



"BABEŞ-BOLYAI" UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA
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DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

European Union Cohesion Policy. Case Study Poland.

Scientific coordinator
Prof.Univ.Dr. LUŢAS Mihaela

PhD Candidate
PETCU Dumitru Cătălin

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European Union, Cohesion, Regional Development, The Cohesion Policy, Structural and Cohesion Funds, Absorption Rate, Poland, financial allocating, programming period, operating principles, strategic documents, implementation, grant.

Introduction

The European Union is one of the most prosperous and competitive integrated areas in the world, both in terms of the level of economic development and the potential for development. However, disparities in prosperity and the welfare of the Member States and their regions are a major structural weakness.

Not all the European Union's regions have the same conditions. There are differences of economic, social, historical, geographical, cultural and political nature, therefore regions do not have the same starting point, which can lead to new disparities or could increase the existing ones between EU regions.

Throughout the postwar history of the European integration, the importance of cohesion increased. But as the Union expanded, attaining economic and social cohesion has become more difficult as the supranational structure has become increasingly heterogeneous.

The Cohesion Policy has been developed to contribute to the homogenization of the European area from a socio-economic perspective, but its implementation has proven to be a complex one. Such being the case, Cohesion as policy of the EU is in a constant transformation state and it's looking for ways to increase efficiency so that the results are more numerous and have a considerable impact on the development of the Member state's regions.

The thesis entitled "*European Union Cohesion Policy. Case Study Poland*"- aims to analyze the importance and necessity of the Cohesion Policy. This analysis will reflect, on one hand, the role of the Cohesion Policy at the Community level and, on the other hand, the positive impact on the development of Poland. The case study dedicated to Poland will reveal how the implementation and the absorption of financial support from the Cohesion Policy were achieved in Poland.

The general objective of this research is to develop a comprehensive analysis of the Cohesion Policy outlining its results and demonstrating the importance and necessity of this policy for the European Union and its regions.

In order to increase research efficiency and achieve the above mentioned objective, the following **goals** were established:

- Highlighting the evolution and the role of Cohesion Policy in the economic growth of the European Union;

- Analysis of Poland situation before and after joining the European Union in terms of regional disparities and how to reduce them;
- Analyzing the main problems of the implementation of the Cohesion Policy in Poland;
- Highlighting quantitative results of the implementation of the Cohesion Policy in Poland;
- Revealing the impact of this policy in Poland.

The motivation for choosing this PhD thesis theme was firstly influenced by the attempt to identify best practices for a more effective implementation of the Cohesion Policy. I wanted to analyze a topic of interest for the current times, a controversial subject with practical consequences.

EU's Cohesion Policy is a complex policy, with many new elements that directly or indirectly affect the lives of all citizens of the EU states. It all started with the idea of better understanding this European policy and continued with the desire to justify its existence and importance for the regions and the Member States. Poland is one of the models for grants' absorption from the European Union and given Romania's difficulties with its rate of absorption, I thought it would be necessary to address the Polish model and identify possible lessons to follow.

Research methods

Developing this thesis on the research topic of my choice involves employing the main research methods specific to the Economics field and more.

Thus, among the main scientific research methods used to develop this paper, are: the **comparison** method which was mainly used to highlight the differences between the socio-economic development of regions and states in Central and Eastern Europe, that joined the European Union since 2004 and to present the position of Poland's regions; the **historical** method, which was used to capture the evolution of the Cohesion Policy, and the **descriptive** method used in the presentation of the programming periods of the Cohesion Policy in Poland.

The **deduction and induction** methods made it possible to argue the necessity of the policy and the positive role it had in Poland. Starting from real examples, from the results, I was able to extrapolate arguments in favor of the Cohesion Policy. Also, based on general

information about different results in Poland or in the European Union and by having employed the deductive method I managed to find arguments that justify the Cohesion Policy.

The **analysis** method was used to examine various aspects of cohesion as a policy of the EU, respectively the implementation of this policy in a member state, Poland.

Research limits

Due to the complexity of this subject and the fact that it is still an on-going process, the appearance of **research limits** is inevitable.

Some information about the Cohesion Policy is not available as it has not been centralized yet, such as the results for the 2007-2013 programming period, and other information is unavailable or difficult to access. To overcome some of these barriers I got in touch with the representatives of the Commission and the DG Regio and also the Polish Ministry of Infrastructure and Development. As a result of this correspondence I managed to enrich my research by integrating less accessible data.

Another limitation came as a result of the fame and popularity of this policy which, after 2007, became a subject of interest, thus making it almost impossible to include all the literature and all the official documents addressing various issues of Policy Cohesion. The improvement of the monitoring and the assessment of the policy's implementation process and its results lead to the constant emergence of information and data, relevant in the analysis of the Cohesion Policy; however, this limits the objectivity of those researching this policy.

The structure of the thesis can be divided into two main sections. The first section is dedicated to EU Cohesion Policy and the second deals with implementation in Poland.

In these sections we will try to answer some **basic questions** regarding the Cohesion Policy such as: What is the Cohesion policy? Is this policy necessary? What are the results of the Cohesion Policy? How did Poland have an absorption rate this high? Is Poland a model of financial support absorption through the Cohesion Policy?

The current state of knowledge in the field, both nationally and internationally

The attention towards analyzing various aspects of the Cohesion Policy after the year 2000 increased especially when the 7 years programming periods were put in place and particularly in the context of the efforts to increase the policy's efficiency and the EU's expansion to the East.

On what the international literature on cohesion is concerned, there are two movements: one that accompanies the cohesion reports and the Commission's point of view, highlighting the benefits of this policy and another, which criticizes the Cohesion Policy and doubts its effectiveness.

Some authors that argue in favor of the Cohesion Policy are Iain Begg, Dirk Ahner, former General Director at DG Regio, David Allen, John Bachtler, Grzegorz Gorzelak, Claire Dheret, etc

The international literature has also its critical writers on the subject of the Cohesion Policy, such as Boldrin and Canova, Midelfart, Overman, Tarschys, Sapir, etc. They claim the disparities were maintained and even increased, considering the inaccurate macroeconomic models.

Much information can be found on the EU web page. The Transparency Policy and the Commission's desire to inform and raise awareness determine the existence of many data on the official websites of the Commission or the Directorate for the Cohesion Policy, although the way in which this information is structured could be improved.

The cohesion reports represented the starting point in analyzing the performance of the Cohesion Policy. This is the Commission's official point of view that stays at the basis of the the application for financial allocations from the EU's budget towards the Cohesion Policy. Moreover, this is the starting point for the reforms but also the criticism of this policy.

On what the national literature is concerned, the Cohesion Policy has become a subject of interest - as the integration to the European Union approached. This has become a current subject, especially after the accession, when Romania also became a beneficiary of this policy.

Most studies and analysis were performed by specialists such as: Gabriela Carmen Pascariu, Luminița Constantin, Gabriela Drăgan, Ionica Delia, Pascariu Gabriel, Bal Ana, Luța Mihaela, Jora Octavian, Topan Vladimir. Another important role in developing a national literature on the matter of cohesion and its characteristics was held by the European Institute of Romania, through their studies.

Thesis summary

Chapter I. Conceptual Approach

The first chapter aims to bring arguments to demonstrate hypothesis regarding the need and results of EU Cohesion Policy. Throughout this chapter presents ample evidence in favor of Cohesion Policy but have been analyzed also the main criticism of this policy.

Cohesion is a concept introduced in the EU without a precise definition. The first report dedicated to the implementation of the Cohesion Policy in 1996 has provided the most explicit version of the definition of this concept, given by the European Union. In this report, the concept of cohesion is linked to society patterns from the member States. The focus is on the internal values of solidarity and mutual support in order to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens and access to services of general interest and protection.

Strengthening economic and social cohesion by reducing the disparities between regions is an important objective of the European Union. The Single European Act is the one to introduce, through Title V, the concept of economic and social cohesion in the EU Treaties.

The Maastricht Treaty recognized and formalized the significance and importance of the cohesion for the European Communities. Establishing cohesion as a horizontal objective was not enough to achieve it, as the creation of a policy to put it into practice was also necessary.

Because the European Union is characterized by a high territorial diversity, the Lisbon Treaty introduced the third dimension of cohesion, the territorial dimension. According to the European Commission, the aim of territorial cohesion is to ensure that EU citizens are able to maximize the potential of the areas they live in.

The Commission summarizes the concept of economic, social and territorial cohesion associating it with reducing disparities between regions and creating an attractive economic space for both investment and living.

The political vision that led to the emergence of the Cohesion Policy was based on the belief that no community can maintain itself, nor can make sense for the people who belong to it, as long as some have very low living standards and have reasons to doubt the common will of helping each Member State improve the living conditions of its citizens. As a result, the general consensus was that a strong and sustainable Community needs policies that improve

the functioning of the internal market, but also policies that, when applied allow everyone to benefit from the European integration.

Although it is one of the main policies and benefits of consistent financial allocations along with the Agricultural Policy, the Cohesion Policy still does not have a clear and universally accepted definition. Defining it is quite difficult to achieve due to its complexity and its implementation, therefore the Cohesion Policy has more definitions, found in both the specialized literature and the official EU documents.

Analyzing the definitions given by the specific literature and the official documents combined with the mission and the implementation framework of this policy, I believe that an appropriate definition of the concept of Cohesion Policy would be that the policy is complex, has ambitious goals, and it is implemented by a partnership between regions and Member States on the one hand and European institutions on the other hand; it is a policy that has two important dimensions: the economic dimension aimed at promoting and supporting the competitiveness of the regions and the European Union as a global player and, a social one, related to European solidarity and concerned about reducing disparities between European regions and achieving a harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of the European Union and its regions.

The Cohesion Policy has known many changes over the programming periods but two important features were relatively constant, namely the financing system and the key principles.

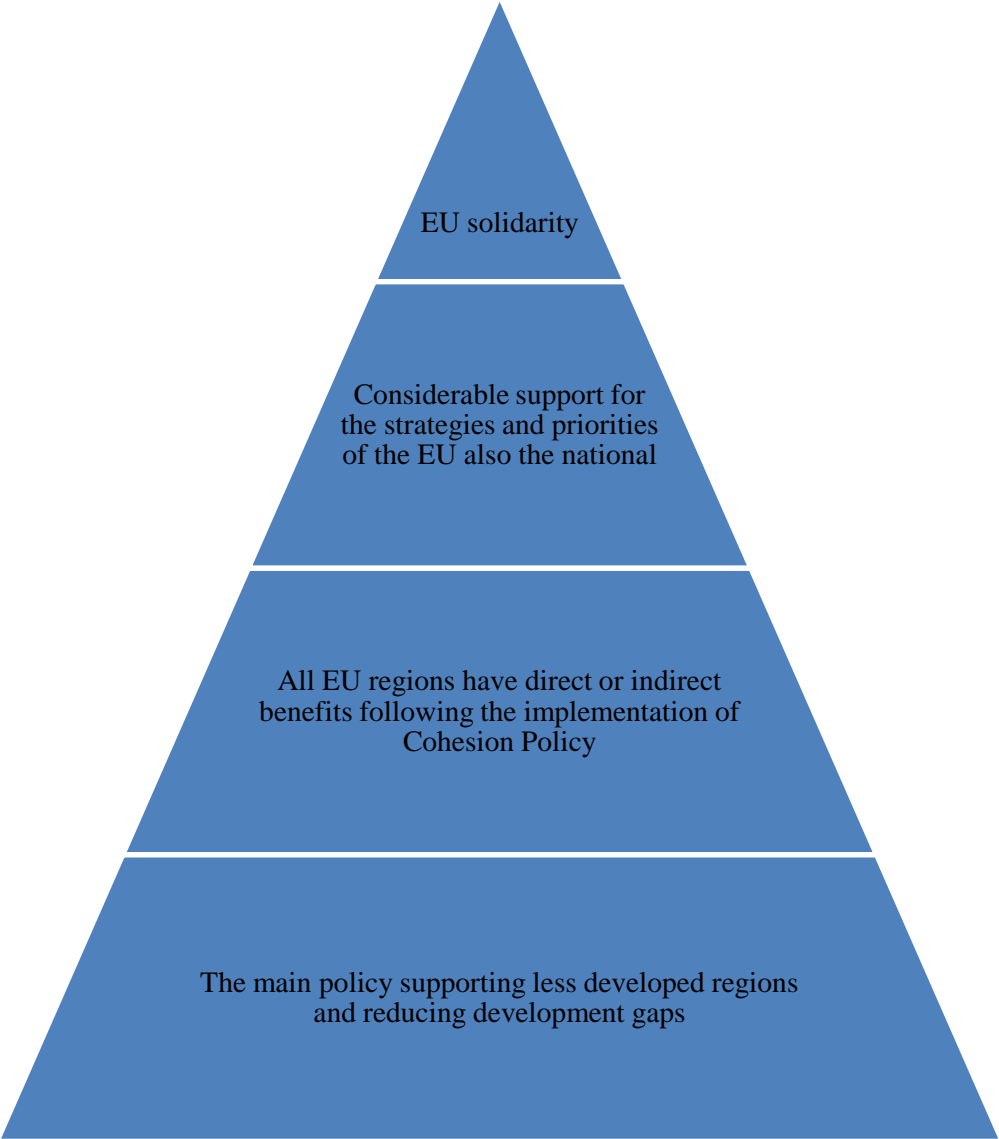
Since the beginning, the Cohesion Policy has been under pressure to legitimate and to justify the consistent amounts allocated to its budget.

The Cohesion Policy is one of the most controversial European policies. Related disputes follow two directions. One is related to its existence and its necessity, and the other, although it acknowledges the necessity, is related to its implementation and efficiency. An additional challenge results from the global context where climate change, economic crisis and the challenges of globalization put pressure on the European Union, stressing the need for results obtained in the most efficient way.

The Cohesion Policy is a perfectible policy, which is constantly improved by the efforts of the EU and at a national and regional level. As long as there will be significant disparities in the Union, I believe that, on the one hand the Cohesion Policy will be needed, but on the other hand the existence of a welfare and development gap is the largest and most justified criticism of the Cohesion Policy, although the Cohesion Policy should not be solely

responsible for reducing regional gaps and its results must always be considered after taking into account various factors.

Analyzing the criticism and the results, as well as the opinions and the arguments of several European policy specialists and officials of Community institutions, I believe that this policy is undoubtedly necessary and important for the European regions especially the less developed ones. I think the justification for this policy must be based on its results. They show, on one hand that the Cohesion Policy is needed because it produced important effects but on the other hand the results can indicate the directions towards the improvement of this policy. I made a summary of the main arguments in favor of this policy, synthesized in the figure below.



The results represent the backbone of justification and demonstrate the importance of the Cohesion Policy. They must be, however, correlated with other arguments such as the need for a policy to mitigate the negative effects of integration, the need to strengthen the links between the rich regions and those lagging behind and the maximization of spillover effects across borders; therefore, there is a need for a European policy which has both economic characteristics, mainly represented by financial support, and social characteristics, reflected especially in the different measures addressed to human resources.

Based on the analyzed literature and paying special attention to the framework and the way the Cohesion Policy is implemented I have made several proposals towards the improvement of the policy.

For example: Proposal 1: The Cohesion Policy should focus on a limited number of strategic objectives and priority themes. I believe that in accordance with the role and the aims of this policy only two strategic objectives should exist: an objective which contains the regions that have a GDP/capita below 80% of the Community average so that this objective includes underdeveloped regions and the transitional regions, and another objective which would have an allocation of up to 75% of the Cohesion Policy's budget and a second goal to support developed regions with a GDP of over 80%. Priority themes should focus on the needs of the regions according to the two strategic objectives. For the less developed regions the priority themes should be aimed specifically at the human capital and then the infrastructure (transport, environment, social, etc.) and support for SMEs. For the more advanced regions funds should primarily support research, innovation and technological infrastructure. Through the spillover mechanisms these gains from more developed regions will be transferred in less developed regions but only if there will be sufficient basic conditions to achieve these transfers.

Chapter II. The accession Poland to the European Union

The second chapter begins with analyzing the situation Poland before accession. I surprised the key reforms made in Poland in the period 1990-2003, in preparation for joining the European Union.

Poland was the largest state which acceded in 2004 both in terms of country area and population. The economic structure, large population, considerable area, its position at the Union's border, and the proximity to economically developed states like Germany, were a number of factors that customized Poland's situation in terms of integration, and implementation of the Cohesion Policy. Poland had, in the two analyzed programming periods, 2000-2006 and 2007-2013, the largest financial allocations of the new Member States and in 2007-2013 had the largest financial allocation through the Cohesion policy in the history of this policy.

After the fall of communism numerous reforms were put in place to modernize the economy and adjust administrative and institutional structures to the needs of a modern and competitive economy that can cope with European and global market challenges. Besides, increasing regional disparities prompted the central authorities to take measures towards achieving and developing a regional development policy that will help reduce gaps between regions and help increase economic and social development of the regions.

In my opinion, that administrative-territorial reform was the most significant progress made towards the establishment of a regional development policy in the Polish preaccession period.

It should be noted that the principles of the Cohesion Policy are innovative, modern and daring, to say the least, to be implemented in the New Member States of the Central and Eastern Europe, as these have customs, traditions, economic, social, cultural and political rules, etc. different from the Western European countries. For this reason it is sometimes difficult to implement them.

I believe however that the principles governing the European Union belong to the proper conduct of modern and balanced societies and certainly had a major contribution to the changes and the modernization of Poland's society and economy and also of the other New Member States.

Both within the government and public institutions and at the legislative level, Poland was not ready upon accession to effectively implement Community policies and to fully and properly absorb EU financial support. In this respect, in post-integration Poland, there was an evolution trend both in institutions and civil society, and one of the catalysts for this development was the Cohesion Policy.

Poland's market oriented economy that started after the 1990's not only maintained the existing regional disparities, but paved the way for other factors generating new inequalities. Thus, there has been a growing polarization of the regional system, especially along two dimensions: the underdeveloped Eastern regions versus the Western regions with more advanced economic base and, urban versus rural, with the biggest discrepancies between the rural and the metropolitan areas.

The poorest regions of Poland are indeed among the poorest regions in the EU-25, with a GDP/capita between 31-35% of the Community average. It is notable that these regions are poorer than the poorest regions in Portugal, Spain or Greece at their accession to the Union.

The situation of Poland and its regions has improved since its EU accession. Before joining in 2004 Poland stood at a Central and Eastern Europe level among the least developed countries. However, after accession, both the Community financial support and the national measures and efforts have contributed to a significant improvement in Poland's situation compared to both EU average and the more developed states of the region. The progress of Poland was not unitary at the level of all its regions. All regions converged towards the EU average, but at different rates which emphasized the existing interregional differences.

Chapter III. Financing Poland through Cohesion Policy for the period 2004-2013

The third chapter examined the management and implementation of cohesion policy in Poland during the two programming periods analyzed (2000-2006, 2007-2013) and the most important results.

With the accession, Poland became eligible to receive Community financial assistance. The most important financial support from the European Union was represented by the Cohesion Policy grants.

In the early years as a member, Poland has focused on fructifying the benefits of the European integration by trying to limit the costs resulting from the accession and made efforts to adapt to the new member state status. The full use of the financial assistance through the Cohesion Policy was prioritized, an approach that was supported by the belief that Poland can reduce the gaps to economic and social developing countries through funding received from the European Union.

The most important problems in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy were related to the administrative system and the malfunctioning of central or regional institutions responsible for managing the absorption of EU funding grants.

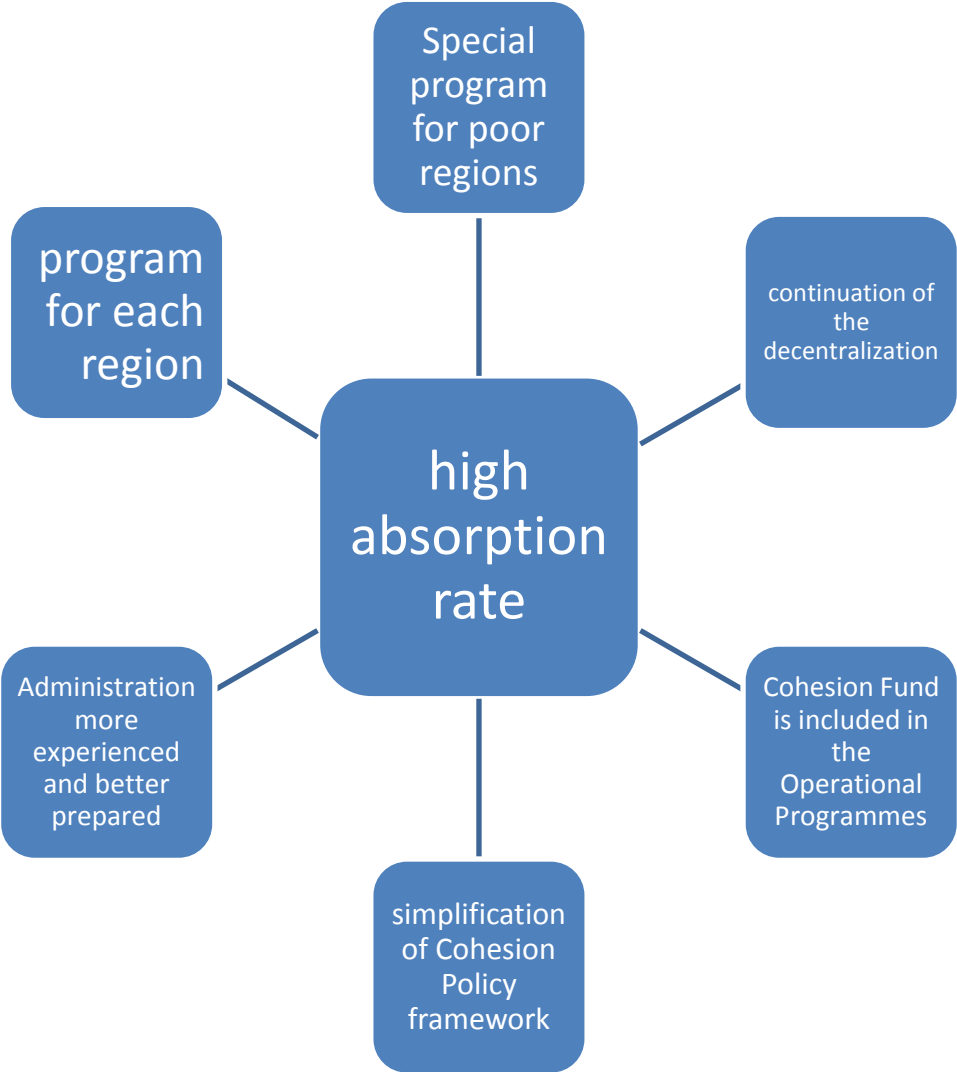
The problems encountered by Poland in this first programming period are not unusual or unprecedented. Each country faces difficulties when first starts to use Community financial assistance. Although it took it about 5 years to get used to the requirements and the implementation issues of the European Union policies and legislation, Poland has not been prepared from the beginning for the proper implementation of the Cohesion Policy but managed to learn along the way, took measures and started seeing results towards the end of the first programming period.

The fact that Poland has managed to adapt and adjust its legislation and administration in order to succeed in using grant funding is emphasized by the end of the implementation period in 2010, when Poland had an absorption rate of about 98.5%, although in early 2006 had paid to its beneficiaries only 11% of the allocated amount.

The implementation of projects financed by the Cohesion Policy by different beneficiaries determined the obtaining of significant results in all the key areas of investment which contributed to the progress of Poland.

In the 2007-2013 programming period, Poland has been allocated about 67.3 billion euros representing approximately 20% of the total budget of the Cohesion Policy. Poland received the most substantial financial allocation to a Member State within a programming period in the history of Community policies. Although it had a significant allocation Poland managed to absorb by the end of 2014 about 85.3% of the amount allocated and has the ability to absorb the entire financial package until the end of the implementation period.

To be able to absorb substantial amounts of the financial package, but also to improve the Cohesion Policy implementation and achieve better results, the Polish authorities have made significant changes in the implementation of the policy framework for the 2007-2013 time frame. The most important changes are summarized in the chart below.



Focusing on spending the financing offered by the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds without a clear vision and without clearly defined goals compared to the needs of the regions, the lack of well shaped development strategies for the lagging regions and taking measures to remove the obstacles to the economic development of the regions, resulted in an increase of inter-regional disparities.

In accordance with the analysis and studies for the programming period 2007-2013 I believe that the problems in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy in Poland can be divided into two categories: problems related to the absorption of the financial support from the Cohesion Policy and issues related to the manner of implementation and to the results of this policy.

Chapter IV. Indicators of Cohesion Policy in Poland for the period 2004-2013

Chapter four is dedicated to the analysis of the main outcomes and impacts of Cohesion Policy implementation in Poland for the period 2004-2013 by using a set of socio-economic indicators.

In the analysis of the Cohesion Policy in Poland, it was more suitable to follow a set of indicators and to make correlations between the dynamics of these indicators, the results and financial support given to Poland by this policy through its financial instruments. The evolution and dynamics of certain indicators can illustrate how the Cohesion Policy has influenced the development of Poland or of certain regions.

On what the results and impact of the Cohesion Policy are concerned, most of the research conducted in both the EU institutions and Poland's authorities consider them as positive.

The results of several simulations carried out by the Commission point out that many of the expected benefits of the expenditures under the Cohesion Policy last for several years due to strengthening competitiveness of the economies that receive support and continue after the investment programs were completed.

EU, through its Cohesion Policy has enabled consistent access to the funds that Poland used to modernize its economy and to develop their human resources. These funds have increased Poland's competitiveness on international markets, which has an exceptional significance in both European and global perspectives.

Projects financed by the Cohesion Policy in the 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 programming periods have achieved important results in developing and modernizing Poland demonstrating the positive impact of this policy on the countries and regions it supports.

Poland has faced numerous problems in the Cohesion Policy implementation in both 2004-2006 and in the 2007-2013 programming period. However, Poland has managed to overcome most of the difficulties and to absorb almost all funding provided by this policy. Succeeding to achieve high rates of absorption was necessary to implement numerous measures and reforms.

To streamline the implementation of the Cohesion Policy and especially to increase absorption, Poland has taken numerous measures, especially because a high absorption rate was considered essential to demonstrating the good integration of Poland but was regarded at the same time as the quickest way to significantly reduce, in a short time period, the gaps between the regions of Poland and those from the developed Member States.

Because Poland got an exceptional absorption rate in both programming periods, I believe that the changes made by Poland could be considered best practices to be followed by other Member States in search of a high absorption rate. Of course there is no generally valid recipe for successfully absorbing the Cohesion Policy funding, but surely there are good practice lessons that Poland offers. Given its high absorption rate, Poland can be a model for Member States with low absorption.

Conclusions

This paper is focused on the issue of cohesion in the European Union. A part of this paper deals with the the Cohesion Policy as a policy of the EU and the case study was dedicated to the implementation of this European policy in Poland.

The establishment of the European Communities in 1957 represented a fundamental step towards ensuring the peace and well-being of European citizens. The Treaty of Rome stated the desire and vision that these communities developed in a harmonious and balanced way and strived to reduce disparities between the regions of the Member States.

This vision is the idea underlying the concept of cohesion. The Single European Act of 1986 formally introduced the concept of economic and social cohesion. The Iberian expansion of the European Communities in 1986 correlated with the conceptualization of cohesion will determine in 1987-1989 the achievement of a profound reform of the regional development policy. The consequence of this reform is the emergence of the Cohesion Policy at a Community level.

Another milestone in the development of cohesion and its dedicated policy is the Treaty of Maastricht. It substantiates cohesion in the European Union, both as a horizontal objective to be included in all Community policies and a Cohesion Policy. This is the European Union's main instrument for achieving the economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Due to the complexity, its different way of implementation, the raised issues and also thanks to its ambitious targets and goals, the Cohesion Policy has no clear, specific and unanimous definition. Both the literature and the official documents give us numerous definitions that address different aspects of the Cohesion Policy. Based on the analyzed literature I attempted to formulate an adequate and more complete definition of the Cohesion Policy.

High expectations and the implementation issues have given rise to criticism of this policy. Generally, the arguments against the Cohesion Policy followed two directions; it was the existence and the necessity for the policy that has been criticized or the outcomes, efficiency and the implementation of this policy.

The Cohesion Policy evolved during the programming periods, when reforms and transformations that support its need to accommodate both existing regions and the enlargement process occurred. At the same time reforms had to contribute to the effectiveness of this policy and deliver more results with a high impact on regional development.

Projects implemented through the Cohesion Policy had many results over the programming periods. They helped improve the socio-economic development of regions which have benefited from the support of that policy. The most important effects were obtained among others in infrastructure, environment and human resources.

Both the results and other indirect benefits that affect all EU regions constitute irrefutable arguments that demonstrate the importance and need for the Cohesion Policy. In my opinion, this policy has a key role in developing the regions and the Member States, in ensuring their competitiveness and contributing to the Europeanization process and the deepening of the European integration, actively participating in maintaining peace and stability in Europe. The positive role of this policy for the regions and the European Union as a whole is, in my opinion, considerable. But after analyzing the way of implementation, the official documents and the literature I consider that the efficiency of the Cohesion Policy can be improved so that the impact on regional development and the cohesion objective would get closer to being achieved.

Poland is one of the former communist states, located in the Central Europe, which joined the European Union in 2004. This, on one hand, led to imposing reforms and adapting to EU's requirements but on the other hand Poland's integration opened important development opportunities.

After the fall of communism, Poland started its transition to a market economy and democracy. This was made possible by numerous reforms designed to change and modernize the old economic, social or administrative structures. A strong push towards modernization is represented by Poland's desire and need for integration of into the European Union. In 2004 Poland joins the European Union, along with 9 other European countries. The economic situation at the accession moment placed Poland among the Member States with the lowest levels of development. Poland's accession brought both obligations and benefits. The most important benefits were those represented by the possibility of accessing grants from the Cohesion Policy.

The Cohesion Policy's implementation in Poland generated hope on the one hand by pointing out the beneficial impacts on the economic development and on the other hand fear among the experts regarding the many shortcomings in the system.

During the first years after its accession Poland has encountered significant difficulties in absorbing the financial allocation therefore in early 2006 the absorption rate was low. Most problems have resulted from the lack of experience in implementing European policies as a member, centralization, bureaucracy, cumbersome and inefficient administration, outdated

institutional structures, the lack of well-trained people, and the failure to provide co-financing or a malfunctioning, incomplete or overregulated framework for the implementation of the Cohesion Policy.

But management and management authorities have constantly adapted the implementation process and resolute and consistent measures were taken towards the improvement of the system distributing the financial support through the Cohesion Policy. As a result the absorption rate began to rise significantly in 2006 and Poland managed to absorb 98.5% of the funding for the programming period 2000-2006.

The results of the projects financed by this policy have helped modernize the economy and reduce the development gap between Poland and the more developed states of the European Union. To demonstrate the positive role of the Cohesion Policy in Poland we summarized the main results obtained by the projects' of this policy and made an analysis of the economic and social indicators' groups which showed the impact of the Cohesion Policy on Poland's economy. Both nationally and regionally Poland reduced the development gap to the more developed states of the European Union. But progress was made by generating differentiated convergence with the European average and divergence between regions in Poland.

Poland's situation compared to the other Central and Eastern Europe countries that joined the European Union, has significantly improved, and the Cohesion Policy had an important role in this regard.

The impact of this policy on Poland's development was manifested in two main ways. On one hand, are the substantial amounts of funding that sometimes filled or refilled national funding and on the other hand are the results of projects co-financed by the Cohesion Policy. These results contributed either directly to the development of the Polish economy by carrying out certain activities, by proposing and reaching certain indicators, targets and absorption of financial resources but also indirectly through the engagement and mobilization of additional resources through projects development or the effects continuing after completion.

Poland achieved exceptional absorption rates in both programming periods. I considered that the fundamental factor that contributed to the success of absorption was particularly represented by the determination and consistency of the Polish authorities to absorb as much of the financial allocation and their high interest in grants both from the private and public beneficiaries. Financial support was seen as a key component to upgrading

the Polish economy and reducing the gaps to the more developed countries in the European Union.

Due to Poland's way of resolving the problems hindering the access to financial allocations from the Cohesion Policy and to obtaining an appreciable absorption rate represents, in my opinion the reason why Poland should be seen as an example of good practice, a model in terms absorption grants.

A sound approach on the implementation of the Cohesion Policy should be focused on the impact and results of the projects financed so that the central goals of reducing development disparities and increasing regional competitiveness are met. Orientation towards results has a high impact on the development of an economy even if the absorption is not complete. But the first step towards an efficient implementation of the Cohesion Policy, which maximizes the impact and results, is the very achievement of a high absorption of financial allocation. This is particularly important because it means that a Member State has succeeded in learning the operating mechanisms and management of the Cohesion Policy which is a precondition to effectively implement this policy. Poland has successfully managed to absorb financial support through the Cohesion Policy in the both analyzed periods.

I believe that Poland, compared to the situation of New Member States and its socio-economic domestic conditions, and managed a high absorption is a role model, but in relation to the objectives of the Cohesion Policy and EU and Poland's development strategies, I consider that Poland should correlate its absorption related measures with the efforts to maximize the results and the impact of projects financed by the Cohesion Policy.

Throughout this paper we analyzed two interrelated assumptions: The necessity and importance of the Cohesion Policy and Poland's possible model for the absorption of financial assistance through the Cohesion Policy.

After analyzing the literature, official documents, and based on the drawn comparisons, it can be concluded that:

The Cohesion Policy produces results in the areas where it is implemented. The size of these results is variable and depends mainly on the management of the Cohesion Policy in the Member States.

The Cohesion Policy supports its necessity and importance, especially through its results. In my opinion, at the basis of this policy should be placed the problems it is trying to solve, namely reducing disparities and increasing the competitiveness of the EU and the member areas. The nature and the extent of the regional disparities combined with the

Cohesion Policy's mission to support the achievement of the objective of cohesion are essential to justifying this policy.

The fact that it is necessary and that it has results is undeniable but the Cohesion Policy should continue its efforts to streamline its implementation, especially the maximization of results and impacts on the development of EU regions.

Poland exemplifies both the need and the outcomes of the Cohesion Policy. The main socio-economic indicators of this state have improved after joining the European Union. The Cohesion Policy implementation has highlighted the difficulties a new Member State in the Central and Eastern Europe has in managing this policy. The measures to increase the efficiency of its implementation and achieve nearly complete absorption rates are strong arguments to consider Poland a model in absorbing the Cohesion Policy funding.

Author Contributions:

- Addressing cohesion as both an objective and a policy.
- Proposing a comprehensive and appropriate definition of the Cohesion Policy.
- Presentating and analysing the main criticisms of the Cohesion Policy.
- Synthesizing the most important results of this policy at the EU level.
- Revealing the importance of Cohesion Policy efficiency by proposing possible solutions in this regard.
- A comparative presentation of the development regions and states in the Central and Eastern Europe that joined the European Union since 2004.
- Investigating and analyzing the measures that helped Poland get high absorption rates.
- Collecting and synthesizing the main results of the projects co-financed by the Cohesion Policy in Poland.
- Analyzing the impact of the Cohesion Policy on Poland's development

This paper addressed the Cohesion Policy arguing the need and importance of this policy both in terms of its implementation and the results of the European Union and the positive role of this policy as shown by the case study dedicated to Poland.

Arguments in favor of this policy and their criticism are increasing in number as new data appear regarding the results and the issues addressed by the Cohesion Policy. This makes it impossible to create a full and adequate picture both favorable to the Cohesion Policy and to the opinions contradicting this policy. Therefore the findings and the results of this thesis can be improved in a future research.

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