From the Margins to the Mainstream.
Non-mainstream Political Parties in the Process of Representation.

Dominika Kasprwicz, PhD, emial: d_kasprowicz@wp.pl

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If it is wrong to neglect the association between part and the party, it would also be quite wrong, to consider the party as a part that is unrelated to the whole.

(G. Sartori 1976: 23)

Abstract: Author presents a problem driven qualitative oriented empirical research of the Polish case, where various types of linkage between the political party arena and social organizations has recently been established. Poland here serves as an interesting example of a political system where the mainstream politics (electoral, parliamentary and executive) is closed for the new entrants and resistant to the new topics of interest. At the same time, a considerable number of civil society organizations as well as political parties keep operating on the margins of parliamentary politics. In-depth Interviews with those organizations and non-mainstream parties’ leaders (conducted in 2011/2012) revealed three main “emergency entrants” that have been used to influence mainstream politics: export of experts, mediatisation of the topic and institutionalization of interests and a new role this institution plays the new democracy.

Introduction

The non-mainstream parties have been intensively researched over past years, and numerous perspectives on that topic have been introduced so far. Chronologically, the most prominent one was dedicated to the New Politics of the ‘60s – melting of the traditional-frozen cleavages, significant shift in social values and political support and in result new entrants on the electoral and parliamentary stage, the Greens, populist parties as well as the radical right and radical left ones (Lipset&Rokkan 1967, Dalton&Kuechler 1990, Mair&Müller&Plasser 2004). As a result of this shift, for the next 30 years party politics analysts interested in the non-mainstream have scrutinized the developments of these parties and their
changing status, mainly in the established democracies of the West, facing it with the transformation of the big-brothers, the traditional parties.

Some of the academics followed the “ideological cleavage” and dedicated their work to the particular party family distinguished on a basis of its programmatic appeal. Therefore we have excellent studies on the Green parties (i.e. Muller-Rommel&Poguntke 2002, Frankland&Lucardie&Rihoux 2008) or Populist Radical Right (Betz 1994, Kitschelt 1995, Ignazii 2003, Carter 2005, Mudde 2007, Art 2009), but also relatively new concepts like anti-establishment parties (Schedler 1996), new parties (Sikk 2012), or niche parties, that were defined as “parties that compete primarily on a small number of non-economic issues” (Wagner 2011: 845).

Other interesting approach to the non-mainstream parties was proposed by group of scholars who somehow distanced themselves from the parties’ ideological appeal and focused on alternative aspects of this phenomenon. They proposed studies concerning the size of a party (vote-share) (Taagapera 2007), political strategies within the party system and fate of new parties in governments (Deschouver 2008), “support parties” (Bale&Bergman 2006), “outsider parties” (McDonnell&Newell 2011), “minor parties” (Pedersen 1982). All these terms have been used vaguely as an descriptor of the parties that (at least at the beginning) were outside the cartel, that differed from the mainstream in terms of appeal, history, size etc.

The academic debate over the topic was accelerated in the ‘70s and then ‘90s when transition in Spain, Portugal, Greece and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Block initialized socio-political transformations in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Many factors, like accumulated legacies of the pre-communist period, communist history and the transition influenced the format of post-communist party systems. In the eyes of scholars and commentators post-authoritarian party-systems were either transformed or re-established (Kitschelt&Mansfeldova&Markowski&Toka 1999, van Biezen 2003) and the question of being-not-a-mainstream-party become relevant, but in a radically different context.

Generally speaking, not from the very beginning but shortly afterwards, the newly transformed systems were colonized by four types of parties: post-communist ones, those formed by the former pro-democratic opposition (usually in a form of wide coalitions), historical parties – rooted in the mid-war period and re-established in the ‘90s and, so called “the new ones”1. When looking at the Polish case, some of

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1 When thinking about their characteristics, it is hard to draw up any generalizations – the new parties, their number, status, appeal differed in particular political system and we can assume, relied on a mixture of a demand (civil society) and supply side
them follow the bottom-up path and were rooted in the society, based on organizations or social movements, some, according to the top-to-the-bottom scenario, tried to attract wider audience after they were authorized. In the first years of transition, supported by loyal electorates and represented interests of the particular parts of the society were i.e. former member of the communist nomenclature represented by the post-communist Social-Democrats (SLD), peasants gathered around the pivotal agrarian party – PSL and agrarian populist Selfdefense. But this should be read rather as an exception than a rule in a system with extremely high level of party and electoral volatility.

For the next two decades, what, obviously, focused the academic attention, was the process of the mainstream creation and studies on parties that constituted it (Kopecky etc.). Polish political parties catch up their big brothers (see i.e. the transformation of the post-communist parties into the new social-democracy), spread their area of activities on the sub-national level (Paczeński 2010), got europeanised (Kasprowicz&Styczyńska 2013) and institutionalised (Szczerbiak 2001). In result, the same questions regarding changing role and functions of political parties and their alleged crisis that were asked in the established democracies, were being asked in their younger counterparts (Sitter 2003: 178-202, van Biezen 2003, Mair 1997: Ch.8).

The proceeding polarization and institutionalization of the party system in Poland at the turn of the century shaped the party mainstream. Unlike in the West, the non-mainstream parties in the new democracies did not catch much of domestic or international attention and up till now stayed as one of under-researched phenomena.

**Mainstream formation in Poland.**

In late ‘90s, Polish sociologists working on political parties’ formation in Poland concluded that: Political parties, unwanted by political elites (or at least a large part of the post-Solidarity elites), formed in an unstable institutional and difficult material conditions, with humble organizational and human resources, ridiculed by the media and disliked by the public - in spite of all of this were created, operated and carried out their functions, eventually became the driving democratic (lawmakers etc.) factors.
institutions (Grabowska and Szawiel, 2003: 23, own translation) Much of it has remained true up to now, especially when comes to the non mainstream parties that, in Poland, comparing to their counterparts face the extremely unfriendly institutional conditions. In order to explain this particular situation a short introduction to Polish party politics is needed.

Poland extricated itself through negotiated transition with semi-legal opposition. The “Round Table talks” in June 1989 initiated peaceful transition to democracy and opened the first (out of four) stages in the Polish party system development. In result of the negotiations, in June 1989, the first semi-free parliamentary elections took place and seats were redistributed among the opposition candidates (40%) and nomenclature (60%). In spite of the number of seats, it was the pro-democratic opposition that was massively supported by the society, that fueled decomposition within the Communist Party, proliferation of new political parties and irreversibly changed the monoparty system into multiparty one.

Political détente of that time opened the space for new entrants – in the second parliamentary election of 1991, 111 political parties contested in, as was mentioned, four categories of parties (post-communist, originated from pro-democratic opposition, historical and new ones). The next three years could be called and “era of small parties”, as that was a time of extremely high fragmentarisation of the Parliament (33 parties won seats, non of then more than 15%). In polarized and highly competitive Parliament with post-communist isolated by democratic forces the mainstream based on Sartorian categories of blackmail and coalition potential consisted of the highest number of parties ever. The volatile support of numerous parties for the three consecutive governments accompanied by the economical turbulences and growing social discontent led to an epic fall of the three consecutive governments and ended with the early elections of 1993. The Polish party system entered the third phase that lasted for the next 12 years.

Bipolar party system was an effect of the more restricted electoral laws (3% and 5% thresholds, D’Hont formula, etc.) and high electoral volatility, characterized with the much lower effective parties’ number (4-7), concentration of smaller entities around two main opponents – reformed Communist Party (Social-Democracy, SLD) and the centre-right coalition of former pro-democratic opposition parties (AWS), pivotal agrarian party (PSL) and growing number of the “outsiders”. Between 1993 and 2005 four parliamentary elections took place and the consecutive governments
were formed alternately by the consolidated left and more fragmented and in-coherent centre-right. The leftist governments between 2001-2005 ended with an epic fall after a series of financial and political scandals (described by Polish media as the Rywin-gate) and started the demise of the social-democracy and its allies. At that time, two political parties moved from the political margins to the mainstream: the populist radical right League of Polish Families (LPR) and agrarian populist Selfdefense.

The radical electoral shift and decline in support for the social-democrats in 2005 re-constructed Polish party politics. Since then the mainstream is constituted by (the same/repeated) parties, and the division line goes between parties of the similar origin: liberal-conservative Civic Platform (PO) and conservative Law and Justice Party (PiS). After two years of conservative governments (K. Marcinkiewicz, J. Kaczyński) supported by the populists and radical right, in 2007 PO (with the agrarian PSL as junior coalition partner) took over the power and managed to keep it for two terms. Although, in result of decomposition of the conservative opposition and PO, a few maverick parties - splinters from the mainstream, were funded (i.e. post-modern Janusz Palikot Party run by an eccentric businessman, focusing on the economical liberalism, sexual minority rights and anti-clericalism), general picture of the party system stayed untouched.

The table below presents the Polish Parliamentary Elections 1993-2011 results. Within each column the fields in bold (with the results) indicate coalition partners at the beginning of each term.

Table 1

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One of Polish sociologists, Radosław Markowski metaphorically describes the Polish party system as a “cemented one” (see Markowski 2000, 2006), that perfectly exemplifies status of the non-mainstream parties, with very little chance to gain, traditionally understood, relevancy. The mainstream, that arose in the ‘90s as a result of turbulent socio-political transformation not only stays unchanged in terms of the political elites and general ideological stances but consolidates and fortifies, preventing the radical change.

In Poland three main supply factors behind it concern: electoral law, party financing and media. In general, in spite of the type of election (local, parliamentary, European) the existing solution favours competitors who operate nation-wide rather than locally and have the most developed and professionalized structures. And results in low effective party number.

Table 2

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<th>Number of parties and coalitions in the parliament</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of parties officially registered</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of electoral committees contesting in the election</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
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Source: PKW

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Leftist and Democrat coalition includes Left Democratic Alliance, Democratic Party, Social democracy of Poland and Workers Union. Coalition entered Parliament, but was dissolved in 2008.

The electoral committees can be registered by the political parties, coalitions of parties and voters.
Only before the last parliamentary elections (in 2011) 81 parties were officially registered and 6% of them won seats. Not more than 15% of all parties run in the election, and 5 of them gained at least one mandate.

That is interlinked with the system of financial support where political parties are major beneficiaries of the state subsidies and donations, the other hand, public money that is distributed among the biggest (vote-share) parties covers around 80% of their budgets (National Electoral Commission Database, PKW).

When comes to the media coverage, during electoral campaign only those entities that manage to register in half of the constituencies are given the chance to free advertisements in public media. That coincides with the monopolization of the commercial stations by the “known-because-of-being-known” mainstream politicians.

To sum up, political opportunity structures (electoral laws, party financing regulation, media coverage) that favors mainstream, leave other ones far behind. That, however did not prevent a group of activists from taking up the challenge. In spite the fact that after 20 years of democratization their channels of representation, alternative ways to influence public sphere (professional lobbies, NGO, trade unions, international organizations etc.) appeared, the party organization is still chosen and subsists - since the foundation of the open-access political party archives in 1998, around 80 unique party records has been created.

In this article, author aims to explore the group of non-mainstream parties As the general distinction that has been made so far – parties divided into the mainstream and non-mainstream ones is far too elusive to be a starting point for the research, therefore in the first section, the conceptualization of the non-mainstream parties will be presented as well as several assumption as to this particular group of parties will be made.

If not a mainstream then what?

As it was mentioned, the non-mainstream parties have been assessed from many angles and appeared to be not only interesting but also inevitable element of party politics change. McDonnell&Newell who proposed a concept of the “outsider party” see them as parties that “by the nature of their ideology, rhetoric or positions on
government participation, have placed themselves or are being placed by others “outside” the sphere of potential governing parties”, but eventually entered the government (McDonnel&Newell 2011:445). More clear-cut distinction was made by Nicholas Barr (2009:32) who in the article on political populism separated the anti-establishment politicians from the outsider ones. The latter category includes those “who have gained political prominence not through or in association with an established, competitive party, but as a political independent or in association with the new or new-competitive parties”. The latter study by Bale and Bergman turn attention to another important aspect of being-not-a-mainstream party, it is the existence in-between, in the grey zone of party politics. This analysis focused in turn on the green parties that operates between opposition and government as a support parties for centre-left governments in New Zealand and Sweden. Authors prove the importance of the support parties and show the growing institutionalization of this type of behaviors and their ambivalent effects (Bale&Bergman 2006).

All those studies, albeit underlining importance of the non-mainstream agents have one thing in common - the researched political parties are captured in an advance stage of their development, using the Mogens Pedersen’s approach (were parties goes through a number of stages, starting with being born and ending with the party death (Pedersen 1982)), hese were non-mainstream parties at the third and fourth stage of the lifespan, this means representation (parties that won seats and entered the parliament) and relevance (synonymous to party in office). So the “outsiders” or the non-mainstream group overlapped with the ones relevant in Sartorian sense, leaving behind one more.

As Mogens Pedersen put it: “Minor and new parties tend to be forgotten by analysts of parties and party systems. Good as well as bad reasons account for this neglect. The neglect ought, however, to be remedied, since it can be argued that minor, and especially new minor, parties play an important role in the transformation of party systems” (Pedersen 1982). This remark made more than 20 years ago remains up to date especially, when it comes to newly born political parties or those staying long at the one of two initial stages of their lifespan – declaration (announcing the will to become a party) and authorization (fulfilling the requirements to be recognized as a party). All of them definitively fall into the category of non-mainstream ones.
On that basis, the mainstream here is understood as a group of parties of the highest possible level of Sartorian blackmail or/and coalition potential. The non-mainstream in turn, are all the parties that are not relevant in Sartorian terms, with no blackmail nor coalition potential, neither supported by the state.

**Unlike a “cartel party”. Non-mainstream parties as research units.**

The reasons why this research area of non-mainstream parties has not attracted wide attention are understandable. Operating on the margins, outside the parliaments not to mention governments, with merely no media coverage or just newly born could not tell us much about the quintessence of politics that we observe at the echelons of power. This is also a research area of high diversity and changeability that makes it hard to capture and explore. Nevertheless, when working on the changing political party concept, going for the non-relevant and small in terms of party organization in author’s opinion have at least two substantive advantages.

The first important aspect is embedded in the well known “catch-all” and “cartel party” theses that underlined change that occurred in the traditional intermediary function of the political party. Kirchheimer’s proposal underlined a new style of aggregation of interests and values of different parts of society made by political parties, that started in the ‘50s and aimed to secure the electoral support across the “traditional” cleavages (Kirchheimer, 1966: 186). Theory by Richard Katz and Peter Mair, distinguished cartel party from other party types by its ‘symbiotic’ relationship with the state, which provides it with the means to ensure its survival in spite of growing detachment from society. Political parties’ increased organizational and electoral dependence on the use of state resources, therefore a response to arguments of party decline has been given - the ‘party in central office’ and the ‘party in public office’ were stronger than ever (Mair 1997: Ch.6). Subsequently, the ‘party on the ground’ was undoubtedly weaker and the process of party detachment become a focal point to numerous studies. This thesis has been partially confirmed also for Poland (Szczerbiak 2001, Sitter 2003). In result we have a group of parties which linkage with the society, necessity to represent group interests become, at least, questionale. The picture where political party floats in complete isolation from society not true, though. Once permanent type of linkage between party and the particular groups of society is voting, second, public opinion that influence party agenda, but
what draws our attention is the importance of the party-interest groups linkage in the theory and practice of party systems and recent developments. The exhaustive literature overview made by Allern&Bale (2012) prove that the crucial topic needs not only theoretical clarification but also empirical data. The latter has been gradually provided by several authors.

More a decade ago Yishai (2001) described the rise of new type of Israeli “post-cartel parties” that were in need of re-incorporating society into politics. This reunion, was in author’s opinion, considered by the parties as a chance to build the permanent linkage with the volatile electorates. It is being partially confirmed in the well established and post-authoritarian states, i.e. by Verge that analysed links between Spanish parties and organisations. He concluded that creation of social organizations and the infiltration of party members in existing organizations seem to be more fertile strategies in a context of weak party organizations and weak civil society. (...) parties’ weak membership might call for the expansion of links with society, and civil society’s capacity to prevent parties’ interference in its domain is limited when it is poorly developed. (Verge 2012: 55-6) In Portugal recent research revealed the different type linkage with civil society. The analysis of state grants indicates that parties act as brokers between the state and civil society groups, instrumentally using patronage resource. (Jalali&Silva&Sils 2012: 61-80). Also dynamic of these relations was put under scrutiny i.e. by Rassmussen and Lindeboom, who, in distinguished and described broad set of actors and activities with low degrees of commitment (Rassmussen&Lindeboom 2013:282).

Keeping in mind the vague representatives of the catch-all and cartel party and ‘getting back to the society’ trend author decided on an alternative units of analysis – non-mainstream parties, assuming that their non-cartel neither catch-all character will help in getting genuine answer to the basic research question: What is the political party? What is the nature of the relations, both with the interest-groups and the cartel party?

The fact, that non-mainstream parties at their early stage of development stay under-researched, the open type of research questions that goes under the skin of a phenomena in order to get a general idea on “what is going on there?” as well as explorative character of the research imposed the qualitative (QUAL) research design. In the QUAL research design researcher adapts interpretativist and
constructivist view and in result is able to produce detailed descriptions and understandings which are based on, or offer an interpretation of the perspective of the participants (Denzin 20, Bogner, A. & Menz, W. 2009). Here data was collected during series of an semi-structured in-depth interviews.

In Polish context, where the financial support is given to the political parties that run in election and meet the 3% threshold, and the seat redistribution starts when 5% threshold is reached, the non-mainstream party group would overlap with a non-parliamentary parties at the first of second stage of the lifespan – announced to be started or that crossed the line of authorization⁴. Between 2011 and 2012, 22 interviews were conducted with representatives of 10 non-mainstream parties. This small but purposefully selected sample included either party founders, their presidents or board members at that time, therefore gives us a unique opportunity to enter the perceptual schemes of a ‘living’ source; to generate information on their views, attitudes, experience, opinion in other words, privileged insight. Expert interviewing technique and the data gathered enable to explore the filed and map out the research area, but has its limitations. We need to keep in mind that it is the representation of social world of our interviewees that unables us generalizations. The categories that appeared in the course of research do not create a exhaustive catalogue, but establish a starting point for further investigation.

The sample included: Better Poland Party (Lepsza Polska, LP), Electorate (Elektorat), Slavic Association (Związek Słowiański, ZS), Pirates Party (Partia Piratów, PP), Drivers Party, (Partia Przewoźników i Kierowców, PPiK), Party for Development (Partia Rozwoju, PR), New Vision of Poland (Nowa Wizja Polski, NWP), Free Homelands Party (Partia Wolnych Ojczyzn, PWO), National Entrepreneurship Party (Partia Krajowe Forum Przedsiębiorczości, KFP) Children’s Party (Partia Dzieci i Młodzieży). These are non-mainstream political parties at the first of the second stage of their lifespan, some of them contesting in election but with no representation so far neither in the European Parliament, nor in the Sejm or the Senate, or any of the elective local government bodies. None of them is supported financially from the state budget, they are also not a maverick parties, that would

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arise as a result of a split in the existing parties and claim not continuing activity of any of the pre-existing parties. The parties in question were started in 2001 and afterwards. This censure was introduced in order to get the most comprehensive and comparable cases, as in 2001 in Poland rules for the financing of political parties were liberalized and the new electoral laws introduced. Definitively these were not new parties (the “youngest” one was funded in 2009) but rather stayed long at the particular early stages in their lifespan not crossing the electoral thresholds and media ones.

The narratives of the party elites revealed they were both individual and group oriented, interrelated and fueled social and political activities of the interviewees. What stood out, were the feeling of misrepresentation, external impulses and group-interests.

Mair pointed out that parties which originated in interest groups have distanced themselves from them, while those that did not originate from them have no interest in forging such links (Mair 1997). In Poland, both parliamentary (agrarian party – PSL) and non parliamentary ones not necessarily follow this path. What all respondents had in common was a prevalent feeling of misrepresentation of the group interest. This opinion goes directly in line with the catch all party and cartel party theses and to substantive extent reflects the public disenchantment with party politics and political elites reflected in the public opinion pools. What interest representation was missing?

One of them was an ethical aspect, lack of transparency and general feeling of disenchantment with the moral “backbone” of political elites and alienation of power, as it was put: We try to counteract hypocrisy and corruption in politics, not counting with the people and environment, cause they decide for us but with no respect to our will and we want the human being to in the centre [Electorate]. The disagreement with political style rather than a content was strong enough to fuel, in this case, political engagement and was confirmed by other parties’ representatives. The mainstream was also seen as hostile to active citizens (as a citizen I tried several times to propose some basic changes but I was blocked, then I realized that changes from below are not possible [PR]) over regulative (they treat us like a slaves [LP]), not keeping their promises and infringing legal boundaries, especially when it comes to competences of the tax authorities and police.
Apart from being agents of the disenchanted society, our interviewees also underlined their linkage to several organised interest-group like: entrepreneurs, women, drivers, internatus, Slaves or children right activists, who were not represented or properly represented by the mainstream parties: Nobody gives a damn and nobody cares about the drivers, but there are plenty of us [PK]. The founder of EWO claimed to be directly inspired and asked to start a new entity by the diverse circles - conservative liberals to people „still on the board” from the ultra-catholic-patriotic milieux, that liked our previous activities and urged us to form a party dedicated to European matters – Free Homelands Party.

The second part of the Katz and Mair’s commentary also seems questionable, as author indicated: For their part, interest groups, now that parties putting the onus on them to make demands on the state directly ay prefer more room for maneuver and may not want to run the risk of being tainted by association with particular parties. (Katz&Mair 1995:23)

In this area, “third way” has been adopted by the non-mainstream political parties. In most cases they originated from the formal or informal interest groups and although they decided not to be associated with particular parties, on deliberation they did not “give up ” on this particular type of organization but purposely use it. In the eyes of non-mainstream parties’ elites political party was not an ideal, but in Polish political system the most effective mean to achieve political goals and stand out from other types of organized interest: Breaking through [to the general public with ideas - DK] is only possible when you own a party, no association would manage it. The party is the power in our country. [Electorate]

Definitively that was not an idealist picture of politics, most of the leaders were perfectly aware of the advantaged and disadvantages of party politics: It was a hard decision to register as a political party. We were aware that people neither like nor respect political parties, but there were few associations similar to our already, and we thought, we could influence the authorities more and be more decisive once we take part in power. [Pirates Party] Respondents were aware of the poor public perceptions, limits imposed by electoral system, they had no illusions about the chances of success of their candidates in national elections and already experienced problems in reaching and mobilizing potential voters. Another disadvantage concerned finances – the electoral regulations substantially limits the state budget subsidies for the parties with undeveloped local structures or those with low number
of votes, in result, the financial resources of the not-subsidized parties are narrowed down to members’ fees and small private persons donations. That, in turn, puts them in a worse position when compared to foundations or associations that can be sponsored by business donors.

Interestingly, in some of the cases, international influences played important catalyst role. Political parties abroad that stood for particular solutions and succeeded, like Pirate Party in Germany or Sweden inspired leaders to start this kind of activity and to prevail.

The parties in question have not been building the linkage with the particular interest groups the they emerged from them. The starting point for non-mainstream party activity were personal involvement in a variety of integration activities, influencing public institutions, improving the status of interest groups through informal cooperatives of friends and colleagues, workshop classes, associations, trade unions. Subsequently, these organizations were either simply transformed into non-mainstream political parties or served as a “training grounds” for the future party leaders. But the transformation itself was claimed to be gradual, non-random, bottom-up, consequent and for some, necessary step in order to secure interests they stood for: *It's a long story, because the party was set up four times. First it was a joke in 1999, when we founded the Low Prices Party. Then it was Party for Development which had been filed in the official record and deleted three times. The last time we registered last year.* [Development Party]

The “gains” appeared on different levels – organisational, communication level and at level of non-mainstream-mainstream relations. The legal framework in Poland enhances professionalization of the party structures – in the moment of party registration – the name and seat of the party need to provided as well as names of party board, and a proxy responsible for finances. The party in order to keep the legal entity and not to be deleted from the register needs to have an accountancy and provide financial statements every year. In some cases, this demands did not change much in the way they operated: *We had an association before so I didn’t see much difference before and after registration the party* [ZS]. In other cases, not formal and unsystematic actions changed into institutionalized behaviour with more regular meetings, seeking for new initiatives and organizing events.

Becoming a party, in respondents view, opened the organization to the “outside”, that meant attracting new members and supporters as well as mainstream...
politicians interested in their activities. The basic communication channel was internet – websites, understood and used simply as a “cyber visit card” for the audience, and application like online chat-rooms, Skype, GaduGadu that enabled intra-party communication.

That lead us to the communication with the outside, or in this case we speak about more inside/mainstream parties and media. Interest groups that started or transformed into political party at the beginning see themselves as more powerful and influential when comes to the character and intensity of an intra-party relation. By joining the party club our interviewees wanted to gain relevancy in the eyes of the mainstream and become an equal partner in the communication process. Therefore we have a situation when a political party itself becomes a mean of communication between the outside world and the cartel party: If your organization is not formal, there are plenty of obstacles starting with the right to attend [official – D.K.] conferences, not being invited for consultations to ministries or somewhere. Our members, who run different types of associations on the side, have been invited but not as our representatives but just as members of these organizations. [Pirates Party Poland]

The same approach appeared in the communication between non-mainstream and media, were political party supposed to be a remedy for lack of media attention. In some cases, media coverage become a main aim of the party founders, like in Slavic Association Party, that was organization was proceed by the association with the official aim to promote the cooperation of the ethnic Slaves from the CEE, especially Byeloruss, Poland and Russia and claimed success in that matter after setting up s party. Generally, all of our respondents realized the importance of TV message to public opinion, relations with media and holistic view of this sector were ambivalent: No one counts with people like us. They know that we can do nothing. They will show extremists on TV and do not show people doing everyday activities. Positivist. [LP]

Political party was concerned not only as a speaking tube that helps message spread but also had a protective function. As was mentioned, the cartel party was described as a hostile and adverse or, at least, not welcoming, and in many terms different from the nonmainstream. Some of the new political initiatives provoked the reaction of the parliamentary parties and proved that the non-mainstream activities were monitored by the cartel. Some of the minor parties were offered places on
electoral lists, some, less formal invitations for cooperation but in the eyes of the respondents these were attempts either to weaken or takeover their parties. But that did not mean complete separation of these two spheres - a few of them favoured their fortunes by initiating the electoral cooperation with the mainstream but in all cases, this cooperation led to a dead-end. That was a case of the Party of Free Homelands: *The big mistake was to work with the Self-Defense in 2011. We entered their electoral list, and they have failed to submit signatures we have collected.* In result the cleavage between the center and peripheries become even widen. Politisation of interests gave the nonmainstream a chance for better protection of their ideas and organizational independence also from other non-mainstream competitors, i.e. registering the Pirates Party helped their founders to stand out among associations and think-thanks that proliferated after the anti-ACTA protest.

The interest groups on behalf of which our respondents act, but also specific topics not covered by the mainstream or those where legal solutions were read as ineffective, motivated them. The areas close to a common man like clean energy, housing and wholefood. That was a case of free access to internet supplies and ACTA law proposal. Relatively new area in domestic politics that gathered substantial media attention but, above all, in 2012 activated thousands of young peoples around the country in protest demonstration and was one of the early birds of decline in support for the governing coalition. Anti-ACTA movement was co-coordinated by the activist from the Pirates Party Poland and their chairman was aware of the fact that, at that time: *Only two-three associations are taking up with this topic.* This “single issue-izm” concerned subjects known and present in a public sphere also i.e. children rights, favourable more liberal regulations for the small and medium-size companies, GMO free food. On the other hand, the motives that laid behind starting a party were more of personal and even intimate character: *After my best friend who was a conscript had a tragic accident, I decided to start a political party to do away with obligatory military service. Once it was done, our activities were put on hold.* [LP]

This group of political parties that distanced themselves from mainstream party politics and kept operating on the margins trying to benefit from the organizational form they embraced. What are their goals?

Definitively, parties in question do not put priority on being in parliament or in the office. This aim was not completely ignored by rather perceived as a mythical long-term goal, achievable only when the political opportunity structures would be
changed in favor of minor players. That notion seems important because, at least in Polish realm, urges us to re-thinking the party concept. Does the organization that fulfils the formal requirements and obtain the political party legal entity, claim to be an intermediary but officially not seek the office, a political party at all? To better understand that phenomenon we need to put under scrutiny alternative means of representation adapted by the non-mainstream.

If not in office, than where?

In the eyes of the interviewees, political party was expected to influence the society and mainstream far beyond other organisations. In other words, not the locus of the party but the fact that interests were politicised by the political party was the most important. In what sense does that create an alternative? In the understanding of the interviewees, their organization “in spite of being a party” had not much in common with the well-established ones. They underlined differences in the style of making politics and managing party business. The style of the non-mainstream was to be based on transparency and ethical values as well as rooted on the ground. Their vision of politics was inclusionary and deliberative, focused on a few, important issues.\(^5\)

As to the intra-party relations, all the respondents stressed the equality and significance of the party members and their role in managing the organization. One of them put it bluntly: **Our idea is not to create an autocratic party, but one with more than one leader. And each of them would be responsible for different policy areas.** [Pirates Party]

The descriptions of an everyday practices revealed also, that the relations of different types were foster between the non-mainstream parties themselves and NGO sector rather than with the relevant parties. Two documented meetings where the possibility to merge minor parties was discussed took place and both failed. Those initiatives did not arouse much interest – out of 44 parties invited only three attended. That left the non-mainstream area polarized and diverse.

Being a political party but intentionally playing on the side of civic society gave them extra credits in the relation with the supporters, media and mainstream parties:

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\(^5\) This strategy differs from the political populism, where more generally understood “the people” also occupy the central position of the political message but stay on the margins of the every-day politics that is overshadowed by the figure of charismatic leader and/or demagogy (Barr 2009, Cholova&Kasprowicz 2010)
Success for us is not necessarily connected with [our – D.K.] party. If the same postulate would be implemented by others, that would also meant success. For now, when many people attend our conference, similar organization contacts us, international press writes about our aims, that is success. [ZS] Some of the leaders basing on the previous experiences, chose to widen the scope of interest and influence the society as a whole in order to change the perception of politics, some in respect of the particular interest-group decided to influence the public sphere in-directly, that concerns especially legislation.

Conclusions: The non-mainstream that matters

The process of party system consolidation and stabilization in the context of the new democracy should not be read unambiguously positive. In this respect, questions that have already been asked (i.e. by Kitschelt et a. 1999) as to the quality of solutions proposed by the mainstream and its representativeness still seeks answer. In order to answer them, author focuses attention on borderline phenomena between the party understood more as a public utility and organization that represents interest groups. The not-traditionally relevant non-mainstream parties proves to be not only interesting but important new element of the political party puzzle.

This is the group of the Polish non-mainstream parties, non-parliamentary parties with no state subventions that operates in the grey area of between society and politics. The focal point of the non-mainstream party existence are group interests of different types that, in the eyes of the respondents, are ignored or not effectively carried out by the main political players. That, to some extent helps to map out the thematic deficits of the mainstream, like: general picture of politics as dehumanized, alienated and not reliable, questions of bureaucracy and overregulation that strongly influence the small business sector, post-material values like sustainable development (eco-housing, whole-food, clean energy), on-line resources and issue of the free-access, national and ethnic minorities etc.

The pathways of particular parties fall into the bottom-up scenario, where starting political party was proceed by other type of social activities like associations, workshops, trade unions. Their transformation into political party was, in the eyes of

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6 The best example is Bulgaria, where party system consolidation continues with mostly non-effective in terms of social and economical policies populist parties and on one hand stabile but at the same time confrontational style of making politics.
its own leaders, a necessary evil – the solution adapted in order to exceed the scope and effectiveness. The party founders were perfectly aware of the negative effects of the transformation, they seemed to share an apparent historical antipathy towards political parties (Szczerbiak 2006:92), and in spite of being a political party openly distanced themselves from the mainstream in terms of values and style of intra-party relations. This anxiety was brought about by the hostile behaviors of the main players that made attempts to overtake or diminish the “outsiders”.

What made them embrace party form were gains, benefits that “belong to the party” in the cartelized world. These were: visibility and credibility gained in the eyes of the supporters, cartel party and media. These were assets necessary in process of politisation of their interests, as the status of the not relevant party did prevent them for pursuing their goals. The small parties institutionalized in the non-mainstream context and found a third way in between what is social and what is political.

The expectations that definitively were not fulfilled were those regarding relation with the society. In most of the cases (with exception of the Pirates Party) the wide audience stayed unmoved with the ideas or initiatives of the parties in question and the party structures developed slowly and activities relied on the modest number of those who started it. When it comes to the media and the mainstream, the party label become more effective and appeared to be a tractable tool in the process of non-direct influence on these two spheres. Some parties gained media attention for their programmes or initiatives some exported experts in order to change legislation. In that sense non-mainstream political party itself become a new mean of communication between the state and parts of the society.

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