

mgr Przemysław Charzewski
Department of Public Administration
Faculty of Law, Administration and Economics
University of Wrocław

ACTIVITIES VI

Regional policy of the European Union

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With each class our progress is increasing. This time we will be looking at the regional policy of the European Union, which we guess is an example of public policy.

Regional policy itself may have various manifestations. It may serve the purpose of enabling the population living in certain parts of the national territory to accentuate their national/ethnic distinctiveness - which manifests itself, for example, in the diversity of local priorities (we may be dealing with autonomy). Later on, it may also contribute to enabling certain communities with well-established national distinctiveness to influence the policy of the central government. Finally, it may also be a more far-reaching autonomy, as in the case of the USA [Bovaird, Löffler 2009, p. 23 - 24]. So we have in fact three main possible faces of it.

However, the above requires taking into account that, as H. J. M. Goverde wrote, "the reform of local and regional government should be based on a thorough analysis and clarification of the dynamics of the socio-political environment of the governing institutions" [Goverde 1996, no. 1-2, p. 80].

In turn, as J. Jeżewski writes, regional policy consists in the recognition of the state of public affairs, the analysis of their causes and conditions, and the assessment of the possibilities of changing this state in accordance with the assumed postulates and concepts of the public good, as well as the development of a programme indicating the objectives, means and ways of achieving them, and the expected effects of changes. All this in relation to the regions. The author also agrees with the distinction of the interregional policy, conducted by the state towards regions and the intraregional policy, conducted in the region by units of territorial self-government [Jeżewski 2002, p. 289].

The term 'regional policy' is not used in any of the official legal documents of the European Union. Nor do we find any official definition in the Treaties. The Treaty on European Union, including the provisions of the Preamble [Burger 2010, p. 187], is currently fundamental in this regard.

One of the characteristics of European Union law is integralism. It treats law as a coherent whole, a body of law, an integral system [Tokarczyk 2012, p. 200]. In addition, there is the "multi-level-governance" mentioned in the last class, characteristic of a network state and particularly popular at the level of the European Union. It means a plurality of public structures - social, economic, political - activating themselves to carry out public tasks [Lipska-Sondecka 2015, p. 234]. As H. Izdebski, referring to other authors, also wrote, "within the framework of multi-level partnership, multi-level partnership within public authorities is indispensable,

understood in such a case as a set of co-existing and cooperating intergovernmental bodies and organisational units, international organisations, the European Union, state administration, in particular government administration and local self-government" [Izdebski 2017, p. 317]. An example in the context of the above is given, for example, by S. Biernat, who cites the so-called comitology, writing: "a particular type of such networks is the so-called 'comitology', i.e. the EU administration operating within the European Commission consisting of executive committees composed of representatives, as well as relevant according to the type of competence, authorities of the Member States. Their importance in developing and implementing EU policies follows the idea of a multi-level integration of governance institutions at different levels and a more dynamic formula of distribution of competences between Member States and the EU, taking into account the principle of subsidiarity. These committees often operate on the basis of deliberative decision-making, informal negotiation processes and consensus based on substantive and technical arguments rather than political horse-trading, in order to achieve a common EU objective rather than to promote particular national interests" [Biernat 2020 and authors cited therein, Legalis; accessed 1.04.2022].

Integrationism is influenced by the regional character of integration processes and the existence of significant disparities in the economic and social development of the regions of Member States. The task of regional policy is to reconstruct the economic and social structure in the poorest regions of Member States, aiming to increase the socio-economic cohesion of the EU and thus optimise the use of resources, and to increase competitiveness and economic modernisation in order to make integration processes more effective. There is an inherent impact on the social and economic development of both regions and Member States. On the one hand, interventions are of a regional nature, but on the other, they concern the whole territory of the European Union. Socio-economic cohesion is therefore achieved by closely linking the institutional and legal scope of EU regional policy to that of the economic policy of the European Union as a whole. Indeed, the overarching objective of the aforementioned EU regional policy is to take advantage of the diverse characteristics, resources and predispositions of regions as factors for high rates and sustainability of economic growth [Klimowicz 2014, pp. 232 - 233].

This cohesion policy obviously has its origins and, in fact, one could say that it is constantly evolving from time to time. The first stage was the creation of the European Regional Fund in 1975, which was dictated by the accession to the European Union in 1973 of countries less economically developed than the founding states (here, for example, Ireland). The next stage was the adoption of the Single European Act, which added Title V on economic and social cohesion to the Treaty of Rome. The related reform of the implementation of cohesion policy took place in parallel. At that time, for example, the funds allocated to the poorest European regions were increased and the principle of concentration was introduced, under which money from European funds should be used for precisely defined purposes. The 1994-1999 financial perspective saw an increase in funding for cohesion policy, although this was accompanied by a simultaneous reduction in funding for the Common Agricultural Policy. The next step was the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty and the creation of the Cohesion Fund. Between 2000 and 2006 there was a thorough reform of the cohesion policy, which was related to the admission of new countries, including Poland. The principle of concentration was strengthened, the programming process was simplified and the role of the European Commission in its implementation was redefined. Above all, an attempt was made to demarcate the competences of the European Commission and the Member States. This manifested itself in the fact that

numerous competences, including those related to the implementation of cohesion policy, were entrusted to Member States, while the European Commission was left with the approval of operational programmes, making decisions on amending operational programmes, assessing major projects and deciding on their eligibility [Dudzik, Kawka 2014; Legalis, accessed: 3.04.2022] .

From 2007 to 2013 there was a further simplification of the programming process. As in 2000-2006, three regional policy objectives were set. The main one was convergence, aimed at speeding up the socio-economic development of the least developed regions of the Union. An objective previously pursued under the INTERREG programme, namely European territorial cooperation, was also added. Regions that were not eligible for the Convergence objective were in turn covered by the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective [Dudzik, Kawka 2014; Legalis, accessed 3.04.2022].

Incidentally, it is worth mentioning the common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS). This classification is used for the collection, harmonisation and sharing of regional statistics of the European Union countries. It is the basis for the development of regional economic accounts, regional agricultural and other statistics. It shapes the regional policies of EU countries and is used to carry out analyses of the socio-economic degree of regions in order to assess regional differences and to develop regional development programmes [Lemańska 2008, p. 144].

Finally, it is also worth mentioning the consultative body, the Committee of the Regions, which assists the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission. It is made up of representatives of regional and local communities who either hold a regional or local authority electoral mandate or are politically accountable to an elected assembly. Its bodies are the Plenary Assembly, the President, the Bureau and the Commissions.

The Committee of the Regions has an advisory and consultative role, and consultation may be either mandatory or optional. Opinions alone, however, are not binding. The Committee is consulted as necessary by the European Parliament, by the Council or by the Commission where the Treaties so provide and in all other cases, in particular those which concern cross-border cooperation. It may bring actions before the Court of Justice of the European Union to protect its prerogatives. This applies in particular to Union legislative acts which would violate the principle of subsidiarity in cases in which consultation is required. The European Parliament, the Council or the European Commission may, if necessary, set the Committee of the Regions a time-limit within which to deliver its opinion. However, this may not be shorter than one month from the date on which the President is notified to that effect [Gorka 2012, pp. 176 and 180].

We can therefore see that regional policy has different faces. In the case of the European Union and its objectives, however, it acquires much greater significance. It goes beyond purely national, identity-related aspects. Instead, it aims to equalise the level of economic development of weaker regions in relation to stronger ones and, in the process of implementation, it is also a manifestation of new trends in global public management.

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