

Recommendations for activating international co-operation at the regional level in Poland

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1. INTRODUCTION

Paradoxically the political and economic integration in Europe and ongoing process of globalisation increased the role of regions and regional structures in European economy.

Firstly, in line with the development of the Monetary Union, liberalisation of capital and labour (resource) movements in the EU more and more often the issue of socio-economic cohesion appears as a long term developmental goal of EU. In the traditional model the state authorities could countervail excessive and unfavourable regional differentiation with various instruments of fiscal and monetary character, or exchange rate and commercial policies such as subventions and subsidies, tax allowances and last but not least customs duties and other instruments of protection of national productive resources. Single European market and monetary union entail the need to resign from some attributes of national sovereignty in relation to the national economy. In effect a need appears for better stimulation of endogenous development at regional level.

Secondly in line with the post-Fordian development paradigm more importance has been assigned to the qualitative factors of development (such as natural environment, human capital, regional innovation systems), and not only on the quantitative ones¹. Such factors are often of intangible character and are regionally bound i.e. being of low or poor spatial mobility. The whole notion of sustainable development originates from this type of thinking².

Globalisation means that local economies are made less dependent on national economies, and that they are increasingly linked to global chains of production as subcontractors. As a result, the role of local/regional conditions of development has been growing, and the whole process may be termed as Glocalisation = globalisation + localisation.

„This results in an increased vulnerability in the regional systems and new trends in regional development. The core-periphery scheme has been supplemented by a „patch-work” or ”mosaic” development scheme, in which „winning” and „losing” regions may lay side by side. This reflects the fact that the economy has changed from a large-scale economy facilitating price competition to a „just-scale” economy facilitating innovation and service and consumer orientation. While mass production is facilitated in larger metropolitan centres, the „just-scale” economy may be facilitated by a variety of more specific facilities which might be present in one region and not in the neighbouring region. In this sense, the adjustment of local production facilities - sometimes including attractive living environments for the well-educated workforce - to specific production needs has grown more important alongside globalisation.”³

Globalisation, on the one hand, leads towards the increase of competition between regions for the resources needed by them for growth and development, and on the other hand determines them to network-type co-operation increasing the efficiency of absorption of intangible factors of development (innovations, regional mega-product), which are so important in case of „just-scale” economy.

One of the most important aspects of “glocalisation” is the question of regional character of innovativeness. Innovations are generally regarded as one of the primary factors that assure development. It is assumed now that innovations can be strengthened by local and regional factors such as industry’s ability to absorb innovations in the form of existence of various firms and government agencies playing the role of intermediaries (serving as an interface) between science and business. Regional distribution of interfaces between knowledge and manufacturing, research institutions and business entities as well as the frequency and quality of interactions with industry and the research sphere may determine the level of innovativeness of a country or of a region. Similarly important role may play the communication infrastructure (mobility network). Recent research studies demonstrate, however, that a condition for the increase in the level of regional competitiveness depends also to a growing extent on the way of solving the problem of water supply and assurance of high quality natural environment and recreational space. Similarly the life aspirations of inhabitants of a region may be determined by the degree of their perception of the phenomenon of peripherality. Among nine features that characterise innovations J. Guinet mentions, at the third place, the fact that innovation is localised.⁴ It means “creation and transmission of innovation takes place in a concrete space. Thus it has a specific form of localised informational external benefits. /.../ Transfer of innovation is not possible unless in another place in space exists another organised innovation arrangement. Under condition of absence of adequate territorial innovation arrangement a “one-off” technology transfer is only possible, or, at most, an insular development within a region.”⁵

“Some observers suggest, that /.../ complicated systems of technology, production and organisation of industry and support infrastructures of social and political investments are very often characterised with distinct spatial features. Putting stress on the

¹ Jerzy Hausner, *Postfordowski paradygmat rozwoju*, „Gospodarka Narodowa” 4/1994

² More on subject of sustainable development at regional level see Jacek Zaucha, *Sustainable development for regional Policy*, [in] Witold Toczyski [ed.], *Competition and co-operation of the Baltic Regions of Denmark, Germany and Poland*, Government Centre for Strategic Studies, Sopot 1998

³ Ole Damsgaard, Niels Boje Groth [eds], *Spatial Planning for Sustainable Development in the Baltic Sea Region*, VASAB 1998, p.7

⁴ J Guinet, *National Systems for Financing Innovation*, OECD, Paris 1995, p.21

⁵ Tadeusz Markowski, *Wspieranie wzrostu konkurencyjności w polityce rozwoju regionalnego*, [in], *Strategiczne wyzwania dla polityki rozwoju regionalnego*, Warszawa, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1996

relationship between geographical proximity and technological dynamism finds its roots in the newest insight into the essence of the innovation process".⁶

In this internationalised context, regions and towns are invited and compelled - individually or in co-operating networks - to manifest themselves in the new societal (dis)order.

The international co-operation of Polish regions is passing through a stage of spontaneous development. ⁷ The main factors influencing this process are:

- the systemic socio-economic transformation of Poland and majority her neighbours;
- changes in the geopolitical situation in Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland's efforts to join the European Union and still growing sentiments in the Russia towards the past;
- the European Union's openness to regional issues;
- the effects of aid programmes supporting cross-border co-operation and regional co-operation, e.g., PHARE CBC, INTERREG, ECOS-Ouverture, CREDO, and BSPF and enlargement of this aid from 2000 in a form of larger national PHARE and new pre-accession instruments such as ISPA and SAPARD;
- empowerment of Polish regions (voivodships) through establishment of regional self-government in Poland in 1999 unfortunately with relatively weak budgets and therefore low possibility to influence regional development;
- the opportunities now emerging to participate in pre-accession programmes, as part of the wider process of integration with the European Union.

2. CO-OPERATION BETWEEN REGIONS IN EUROPE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL POLICY IN POLAND

Regional development is one of the major processes through which the ideas of subsidiarity and sustainable development can be realised in Europe. According to the recommendations of the Task Force for Regional Policy,⁸ the international co-operation of regions should be placed in the context of the strategies or plans of regional development - as an instrument for promoting regional development. Such an approach to co-operation entails its integrality and, in some cases, interchangeability with other instruments promoting regional development. These recommendations has been taken seriously by many of Polish regions. In strategies of newly created Polish self-government regions international co-operation in fact is treated as very important factor of development. The example can be Podlaskie, Opolskie, Lubuskie and other voivodships . Also in strategy of the Pomeranian region international co-operation is among priority measures to develop the province. There are several examples (e.g. visit of President of Pomeranian Region to Republic of South Africa) that some international co-operation at regional level has been started by Polish regional self-government only to promote and support emerging business relations between enterprises from regions in question.

In this context, principles (or a philosophy) of international co-operation, and instruments for promoting and monitoring it, should be formulated in line with the current conditions prevailing in the European Union and its member states. Also, we should see such co-operation as a process of learning through acting. Co-operation secures a free flow of knowledge and know-how from the EU to Poland in such areas as establishing joint programmes and projects with foreign partners, using international assistance funds, and investigating the benefits resulting from greater openness and international partnership. The example of Spain may be of significance here, as its financial contributions to the EU's joint budget during the country's first three years of membership were larger than the transfers it received from structural funds. This situation resulted from Spain's regional and local administrations having to adjust to the new conditions. Poland's pre-accession strategy should take this factor into consideration. Any change in approach or philosophy should entail a **shift in focus among decision-makers** (all regional entities). Rather than applying for subsidies and grants they should **activate the internal resources and developmental factors** of their regions, and generate a "spirit of enterprise".

In addition they should focus on the following factors:

- the business environment,
- stimulating local endogenic potential, including human capital,
- the communication infrastructure - from motorways to information highways),
- advanced technologies and financial and information services,
- innovations and strengthening indirect links between theory and practice,
- translating international contacts into regional impulses of development,
- co-operation of different entities within regions since modern development requires inputs from different sectors and spheres (including culture, natural environment, business environment interfaces with knowledge and many others).

⁶ D.A. Wolfe, M.S. Gertler, The Regional Innovation System in Ontario, quoted after Antoni Kuklinski, Regionalne Systemy innowacji w Polsce, doświadczenia i perspektywy,[in:], Regionalne i lokalne uwarunkowania i czynniki restrukturyzacji gospodarki Polski, Wzrost Konkurencyjności Regionów, Łódź, 1996

⁷ **International Cooperation of Regions. Supplementary Report, Task Force for Structural Policy in Poland, Warsaw 1997. At this article there are an elements of diagnosis and recommendation which are still up to date.**

⁸ Regional Policy is the conscious and deliberate activity of public authorities aimed at regional development (growth in the economic potential of regions, a steady growth in their competitiveness and the living standards of their inhabitants, leading to the socio-economic development of the country). See Outline of a Regional Development Strategy for Poland. Final Report, Warsaw 1996, p. 20 (in Polish).

One of the forthcoming challenges for Polish regions and other actors engaged in regional development is to learn the “technology” of partnership building in the interregional co-operation involving EU programmes and funds. The requirement of “genuine partnership” - also reflected in common co-operative structures and procedures - is clearly identified in EU regulations.

In that context, some opportunities may be associated with further development of “Euroregions” with active participation of the Polish partners. Nevertheless it should be noted, that “Euroregion” itself doesn’t provide satisfactory legal basis for transfrontier or network co-operation confining joint management of programmes/projects.

One should note, that euroregional co-operation may be institutionalised both as a parallel structure or as an integrated one (possibly as a single legal entity). Creation of the parallel structures may turn out to be enough only to stimulate and channel the network of contacts and inter-links among various actors (representing different sectors) operating within the scope of “Euroregion’s” territory. In this case Euroregion’s institutions play important role acting as an organiser of the broad co-operation in different sectors.⁹

Nevertheless, in the perspective of Poland’s accession to EU, the new forthcoming challenge for transfrontier institutions (like „Euroregions”) will be related also to their potential capacity and ability to manage and implement transfrontier programmes and projects co-financed by the EU.¹⁰

EU law does not interfere in Member States’ internal rules defining the scope and legal forms of their territorial units’ international activities. Nevertheless EU influences them indirectly by creation of some financial instruments supporting transfrontier, interregional and network cooperation, along with the rules and guidelines laying down the requirements regarding their absorption. The INTERREG experience gained up-to date proves, that the borders regions which have successfully developed truly joint and permanent transfrontier structures, founded on the clear and regular legal basis demonstrate (if to compare them to the regions which are still at the beginning of this process) much stronger ability to produce genuine integrated transfrontier policies, as well as they are more effective in absorbing EU financial support and managing relevant programmes/project.

As it is being stressed in relevant documents, this experience shows that significant steps have been made towards joint cross-border programming and programme management in many cases. However, the kind of strong co-operation that takes place, for example, in “Euroregions” is still the exception rather than the rule. Whereas a great deal of development activity has taken place in border areas and those areas have certainly benefited from that activity, it has generally been much more difficult to establish genuine cross-border activity jointly. In some cases, this has led to perverse effects such as parallel projects on each side of the border. In any case, it has prevented border areas and Member States from reaping the full benefits of co-operation. Therefore, as it is stressed in EU regulations - the development of a joint strategy laying down joint priorities is an essential condition for acceptance of the proposals submitted for Community financing. All the measures and operations must be based on this joint programming for the regions or territories concerned and demonstrate the value which it adds. Consequently the operations selected to implement the programming must also be clearly cross-border/transnational in nature. This means that they shall not be eligible unless they were selected jointly and implemented.

The implementation of co-operation on the basis of these principles requires truly joint structures to prepare the programmes, involve the parties concerned, select the operations, manage the whole and co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of programming and, if appropriate, the joint mechanisms for the management of measures and operations.¹¹

3. THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS AND ORGANISATIONS

Polish regions have a chance to play an increasing role and win greater benefits in those international structures associated with the international co-operation or regions. The most important goal here is to secure **political influence** on the development of co-operation in Europe, as the positions of West and East European regions in the international community are not equally strong. Poland, therefore, should try to gain influence in the Council of Europe, and even more so in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLARE) and the Association of European Regions (ARE) based in Strasbourg. Poland should also adopt such measures on European co-operation as will eliminate the structural disparities appearing in the economic positions of different Polish voivodships. Equally important is the need to increase the volume of technological and financial aid for Polish regions. This requires lobbying on behalf of Polish regions - the importance of which exceeds the moderate costs of such activity.

As far as the ARE is concerned only few Polish regions are participating in its work (currently Malopolskie, Zachodniopomorskie, Dolnoslaskie, Swietokrzyskie, Slaskie i Opolskie).¹² Some other regions are considering their membership. The main barrier is financial one of covering participation costs from the limited budget of the Presidents of the regions while benefits from participation are soft and only in a long run.

The present Polish delegation at the Council of Europe is empowered to provide a full programme of training sessions, consultations and seminars, etc., for representatives from Polish regions. Such training sessions, combined with meetings with Polish representatives at the Congress and Polish deputies in the Council of Europe, would facilitate a rapid diffusion of international programmes and activities in Polish regions. At the same time, these sessions would encourage Polish representatives to offer realistic opinions on the problems facing Poland’s regions.

⁹ See: Practical Guide to Cross-border Cooperation, EU Regional Policy and Cohesion, Second Edition 1997; Institutional Aspects of Cross-Border Cooperation, LACE, Gronau, March 1999

¹⁰ See: Practical Guide to Cross-border Cooperation, EU Regional Policy and Cohesion, Second Edition 1997; Institutional Aspects of Cross-Border Cooperation, LACE, Gronau, March 1999

¹¹ See: **Communication from the Commission to the Member States** of 28.4.00 laying down guidelines for a Community Initiative concerning trans-European cooperation intended to encourage harmonious and balanced development of the European territory, Brussels, 28.4.00 C(2000) 1101 - EN

¹² <http://www.are-regions-europe.org/COMMUN/A15abis.html>

Polish regions should try to influence the Council of Europe with the aim of increasing international co-operation between regions, **particularly with respect to countries, regions and cross-border areas in Eastern Europe**. These efforts should represent a political option realised in co-operation with Poland's eastern and southern neighbours.

The presence of Polish regions in the Association of European Regions (ARE) would yield better results if the work of their representatives was better co-ordinated. Increasing their activities would have consequences for the other Polish regions and those government institutions concerned with the international co-operation of Polish regions.

Similarly important for strengthening the position of Polish regions in relation to their European partners would be active participation in the European Border Region Association (Gronau) and the Baltic Sub-Regional Conference. Once again, better co-ordination of the activities of Poland's representatives in these bodies is indispensable.

The growing number of Polish of regional development agencies participating - either directly, or through their Polish association (NARDA) - in the proceedings of the European Association of Regional Development Agencies (EURADA) is also helping consolidate the position of Polish regions; these agencies should be supported by the state administration.

4. THE EUROPEAN UNION

Polish regions should understand the important role of the European Parliament as an influential political and opinion-forming body. Poland should seek ways of presenting issues connected with the international co-operation of regions that affect Polish interests to the Inter-Parliamentary Commission of the European Parliament and the Polish Sejm. It is vital for Poland to have a say in the development of new programmes, for instance, those concerned with pre-accession procedures.

Polish government institutions should pay particular attention to the professional management of programmes jointly financed by the European Union.

Although Polish regions are not members of the Committee of Regions, the association agreement does allow them to take part in the Committee's proceedings in the role of observers. Currently the work is going on aiming at establishment of Joint Committee between Poland and Committee of the Regions of EU composed of 8 members from Polish side, representing regional and local self-governmental authorities.

Polish regions should also be prepared to contribute to the ongoing strategic discussion on the future of the European integration, which also includes the possible role and position of regional/local level.

In all member states the EU local and regional authorities are in a learning process as they attempt to make secure their role in the Community.

Regions and other territorial authorities represented at the European level within the structure of the EU Committee of Regions see themselves as obliged to strive for bringing the EU closer to its citizens, to local and regional communities. In that context, the local and regional authorities of the EU – by using the Committee of Regions as the medium - have produced an position as to the outcomes they wish to see achieved in futher development of European integration and the evolution of European institutions, structures and legal framework. In the most unequivocal and clear manner those expectations had been expressed in the set of propositions and requests prepared by the Committee of Regions as its contribution for discussion at Intergovernmental Conference in 1996. This should be seen as a core of common values, aspirations and desires of EU territorial authorities, forming a kind of united front of EU regions and the local communities in the discussion on the European future. Polish regional and local authorities should be conscious of that discussion bearing in mind their future participation in the EU policies.

Opinions of the Committee of Regions, put in the set of propositions and requests focus on the principle of subsidiarity, the possibility of appeals to the Court of Justice and the Committee of Regions (COR) institutional and legal position in the EU structures. The following points had been submitted for consideration of the EU member states governments:

- support for financial and organisational separation between the COR and the ESC;
- consideration of the right of the COR to draw up its own rules of procedure;
- consideration of the extension of areas for consultation by the Committee of the Regions;
- the extension of consultation to the European Parliament;
- support for the granting of institutional status for the COR;
- the right of the Committee of the Regions to appeal to the Court of Justice in defence of its own prerogatives;
- the right of the Committee of the Regions to appeal to the Court of Justice in cases of infringement of the principle of subsidiarity;
- the right of regions to bring actions before the Court of Justice in cases where their own legislative capacities are affected;
- support for the requirement of a legal mandate, or political accountability, for members of the COR;
- support for the clarification of the principle of subsidiarity;
- the degree to which subsidiarity should be explicitly extended to local and regional authorities;
- an examination of the support for the inclusion of the principle of local autonomy in the Treaty.¹³

¹³ Opinion on the Revision of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Instituting the European Community, 21 April 1995 (CdR 136/95)

In displaying the depth of positive local and regional support for these issues it is clear that the co-operative endeavours of local and regional authorities within Member States have not only been impressive but of paramount importance in the process of constructing a unified, and consequently stronger, local and regional European voice via the medium of the COR.

Among the others, one can find some requests that are worth of special attention:

- As to the request calling for extension of COR's advisory responsibilities - areas of current consultation for the COR include regional policy, education, culture, public health, trans-European networks and economic and social cohesion. The request extends the areas on farther consultation, with the view to include in perspective all matters affecting local and regional authorities.
- In order to strengthen its democratic mandate and to reach genuine organisational independence from national authorities, the territorial authorities also call for a local/regional electoral mandate for COR members. This request is formulated to guarantee the political autonomy of the COR and aims to enhance the democratic legitimacy of the whole EU structure. EC Treaty should stipulate that COR members should hold a democratic mandate in a region or local authority or be responsible to an assembly elected by direct universal suffrage.
- The request calling for COR to have access to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in order to defend its own prerogatives seems to be really important from the legal, as well as the practical point of view. The COR has called for the "recognition of the special right to bring actions before the Court of Justice", in order to defend its own prerogatives in the cases where the "the rights of the COR are not respected." Equally important for the territorial communities legal position within the frames of European integration rules and structures seems to be the next request – calling for access to the European Court of Justice by the COR in general cases of the violation of the subsidiarity principle. In that context COR asks for the ability to "fight legal provisions - before the ECJ - which, by infringing the principle of subsidiarity or demonstrating other violations, are prejudicial to the functions and powers of the COR and its constituent members". The COR considers this necessary, "in order to ensure that subsidiarity does not remain an abstract principle".
- The request for access to the European Court of Justice by regions themselves to defend their legislative powers goes even further, as it requested here that: "regions endowed with legislative powers should also be given special right to initiate proceedings - before the ECJ - for the purpose of defending their legislative rights".
- Nevertheless, the last couple of COR's proposals seems to be the most revolutionary and fundamental for the potential Europe of regions – the one in which regions constitute the equally important element of integration – along with national and Community level. Firstly, the COR calls for rewording of article 3b in order to clarify the principle of subsidiarity. The COR supports a clear reformulation of the principle in order to address its characteristics as an approach to policy-making from the bottom up. In the COR's opinion: the justification for actions by the EU on the grounds of "effectiveness" is problematic. The COR requests that the EU should only act if the policies implemented at a lower level are clearly insufficient. Secondly, COR requests the rewording of article 3b in order to recognise the role of local and regional authorities in European integration process. The reformulation of the principle, as favoured by the COR, would introduce local and regional authorities as a level of government capable of participating in the responsibilities of the EU, providing a greater democratic link between the EU and its citizens. Finally, COR requests for enshrinement of the principle of local autonomy in the treaty. The COR favours the incorporation of the recognition of regional autonomy and local self-government by introducing the principle into the Treaty in the form in which it is defined in the Council of Europe's "Charter of Local Self-Government."

Up to the present time the response to the requests formulated by the Committee of Regions has not been satisfactory for regional and local authorities. Finally adopted (in 1997) text of the Amsterdam Treaty (amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Instituting the European Community) hardly meets their expectations. The Treaty only implements the financial and organisational separation between the COR and the ESC, gives the European Parliament the non-obligatory prerogative to consult Committee of Regions, and finally – extends COR's right to be obligatory consulted by the matters associated to the transfrontier (cross-border) co-operation.¹⁴

As a result, the core of Committee of Regions' proposals still remains on the agenda of pan-European debate. The Polish regions, as well as national authorities should therefore bear in mind that above listed issues may soon be back on topic, as the strategic decisions on European future (possible federal system, general-constitutional division of powers among Union, national governments and the regions) seems to be coming closer.¹⁵

An information and lobbying office serving the interests of Polish regions should be set up in Brussels. A large number of European regions have established offices for the purposes of informing regional authorities about the European Union's policies and initiatives. The cost of running such an office amounts to approximately PLN 0.5 million annually. Such institutions could be financed from domestic resources and could possibly be supported by the PHARE programme in the framework of institutional building being among two the most important priorities for Phare 2000-2006. So far only few Polish voivodships have such office in Brussels. Podlaskie and Lubelskie voivodships were pioneers here, as they have opened a joint office named as: Eastern Poland Euro-Office. Lately also Opolskie voivodship has completed the procedure of registration of its representation office, and

¹⁴ See: S. Parzymies, *Unia Europejska a Europa Srodkowa. Polityczne aspekty współpracy*, Warszawa 1997, p. 128-129; K-H. Neunreither, *Zasada subsydiarnosci a Parlament Europejski* [in:], D. Milczorek [ed.], *Subsidiarnosc*, Warszawa 1996, p. 108-109; Z. Czachór, *Komitet Regionów w procesie poszerzania Unii Europejskiej*, [in:] P. Buczkowski, K. Bondyra, P. Sliwa [ed.], *Jaka Europa? Regionalizacja a integracja*, Poznan 1998, p. 74-75

¹⁵ The EU Intergovernmental Conference with the purpose to distribute powers among states, regions and Community level is expected to take place in 2004

Mazowieckie voivodships is close to succeed with it as well. Other Polish regions are also undertakings some efforts to this end in particular when supported by external help. For example Pomeranian voivodship (region) has taken advantages of relations within the Baltic Sea Region and negotiates the formula of the representation office opened with help and in co-operation with one of its partners from Sweden (SydSam) or Germany (HansaOffice, Bremen). Some talks were also held to organise such an office jointly for three Northern Polish regions.¹⁶ The main barrier seems to be financial obstacles and rather long-term horizon of the benefits hardly convincing for regional councils and weak support from national government. There are also some problems with getting work permission for Polish citizens in Brussels.

It is likewise important to provide particular institutions, especially the European Commission, or simply individual officials (who have some influence on programmes affecting Polish regions), with reliable information on actual trends and needs related to regional development in Poland, as well as any other information relevant to regional marketing.

International co-operation between regions hinges crucially on **co-operation with DG Regio and the INTERREG IIIB and IIIA programmes, the aim of which is to stimulate international co-operation among regions bordering European Union member states**. On the initiative of, and in co-operation with, representatives from the EU Baltic regions, the Directorate is trying to achieve more visible progress in integrating the Baltic countries, comparable to the integration achieved between Mediterranean regions. Such an approach taken by European Union institutions requires dynamic support.

So far Polish regions (and municipalities) have been very active in the INTERREG II C and II A. Taking the Baltic INTERREG II C as a case study one should note that Polish regional authorities have performed well both at project and at regulatory level. The representative of Polish Northern Regions (firstly from Voivod offices and since 1999 from Offices of Presidents of the Regions with smooth transfer of responsibilities) took part in all meetings of BSR INTERREG II C Steering Committee which has been modelled on the Polish-German Planning and Monitoring Committee established under the INTERREG II C and PHARE CBC programmes. This participation enabled Polish Northern regions to assess and influence development of all INTERREG II C projects resulting in reformulation of many EU projects aiming at better accommodation of Polish interest and in inclusion of Polish partners into the most interesting (from Polish point of view) projects. First time Polish regions have gained real influence on development at the BSR level. The result is that Poland is the most active non-EU country in the BSR with regard to participation in the INTERREG II C projects. Poland has been involved in 21 projects out of 45 projects approved by INTERREG II C. As far as the number of partners is concerned Poland with its 37 partners has exceed even Denmark and obviously all non EU Baltic countries e.g. next Baltic Russia and Estonia by 80%. Out of 12 INTERREG II C projects, which received PHARE support only three projects have not been elaborated by Polish applicants. For the rest co-financing from budgets of Polish regional and local authorities was secured. Polish interest has been concentrated mainly in spatial planning projects connected with sustainable transport development, multimodal split, regional transport revitalisation, and combination of transport development with regional development. The next priority is balanced and polycentric settlement structure targeted mainly by local Polish authorities. An illustration can be projects dealing with revitalisation of sea functions for development of coastal cities and towns, or case study for metropolitan region of Gdynia-Gdansk in the broader Baltic context.

It would be to Poland's advantage to accept the invitation from the European Union to continue this involvement in INTERREG affairs after 2000 by designating Polish representatives to serve on the Monitoring and Steering Committee of the Operational Programme under the INTERREG III B programme¹⁷ for the Baltic Sea Region.

The Polish VASAB 2010 Committee (the inter-governmental programme entitled "Visions and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea Region 2010") should continue as the national subcommittee of the Baltic Operational Programme under the INTERREG IIIB programme. Similar recommendations should be formulated in connection with the INTERREG III B Operational Programme in the CADSES region, which covers the whole Poland (with focus on the southern and western part).

5. POLISH REGIONS AS A LINK BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

With its geographical, political, and economic characteristics, Poland is well equipped to play a role in the international co-operation of regions along the East-West axis. This requires:

- helping establish and stimulate Euroregions along Poland's eastern and southern borders;
- Polish regions actively participating in projects implemented under the CREDO programme and seeking opportunities to influence its progress;
- pushing for a change in the criteria for selecting projects under the INTERREG IIIB programme as regards the constellation of West-East partners or establishing a complementary programme;
- pushing for improvements in the road infrastructure, and other types of infrastructure along the eastern border, while setting up programmes aimed at increasing spatial coherence in Europe.

¹⁶ It should be also noted, that their European representation in Brussels already have a number of Pommeranian communes. The Brussels office of Pommeranian Association of Rural Communes (Pomorskie Stowarzyszenie Gmin Wiejskich) represents more then 70 Pommeranian localities. See: Rzeczpospolita, 23.01.01, No 19

¹⁷ The Analytical part of the Operational Programme for the Baltic INTERREG III B has been prepared to large extend in Poland by Self Government of Pomerania Region and VASAB Secretariat.

6. THE INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION OF REGIONS AS PART OF POLISH GOVERNMENT POLICY

Polish government policy should enable regional authorities to compete and co-operate with other regions in Europe as part of a wider plan of European development. This should be done by further developing structural policy in regions. It is generally assumed that empowering regions is essential and work on strengthening a new territorial organisation of the country should continue to aim at establishing stronger regions with autonomous budgets. Also important is the fact that strategies of development of newly established Polish self government regions are screened by Ministry of Economy (previously: Ministry of Regional Development and Building) responsible for inter-regional development. This gives hope that international co-operation in these strategies will be treated as instrument enhancing socio-economic development of the region.

Integrating and co-ordinating the activities of Polish regions requires new arrangements on the national level. These will depend, among other factors, on the formal measures governing co-operation. An efficient system of co-operation should be established between:

- The Committee of the Regional Policy and Sustainable Development of the Council of Ministers,
- The Committee for European Integration,
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
- The Ministry of Administration and Internal Affairs,
- Ministry of Economy (previously: Ministry of Regional Development and Building)
- The Government Centre for Strategic Studies,
- Commissions of the Sejm and the Senate, responsible for international co-operation between regions,
- Representatives of the Polish regions in the Regional Chamber of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLARE) and in other international networks.

Responsibility for co-ordinating these measures in practice should be assigned to the Committee of the Regional Policy and Sustainable Development of the Council of Ministers.

The aims of such co-ordination work should, among other things, be to:

- formulate Polish *raison d'état* on co-operation between regions;
- exchange information on regional co-operation between institutions, as well as between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Committee for European Integration and regional authorities;
- monitor and provide consultation on co-operation between regional authorities and foreign regions; these functions should be performed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Committee for European Integration;
- introduce systematic training sessions for regional authorities on European integration as well as on the aims and forms of international co-operation between regions.

The process of harmonising international co-operation between regions should be realised by:

- **providing regional authorities with systematic information on state priorities** regarding international co-operation, by way of publishing information on and popularising the country's socio-economic development strategies and other planning documents accepted by the government (e.g., VASAB 2010, Green Lungs of Europe, etc.);
- carrying out analyses and informing regional authorities of the potential benefits of international co-operation;
- adjusting the instruments of national spatial development to the aims of international co-operation at the regional level (focusing on investments in the transport infrastructure and border crossings designed to make the borders more "permeable");
- negotiating public contracts commissioning regional institutions (e.g., Euroregions, *gmina* [communal] associations, agencies, foundations, and regional authorities after their empowerment) to engage in international co-operation under the auspices of the central administration (e.g., in the form of commissioned tasks);

It should be underlined that according to the existing regulations *National Strategy of Regional Development* is to be harmonised with regional development strategies. Such dialogue is starting just now, but even the first draft of the national strategy has been based on priorities formulated by regional level.

Funds from the central budget and the European Union for the purposes of supporting regional development **should be allocated in line both with the principles of European Union regional policy**, (especially the principles of subsidiarity, additionality and planning, through project (planning) competitions) and in accordance with the priorities of Polish regional policy. Support should be given to projects contributing both to regional development and to the development of the country as a whole. Changes in the principles governing the allocation of European Union regional development aid have also been strongly recommended, to bring it more in line with existing EU programmes and initiatives. Polish regions should receive support for their international co-operation initiatives on terms similar to those prevailing in European Union regions.

Establishment of joint Steering and Monitoring Committees for pre-accession funds for Poland seems to be a long expected move in a right direction. This conscious decision of central and regional governments will create a structure dealing in an integrated way with financial side of regional development and encompassing the most important public actors at regional scene: sectoral ministries,

regional self-government and voivods (governors) being representatives of central government in the regions. This approach will also prepare Polish regions better participate in structural funds activities in the future.

When setting up contracts with regional authorities, the government should consider international co-operation at the regional level as one of its priorities.

With regard to PHARE CBC, the programme's development and co-operation with the **INTERREG IIIA** Secretariats should be considered.

In particular, priority treatment should be accorded to Polish regions co-operating under existing EU programmes, such as **INTERREG III A** and **INTERREG IIIB**. The considerable experiences gained during the joint discussions on the INTERREG II and PHARE CBC programmes within the framework of the Polish-German Planning and Monitoring Committee and INTERREG III B STEERING COMMITTEE should be further consolidated. Financial aid for such activities should also result in synergetic effects beyond the purely national level. The Polish government should push for the highest possible level of integration in regional co-operation initiatives associated with the EU, such as INTERREG III, EQUAL and LEADER III, with PHARE CBC, TACIS CBC¹⁸ and CREDO, as well as for simplification and unification of the procedures employed under particular programmes, so as to reduce the difficulties facing Polish regions wishing to participate in these programmes now or in the future. One reasonable option would be for the Polish government to obtain permission to implement certain aspects of the PHARE CBC programme in the southern, as well as eastern border regions of the country.

"Hard" infrastructure projects (mostly concerning border infrastructure and telecommunications) have dominated Poland's international co-operation activities and will do so probably under ISPA and national PHARE. However, supporting "soft" projects in areas such as education, co-ordinating sector policies, building strategies, standardising information, international co-operation etc., should play an increasingly active role in regional development in Europe. Hence, there is a need for political decision on the level of (government and aid) resources supporting international co-operation at the regional level, and which would also distinguish between "hard" and "soft" projects.¹⁹

This option is also very important because of the launching of INTERREG III, the main purpose of which is to support "soft" projects with limited investments measures (only pilot and innovative investments).²⁰ Polish regions participating in this programme will have to obtain sufficient resources to jointly finance such activities.

7. INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION INVOLVING VOIVODSHIPS

At present, Presidents of the Regions are the main, substantive entities engaged in international co-operation at the regional level. International bodies in this area (e.g., the Council of Europe) assume their future empowerment. Existing activities need to be stepped up in the following areas:

Voivodship units should be organised specifically for the purposes of international co-operation at the regional level. These should take the form of close co-operation between departments of Presidents Offices responsible for regional development and those working in the field of interregional international co-operation. Their joint task would be the organisational and financial engineering (montage) of international co-operation among regions. Such cross departmental units should initiate international co-operation at the regional level, through their contacts with various entities on the regional scene, including voivods and their staff and non-governmental organisations. They should also monitor co-operation by submitting appropriate proposals to the President. These tasks may be contracted out by the President e.g., in the form of appropriate agreements concluded with regional development agencies. Various public and economic actors should also engage in substantial forms of co-operation, for example, voivodship and *gmina* (communal) authorities responsible for providing particular social services;

- President should have real possibility to finance international co-operation from budgetary funds;
- obligatory methods should be established for co-ordinating international co-operation entered into by the principal entities active in voivodships (local government authorities, local government caucuses, regional development agencies, and others) under the direction of President of the Region.

The areas and general forms of international co-operation should be specifically set out in a region's overall development strategy (programme). In accordance with the planning principle, such co-operation should be neither incidental nor haphazard, but be in harmony with regional and national development policies.

A series of training sessions should be organised for regional and local authorities as well as other regional agents, dealing with issues pertaining to international co-operation at the regional level. Such training should shed light on the positive experiences gained in this field and provide information on appropriate procedures. Instruction should be given on how to prepare and implement projects, including those concerned with financial and organisational montage, as well as on the regional policy principles adopted in the European Union and its member states. These tasks may be contracted out by the President of the Region e.g., in the form of appropriate agreements concluded with regional development agencies

¹⁸ The association of INTERREG II C with PHARE CBC and TACIS CBC was the subject of a review conference of the Baltic Sea Region projects in Rostock, 12-13 June 1997.

¹⁹ This level should represent one of the government's parameters steering regional development and international co-operation - at present, however, it is mainly the result of coincidental circumstances, or even deals made behind closed doors.

²⁰ INTERREG III's resources may only be spent within European Union territory. However, INTERREG III's projects are also accessible to third party countries, owing to Polish participation in the work of the INTERREG III B Programme's Secretariat.

The President's budget should provide incentives for actors on the regional scene to undertake activities consistent with the overall strategy (programme) of regional development, including any international co-operation ensuing as a result. These activities will take various forms, depending on, among other things, the information and financial needs involved.

Clear division of labour between President of the Region and the Voivod (governor) should be established by the central government decisions. So far responsibilities of the voivod in the field of international co-operation of the regions are not clearly defined. The existing law gives primacy to the President of the Region while reserving some competencies for the voivod. These competencies are not sufficiently defined. **In practice** sometimes voivod takes initiative and pursue some arrangements in the field in question like for example in the case of establishment of the office representing Northern Polish regions in Brussels.

8. OTHER AGENTS ENGAGED IN THE INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION OF REGIONS

Large cities representing seats of local government, such as Warsaw, Poznan, Kraków, Wrocław, Szczecin, Gdansk, Łódź and Katowice, co-operate independently with cities of similar size, and complement the activities of regions (voivodships). Their strategic importance for the economies of their respective voivodships and their institutional potential need to be strictly co-ordinated with the work of President's Offices, e.g., in the form of **a Voivodship Group for European Integration**.

With regard to the interests of international co-operation - including cross-border co-operation - **a network of Central European cities must be developed**, which may play an important role in creating a coherent European spatial structure. One relevant example of this is the co-operation between Baltic cities within the Union of Baltic Cities, which is having a significant impact on European Union institutions in Brussels. Owing to the powerful influence of the area's cities, the Baltic Sea Region is becoming a powerful international group ready to assume the high position it deserves in Europe.

Regional centres providing information and support for non-governmental organisations (the six centres existing in Poland cover the whole country) owe their existence to the inspiration and funds of the PHARE Democracy and Civil Dialogue programmes. At present, they are expanding their activities into the field of international co-operation and thus are becoming a natural partner for Presidents of the Regions, as their contribution complements that of central and local government. Owing to the **fragmented network linking smaller non-governmental organisations** they may become a very powerful structure consolidating strategic trends in regional co-operation. Presidents and caucuses should not engage in international co-operation without non-governmental organisations participating in the role of partners.

Polish regional development agencies and foundations organised within the NARDA association, have in recent years established many important contacts and carried out many joint undertakings with foreign partners from various European regions. This extensive and effective network of European co-operation should be used by public institutions engaged in international co-operation at the regional level, and its future development should be systematically supported.

9. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE FIELD RESEARCH

Field research performed in 1996 has revealed the following weaknesses of international co-operation of Polish regions:

- The prevalent forms of foreign co-operation initiated by regions in the branch system had been in education, culture, health care and social assistance. On the other hand, the economy, communications, finances, insurance and construction have been very much neglected.
- On the other side thinking about the development, FDIs as the result of international co-operation at regional level had been rather weak in Polish regions.
- International co-operation in voivodships remained isolated from the main trends of regional strategic development. The system for steering this development seldom seemed to perceive co-operation as a tool of endogenous regional development, as if Polish regions did not have to compete with foreign regions.
- There was a great deal of fluctuation in the personnel responsible for international co-operation at the regional level.
- The choices made in the field of the international co-operation of regions were often accidental. The only exception to these rules was co-operation along Polish and German border, which has been determined by powerful political and economic support from the Germans and assistance funds (PHARE CBC on the one hand and INTERREG A on the other).
- Co-operation with well developed countries such as Great Britain, Belgium and Sweden remained far behind Italy or even China and Russia. There was also low level of co-operation with Slovakia and the Czech Republic. This picture puts into question the degree and progress of integration with the countries of the Visegrad group.
- Financial and legal restrictions were the most frequently mentioned barriers to co-operation.
- One of the major economic barriers to co-operation was the lack of strong representation for economic entities. Regional authorities felt that they lacked a partner in the economy, with whom they can consult and jointly carry out voivodship development policy, including in the field of foreign co-operation.
- Analysis of social barriers also showed the need to market international voivodship co-operation as a development tool of regional institutional systems.

It seems rather important to check whether introduction of self-government at regional level with competencies in the field of international co-operation has changed this rather sad picture. The answer seems to be positive. The financial and legal barrier to co-operate was partially removed. Regional government gives necessary institutional framework to combine regional development with international co-operation. Newly emerged regional authorities have made a substantial attempt to enter into dialogue with central

government on important regional issues including foreign assistance, co-decision making on use of the pre-accession instruments and many others.

This dialogue is important since over-centralisation of the decision making process in the field of development is equally dangerous as too intensive decentralisation. The reason is that regional optics and horizon can differ from the nation-wide optics.

What probably has still remained is missing partnership with economic and social actors to introduce them more to the process of inter regional development and in the same time to involve regional co-operation treated as a tool for such development.

10. OPPORTUNITIES AND METHODS FOR CONSOLIDATING THE POSITION OF POLISH REGIONS IN EUROPEAN STRUCTURES

European structures, organisations and programmes are changing with regard to their methods and sphere of activities and are beginning to expand eastwards. This refers in particular to the European Union and its institutions and programmes, which are seeking active contacts and substantial co-operation with partners in the East. **The possibilities open to Polish regions to take advantage of this situation should be presented in the form of a co-ordinated plan of action.** Such a plan should be drawn up quickly so that no time is wasted, because changes and decisions important for the future are being made now. One particular opportunity for increasing Poland's say in the future of the European Union, and more specifically the influence of Polish voivodships in the structures and programmes supporting regionalism and the international co-operation of regions, lies in their willingness to talk with their Eastern partners and consider detailed proposals and demands.

The aims of such a plan should be to:

- become acquainted with the capabilities of particular organisations and programmes, so as to further develop and improve regional development policy in Poland;
- develop adequate organisational and representative structures which will consolidate Poland's position in European structures;
- test the significance of particular organisations and European programmes and assess their potential for making Polish regions equal partners on the European scene;
- become acquainted with European institutions and their mechanisms in practice, before Poland becomes a member of the European Union;
- co-operate with new member states of the Union, which may prove helpful in any assessment of these institutions and their activities;
- bridging East with West.
-

Such a plan should also include four strategic areas of activity:

- Taking an active role in existing European representative organisations and in those programmes where it is already possible to do so.
- Effectively co-ordinating internal activities e.g., by creating new structures grouping together Presidents of the Regions, Ministry of Foreign Affairs or by exploiting existing possibilities,.
- Creating an effective system of information flow between European Union institutions and Polish regions - also establishing in the future a Polish office to represent Polish regions in Brussels.
- Advising and supporting Polish regions and their organisations undertaking various activities similar to those of European institutions and organisations.
- Supporting Polish regions in preparation of developmental projects including both West and Eastern partners.

Structural and assistance funds, as part of the wider system of aims, instruments, incentives, programmes, projects and grants, are the basic means for decreasing regional disparities, developing spatial cohesion and strengthening regional co-operation - based on the example of the European Union.