

Context debate on EU regional policy after 2013 +

ALŽBETA IVANIČKOVÁ

University of Economics in Bratislava, Faculty of National Economy

Department of Public Administration and Regional Development

Dolnozemska cesta 1, 852 35 Bratislava

Slovak Republic

ivanicko@euba.sk

Abstract

The future development of European regions is currently under discussion at the national and European level. What are the new roles of the structural funds and what role will they play in the national regional policy? Does the regional policy of the European Union have the right tools to tackle the new challenges that regions are facing such as globalization, exegetics, demographic change and migration?

The purpose of this paper is to outline some of the problematic issues associated with the future of regional policy of the European Union after 2013. It is likely that a gradual growing of the debate on this policy will increase the specific design and problem areas and also the number of alternative scenarios, which will generate concrete and feasible solutions.

The EU cohesion policy is subsequently having more and more important role and its approach to the economically weaker states and regions is till more the policy of solidarity. This raises the debate of whether this trend is sustainable and whether the Member States will be more willing to contribute financially to the benefit of less developed countries and regions. The fact that national visions are different can be identified as early as today by various opinions on the shape of EU cohesion policy after 2013.

Keywords: cohesion policy, reform of EU regional policy, EU budget, the debate on the reform of EU regional policy for the period after 2013

JEL Classification: O52, R59.

1 Political context of cohesion policy and milestones

More than any other policy cohesion policy gives us the tools to solve problems whose solution would be otherwise solved in 10, 20 or possibly 30 years.

The aim of the cohesion policy, which seem to remain to the future, is achieving the objectives of EU in the field of sustainable development. Nowadays it is strengthening the economic, social and territorial cohesion throughout the Community as a whole.

The existence of the cohesion policy (since 1988) contributed significantly to the economic and social convergence. For example, Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal - the largest beneficiaries of cohesion policy, in recent years has experienced significant growth. Between 1995 and 2005, Greece reduced the gap with other countries of the EU-27 from 74% to 88% of GDP / capita of the EU average. In the same period, Spain ranged between 91% to 102%, Ireland reached 145% of GDP / capita of the EU average. Similar results are expected in the new Member States, where the cohesion policy has been launched and participates in supporting high growth rates [1].

Between 1995 and 2004 the number of regions with GDP/capita 75% below the EU average has declined from 78 to 70, and the population living in regions below 50% of GDP/capita of the EU average has decreased from 39 to 32 [1].

Practically, after twenty years, the cohesion policy must face new challenges such as globalization, climate change, demographic decline, migration and energy security, which will also affect the functioning of existing mechanisms. It may be a debate on the future of cohesion policy to not focus only on addressing economic and social disparities between regions, as new challenges requires policies focusing on adequate structural factors of competitiveness, as well as environmental and social sustainability, restructuring of regional economies, in response to their specific geographic, institutional and human resources. Debate on the future of cohesion policy should be seen in that context.

Discussion on the future of cohesion policy was formally launched in 2007, called Fourth Forum on Cohesion. The debate involved a wide range of entities, Member States, regions, representatives of the Directorate General for Regional Policy, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and NGOs. Responses from public consultation have been processed in the Fifth Progress Report on economic and social cohesion [2], which inter alia stated

- The strong support for the existence of cohesion policy,
- The idea of re-nationalization cohesion policy is unlikely,
- Financial support should be provided to all EU regions, with emphasis on lagging behind regions,
- Convergence cannot be achieved without competitiveness,
- Interventions should be a priority for investment in innovation, skills and education, sustainable development and infrastructure for the whole EU,
- Should be strengthened by an integrated approach,
- The coordination of cohesion policy with other Community policies should be strengthened,
- Regional cooperation is considered the best example of the added value of cohesion policy and should be strengthened,
- Should continue to simplify the mechanism of cohesion policy.

In October 2008 the European Commission (EC) presented a long-awaited Green Paper on territorial cohesion [3]. Although has not provided a definition of the territorial cohesion, paper has initiates this issue through public consultation. According to the Green Paper territorial cohesion has to ensure that the development of the EU territory is harmonic and that inhabitants of individual regions show the utmost use of their specific properties. The Green Paper appears the idea that diversity should be really beneficial and competitive advantage, which would contribute to sustainable development across the EU. The main challenge is therefore to help regions in using these benefits. As stated in the Green Paper, effective solutions often require a unified approach and cooperation between different authorities and interested parties. At the same time the need to improve the management of cohesion policy to become more flexible and to adapt the necessary measures was mentioned.

The Green Paper focuses on the need to ensure balanced development in urban and rural areas and proposes means to avoid depopulation and urbanization. Three key concepts were developed, based on which the concrete political action has to be planned. These are concentration, networking and cooperation:

- The concentration brings advantages such as higher productivity and creativity, but also has negative effects, especially in terms of environmental costs, congestion, land prices and social exclusion. In the context of territorial cohesion is therefore necessary to strike the right balance between profits resulting from the merger and the need to exploit the potential in a broader geographical scale in order to contribute the utmost to the development of the EU as a whole.

- Linking stresses the need for European unification, which will help to faster and more efficient access to markets, services and people. This includes transportation, but also the infrastructure forming the basis for an efficiently functioning single market - e.g. those which guarantee access to health care, education, energy and broadband networks. All these links are currently unevenly distributed in the EU.
- Cooperation has always been an important pillar of the cohesion policy. According to the Green Paper we should focus on it and deal with the cross-border cooperation questions, ranging from travel to work to the environment. This cooperation should take place at several levels and should involve new partners.

In June 2009 the European Commission issued Sixth cohesion report [4], which presents the factors that may support a "launch" creativity and innovation in both developed and less developed regions. The report also answers questions relating to issues raised in the Green Paper on territorial cohesion [5], the introduction of the concept of territorial cohesion alongside economic and social cohesion, another pillar of cohesion policy. The European Commission launched a public consultation process on the design of future regional policy.

Regions Report 2020 [6] is another input into the process of formation of the cohesion policy beyond 2013. Using several indicators the is showing "Vulnerability index", which is to determine "vulnerability" of individual regions in terms of the impact of globalization, demographic trends, climate change and energy. It analyzes the possible consequences of these effects in the time horizon to 2020. The main findings are as follows:

- There are striking differences between regions as a result of globalization. Overall, the report shows that globalization will benefit the region, with competitive and innovative economies, while regions that lack the capacity to develop knowledge-based economy are likely to find themselves in difficult situations. Estimates show that in the least favorable situation will find many regions of southern and eastern parts of the EU, which extends from Latvia to the southern Portugal. Situation in the regions where the major urban centers, which tend to attract people with higher education and the latest technology should be relatively favorable.
- Next, the report shows that approximately one third of European regions are projected to decline of population by 2020. The vast majority of these regions are located in the new Member States of Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern Germany, Southern Italy and northwestern Spain. The report also predicts that in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the demographic problems occur at a later stage. It is recommended to use this time to prepare for economic and social systems, the consequences of an aging population.
- The European Union affects the volatile energy markets. All regions in the EU are increasingly exposed to changes in energy markets, which security of supply issues and challenges relating to energy efficiency and environmental sustainability.
- The report anticipates that the majority of European regions will suffer the negative consequences of climate change in greater or less extent. Tense situation will influence a number of economic sectors, especially tourism, energy, agriculture and fisheries. More than 170 million people - more than a third of the EU population live in regions that will suffer the greatest pressure.
- The report concludes that the European policy framework must be adapted to help the region to cope with the challenges of 2020 and that all regions will need to find "solutions tailored" to the combination of challenges that they face. Cohesion

policy must be accessible to all regions and its paradigm aimed at mobilizing the potential of regions and better use of their resources (place-based policies).

The character of the potential differences between regions, which may cause the above challenges, as well as their impact on shaping the future of the cohesion policy are expressed in so called vulnerability index in relation to climate change, energy, globalization, demographic changes and other problems [6].

In the first half of 2009 the conclusions of the document were also presented to the public at the request of Commissioner D. Hübner. Independently of the European Commission in collaboration with academic experts and officials from Member States, Fabrizio Barca, Director General of the Italian Ministry of Finance and Economy, prepared so called Barca Report [7].

The Report submitted justification of European cohesion policy and suggested some recommendations for comprehensive reform, based on 10 points, so called pillars. Its general conclusion can be summarized in the thesis that the current cohesion policy is a "good basis" but without further reform fails to meet objectives of the European Union after 2013 [7]. The aim of this report was to pave the way for negotiations in the coming years on how cohesion policy should look like after the current programming period 2007 - 2013 and its tools in the context of the present opposing views on this policy.

The report's recommendations to reform are based on ten 'pillars', namely:

1. Concentration on key priorities. According to Barca, the EU should approximately 65% of their financial contributions focus on three of the four key priorities, with participation of Member States and regions should differ depending on the needs and strategies. Criteria for the allocation of financial contributions would essentially not be changed (i.e. they should reflect the level of GDP per capita). One or two key priorities should be aimed at social inclusion in order to make develop territorial social program.
2. A new strategic framework. It is necessary to step up strategic dialogue between the Commission and Member States (or regions) and base it on so called 'European framework of development strategies', setting out clear principles, goals and indicators for assessing the results.
3. The new contractual relationship, implementation and reporting. The Commission and Member States should prepare a new form of contract (e.g. contract of the National Strategy for Development), focused on results and verifiable commitments.
4. The increased release of key priorities. The Commission should develop a set of 'conditions' determined by national institutions, which are a prerequisite for the distribution of financial contributions for specific priorities and would serve to assess progress in meeting goals.
5. Support for additional, innovative and flexible spending. The Commission should strengthen the principle of 'additionality', which creates direct link with the Pact Stability and Growth and ensures that Member States will not replace national expenditure in the EU. Efforts to provide innovative and value added measures will require a contractual commitment.
6. Support experimentation and mobilization of local actors. The Commission and Member States should encourage experimentation and a better balance between creating incentives for local participation in policy and prevention of 'abuse' policy by interest groups.
7. Supporting the learning process - a step towards forward-looking assessment of the impact. Better preparation and implementation of better methods of forecasting results, which would be reached if there is no intervention, would allow a better

understanding of ‘what works where’ and should be disciplinary action when designing activities.

8. The increased role of the Commission as a "Competence Center". In order to cope with the increased role and discretion of the Commission under the policy is necessary to provide the Commission with more specialized skills and improve coordination between DGs. This will require organizational changes and substantial investments in human resources.
9. Providing financial management and control. Achieve greater efficiency in management of the Structural Funds the continuation of the ongoing simplification of programming and consider other options to reduce costs and burdens for the Commission, Member States and the beneficiaries.
10. Strengthening the system of checks and balances on a high political level. Strengthen the system of checks and balances between the Commission, Parliament and the Council of the formal establishment of cohesion policy. Promote an ongoing dialogue on the content, outcomes and impacts of policy coherence [7].

The Barca report advocates that the current cohesion policy provides an appropriate framework, but that "changing direction" is needed.

Phase of formal negotiations directly related to the cohesion policy for the period 2014 - 2020 will be launched by the European Commission in 2011.

Target contribution

The purpose of this paper is to outline some of the problematic issues associated with the future of regional policy of the European Union after 2013.

The contribution will focus on evaluation of developments in the debate towards shaping new cohesion policy, both in terms of ongoing debates on the EU budget and its own form of cohesion.

The contribution is based on discussions arising from the academic and political ground level in some EU Member States.

It is likely that a gradual increase of the debate on this policy will increase the specific design and problem areas and also will increase the number of alternative scenarios, which will generate concrete and feasible solutions.

3 The potential appearance of cohesion policy after 2013 - the outcome of the discussions of Member States

Policy objectives

One of the key themes in the debate on the future of cohesion policy aims to change the paradigm in relation to the objectives, priorities, instruments, entities and geographical areas of intervention.

A new paradigm confirms that the potential of different regions and their competitive advantages need to be used. It emphasizes the importance of spatial direction and focus of regional policy (place-based policy) for optimal responsiveness to local conditions and the potential use of local expertise, knowledge, skills and linkages between different actors.

The current debate shows that majority of the Member States agree that the main objective of cohesion policy is to reduce economic and social disparities at various levels of European regions. Regions lagging behind must therefore remain the focus of the policy.

Although the majority of opinions and the opinion of the European Parliament as well stress that the policy should cover the whole territory of the EU cohesion policy as it is a simple mechanism of solidarity and should focus on fostering the endogenous development potential of European regions. This argument can be found in the F. Barca report, according to which the Cohesion Policy provides a framework for implementing the policy guidance of the spatial (place-based policy) model.

The majority of stakeholders is recognizing the territorial cooperation as a key element of the cohesion policy and acknowledges that it has become an adequate objective. They stress that the territorial cooperation is one of the best examples of the value added of this policy and therefore should be strengthened.

The discussion identified a series of challenges, which must and will have to be faced by regions and Member States increasingly, as globalization, demographic change and social tensions, climate change and increasing energy prices. Although it is recognized that cohesion policy should address these challenges, the discussion highlighted the fact that cohesion policy can not be the only tool to solve these problems. The discussion also showed that these challenges are already being addressed through the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas.

Competitiveness and Convergence

Competitiveness is an essential element of the cohesion policy. The requirement for a redistribution of the significant share of financial sources to the key investments linked to the renewed agenda for growth and employment has a wide support. In particular, research, innovation and upgrading skills to promote the knowledge economy, develop human capital through education and training, support to the small and medium-sized businesses, strengthening institutional capacity and developing an entrepreneurial culture are seen as key areas in which investments should be targeted.

Commissioner for Regional Policy, D. Hübner at a recent conference on the future of cohesion policy for the Slovenian presidency said "Cohesion policy must continue to evolve in a way to ensure the implementation of the EU agenda for growth and employment and to enable the internal development of the regions. Therefore, going forward the reform in the period 2007- 2013 cohesion policy towards investment in the most return in terms of strengthening the competitiveness of European regions". The debate that is currently prevailing view is that cohesion policy should cover all EU regions and not necessarily focused only on the poorest regions, respectively less developed. Convergence and competitiveness are seen as complementary phenomena.

Range objectives of cohesion policy

Already in the previous programming period 2000 - 2006 cohesion policy has undergone considerable reduction targets, which amplified the current programming period, by removing rural development from the cohesion policy framework and allocation to another budget. The discussion shows that further reduction in the number of targets of today's three goals, is not desirable, but an idea proposing that the objective of territorial cooperation could be integrated into the first two dominant goals exists. This is related to the maintenance of two dominant goals (the Convergence and Competitiveness). The reason is that the scope of the objectives of cohesion policy in the period after 2013 will change. Many regions will be close to the level of economic maturity (as measured by GDP capita, in PPS), which reduced the scope for classical cohesion policy. Most Member States consider that the real objectives of the cohesion policy in terms regional approaching and catching up will be "way far" from the actual regions and that they will merge with the substantive areas of the competitiveness

objective. One proposal says that the future definition of what we call today competitiveness objective was more complementary with today's regional cooperation objective. That will help to fulfill objectives of the "Reformed Lisbon strategy", which set up territorial cohesion (along with economic and social) as a policy objective with a shared competence between the EU and the Member States.

Territorial cohesion and cooperation

The territorial aspect of cohesion has been discussed at the Community forums since the end of 90ies. In general, the inclusion of territorial cohesion to the Lisbon Treaty was welcomed. To understand the concept of territorial cohesion better, the Commission was asked to develop a definition of this concept and its indicators. There are various concepts of territorial cohesion. The common elements, which appear in different concepts, are narrowing differences to get to the coexistence of the regions and ensure close liaison and cooperation between them, using flexible and functional access to geographically close element, focusing on local development, foreseeing the development of urban agglomerations while respecting the factors of development of rural areas, co-ordination between sectoral and territorial policies.

Territorial cohesion is viewed, especially by regional and local entities, such as opportunity to strengthen the role of regional and local authorities and other entities in implementing this policy. Several contributions stress the role of urban areas and rural areas and their interdependence as an important dimension of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

There are also opinions that the concept of territorial cohesion may help to better integrate the territorial dimension of European sectoral policies.

Thematic priorities and new development challenges

The prevailing European view is that the cohesion policy is so significant and strategic with its own objectives that it can be perceived only as an instrument of achieving goals of other policies and strategies in terms of the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy because the horizon of the Lisbon Strategy will expire in 2010 and future periods of the cohesion policy framework will start to be active in years later. Concerns can be summarized in two points:

- Traditional development objectives of cohesion policy, focusing on the poorest countries and regions should not be threatened, especially since the Lisbon goals are not always suitable for the regions included in the Convergence objective;
- It should clearly define the objectives and tasks and to avoid such duplication of national reform programs and the national strategic reference frameworks.

The second view, which is formed in the current debate about the role of policy coherence for development in the future, is that "Lisbonisation" Cohesion Policy in the right direction.

The management of cohesion policy

Discussion on the future of cohesion policy also includes questions about the implementation of this policy throughout the system. All Member States agree that the improvement of this system is a precondition for efficient and effective continuation of the cohesion policy in the future. It should be noted that the discussion was also focused on two

important principles, namely proportionality and subsidiarity in the context of cohesion policy.

Most Member States points to the inextricability and administrative burden associated with the implementation of cohesion policy and suggest principles for simplification and proportionality, and oppose, that the declared simplify of the management of regional policy in each programming period, have led to the opposite result, so that some modifications were replaced by other rules, which were complicated the same way as the previous ones, ex. state aid rules, procurement, environmental impact, technical standards and so on. The most complicated burden is the rules of financial management, audit and control. Discussion is led by the spirit of the principle of proportionality and Member States propose for future cohesion policy to transfer more responsibility for the management of cohesion policy to the Member States.

Given the division of powers between different levels of management, the Member States are calling for strengthening the subsidiary principle for the future reform of the management of cohesion policy. The management of cohesion policy should be left to the Member States themselves, for their own decisions with regard to the optimal level of decentralization. Decentralization is a way that enables and streamlines the implementation of the EU regional policy. The effort to decentralize policies is additional to already implemented partial transfer of management and coordination powers of the EC Member States, especially to dragging regions and large cities to the management and implementation. There are also efforts to establish direct links between the EC and the local authorities. The reasons are various, often contradictory. For example they are based on the idea that consensus between stakeholders improves the effectiveness of interventions and allows to greater efficiency (controls, monitoring committees), which is based on the principle of partnership.

Conclusion

Based on the suggestions from the discussion so far several models of cohesion policy directions have been created for the period 2014 - 2020 [8].

Model I. entitled - Cohesion policy as an instrument of solidarity - policy coherence of development policy.

Model II. labeled - Cohesion Policy in support of the Lisbon objectives, especially competitiveness.

Model III. presents - Cohesion Policy in support of measures aimed at tackling climate change, environment, energy, demographics.

Model IV. motivates - Re-nationalization regional policy.

Discussion on the future of regional policy is still an ongoing process about the form and the final decision of the design of EU regional policy after 2013. The question is which scenario will be selected.

The fact that national visions are different can be proved in three presented scenarios for future EU regional policy [9].

First scenario is representing the views of more advanced and richer EU member states. Under this scenario, the cohesion policy with the nationally determined sources should be replaced by a model in which the projects of individual Member States and regions will compete across the EU, which seems to be the fairest system because it would enable that the EU funds are spent efficiently and that the best projects are selected. On the other hand, in this case it is difficult to talk about the application of solidarity, which is essential for the implementation and realization of the regional policy. Less Developed Member States reject this scenario.

The second scenario envisages that in the beginning of the next planning period the most new Member States will go through the period of a dynamic development, which will bring their degree of maturity much closer to the EU average. Therefore, this scenario prefers to maintain the current parameters of EU regional policy. The strengthening of regions in the new EU member states will head to their exclusion from the Convergence objective and the model thus supports the convergence of only the most weak regions. Cohesion factor would thus become a major content theme, which should take into account the coherence induced by the expected further enlargement. This would have to support only the least developed regions or the criteria for disbursement under the Convergence objective of 75% per capita average can be reduced. This reduction would be made in the interest of future EU enlargement.

The third scenario is aimed primarily at maintaining the level of financial aid to new EU members and those after 2013, so as to avoid slippage of greater financial resources compared to the current programming period. These models versus another scenario proposed modification of the current system in the opposite direction - the criterion for drawing, for example, increase the convergence target of 90%. A solution would be to transfer the total budget from convergence to competitiveness objective, but also the transfer of territorial cooperation objective to the two main objectives, with the possibility of increasing a total amount for the purpose of international partnership in the EU.

Of course, that these aspects are the subject of public debate and it is expected that planning for future periods may affect the shape of EU cohesion policy. In subsequent stages of the debate on future cohesion policy in the wider context of the EU budget perspective it will be extremely important to focus on these three statements – objectives, governance and resources.

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