POSITION ON THE FUTURE OF THE EU COHESION POLICY AFTER 2013

The European Union is currently facing a need to assess the effectiveness of Community policies financed from the Union budget. On the one hand, its unprecedented success, with single market and the related program of support to member states and lagging-behind regions as its main driving forces, gives reasons for satisfaction and pride. But on the other hand, many new challenges faced now or in the immediate future by the European Union, inspire an in-depth reflection over its future and force it to be ready to review its major policies.

On 30 May 2007 the European Commission published a Communication on the fourth report on economic and social cohesion, which opens a debate on the future of the cohesion policy of the EU.

When talking about this debate, one needs to take into consideration a broader context thereof — a review of the EU budget, provided for in conclusions of the European Council summit of December 2005 and scheduled for the years 2008-2009. Results of the EU budget review will be implemented in the next financial perspective, but they will have impact on the shape of European policies also after 2020.

Poland, its regions, metropolises and local communities, will be significant beneficiaries of cohesion policy. This means that the shape of this policy will directly affect their economic and social situation, and a success of the catching-up process.

The success of catching-up process in Poland and other new member states will determine cohesion of the entire EU. This shall mean not only economic cohesion, but also cohesion in the political dimension. It would be much more difficult for Europe deprived of cohesion to formulate joint responses to new challenges.

Territorial cohesion of the EU is based on inter-connections of the network of European metropolises. This viewpoint is increasingly recognized — in the works of ESPON, the Economic and Social Committee, as well as some Commission documents — even though in the programming period 2007-2013 it failed to lead to formulation of a full-fledged European metropolitan policy.

Particular attention needs to be drawn to the fact that a full integration of new member states requires support to development of the CEEC metropolises and their connections with metropolises of the “old” Europe. Development of metropolises of new member states is necessary to make it possible — in line with the polycentric development concept — to create such areas of business activity concentration in the European Union that would be complementary to the Pentagon area.

Poland’s largest cities are centers of developing metropolitan areas. It must be also borne in mind that they are all located in underdeveloped regions, covered with the support under Objective 1 of cohesion policy. Metropolises naturally play the role of growth poles and development engines. A success of metropolises translates into a success of catching-up process of the entire regions where they are located. Polish metropolises are the only genuine alternative for emigration of young, well-educated people, who are our country’s future elite.

Polish metropolitan areas are inhabited by over 14 million people. Therefore, they represent interests of over one third of the entire population of Poland. Cohesion policy measures in metropolises are characterized by a higher return rate than the average for the entire cohesion policy. This ensues from the number of residents benefiting from those investments. Moreover, due to relatively low level of accumulated capital in central European metropolises, the final efficiency of measures implemented therein is higher than in West European states, which have higher saturation of capital. Attention should be also drawn to the fact that reinforcement of the role of metropolises as development engines is the easiest way of attaining Lisbon Strategy objectives.

New challenges faced by the EU, such as globalization, climate change, demographic problems, will be particularly felt in metropolitan areas. Cohesion policy instruments should be used to meet those challenges. Therefore, cohesion policy should constitute a basis for responses to future challenges.

Simultaneously, a precondition for performance of a cohesion policy reform should be the maintenance of the priority character of the solidarity rule.
From the viewpoint of Polish metropolises, top priority among measures financed from cohesion policy funds should be assigned to:

- improvement of the conditions for development of entrepreneurship and innovation,
- support to R&D sector,
- investments in human capital and improvement of broadly understood adaptive capabilities of employees,
- infrastructural investments (public transport and road network as well as telecommunication and environment protection).

In the context of investments into infrastructure, particular importance is played by:

- construction of transport connections between metropolises and their immediate surroundings, including in particular the development of environment-friendly public transport system respecting the rules of sustainable development (which is important due to challenges related to climate change),
- construction of transport and telecommunication connections between metropolises, enabling creation of knowledge-based network economy.

Although metropolises fulfill the role of growth poles, they witness the greatest accumulation of problems affecting the level of social cohesion, such as:

- unemployment and the ensuing phenomena of social exclusion, poverty and homelessness,
- degradation of post-industrial districts,
- decapitalization of housing substance.

Therefore, one must not forget that support from cohesion policy funds is deserved also by the task of revitalization of the urban tissue, in particular by huge concentrations of blocks of flats and post-industrial areas. In this context, particular attention is deserved, among others, by the new initiative JESSICA, which aims at financing of the revitalization of urban areas through combination of funding from cohesion policy and loans from international financial institutions. Greater stress than it was so far must be laid on support to innovative revitalization strategies.

Due to very high added value ensuing from cooperation, particular priority must be given to any actions aimed at exchange of best practices.

A future shape of cohesion policy should be based on a decentralized implementation system. Existing experiences show that regions and metropolises utilize funds available under cohesion policy in a much more effective and efficient manner.

Cohesion policy is closely related to other EU policies. It also plays an important role in the creation of an integrated structural policy, combining actions carried out under structural funds and Cohesion Fund with actions implemented under Community policies. Those inter-relations must be taken into consideration during the reform of cohesion policy.

Cohesion policy is also complementary to national level policies. Cohesion policy is beneficial for states, regions and metropolises due to its effects on administrative structures and modernization of the public funds management system. Due to the requirement of programming the cohesion policy measures, metropolises in Poland implement modern development programs, which encompass measures financed also from sources other than the European budget.

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