective, however, there is evidence of a diversity of views. It is, for example, the case that fundamental opposition to the European Union is evident in political organizations found on both the right and left of the political spectrum (see Evans 2000; Holmes 1996; Mudde 2007). What is consistent across these different groups, however, is the view that the European Union as currently constituted is detrimental for their country and that what is required is either a fundamental reform of the EU or their country’s withdrawal from the EU.

#### *What Accounts for Euroskepticism?*

Given the growth and the diversity of Euroskeptic opinions throughout Europe, it is perhaps not too surprising that many different explanations are offered to account for this skepticism. It is widely accepted that the growth of critical perspectives is linked to the development of the European Union itself (see Mair 2007). As integration has progressed and become more visible in daily economic and political life, a growing number of citizens and organizations express opposition to these developments (Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley 2009). Beyond this, however, disagreement exists. It is, for example, sometimes asserted that critics of the European Union do not in fact understand what they are criticizing, or indeed that they may not even be critical of the European Union at all. Instead, it is sometimes suggested that their criticisms are in fact focused on domestic politicians or policy choices rather than the European Union itself. This view was prominently expressed by European leaders

and EU political figures at the time of the French and Dutch rejections of the Constitutional Treaty and the initial Irish rejection of the Lisbon Treaty (see “Who Cares about Europe” 2008). The then European Commissioner from Ireland, Charlie McCreevy, for example stated that the 2008 Irish referendum result was “not a vote against the European Union. It is about a myriad of other issues” (quoted in “Reaction to Irish Referendum on Lisbon Treaty” 2008).

A related view is that Euroskepticism is frequently based on misunderstanding of developments within the European Union. In his study of the 2008 Irish referendum, for example, John O’Brennan highlighted Irish citizens’ ignorance of the Lisbon Treaty’s contents as being a significant cause of their rejection of the treaty (2009). He argues that “although the Irish remain among the most enthusiastic about EU membership, there remains a significant knowledge vacuum, with a large majority of citizens professing to know little or nothing about how decisions are made at the EU level and how the EU institutions function” (O’Brennan 2009, 270). According to this analysis, then, lack of popular understanding of the European Union and European integration may allow political space for political groups and parties to attract support by misrepresenting the development of integration.

Another view links Euroskepticism to the party systems that exist within European Union member states and argues that Euroskepticism manifests itself differently in different political parties and different party systems (see Taggart 1998). According to Paul Taggart, for example, Euroskepticism is frequently most likely to be adopted by protest-based parties that stand at the fringes of the existing party system and which are outside of government (1998, 372). In this view, Euroskepticism is part of a more general opposition to existing political systems and leadership structures and may be adopted by these protest-parties or populist-parties in order to secure electoral support. Taggart further argues that these parties are likely to be “parties for whom the EU issue is a secondary issue which can relatively costlessly be appropriated to strengthen their claims to be alternatives to the political centre” (1998, 384; also Harmsen and Spiering 2004; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008a). Sitter also argues that the adoption of Euroskepticism is best understood as the “politics of opposition” and that generally political parties will avoid adopting Euroskeptical positions to the extent that they aspire to be in government (2001, 27). According to these arguments, then, Euroskepticism is not necessarily a prime objective but rather is adopted as part of a more general opposition strategy and because it is perceived to be advantageous in electoral terms.

A common theme running through the accounts of Euroskepticism examined thus far is that this opposition need not necessarily be based on an accurate understanding or portrayal of the European Union. An alternate perspective is that critics do in fact understand the European Union. In this view, criticism stems from opposition to what the European Union is and the

policies that emerge out of the EU's institutional system. Martin Holmes, for example, seeks to demonstrate that while there are multiple strands to the Euroskeptic case, many of them are built upon serious analysis of the European Union (see Holmes 1996; 2002). Holmes argues that: "All too often the Euroskeptical case has not been debated, still less refuted, but pilloried as unworthy jingoistic prejudice..." (1996, 1; see also Forster 2002). Simon Hix also argues that it is wrong to dismiss popular opposition to the European Union as based on ignorance of the European Union (2008, 50). Rather Hix asserts that, since the 1990s in particular, information about the EU is widely accessible and that "public understanding of the EU has grown as a result" (2008, 54; Forster 2002, 8). In this setting, citizens are aware of decisions made in the European Union and base their opinion of the EU on its impact on their own economic and political preferences (Hix 2008, 62). Hix uses this analysis to explain why some opponents of the EU are found on the right and some on the left of the political spectrum. In the United Kingdom, for example, EU social measures tend to be more interventionist than pre-existing policies and therefore generate opposition from the right. In France, however, these same measures are less interventionist than national norms and thus generate opposition from the left (Hix 2008, 63).

Other studies of Euroskepticism highlight country-specific characteristics in explaining the form and prevalence of skeptical opinions towards the European Union. Medrano, for example, studies the impact of history and national culture in framing both elite and popular attitudes towards the European Union (Medrano 2003). Daddow (2006) also points to the importance of identity construction in his analysis of British Euroskepticism. In this analysis he highlights the role played by both the national press and history education in perpetuating the idea of Europe as the "other" and concludes that a more positive view of Europe will require a change in the way the nation views itself (Daddow 2006, 84). A further example of a focus on distinct national characteristics in the explanation of Euroskepticism is Mark Aspinwall's study of the importance of the British first-past-the-post electoral system in explaining the prevalence of Euroskepticism within the major British political parties (2000).

Overall, then, a variety of different possible explanations of the development of Euroskepticism are offered. This article examines these explanations through a case study of the development and policies of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).

### **3. Euroskepticism in the United Kingdom: The United Kingdom Independence Party**

Opposition to the European Union is particularly evident in the United Kingdom. This opposition manifests itself in public opinion polls indicating a widespread public belief that the country's membership of the EU is not a good thing (see Hix 2008). It is also present within the policies adopted by both the major political parties as well as by other more marginal political forces (see Bale 2006; Baker et al. 2008). Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, while always reticent about the progress of European integration, became a vocal and prominent hard Euroskeptic voice after leaving office in 1990. In her 2002 book, for example, Thatcher argued that in the absence of fundamental reform, the United Kingdom would be better placed leaving the European Union and applying for membership of the North American Free Trade Agreement (Thatcher 2002, 403).

The overall place of the United Kingdom within the European Union is extensively studied (see, for example, Booker and North 2003; George 1998; Wall 2008; Young 1998). These studies highlight that hostility toward European integration is not a new phenomenon within the United Kingdom and that it has found expression within both Conservative and Labor governments throughout the EU's existence. Division on the issue of the European Union has been particularly prevalent within the Conservative Party over the last two decades and has even appeared to dominate that party's internal politics at several key moments (Baker et al. 2008; Baker and Seawright 1998; Sowermimo 1996). These moments include the controversial parliamentary debates over the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty (Baker, Gamble and Ludlam 1993; Berrington and Hague 1998) and the series of recent leadership contests (see Bale 2006). Opposition to the European Union has also been evident within the Labor Party and the policies of the 1997–2010 Labor Government with respect to the European Union were often similar to those of the Conservative opposition (see Bale 2006). Labor opponents of the European Union have frequently drawn attention to the perceived dominance of big business within the development of the European market place along with a general opposition to the loss of sovereign decision-making authority (see Rowley 1996; Baker et al. 2008).

Alongside the existence of Euroskeptical opinions and policies within the major political parties, the last two decades have witnessed the emergence of political parties and groups advancing positions that can be defined as "hard Euroskepticism;" that is they are seeking either the fundamental reform of the European Union or the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU. Sir James Goldsmith, for example, formed the Referendum Party to contest seats in the 1997 UK general election and which secured votes on the basis of its demand for a referendum on Britain's place within the EU (see McAllister

and Studlar 2000). One of the Referendum Party’s successor organizations is the non-party Democracy Movement, which believes that liberal democracy in the UK is “fundamentally undermined by the single currency, the EU Constitution / Lisbon Treaty and the drive to create a Brussels-based system of government, which will result in all major decisions being taken at the European Union centre by undemocratic institutions” (Democracy Movement 2005). The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) is arguably the most prominent of these Euroskeptical organizations.

The United Kingdom Independence Party was formed by Alan Sked in 1993 and emerged out of his campaign against the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty (see Abedi and Lundberg 2009). Since that time the party has faced a number of controversies including, for example, disputes over its leadership as well as its purported links to the populist far-right British National Party (BNP). In spite of these controversies the party has enjoyed some notable electoral successes which have made it a significant minor party within the British political system (see Table 1). Indeed, UKIP’s electoral success is one factor that led Webb to question the accuracy of referring to the UK as a two party system (Webb 2005). The major breakthrough for UKIP came in the 2004 European Parliament election when the party placed third by securing over 16 per cent of the vote and 12 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) (see Baker and Sherrington 2005). The party improved on this performance in the 2009 European Parliament election when it increased its vote share to 16.5 per cent and secured one extra seat (from a smaller UK total). Most remarkably, UKIP’s share of the vote meant that it placed second to the Conservative Party and pushed the governing Labor Party into third place in terms of vote share (Whitaker and Lynch 2011; Ford, Goodwin and Cutts 2012).

**Table 1:** UKIP’s Electoral Performance

<b>Election</b>	<b>% of Vote (# Votes)</b>	<b># of Seats</b>
1997 General Election	0.3 (105, 722)	0
1999 EP Election	6.9 (696, 057)	3
2001 General Election	1.5 (390, 563)	0
2004 EP Election	16.1 (2, 660, 768)	12
2005 General Election	2.2 (603, 298)	0
2009 EP Election	16.5 (2, 498, 226)	13
2010 General Election	3.1 (919, 546)	0

In spite of this success, as noted by Usherwood (2008), UKIP has received relatively limited academic attention (although see Hayton 2010; Whitaker and Lynch 2011; Ford, Goodwin and Gutts 2012). One possible explanation for this is the fact that the party has been unable to make a major breakthrough at the national level and has failed to return a single member of parliament. Although the party’s vote share has increased at the last three

general elections (see Table 1), it secured less than 3 per cent of the national vote in 2005 and in spite of running almost 500 candidates in that election, the party failed in its goal of electing a candidate to parliament (Webb 2005). The party also failed to win a seat in the 2010 general election. In terms of electoral success, therefore, UKIP remains a minor party on the national stage. One explanation for this is the first-past-the-post electoral system used in UK general elections, which penalizes smaller parties at the expense of the larger parties, as compared to the system of proportional representation used for EP elections (see Aspinwall 2000; Usherwood 2008). It is also potentially explained by the argument that European Parliament elections are “second-order” elections that allow voters to vote differently than they do in national elections and potentially use them to cast an electoral judgment on the party in power at the national level (see Reif 1997; Reif and Schmitt 1980). In this view, UKIP has enjoyed more success in European Parliament elections mainly because voters do not consider these to be significant elections. This argument will be examined below in relation to a wider analysis of the significance of UKIP. First, the article examines the major themes in UKIP’s policies and electoral platforms. In so doing, it analyses their brand of Euroskepticism and seeks to explain its roots and development.

### *The Policies of UKIP*

Belying the idea that it is a single-issue party, UKIP has policies on a wide-range of issues including, for example, taxation, health care, transportation and defense (see UKIP 2010a; UKIP 2004; Usherwood 2008, 257). Nevertheless, the party’s central policy goal, and its *raison d’être*, is to secure UK withdrawal from the European Union. In its 2009 EP election manifesto, the party stated that UK membership of the EU “should be replaced with a genuine free trade agreement similar to those enjoyed by other non-EU nations such as Switzerland, Norway and Mexico. We want friendship and free trade with our European neighbors – not political union” (UKIP 2009a). The overwhelming majority of UKIP’s other policies stem from this starting point. In the case of defense policy, for example, UKIP calls for increased spending on the military in the continued context of NATO membership and independence from the EU. Similarly, the party calls for renewed control over the country’s fishing grounds to be established outside of the EU’s common fisheries policy. The party further claims that many of its spending commitments can be financed through costs saving as a result of withdrawal from the EU.

The exact details of the policies advocated by UKIP are diverse and have been contested within the party (Usherwood 2008). Nevertheless, certain interrelated themes emerge within UKIP’s policies and campaign; themes that are often replicated in Euroskeptic parties across the European Union. First, the party is intensely critical of the extent to which the European Union has challenged British state sovereignty and advocates restoring sovereign

decision-making power by withdrawing from the EU (Webb 2005). UKIP, for example, asserts that “the EU agenda is complete political union with all the main functions of national government taken over by the bureaucratic institutions of Brussels.” UKIP continues by suggesting that the EU is “an alien system of government that will ultimately prove to be totally unacceptable” (UKIP, 2009b). UKIP MEP Marta Andreasen expressed these sentiments when she referred to the European Commission as a “political elite who wants to acquire more and more power.” She further argued that: “The EU wants to have one government, one superstate, one law and one justice” (quoted in Sloan 2009).

Related to these fears about the loss of sovereignty, UKIP argues that EU membership poses a threat to British democracy. UKIP claims that an increasing number of issues are being determined at the EU level rather than within the British political system and that consequently British voters are losing control over those decisions. In advance of the 2005 general election, for example, the then party leader Roger Knapman appealed for votes by arguing that: “This is the opportunity for you to back UKIP and get our country back” (BBC 2005). Indeed, the title of the party’s 2005 general election manifesto was *We Want Our Country Back* (UKIP 2005). The party also claims that the governing political parties have deliberately kept the development of European integration a secret from the British public and have concealed the extent to which sovereignty has been delegated (in line with the argument made by Booker and North 2003). Former UKIP leader, Lord Pearson (who was elected in November 2009) made this point when he argued that his party was “for people who now for many years have seen through the lies of our political class and our main political parties, particularly in regard to our relationship with the European Union.” In the same speech he stated: “If you want to go on being deceived by the main parties, then stay in them and vote for them – if you don’t, the only way forward now is UKIP” (quoted in Norman, 2009). In this sense, UKIP is establishing itself as a party that stands in contrast to all of the major governing political parties (see Abedi and Lundberg 2009; Taggart 1998; Ford, Goodwin and Cutts 2012).

A third theme evident within UKIP’s policy platform is the preservation of British identity. In the period since 2002 in particular, UKIP has developed a range of policies linked to immigration and asylum (Usherwood 2008). In 2007, for example, UKIP called for a five year freeze on immigration into Britain. The party made the link between this policy and identity explicit when it recommended that: “No one should be admitted unless they are fluent in English, have the required educational qualifications, demonstrate loyalty to the UK, its laws and values, and can support themselves financially, with no recourse to public funds – and this to apply equally to their dependents” (UKIP, 2007a).

The party also advocates a slate of policies that it claims are aimed at “restoring Britishness.” These policies deal not only with immigration but also with opposition to the devolution of power within the United Kingdom. They are also linked to the recent call to limit the wearing of the burka in the United Kingdom. Lord Pearson claims that the burka is “incompatible with Britain’s values of freedom and democracy” (quoted in “UKIP to call...” 2010). Leader Nigel Farage introduced the proposed ban by arguing that the burka is a symbol of an “increasingly divided Britain” and of the fact that a different culture is “being forced on Britain” (quoted in “UKIP chief...” 2010). The predominant theme of all of these policies is that British identity is under threat and needs to be preserved. The European Union is one cause of this threat in the eyes of UKIP because it reduces national control over key areas of national life including immigration and asylum policies (see UKIP 2009c).

The existence of the United Kingdom Independence Party, and the policies it promotes, to a great extent, provide an example of Euroscepticism as the politics of opposition (Sitter 2001). The party seeks electoral advantage from its advocacy of withdrawal from the European Union. In assuming this position, it seeks to position itself as distinct from the major political parties, and particularly the Conservative Party, and has drawn support from these parties, particularly at European Parliament elections (Whitaker and Lynch 2011; Hayton 2010; Ford, Goodwin and Cutts 2012). It is not the case that the political party has grafted a hard Eurosceptical position onto its pre-existing electoral agenda only for the purpose of securing votes (Taggart 1998; Sitter 2001). Within the United Kingdom this type of Euroscepticism is more readily linked with the British National Party. In the case of UKIP, withdrawal from the EU is the core of its platform rather than an appendage to it. The members of the party have gravitated towards it from other political parties in large part because of its stance on the European Union (Usherwood 2008; Ford, Goodwin and Cutts 2012).

There is, nevertheless, a significant extent to which it is useful to see UKIP’s existence and policies as the politics of an organization at the fringes of the political system. Analysis of UKIP and its policies demonstrate that its leaders misinterpret the European Union and its implications. At the very least, there can be little question that the party employs radical rhetoric and launches populist appeals in an attempt to secure both media attention and votes. A recent example of this tactic was the personal attack launched by UKIP’s leader, Nigel Farage, on the President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, in the European Parliament. In his widely reported comments, Farage asserted that van Rompuy has “the charisma of a damp rag and the appearance of a low-grade bank clerk” (quoted in Charter 2010). This speech resulted in Farage being fined by the European Parliament president but it was successful in securing media and public attention. It also

provides an example of UKIP basing its appeal on a partial truth but doing so in a radical fashion. When the EU's heads of state and government selected Herman van Rompuy as the first individual to fill the position of European Council president, there was considerable commentary that questioned the decision on the grounds that van Rompuy is relatively unknown outside of Belgium (see Traynor et al. 2009; Kirkup and Waterfield 2009). This commentary came particularly in the light of the fact that the initial proposal for a permanent European Council president had in part been intended to give the European Union a more visible international face (Crum 2009).

A second example of UKIP basing its appeal on an exaggeration of the implications of European integration is its claims that it has created, or is in the process of creating, a European superstate centralized in Brussels. This contention, as noted above, is pervasive in UKIP's policy documents and public statements. In his criticisms of Herman van Rompuy, for example, Nigel Farage asserted: "I have no doubt that your intention is to be the quiet assassin of European democracy and of European nation states" ("Nigel Farage summoned..." 2010). The party's 2010 general election manifesto makes frequent reference to the idea of a United States of Europe or a European superstate (UKIP 2010b). In the section on foreign affairs and international trade, for example, UKIP claims to recognize "Britain as a global player with a global destiny and not a regional state within a 'United States of Europe'" (UKIP 2010b, 6). It is certainly the case that EU membership does entail a pooling of sovereignty and it does mean that some decisions that were previously taken by the British government and parliament are now taken collectively within the EU's institutional structure. More measured analyses of the European Union, however, argue that this pooling of sovereignty has not created a superstate, and arguably will not do so. Certainly this is the argument made by both Andrew Moravcsik (2001) and Anand Menon (2008). Menon, for example, cogently argues that the European Union has been created by the member states because it is in their interests and that power remains at the state level. He states that: "The European Union, far from representing some kind of artificial construct separate from its constituent member states, is, in reality, a tool created and dominated by them" (Menon 2008, 106). Even scholars who suggest that the European Union has had a significant impact on the participating states are far more likely to refer to it as a multi-level polity, or quasi-federal system, rather than a centralized superstate as claimed by UKIP (Hooghe and Marks 2001). There is much to suggest, then, that UKIP is playing to the politics of fear rather than presenting an accurate analysis of the European Union.

A third example of this relates to UKIP's claim that the development of the European Union is a secretive, elite process that is closed to the public. Lord Pearson, in a House of Lords debate, claimed that "most of our national law is now imposed by the secret Brussels system of law-making" (UKIP

2007b). In its 2010 election manifesto, UKIP claims that it will address this situation by giving “power back to Westminster and to the people” (UKIP 2010b, 2). In contrast to these claims, a number of commentators have noted that although policy-making in the European Union is complicated, it is in fact remarkably open (see Moravcsik 2002; Richardson 2006). Former Commissioner, and Conservative cabinet minister, Leon Brittan refers to the extensive consultations that occur in the preparation of EU initiatives. As he indicates: “The Commission does not prepare legislation in isolation from the extensive committees of national civil servants, but it does sometimes suit some member states to imply that they had nothing to do with the terrible proposal that has just emanated from “Brussels”” (Brittan 2000, 5; also Menon 2008).

Leon Brittan’s analysis, in part, provides one explanation for the approach adopted by UKIP and its success in securing a share of the UK vote. Governments in general have not been active in providing information about the European Union to generally apathetic populations (see O’Brennan 2009 in relation to the 2008 Irish referendum campaign; Mair 2007). Indeed, it is often the case that governments campaign either on the basis of standing up for their country against the “European Union” or on the basis of their own success without mention of the impact of the European Union on this success (see Menon 2008). This is particularly the case in the United Kingdom with its long-standing popular and media tendency to view continental Europe as the “other” (see Daddow 2006; Harmsen and Spiering 2004, 16), a generally low level of popular enthusiasm for the European Union (Spiering 2004), and the frequent tendency of British governments to be on the minority side of EU debates (see George 1998; Wall 2008; Young 1998). In this context, a hard Euroskeptical message has fertile soil into which it can sink its roots. The development and success of UKIP cannot, therefore, be separated from the United Kingdom’s difficult relationship with European integration. It is, rather, an extreme manifestation of widespread popular and elite critical attitudes with respect to the European Union that are evident in the press (Anderson 2004) and within the major political parties (Holmes 1996).

At the same time, UKIP’s existence and policy platform is also linked to the lack of clarity within the European Union and EU debates about direction of integration or its final destination. Disagreement has been evident since the earliest days of the integration project and different definitions of integration exist (Taylor 2008). There are competing visions about what European integration is designed to achieve and political disagreements are inevitable given the size of the organization and the diversity of political views that it contains (Hix 2008). To a considerable extent, UKIP builds its campaign based on this lack of clarity about the future of European integration. UKIP is able to play to fears that are prominent within the United Kingdom about the potential for the European Union to develop into a superstate. The fact that

there is no widely accepted definition of European integration's final destination makes it easier for UKIP to construct a political campaign that exaggerates and distorts the implications of integration.

#### **4. The Consequences of the United Kingdom Independence Party**

Analysis of the policies adopted by UKIP and the roots of these policies inevitably requires an examination of the political consequences of the party's existence. This in turn entails addressing two related questions. First, to what extent does UKIP's presence within the political system represent a radical, extremist force? Second, to what extent has UKIP been successful in influencing the British political system?

With respect to these questions, the evidence provided by UKIP is mixed. The party's central policy goal of withdrawal from the EU is in itself radical and distinguishes it from any of the major parties. Yet its general opposition to the European Union fits with the widespread existence of Eurosceptical opinion within the United Kingdom, as examined earlier (see Spiering 2004). A brief analysis of UKIP's membership and supporters also presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, the leadership has frequently tried to distance the party from the idea that it contains a far-right, extremist component. UKIP party leaders have, for example, attempted to distance themselves from the British National Party (BNP) and the far right in general (Hayton 2010). UKIP's leaders have consistently resisted the formation of an electoral pact with the BNP, including most recently in advance of the 2009 EP elections (see Porter 2008). In response to the suggestion of an electoral agreement, Nigel Farage responded that: "There are no circumstances, no possible situations, in which we would even consider doing any type of deal with the BNP whatsoever... we are a non-racist, non-sectarian party" (quoted in "UKIP rejects..." 2008). The party's web-site further seeks to identify the distinctiveness from the BNP when it states that "UKIP believes in civic nationalism, which is inclusive and open to anyone of any ethnic or religious background who wishes to identify with Britain. We reject the "blood and soil" ethnic nationalism of extremist parties" (UKIP 2010c).

Yet the very fact that the leadership has so often had to issue denials of a link to the far-right lends weight to the argument that UKIP contains, or is susceptible to, such an element. It is certainly the case that other party leaders have sought to portray UKIP as an extremist force. The two most recent Conservative leaders, Michael Howard and David Cameron, have both downplayed the significance of UKIP while at the same time suggesting that it represents a "lunatic fringe" of British politics. In 2004 Michael Howard referred to UKIP as "cranks and gadflies" (quoted in White 2004; see also Baker and Sherrington 2005. This was the title given to Mark Daniel's (2005) insider

account of UKIP). In 2006 David Cameron labeled UKIP a “bunch of fruit cakes and loonies and closet racists” (quoted in Shipman 2006).

While these criticisms of UKIP can at least partially be dismissed as politically motivated attempts to limit the extent to which UKIP draws support away from the Conservative Party, it is also the case that there are other reasons to suggest that UKIP’s populist dimension has attracted voters and supporters from the far right (see *Daily Telegraph* 2009; Usherwood 2002). The party’s immigration and “Britishness” policies have similarities with the policies advocated by the British National Party (BNP). The BNP’s 2009 EP manifesto, for example, called “for British control over British borders so as to stop unlimited and uncontrolled immigration...” (British National Party 2009). The BNP, like UKIP, also called for the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union. The possible infiltration of UKIP by the far right was identified by its founding member (see Sked 2001) and the overlap between UKIP and BNP potential voters has been identified by the study of Margetts, John and Weir (2004). In the words of Margetts et al., UKIP draws “upon the same well of social and political attitudes among the public as the BNP and have the potential to convert such attitudes into votes...” (2004, 12; see also John and Margetts 2009). This is in part the conclusion reached by Ford et al. In their study of UKIP’s electoral support, they conclude that the profile of UKIP’s core supporters (young, disaffected with mainstream politics, and anxious about immigration) is similar to that of the BNP (Ford, Goodwin and Cutts 2012). Indeed, it is sometimes argued that UKIP provides a “polite” alternative to the BNP and thus a more legitimate route for the policies advocated by the BNP to enter the political mainstream (Ford, Goodwin and Cutts 2012; Hayton 2010).

The answer to the question of the extent to which UKIP has influenced the political system is also mixed. There is certainly considerable evidence to suggest that the party remains at the fringes of the political system and that indeed it basis its appeal on being outside of the mainstream. As identified earlier, the party has not been able to make a major breakthrough in national elections and is yet to win a single seat in the British parliament. It is also the case that the party has experienced considerable internal upheaval and dispute, particularly with respect to its leadership (see Abedi and Lundberg 2009; Usherwood 2008). One of the most notable examples of this was when former television presenter Robert Kilroy-Silk launched a failed challenge for the party leadership in 2004 and then left to form his own political organization, Veritas. The most recent leadership changes occurred when Lord Pearson was selected in 2009 to replace Nigel Farage, who stepped down in order to focus on his 2010 general election campaign, but who subsequently was re-elected as party leader in November 2010. While any political party can experience internal upheaval, the level of dispute within UKIP, it having had six party leaders since 1997, suggests an organization that is struggling to

develop a consistent political face and voice. Usherwood (2008) drew attention to this when he identified internal sources of division within UKIP, including the ideological diversity of its membership.

At the same time, there are also grounds for arguing that UKIP is a potentially significant force for change within the British political system. First, also as noted above, the party has enjoyed considerable success in European Parliament elections including placing second in the 2009 election. Although these may be considered second order elections (Reif 1997), it is nevertheless significant that over 2.5 million voters were willing to vote for the party in both 2004 and 2009. It is also the case that while the party presents itself as quite different from the traditional governing parties, it nevertheless has links with these parties, and particularly the Conservatives, on several levels. A significant number of UKIP's leadership, membership and voters are former Conservative Party members or voters. This is true, for example, of both the former and current UKIP leaders, Nigel Farage and Lord Pearson. Nigel Farage left the Conservative Party in 1992 following the Conservative government's signature of the Maastricht Treaty and Lord Pearson was one of four Conservative members of the House of Lords expelled from the party in 2004 after openly urging support for UKIP in the EP election (see Baker and Sherrington 2005, 310). It is also the case that many Conservative voters are at least willing to contemplate voting for UKIP (see Margetts et al. 2004) and several major Conservative Party donors have switched their donations to UKIP (see Kite et al. 2009; Usherwood 2008). In the 2005 general election UKIP claimed that voters switching to UKIP cost the Conservatives a possible 27 seats (see Bale 2006) and a *Sunday Telegraph* survey suggested the Conservatives feared losing support to UKIP in the 2010 general election (see Kite et al. 2009). Stuart Wheeler, a former major donor to the Conservative Party stated that: "UKIP cost the Conservative Party 20 or 30 seats in the last general election. Because people feel so strongly about this subject now they are likely to cost them more than that next time" (quoted in Kite et al. 2009).

This overlap between Conservative and UKIP support is indicative of one possible way in which UKIP already impacts upon the political system and may do so in the future. There is some evidence to indicate that UKIP's existence and campaigning has influenced the Conservative Party's policies with respect to the European Union. Some members of the Conservative Party have called for the party to adopt a more Euroskeptical stance in response to UKIP (see Baker and Sherrington 2005). Pressure from the Euroskeptical wing of the Conservative Party was at least in part responsible for Conservative Party leader David Cameron making and finally fulfilling his 2005 leadership election pledge to withdraw the party from the European People's Party in the European Parliament (see Lynch and Whitaker 2007).

It is not the case that UKIP has so far transformed the UK party system along a new cleavage of opposition to the European Union (Kriesi 2007). The hard Euroskepticism advocated by UKIP remains at the fringes of the existing party system, which is further emphasized by UKIP's failure to win a single seat in the 2010 general election (see Taggart and Szczesniak 2008a; Sitter 2001). Yet in the United Kingdom, where there is a deep-seated popular distrust of European integration, UKIP has not been without influence and helps add to that popular and political mistrust and the radicalization of opposition to the European Union (Usherwood 2002; Hayton 2010; John and Margetts 2009).

## **5. Conclusion**

The United Kingdom Independence Party is a party of paradoxes that is difficult to analyze. It is a party that is highly prone to internal division, but which has endured over time and has been capable of securing significant electoral support. It is a party that paints itself as radical and distinct from the governing parties and its leadership is prone to using radical, populist rhetoric. Yet its message is one that resonates with British political society and within other political parties, particularly the Conservative Party, and it has shown itself capable of attracting significant levels of electoral support.

It is perhaps best to see UKIP as a fringe party (a party of opposition) and its goal of UK withdrawal from the United Kingdom remains at the margins of British politics. It adopts the strategies of opposition parties that see themselves as unlikely to form part of government. UKIP, for example, asserts that other parties lie to the electorate and that its message consists of "straight talking" (see UKIP 2010b). It is also prepared to advance its goals using populist rhetoric that distorts the reality of the European Union. In line with the argument that it is a party of opposition at the fringes of the political mainstream is the fact that the party has yet to translate its electoral success at the European Parliament level into sustained publicity and success at the national level. In spite of this, the party is a relevant political force within British politics. To understand why, it is necessary to examine both the development of the European Union and the domestic roots of UKIP. The inevitable lack of clarity about the future of European integration allows political space for the populist rhetoric employed by UKIP. At the same time, UKIP has developed out of the long-standing opposition to European integration that is evident at both the popular and elite levels within the British polity and its activities and rhetoric helps to sustain the opposition. There is some evidence to suggest that UKIP helps influence British debate on the European Union. While UKIP remains at the fringes of the political system, its message has resonance within the wider British political system.

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