Position of the Czech Republic on the future of EU cohesion policy after 2013

The Czech Republic considers the cohesion policy as one of the essential pillars of the EU. Therefore, it welcomes the current debate about future shape of the cohesion policy after 2013 and is prepared to join actively this discussion.

In this initial phase, the Czech Republic presents hereby its position on the following areas of topics:

Principles, objectives and continuation of EU cohesion policy after 2013

1. The Czech Republic takes notice of the essential importance of EU cohesion policy for the fulfilment of basic principles, such as solidarity, cohesion and partnership.

2. The Czech Republic assesses positively the importance of EU cohesion policy, reflected in its contribution to the strengthening of cohesion and harmonious development of regions through support of economic development and competitiveness of less developed Member States and regions. The Czech Republic believes that both the existing disparities among regions and further tendencies of regionally imbalanced development create an actual need of maintaining the position of the cohesion policy in the system of EU community policies.

3. The EU cohesion policy in the future should remain to be a modern policy with added value, which adheres to its original objectives set out in the EC Treaty and newly also in the yet to be ratified Lisbon Treaty. It should continue to be a tool for further increasing prosperity of and solidarity with less developed Member States and regions. At the same time, the EU cohesion policy must respond to new challenges and to changing conditions in the global economic environment and must respect the Lisbon strategy objectives.

Primary focus of EU cohesion policy

4. The Czech Republic considers the concentration of support on less developed Member States and regions and reducing disparities in their development level as the main priority of the EU cohesion policy. The highest added value of this policy is in the support of those Member States lagging behind and their less developed regions. Due to the foregoing, the Czech Republic deems it necessary to maintain the objective focused on support of the convergence of less developed regions and Member States. Such focus of support must take into account specific conditions and needs of the relevant regions and Member States.

5. The EU cohesion policy must maintain its added value by supporting areas where the Community intervention is more effective than the national one.

6. The EU cohesion policy must facilitate the process of convergence in less developed Member States and regions, thus assisting, in its effect, the implementation of objectives of the renewed Lisbon Strategy.

7. According to the Czech Republic, an important dimension of the cohesion policy can be found in further deepening of the European Territorial Cooperation at the cross-border, interregional and transnational level.

8. The Czech Republic believes that, as regards sustainable development, successful coping with “new” challenges of a pan-European nature requires sharing of objectives
and coordination of procedures together with consistent application of the subsidiarity principle. This process should be based on well-founded expert assessment of impacts of these challenges which are foreseeable in the given period of time. New challenges should be dealt with, in particular, by sectoral policies of the EU. The cohesion policy should only supplement measures adopted at the EU and the Member States’ level based on the specific features of each region. This would lead to better coordination and complementarity with other EU policies and would allow the achievement of synergies.

**Relation between EU cohesion policy and competitiveness of EU regions**

9. The Czech Republic considers the EU cohesion policy as a tool for support of less developed countries and regions by means of strengthening their competitiveness. Based on the foregoing, the focus of interventions should be set up with regard to the needs of the relevant territory. The Czech Republic is convinced that even in future, the cohesion policy should not be perceived and narrowed to mere tool of achieving objectives of the Lisbon Strategy, but must be understood primarily as a European cohesion instrument – its convergence and solidarity function must be preserved.

10. As to specific focus of interventions taking into account Lisbon Strategy objectives, it is necessary to respect the fact that the fulfilment of these objectives falls fully within the competencies of the individual EU Member States. Therefore, their implementation must be primarily a task of national policies based on jointly adopted European strategy.

**Eligibility of territories for support within the framework of EU cohesion policy**

11. In the long term, the per capita GDP or GNP has proved to be the politically most acceptable and quantitatively justifiable criterion of eligibility of regions and Member States covered by the Convergence objective. The Czech Republic still considers the existing methodology for defining eligible areas as the most appropriate for maintaining continuity and comparability of data for EU regions and Member States.

**Territorial cohesion**

12. The Czech Republic will support further debate about the inclusion of the territorial dimension into the cohesion policy. In this respect, the Czech Republic considers as essential issues of interconnection and complementarity of functions of territorial identities of cities and rural areas, development of partnerships between them and an integrated view of programming of the development of territorial units.

13. The Czech Republic welcomes the attention paid to urban issues and the introduction of an integrated approach to the support of the development of cities. The Czech Republic is convinced that the support of the development of functions of cities will increase their significance in regional economies, particularly in less developed regions. With regard to sustainable development, it is necessary to pay attention to the development of a polycentric system of cities as well as to smaller nodal cities and focus on the issues of accessibility as a key factor of maintaining functions of rural and peripheral territories.
14. The entry into the Schengen area has created prerequisites for ensuring that former border regions will lose their peripheral nature and will be able to fully exploit their potential. In this respect, the Czech Republic is of the view that development of cross-border transport and technical infrastructure, development of services, the support of mobility, the introduction of joint spatial planning processes and the defining and implementing development strategies are essential.

15. Regarding the rural development, the Czech Republic deems it necessary to ensure complementarity and mutual synergy of the cohesion policy and of measures of the EU rural development policy, while supporting economic renewal of rural areas. Such complementary approach should assist restructuring and diversification of economy in rural areas.

Support of partnership and cooperation

16. The Czech Republic supports the principle of subsidiarity and partnership among individual management levels, from the local level through regional and national levels up to the EU level. The related transfers of responsibility for control, audit and monitoring from the Community to the Member States will bring more flexible and less bureaucratic approach.

17. In this respect, the Czech Republic promotes the principle of sharing objectives and establishment of mutual ties among national, regional and local strategies. Its aim must be to achieve mutual coordination of activities in regions and achievement of necessary synergies.

18. According to the Czech Republic, it is necessary to continue to provide support to local and regional authorities for the purpose of increasing the effectiveness of public administration and public services, developing new forms of cooperation among regions and among partners within the regions.