

Agnieszka Huczek

## **Regional policy as an instrument for socio-economic development of Polish regions**

### *Region as a political entity*

The aim of this article is to try to answer the question if the process of social and economic transformation in Poland is at the stage which ensures that the regions are really able to participate in formation and realization of these European Union activities, which are addressed to the regions, as political entities, both on the country and European level. Reflection upon the socio-economic development will be based first of all on the fundamental concepts of the European Union Cohesion Policy and—implemented at the national level—regional policy.

Definition of the region can be created on the basis of geographical, historical, economic, socio-cultural or politico-administrative criteria. In the Community law, there is no unified definition of this term<sup>617</sup>. Region in the European Union is basically of economic importance, as the entity of EU policies. It can be assumed that the regions are “spatial subsystems of the economy (...) of the various relationships and spatial relations”. In sociological terms, the region becomes a synonym of the regional community, which bases on “more or less developed sense of separateness and connection, resulting from the emotional relation to the inhabited area”<sup>618</sup>. The diversity in approaching this term shows a significant methodological piece of advice—the concept of region should be interpreted broadly, that is, not only as separated unit of administrative division<sup>619</sup>.

The concept of the region is connected with a process of regionalization. Regionalization is understood as a historical process, but also as some procedure of singling the regions out, through specific research methods, leading to a specific regional division. The concept of

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<sup>617</sup> A. Gajda, *Regiony w prawie wspólnotowym. Prawne problemy udziału regionów polskich w procesach integracyjnych*, Warszawa 2005, p. 22.

<sup>618</sup> T. Madej, *Regionalna polityka społeczno-gospodarcza*, Szczecin 1998, p. 7.

<sup>619</sup> M. Sokołowicz, *W kierunku nowej polityki regionalnej? Rozważania nad przyszłym kształtem polityki regionalnej w Polsce*, [in:] *Polityka spójności – ocena i wyzwania. Materiały z konferencji*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa 2008, p. 8 n.

regionalism refers to the consciousness of community members, residing within the region. It manifests itself in economic, cultural, social and political activity of the community. So understood regionalism is one of the conditions for separation of individual regions<sup>620</sup>. Recognition of the importance of this problem results from the fact that the phenomenon of regionalism is considered as one of the most characteristic development trends of last few dozen of years<sup>621</sup>.

Convincing is the assumption that in line with the growth of importance of the region as a specific economic entity, its importance as a subject of national and EU policies grows as well. The initial stage of research on the level of regional development is to analyze the development conditions of individual regions. This is related to the regional effectiveness, which is defined as “a measure of rationality extent of the socio-economic development process of the region” and it represents the most important feature of regional development. Factors affecting the process of regional development are as complex as the criteria for separating the region. They also include the demographic, social, economic, ecological, specific and external phenomenon<sup>622</sup>. The document entitled *Position of the Government of the Republic of Poland on the Future of the European Union Cohesion Policy Post-2013* also draws attention to the need for a comprehensive definition of indicators for measuring regional development, which should include not only the economic aspect, but also supplementary indicators, taking into account demographic, social, educational, environmental and territorial factors<sup>623</sup>.

The extent of development of the particular regions influences their level of competitiveness towards one another. The fundamental factors influencing this process currently include: modernity, diversity and innovation in regional economies, the quality of land management, the level of infrastructure development and human capital, thanks to which the regions are able to make offers, reaching consumers also at

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<sup>620</sup> T. Madej, *op. cit.*, p. 12 n.

<sup>621</sup> See further: E. Haliżak, *Regionalizm w stosunkach międzynarodowych*, [in:] E. Haliżak, R. Kuźniar (eds.), *Stosunki międzynarodowe. Geneza, struktura, dynamika*, Warszawa 2000, p. 281–307.

<sup>622</sup> T. Madej, *op. cit.*, p. 41, 67.

<sup>623</sup> *Stanowisko Rządu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w sprawie przyszłości Polityki Spójności Unii Europejskiej po 2013 r. przyjęte w dniu 30 stycznia 2008 r.*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa 2008, p. 11.

international markets<sup>624</sup>. Furthermore, the literature refers to the diversification of economic structures of individual regions, the existence of scientific-research background and appropriate institutions of business environment. For these reasons, it is said today about the need for a reorientation of the cohesion policy towards building regional competitiveness. The competitiveness in regional development, therefore, means “the ability of regions to adapt to changing conditions, for maintaining or improving position in the ongoing rivalry between the regions”<sup>625</sup>.

### *Regional polarization in Poland and the European Union*

Against the countries of the European Union, Poland is not a country with a high degree of regional polarization<sup>626</sup>. Different levels of regional development, measured by the scale of GDP *per capita*, are not significant, especially in comparison with other large countries of Western Europe<sup>627</sup>. According to D. Waldziński, low GDP *per capita* in all regions, in relation to indicators of the EU, is one of the weaknesses of Polish regions<sup>628</sup>. The level of GDP *per capita* is still not a sufficient criterion for a proper assessment of the growth prospects of individual regions. Also, important is the level of physical and human capital resources, efficiency of the markets’ activity and the scale of the factors hampering the development. This leads to the conclusion that the problems of regional disparities in Poland may be higher than resulting from the data, which include GDP *per capita*<sup>629</sup>.

Relatively small inter-provincial differentiation in the province level is considered to be strengths of the Polish regions. This

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<sup>624</sup> M. Sokołowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 10 n.

<sup>625</sup> Ministerstwo Gospodarki, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, *Uzasadnienie do stanowiska Polski w sprawie polityki spójności Unii Europejskiej w latach 2007–2013*, [in:] T.G. Grosse (ed.), *Polska wobec nowej polityki spójności Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2004, p. 53.

<sup>626</sup> M. Sokołowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>627</sup> W. Orłowski, *Ocena możliwych skutków gospodarczych udziału Polski w polityce strukturalnej Unii Europejskiej*, [in:] T.G. Grosse (ed.), *Polska wobec nowej polityki spójności Unii Europejskiej*, p. 180.

<sup>628</sup> D. Waldziński, *Polityka regionalna w Polsce w procesie przemian kulturowo-cywilizacyjnych*, Olsztyn 2005, p. 201.

<sup>629</sup> W. Orłowski, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

differentiation is comparable to the average level of diversity in the EU, the existence of agglomeration, in which modernization factors and dynamisation of the economy are focused (as well as R&D centers), the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and business growth, appearing in all Polish regions. The following are the main weaknesses of Polish regions: a high percentage of people employed in agriculture (especially in the regions of Eastern Poland, where it is highest in the entire European Union), the presence of areas which are threatened with permanent marginalization and exclusion from development processes, a low extent of attractiveness of degraded areas, poor quality of transport infrastructure, a small degree of innovation of small and medium-sized enterprises, insufficient quantity and quality of environmental protection infrastructure, and a low degree of advanced processes of building the information society<sup>630</sup>.

When attempting to assess the situation of regions in the European Union, we should bear in mind that occurrence of peculiar hierarchy among the individual regions is only natural<sup>631</sup>. The debate should therefore apply to both real possibilities to represent the interests of respective regions in the EU institutional system as well as the real possibilities of the European Union's impact (within the available instruments) on the level of individual regions development. Most likely it will be an ongoing process, because even in the initial assumptions concerning the shape of structural policy after 2013, there is expressed need to discuss the new role of regions and the Committee of Regions (CoR)<sup>632</sup> in this field<sup>633</sup>.

The integration process has helped to build a new relationship between governments of the Member States and regions. Although

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<sup>630</sup> D. Waldziński, *op. cit.*, p. 200–202.

<sup>631</sup> J.-Ch. Leygues, *Przyszłość polityki spójności w Unii Europejskiej – punkt widzenia Komisji Europejskiej*, [in:] T.G. Grosse (ed.), *Polska wobec nowej polityki spójności Unii Europejskiej*, p. 111.

<sup>632</sup> Establishment of the Committee of Regions (CoR) meant the institutionalization of the impact of local and regional structures on activities of the European Union. See further: A. Sauer, E. Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, M. Kulesza, *Polityka regionalna Unii Europejskiej a instrumenty wspierania rozwoju regionalnego w Polsce*, Warszawa 2000, p. 34–36.

<sup>633</sup> *Polityka spójności po 2013 r. Pożądane kierunki reformy. Dokument problemowy*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa 2008, p. 35.

position of regions depends on the internal institutional context of each country, it does not change the fact that these units have a real opportunity to participate in the integration processes. The regions still put forward their European aspirations and wait for their execution<sup>634</sup> – the process of European integration is connected with their subjectivity. Assuming that in line with the integration process the economic importance of the regions increases, and the European Union is primarily an economic grouping; the natural consequence is a development of such a policy, both at national and European level, which will focus on issues related to socio-economic growth in discussed area.

### *Regional policy and pursuing socio-economic goals*

Regional policy can be understood both as the policy realized at the national level, which is connected with development challenges in the regions located within the state, as well as regional development policy in the EU scale. T. Madej links the origins of modern regional policy in the countries of market economy with the great economic crisis of 1929–1933<sup>635</sup>. However, contemporary understanding of the regional policy is inextricably linked with the European integration process.

However, the aim of regional policy is not only removing the differences in socio-economic development of regions, but also preventing the creation of new developmental disparities<sup>636</sup>. Therefore, a diversity of geographical and natural conditions and heterogeneity of the historical and socio-economic factors, are the premise of regional policy. Due to the fact that these differences “are not and cannot be indifferent to regional and local communities, for their authorities, as well as for State authorities”<sup>637</sup>, they become the subject of politics. Thus, regional policy appears as an area of cooperation between governmental, central, regional and local authorities<sup>638</sup>. The most important instruments of regional policy include: special economic zones, institutions for intervention works and

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<sup>634</sup> A. Gajda, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>635</sup> T. Madej, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>636</sup> W. Sługocki, *Instrumenty kreowania i prowadzenia polityki regionalnej w Polsce*, [in:] A. Cieśliński, W. Sługocki (eds.), *System nadzoru i kontroli nad samorządem terytorialnym w realiach funkcjonowania Polski w strukturach Unii Europejskiej*, Zielona Góra–Łagów 2004, s. 21.

<sup>637</sup> T. Madej, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 17, 20.

public works, provincial contracts, regional development strategies, the rise and operation of Euroregions<sup>639</sup> and use of pre-accession structural aid<sup>640</sup>.

According to Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (OJ C 115 of 9 May 2008), in order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion. In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions. Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions.

The content of the first report on social and economic cohesion of 1996 shows that the Cohesion Policy is a “group of actions aimed at reducing economic and social disparities between Member States, regions and social groups”<sup>641</sup>. The regional policy aims both to increase the economic competitiveness of the regions, as well as to solve structural, social and economic problems related to strengthening of that competitiveness<sup>642</sup>. The territorial cohesion is also one of the priorities of the Cohesion Policy for 2007–2013. The concept of territorial cohesion is not a simple concept, so it is important to clarify its definition, because it will influence the determination of instruments and actions taken to reach it. In the frame of territorial cohesion we can also identify its geographical, political and socio-economic aspect<sup>643</sup>.

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<sup>639</sup> On the history of Polish Euroregions and the Euroregions, with which Poland is associated, see further: [www.mrr.gov.pl/polityka\\_regionalna/Euroregiony/Stroony/Euroregiony%20w%20Polsce.aspx](http://www.mrr.gov.pl/polityka_regionalna/Euroregiony/Stroony/Euroregiony%20w%20Polsce.aspx).

<sup>640</sup> D. Waldziński, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>641</sup> N. Rajkowska, *Czy jest możliwe jednoczesne wsparcie konkurencyjności gospodarki i wyrównywanie poziomu rozwojowego poszczególnych regionów*, [in:] *Polityka spójności – ocena i wyzwania. Materiały z konferencji*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa 2008, p. 37.

<sup>642</sup> T.G. Grosse, *Wprowadzenie*, [in:] T.G. Grosse (ed.), *Polska wobec nowej polityki spójności Unii Europejskiej*, p. 11.

<sup>643</sup> Ł. Wosik, *Wpływ ukształtowania instytucji prawnych prawa krajowego na*

In the period of 2007–2013 the allocation of the structural funds goes to those economic sectors and regions which without external financial support would not have a chance to achieve the average level of economic development of the EU. These funds are granted according to three objectives. Objective 1 refers to the concentration and convergence, Objective 2 covers the competitiveness and employment in regions, Objective 3 covers European Territorial Cooperation. Most of the funds (78%) are dedicated to the implementation of projects under Objective 1, which includes support for underdeveloped areas in the socio-economic development, in which the volume of GDP *per capita* does not exceed 75% of the EU average. Poland has been fully covered by the structural support of this objective. Objective 2 includes the regions affected by social and economic consequences of transformation (e.g. declining industry). Objective 3 covers the prevention of unemployment and its long-term effects, supporting education and vocational training systems. The EU Cohesion Policy is implemented through the projects co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund as well as the European Investment Bank<sup>644</sup>.

The principle of partnership plays also an important role in reducing socio-economic differences. It is one of the main principles of the Structural Funds spending. The principle of partnership includes the appropriate level of state or local authorities, economic and social partners, representatives of civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGO), the bodies responsible for promoting equality between women and men and representatives of organizations dealing with the environment matters<sup>645</sup>.

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*proces rozdziału funduszy strukturalnych. Dotychczasowe doświadczenia i wnioski na przyszłość*, [in:] *Polityka spójności – ocena i wyzwania. Materiały z konferencji*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa 2008, p. 57–59.

<sup>644</sup> M. Trocki, B. Gucza (eds.), *Zarządzanie projektem europejskim*, Polskie Warszawa 2007, p. 25–27.

<sup>645</sup> On the Model of the Local Partnership and the problems connected with its implementation in Poland, see further: A. Ziomek, *Wyzwania polityki spójności. Partnerstwo lokalne, jako instrument rozwoju regionalnego w Polsce*, [in:] *Polityka spójności – ocena i wyzwania. Materiały z konferencji*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa 2008, *passim*.

### *Economic system and regional policy*

The research carried out by means of econometric models shows that the impact of structural funds on the Polish economy in the period 2004–2006 was little<sup>646</sup>. The situation in this domain in other Member States was similar<sup>647</sup>. At this point, it is essential to answer the question whether the structure of economic indicators allows identification of such complex relationships, the effects of which additionally take time. The convergence in this area is the process of approaching the levels of GDP *per capita* to the average EU level, both at country and regional level. The GDP growth rate is, in such an approach, of decisive importance. From 2003–2007 the rate of convergence for Poland increased from 49% to 54.6%. At the same time in 2000–2005 the scale of interregional differences in Poland, the rate of convergence, increased compared with previous years. However, there are regional differences in this respect. Lublin and Sub-Carpathians are the poorest provinces of Poland. The largest contribution to the creation of GDP came from Masovia, then Silesia, Great Poland and Lower Silesia<sup>648</sup>.

It is assumed that in the frame of convergence, in parallel with the process of equalizing the level of GDP *per capita* among the economies of individual regions, their economic cohesion will deepen. It is important to note that this approach also means that poorer regions are characterized by higher economic growth rates than rich regions, and that the economies differ only in the initial level of capital *per capita* (human and tangible). It should be noted that there was a tendency to divergence in countries belonging to the EU before 2004. In turn, in the enlarged European Union the convergence occurs. On this basis, J. Jahn formulates the hypothesis that countries which joined the EU in 2004 had earlier begun preparations and their outcome was positive<sup>649</sup>.

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<sup>646</sup> R. Dzierzgwa, S. Sudak (eds.), *Ocena postępów Polski w konwergencji z krajami UE oraz wpływ funduszy unijnych na gospodarkę w latach 2004–2007*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa 2008, p. 8.

<sup>647</sup> W. Orłowski, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>648</sup> R. Dzierzgwa, S. Sudak (red.), *op. cit.*, p. 114, 116.

<sup>649</sup> J. Jahn, *Wzrost gospodarczy a spójność ekonomiczna i społeczna na poziomie regionalnym w Unii Europejskiej*, [in:] *Polityka spójności – ocena i wyzwania. Materiały z konferencji*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa 2008, s. 143, 145.



The instruments of regional policy are also interpreted in the context of the limitations of the free market activity. In this sense, this policy is seen as a “typical interventionist policy, although its principles are integrated with the principles on which competition policy is based on”<sup>650</sup>. On the other hand, it is considered that the projects co-financed by the EU funds could become a permanent element to support economic and social development in Poland<sup>651</sup>.

*The problem of convergence as the matter in doctrinal disputes*

Research on convergence in the European Union suggests that the implementation of cohesion policy positively influences achieving convergence at the level of countries and the (macro-) regions of the EU, while at the regional level within countries its impact is much weaker. The attention should be paid to even intra-national trends of divergence. In all Community policies, *ipso facto* also within the same Cohesion Policy, simultaneously there is a process of fragmentation, or “extracting ever-smaller areas of intervention in the mutually complementary policies”. This process makes it difficult to coordinate the Cohesion Policy with other EU activities<sup>652</sup>. The literature also points out that the Cohesion Policy may contribute to institutional convergence, namely to improve the operational quality of the institutional system of the EU Member States. The institutional convergence is at the same time considered an essential prerequisite for both economic and social convergence within the European Union.

It is worth noting that the main criterion for determining the areas eligible for Objective 1 (Convergence) is the level of GDP at the level of NUTS II referred to the EU average. As a result, a redistribution of resources is primarily directed to the poorest regions, at the same time it weakens an interest in the Cohesion Policy of the countries which do not get these funds (so-called net contributors). In this situation, the Cohesion Policy is increasingly being viewed more as an instrument of compensation than a facility for achieving the goals of the whole EU<sup>653</sup>. Therefore, we can distinguish two main approaches to both regional policy and the Cohesion Policy. The first is based on the assumption that

<sup>650</sup> *Polityka spójności po 2013 r...*, p. 26.

<sup>651</sup> M. Trocki, B. Gucza (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>652</sup> *Polityka spójności po 2013 r...*, s. 22 n.

<sup>653</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 27, 29.

the divergence is a natural phenomenon and economically advantageous. In this model, capital and human resources are initially concentrated on the so-called growth poles, but after some time a “spread effect” happens, that is the transfer of these resources to less developed regions. The second model of the regional policy implies that divergence (regional polarization) affects negatively mainly the social sphere, leading *inter alia* to the growth of unemployment in regions with a lower level of development. Then it is necessary to consider whether an effective cohesion policy should seek to compensate “at any price” for the differences between the regions<sup>654</sup>.

### *Barriers to implementation and the future of the Cohesion Policy*

The process of increasing the scale of uneven development in the EU, moving the center of gravity of the Cohesion Policy in an easterly direction (which involves a reduction of support to the previously granted countries), and unresolved development problems of some regions are considered as the barriers hampering the implementation of the Cohesion Policy<sup>655</sup>. Given the fact that “the successes and failures in implementation of the Cohesion Policy in 2007–2013 in Poland will be an important argument in the debate about its future shape and will constitute the strength of our voice in this debate”<sup>656</sup>, there are attempts to determine the future of the Cohesion Policy after 2013.

The document entitled *Position of the Government of the Republic of Poland on the Future of the European Union Cohesion Policy Post–2013*<sup>657</sup> states that the further implementation of the Cohesion Policy should include focusing on a limited number of objectives and the resignation or closer linkage of the structural funds. The Government of the Republic of Poland “favors looking for a new balance in the architecture of relations between the EC (and within it) and Member States, regions, actors at local level as well as other stakeholders (such as social and economic partners, including non-governmental organizations and entrepreneurs), which are involved in the delivery of the cohesion policy”. The document also expresses support for the attempts which

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<sup>654</sup> M. Sokołowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 12–14.

<sup>655</sup> W. Orłowski, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>656</sup> *Stanowisko Rządu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej...*, s. 5.

<sup>657</sup> This document is the first reference of the Government of the Republic of Poland to the shape of the Cohesion Policy after 2013; *ibidem*, s. 5.

favor the further development initiatives undertaken in the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation and European Neighborhood Policy – “particularly with reference to the Eastern dimension”<sup>658</sup>. Currently in Poland, none of the major political parties does not create the political agenda of specific regional characteristics. We may hope that the efficient implementation of the regional policy and its growing influence on the public policy, contributes to the “very substantial political value – this will force the political parties to learn to produce a specific discourse on the use of regions and municipalities”<sup>659</sup>.

Providing opportunities to the Polish regions<sup>660</sup> to participate in the national decision-making process in the matters related to the European integration should be considered as another challenge facing the policymakers. It is a matter still open to debate, even though Poland already is a Member State of the European Union. Obtaining a membership in the EU should not in fact be linked only with the completion of accession negotiations, but also with the wider understood “institutional preparation of the State to participate in this great undertaking, which is the process of the European integration”<sup>661</sup>. Also, an open question remains – to what extent local governments have properly identified and taken into account socio-economic needs of their regions, if an excessive dispersion of funds does not come at the expense of their concentration, do regions have the real ability to determine the long-term vision of their development and whether they are capable of taking over and implementing objectives drawn at national level<sup>662</sup>.

According to the World Bank, in the framework of “the rule of law”, Poland next to Lithuania, Slovakia and Italy, still reaches a low position<sup>663</sup>. This result translates directly into the effectiveness of the

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<sup>658</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8–11.

<sup>659</sup> J. Wódcz, *Między lokalnością i regionalnością a nowoczesną legitymizacją władzy lokalnej i regionalnej*, [in:] M. Barański (ed.), *Samorząd – rozwój – integracja*, Katowice 2003, p. 29 n.

<sup>660</sup> On the basis of the Polish law, a province should be considered as a region. See further: A. Gajda, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>661</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 127, 131.

<sup>662</sup> B. Grabowska-Markiewicz, J. Kotrasiński, K. Zielonka, *Nowa koncepcja polityki regionalnej. Refleksje do dyskusji*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa 2008, p. 13.

<sup>663</sup> R. Dzierzgwa, S. Sudak (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

national law instruments in the frame of the delivery of the cohesion policy. I believe that not only “the initial process of distribution of these funds showed that some legal regulations are a significant obstacle to the smooth implementation of investment”<sup>664</sup>. Even now, despite the amendments introduced, there are serious barriers<sup>665</sup> which must be seen from the perspective of the whole system of law. Also, P. Žuber draws attention to the variability of the instruments and ways of achieving the objectives resulting from *acquis communautaire*<sup>666</sup>. A thesis that except for the listed aspects of the discussed problem, the process of liquidation of the social and economic disparities involves “building an active civil society, able to take joint responsibility for the closer and further territorial environment – local and regional environment”<sup>667</sup> is of my highly valued.

Agnieszka Huczak

### **Polityka regionalna jako instrument rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego polskich regionów. Streszczenie**

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy proces społecznej i gospodarczej transformacji w Polsce jest już na takim etapie, aby zapewnić regionom możliwość faktycznego uczestnictwa w kształtowaniu i realizacji tych działań Unii Europejskiej, które adresowane są do regionów, jako podmiotów polityki, zarówno na szczeblu krajowym, jak i europejskim. Przedmiotem rozważań pierwszej części artykułu jest pojęcie regionu jako podmiotu polityki, proces regionalizacji oraz regionalizm. Punktem wyjścia jest tu założenie, iż wraz ze wzrostem znaczenia regionu, jako specyficznego podmiotu ekonomicznego, wzrasta także jego znaczenie jako podmiotu polityki krajowej oraz polityk unijnych. Wymiar regionalny eksponowany jest przede wszystkim w polityce strukturalnej, regionalnej i w polityce

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<sup>664</sup> Ł. Wosik, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>665</sup> See further: *Identyfikacja i ocena barier w wykorzystaniu środków strukturalnych. Opracowanie wykonane przez PSDB Sp. z o.o. na zlecenie Ministerstwa Rozwoju Regionalnego*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa 2007, p. 18–24.

<sup>666</sup> P. Žuber, *Przyszłość polityki spójności Unii Europejskiej. Komentarz do polskiego stanowiska*, [in:] T.G. Grosse (ed.), *Polska wobec nowej polityki spójności Unii Europejskiej*, p. 61.

<sup>667</sup> D. Waldziński, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

spójności UE, których geneza, definicje oraz cele także zostają przedstawione w niniejszym artykule.

W dalszej części artykułu zaprezentowany zostaje problem polaryzacji regionalnej oraz próba określenia mocnych i słabych stron regionów polskich. Podjęta zostaje także próba oceny stopnia oddziaływania funduszy strukturalnych na polską gospodarkę. Ważną funkcję w niwelowaniu różnic społeczno-gospodarczych pełni także zasada partnerstwa, stanowiąca jedną z naczelných zasad wydatkowania funduszy strukturalnych. Kolejną poruszoną kwestią jest problem konwergencji. Konwergencja jest bowiem celem polityki spójności, przede wszystkim w obszarach: społecznym i gospodarczym. Artykuł kończy się przedstawieniem podstawowych barier w realizacji polityki regionalnej oraz wyzwań stojących przed procesem jej implementacji.