

THE POSITION

of the Management Board of the Union of Voivodeships of the Republic of Poland

of 28 June 2023

on the EU Cohesion Policy post-2027

The Management Board of the Union of Voivodeships of the Republic of Poland, representing all Polish regions, contributes to the discussion on the boundary conditions that should be met for the Cohesion Policy to strengthen its role as a catalyst and stabiliser of positive structural changes in all EU regions. For 20 years, Cohesion Policy has been one of the main sources of development funding in Poland, including public investment, as well as an impulse for positive socio-economic and institutional change. Polish Regions are active and very experienced co-creators and implementers of development policy, including Cohesion Policy, recognising thematic areas where it has had significant positive effects, as well as those areas where its importance has proven to be smaller than expected. In 2024, the European Committee will publish the 9th Cohesion Report, proposing the shape of the Cohesion Policy after 2027. Faced with the asymmetric territorial shocks we have experienced in recent years across the EU as a result of multidimensional crises, dynamically changing global conditions and mega-trends, long-term challenges faced by successive generations of Europeans, the historical need for the integration of Ukraine Moldova and the Western Balkan countries to the EU the Polish regions are engaged in a discussion on the boundary conditions that should be met in order for Cohesion Policy to strengthen its role as a catalyst and stabiliser for positive structural change in all EU regions.

Believing that the key purposes of Cohesion Policy are still valid, we present our first position on this issue.

I. As a treaty pillar, the EU Cohesion Policy should:

1. be the EU's main investment policy providing a long-term development impetus and support for the structural transformation of regions;
2. reduce excessive development tensions and disparities between areas of growth and areas of stagnation, and to overcome negative socio-economic trends in areas experiencing marginalisation, particularly in border areas, including the EU's external borders;
3. have a budget commensurate with the challenges (financial critical mass), maintaining at least the current share in the structure of the EU's multiannual financial framework;
4. work synergistically with other EU policies/funds, to be complemented (not replaced) by them, and to be integrated into Pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy;
5. operate with a single fund (European Territorial Cohesion Fund) targeted at all EU regions (NUTS 2);
6. take account of other measures besides 'GDP per capita' (e.g. household disposable income) of the level of development of the regions and the strength of intra-regional disparities when determining the scale and rules of support;
7. ensure a leading role for regional authorities in the preparation and management of programmes, bringing the EU closer to the citizens (subsidiarity, decentralisation, socialisation) and allowing for territorially differentiated problems, potentials, needs, challenges and objectives;
8. promote a personalised approach to the development of regional programmes, thereby increasing the effectiveness of interventions and disseminating good practice in management;
9. promote thematic concentration without imposing a resource allocation structure on the regions, and enable them to respond effectively to changes in the environment during the implementation of the programmes (freer reallocation of resources);
10. improve the resilience and responsiveness of regions to external shocks, without becoming financially involved in day-to-day crisis management;
11. strengthen the subjectivity and the institutional and financial capacity of regional and local authorities as key actors of development processes, integrating various bundles of public policies addressed to communities forming functional areas;

12. foster the implementation of bottom-up, partnership and integrated projects comprehensively responding to the needs and problems of various functional areas, activating their specific potentials.

II. The EU Cohesion Policy should focus on the following issues:

13. combating and adapting to climate change, improving environmental quality, energy transition, improving energy security;
14. reducing the negative effects of demographic change (ageing and depopulation, including the outflow of talents);
15. improvement of living conditions – upgrading of technical and social infrastructure, increase in quality and availability of key public services (e.g. education, health, labour market, social inclusion, culture, mobility), as well as conversion of degraded areas;
16. tackling exclusion in all its forms (social, professional, digital, health, transport) and supporting an open, civic society of creative, cooperative and highly competent people.
17. building ecosystems to support the transformation of the economy towards:
 - a. zero-carbon, zero-waste, digitised and secure supply industries and services applying technological and non-technological innovations based on specific territorial resources and potentials;
 - b. an SME sector capable of creating sustainable and quality jobs;

III. The EU Cohesion Policy governance mechanism should have the following features:

18. full readiness – taking into account the conclusions of the strategic reflection and implementation practice – of the legislative framework at EU level by mid-2027 at the latest;
19. defining and 'contracting' outcomes rather than accounting for expenditure;
20. application of analogous rules (e.g. eligibility of expenditure) as in other policies under shared management and no discrimination with centrally managed programmes (e.g. state aid);
21. a departure from the n+3 rule when using territorial instruments (promoting integrated, multifaceted and comprehensive projects);
22. greater freedom (operational efficiency) in the implementation of support programmes and schemes and subordinating them to their strategic purposes by, for example:

- a. reducing burdens by, for example, adapting implementation mechanisms from the pandemic period and applying solutions characteristic of the Just Transition Fund (comprehensive projects with a broad thematic scope);
- b. increasing the possibility of combining different forms of support;
- c. moving away from the supremacy of the competitive formula in the distribution of funds to bottom-up prepared and regionally agreed (negotiated) project bundles;
- d. development of grant schemes facilitating the application for funds by small entities, as well as the implementation of standard projects;
- e. opening up the possibility of pilot/experimental projects with an acceptable risk of failure.

We express our readiness to cooperate and exchange information with institutions and organisations, as well as with other stakeholders, to ensure a high profile of the Cohesion Policy in the EU after 2027.



President of the Management
Board

of the Union of Voivodeships of
the Republic of Poland

Recipients:

- 1) The European Parliament,
- 2) The European Commission,
- 3) The European Committee of the Regions,