

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE REGIONAL POLICY AND COORDINATION OF STRUCTURAL INSTRUMENTS BEFORE AND AFTER ROMANIA'S ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Gabriela MOTOI, PhD
Faculty of Social Sciences,
University of Craiova (Romania)

Mihaela BĂRBIERU, Researcher III, PhD,
„C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor“
Social and Humanistic Research Institute from Craiova,
Romanian Academy

Abstract: *After 1990, on the political and economic scene of Romania took place a series of transformations under European mark, transformations that led to the development of an environment with specific rules and principles of competition and free market mechanisms. As a natural evolution process, it appeared and was developed a new concept related to the regional development policies, a concept that was among the essential requirements of European integration. In Romania, the regional development policy has been early shaped, since 1996, and the chapter of the Acquis on this topic was opened in 2002. There are two types of tools used by the European Union to stimulate and accelerate the process of regional reform. First, the EU has substantial financial instruments to help and facilitate the tasks of national actors on the formulation of the policy agenda in accordance with the requirements of EU reform, the decision-making process and also the implementation. The financial support is achieved through the allocation of pre-accession funds. Secondly, the European Union has also other tools at its disposal for determining the Member States: this is namely the monitoring procedure through the annual reports.*

This study aims to present the most important issues of regional policy in Romania from two perspectives: the pre-accession period – in which our approach will analyse the legislation and institutional framework for the development and implementation of programming documents, and the post-accession period (after 2007) – in which we will present the most important progresses that Romania has made on regional policy and coordinating of structural instruments.

In the EU economy, a complex system dependent on the proper functioning in all its levels, policies, strategies, plans and programmes of development, the regional development policy directly influences directing financial resources at EU and at national level on the one hand, and generating macroeconomic effects on medium and long term, on the other hand. Although in Romania the economic gaps have been reduced, following the forced industrialisation and urbanisation of the communist period, since 1990, with the transition to the market economy, the regional disparities have resurfaced. The numerous economic and social analyses, carried out during this period, highlighted the great differences that appeared between the most developed region of Romania and the least developed one or between the regions of the western half of the country, having a positive economic evolution, and those of the less developed eastern part. So, for reducing the territorial disparities and balancing the socio-economic factor, the objectives of the regional policies for the pre-accession period were characterised by the enabling of the structural and sectorial adjustments, by supporting the processes of economic restructuring and relaunching, by rebuilding and stimulating the competitive capacity of the regions, as well as by supporting the European integration processes¹.

Until 1998, when the policy of regional development was officially introduced, Romania had not succeeded in very clearly designing such a policy, despite the fact that all the governments had this concern and had acted in this sense through various macro-economic and sector strategies. Measures of social security, with positive effects, which aimed at providing medical services, education, veterinary and plant health assistance in isolated zones, as well as compensation for the hard working conditions through granting salary increase for those living in isolation in zones like Danube Delta, Apuseni mountains etc., with the aim of determining the population to settle in these areas, had been recorded since the years 1993-1994².

Adopting reforms in the transition to a functioning market economy³, and the new framework created prerequisites for joining the EU have made regional development policy clear and easy to become a necessity for Romania, and year 1995, at the same time with working out the strategy of preparing the accession to EU should be the moment of admitting

¹ Doru Cîrnu, Particularități ale dezvoltării regionale și cauze specifice, in „Analele Universității Constantin Brâncuși din Târgu Jiu, Seria Economie“, Issue 3/2010, pp. 76-77.

² For more details, see Analiza politicilor regionale, p. 46, [online], available to: http://www.apubb.ro/wpcontent/uploads/2011/02/Politici_regionale_Suport_de_curs.pdf

³ Gheorghe Părvu, Integrarea economică, Craiova: Sitech, 2007, pp. 158-160

that the problem of regions represents an important element for the coherence of the accession strategy⁴.

Thus, two chapters were focused on issues of the strategy of regional development: *Development Strategy counties and Bucharest*, for the years 1999 and 2004, and *Strategy for Romania's accession to the EU territorial planning, town planning and public works*⁵. Starting from 1998, for Romania there were 6 main objectives concerning regional policy: promoting the development and structural adjustment of the poorly developed areas, carrying out the professional retraining of the regions and zones, contributions to the development of rural zones, assisting the poorly populated regions, fighting the long term unemployment and enabling the professional integration of the young people⁶.

In December 2001, the Government of Romania sent to the European Commission's „Position Paper“ for Chapter 21 regarding the Regional Policy and the Coordination of Structural Instruments. Romania declared that it acceded to the whole Acquis of the community, in force since 31 December 2000 intending to take the necessary measures to effectively implement it until the date of accession. Romania did not request transition periods or derogations⁷. Based on this document, Chapter 21 was opened to negotiations on 21st of March 2002 and the negotiations were closed in 2004⁸.

Through carrying on the PHARE Programme⁹, the first analyses were made concerning 1996) in which the hierarchies of the counties were established and the map of regional and sectorial disparities was carried out. The first report (March 1996), established a hierarchy of the counties on the basis of the *Global index of development*, calculated through the method of aggregation a number of 17 indicators, grouped in 4 categories (economy, infrastructure, demographics and standard of family life), a map of regional disparities being this elaborated. The spatial localisation of poverty and underdevelopment was obvious in two main areas of the country: north-east and south¹⁰. The second report (July 1996) established two hierarchies of the counties, arranged on the basis of the *Global Index of Development* named DEVELOP, and studied the analysis on the tendencies concerning the evolution of the sectorial disparities. The analyses were made for the period 1990-1994,

⁴ Luminița Daniela Constantin, *Strategia și politica regională în România*, in „Administrație și management public“, Issue 2/2004, p. 29.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Cezar Avram, Roxana Radu, Laura Gaicu, *Uniunea Europeană. Trecut și prezent*, Craiova: Universitaria, 2006, pp. 205-206.

⁷ For details, see Marcela Cristina Hurjui, *Cadrul legislativ al politicii regionale în România*, in 'Integrarea României în Uniunea Europeană. Oportunități și provocări', vol. II, p. 197, [online] available at: http://store.ectap.ro/suplimente/simpozion_ager_2007_vol2_ro.pdf

⁸ The official website of the Ministry of External Affairs, <https://www.mae.ro/node/1543>

⁹ Elaborated by European Commission and Romanian Government.

¹⁰ For details, see *Politica de dezvoltare regională a României. Carta Verde*, pp. 7-9, [online] available at: http://audieri.advocacy.ro/sites/audieri.advocacy.ro/files/files/pagini-audiere/documente_conexe/2012-11/1._carta_verde_a_dezvoltarii_regionale_raport_ro.pdf

12 indicators were used grouped in 5 categories (economy, infrastructure, household resources, socio-demographics, urbanisation) and the conclusions of the first report were confirmed, namely that the main problems of the regional development were present in the north-east and the south of the country, while the west and the center of the country remain the most developed zones¹¹.

PHARE has prepared a set of guidelines that were found in „*Green Card. The Regional Development Policy in Romania*“¹². The document, drafted in 1997, proposed a specific model approach to regional development and outlined the principles, objectives, instruments and institutions necessary to promote policies in this area¹³. It was the first document in this regard to Romania¹³ and was aimed at preparing the country for EU integration and to become eligible to grant aid from the Structural Funds, of disparities between different regions and integrating public sector to achieve a higher level of development of the regions¹⁴.

During the following two years (1997-1998), the corresponding Agencies for Regional Development were set up. Without referring to the steps of auctions or reallocations, PHARE 1998 on the basis of its two components, component for Industrial Restructuring and Human Resources Development Component Rural Development funded the 8 Development Regions of Romania's total 457 projects and 19,756,295 EUR (approved budget)¹⁵.

In Romania, the institutional and legal framework for development of regional policies has been set from the need to meet EU requirements. In the accession negotiations, harmonising national legislation with the EU Acquis was essential. The legislative debuted in 1998¹⁶ with Law no. 151 on regional development in Romania which established institutional framework, objectives, competencies and specific tools necessary to promote regional development policy, with subsequent amendments¹⁷.

¹¹ For details, see *Politica de dezvoltare regională a României. Carta Verde*, pp. 7-9, [online] available at: http://audieri.advocacy.ro/sites/audieri.advocacy.ro/files/files/pagini-audiere/documente_conexe/2012-11/1._carta_verde_a_dezvoltarii_regionale_raport_ro.pdf

¹² Luminița Daniela Constantin, *Strategia și politica regională în România*, in 'Administrație și management public', Issue 2/2004, p. 30.

¹³ Dan Sergiu Bogoi, Ionuț Eugen Drăcea, Dan Florentin Sichigea, *Dezvoltarea regională în teoria și practica economică*, in 'Finanțe - Provocările viitorului', Year V, Issue 5/2006, p. 222; [online] available at: http://www.financejournal.ro/arhiva_detalii.php?idR=5

¹⁴ Luminița Daniela Constantin, *Strategia și politica regională în România*, in „Administrație și management public“, Issue 2/2004, p. 30.

¹⁵ For more details, see *Analiza politicilor regionale*, pp. 79-80, [online] available at: http://www.apubb.ro/wpcontent/uploads/2011/02/Politici_regionale_Suport_de_curs.pdf

¹⁶ As a result of research Romanian specificity of the PHARE programme for regional development policy, implemented in the period 1996-1998

¹⁷ Law no. 151/1998, published in Official Gazette no. 256 of 16 July 1998. The law was subsequently amended and supplemented by Emergency Ordinance no. 268/2000, which established decision-making bodies at national and regional Ordinance no. 27/2003 regarding the tacit approval procedure, by Law no. 256/2003. It was repealed by Law 315/2004

This law established the 8 regions¹⁸ that were „the design, implementation and evaluation of regional development policies and collecting specific statistical data, in accordance with EUROSTAT indicators for the secondary level territorial classification NUTS 2, existing in the European Union“¹⁹. They were composed through the voluntary cooperation of the counties, not having legal personality and administrative units, but only the result of an agreement between the county and local councils to coordinate regional development and absorption of EU funds²⁰.

By the Government E.O. no. 142/2000²¹, as amended and supplemented, the SAPARD Agency has been created for technical and financial implementation of the Instrument for Pre Special Agriculture and Rural Development. Another important step in preparing the legal framework for coordination, implementation and management of structural instruments was the adoption of Resolution no. 497/2004, as supplemented and amended, which has been established at the institutional level of the Managing and Paying Authorities and their main tasks²².

On the national level, the structure for regional development was institutionally made up of the National Council for Regional Development (NCRD)²³ and the National Agency for Regional Development (NARD)²⁴. In each region there is the *Regional Council* or *Regional Office*²⁵. In 2002, the General Directorate for Regional Development, Ministry of Development and Prognosis (MDP) replaced NARD. In 2003 appeared a new update: the activity in the field of prognosis was taken over by the National Commission of Prognosis, regional development went to the Ministry of European Integration, work on the business passed into the portfolio of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce and the activities on disadvantaged areas were transferred to the Ministry of Administration and Interior. The multiple changes and transformations caused non functionalities within the efficient

¹⁸ The 8 regions are: 1) Bucharest-Ilfov region (with residence in Bucharest); 2) North West (with residence in Cluj-Napoca); 3) West Region (residing in Timișoara); 4) The South-West Oltenia (with residence in Craiova); 5) South Muntenia (with residence in Calarasi); 6) South East (with residence in Braila); 7) North East (residing in Piatra Neamt); 8) Central Switzerland (with residence in Alba-Iulia).

¹⁹ Benonica Vasilescu, Organizarea administrativ-teritorială și evoluția legislației în domeniul administrației publice locale, in 'Buletin de informare legislativă', Issue 4/2013, p. 12.

²⁰ Mihaela Bărbieru, With or Without Regionalization? Realities, Challenges and Prospects in a European Union of the Regions, in 'Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques', Issue 47/2015, p. 79

²¹ Published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 471 of 28 September 2000, approved with amendments by Law no. 309/2001. In 2006 it was replaced by the Emergency Ordinance no. 13/2006 on the establishment, organisation and functioning of the Paying Agency for Rural Development and Fisheries, by reorganising the SAPARD Agency.

²² Published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 346 of 20 April 2004.

²³ The deliberative body of coordination and promotion of national regional development policy.

²⁴ Executive body of the national council.

²⁵ Luminița Daniela Constantin, Strategia și politica regională în România, in „Administrație și management public“, Issue 2/2004, p. 30.

functioning of the institutional system for the regional development, a reason why Romania has often been criticized in community forums²⁶.

Starting in 1999, the National Plan for Development (NPD) was elaborated for the periods 2000-2002, 2002-2005 and 2004-2006. NDP was conducted in partnership with institutions, regional agencies, ministries and other governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations that had contributed to regional development. It was an instrument of coordination, monitoring and evaluation of implementation of priority development objectives for the 8 regions of Romania. The NDP was founded Romania's access to structural funds allocated in the pre-accession and accession, thus responding to the internal and external needs²⁷.

During the pre-accession period, the analysis of the way in which the financing programmes developed showed the good results in creating new jobs, in raising the exports level, in developing the infrastructure. Unfortunately, they fell short of expectations, among the identified causes being the relatively short term of implementation, the exaggerated bureaucracy, the lack of private financial resources of the beneficiaries, the lack of highly educated specialists, the non-involvement of the local authorities in attracting the possible investors, the poor advertising of the auctions for projects submitting, the fact that the country's population and the economic agents, possible investors, had a low level of knowing the importance of Romania's regional development²⁸.

The economic and social convergence, as a fundamental principle of the European Union has the aim to reduce structural disparities both between regions and also between countries, the EU intending to establish a balanced and sustainable development and promoting equality of opportunity. The regional development policy, a fundamental objective of the European Union, represents all the measures that are implemented by central government authorities for a sustainable social and economic development of under-developed regions. In order to reduce economic and social differences among the Member States, the European Union has founded two funds: the Structural Funds and Cohesion Social Fund.

The Structural Funds can be defined as financial tools set up to implement the regional policy of the European Union. They aim of the Structural Funds are to reduce regional disparities in income, wealth and opportunities.

The elements of Structural Funds are the following: the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG). The Regional development policy is a key component of the Structural Policies, which is supported

²⁶ Luminița Daniela Constantin, *Strategia și politica regională în România*, in 'Administrație și management public', Issue 2/2004, p. 30.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 30-32

²⁸ Dan Sergiu Bogoi, Ionuț Eugen Drăcea, Dan Florentin Sichigea, *Dezvoltarea regională în teoria și practica economică*, in „Finanțe - Provocările viitorului”, Year V, Issue 5/2006, p. 228; [online] available at http://www.financejournal.ro/arhiva_detalii.php?idR=5

by the following three general and fundamental principles: economic efficiency, promoting stability, increased social equity²⁹.

The Social Cohesion Fund was founded in 1993 with the main objective of increasing socio-economic cohesion among EU Member States, by supporting the economically less developed states (with a GDP lower than 90% below the Community average). This fund has been created to support trans-European networks and programs from the field of environmental protection.

The main goal of the pre-accession instruments (PHARE, ISPA, SAPARD) was „learning exercise“, to which we can add institutional strengthening and learning mechanisms required for participation in regional policies themselves and not investment or absorption rate. PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD were preparatory tools that were aimed at increasing the **absorption capacity** for structural funds.

For example, the PHARE programme in Romania had the purpose of co-financing a set of measures to contribute to the achievement of three objectives: development of activities in the productive sector, human resources and infrastructure improvements in the business sector. „The PHARE support was to be focused solely on direct measures aimed at combating unemployment and creating jobs, enhancing investment and support Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs). These measures had to be achieved through initiatives aimed at supporting innovation and technological development, ensuring qualified human resources, appropriate market requirements etc“³⁰.

The funds granted to Romania during 2000 and 2006 represented 7% of the public budget and about 2% of GDP. They began to be granted in the context of the level of readiness which was very low. For example, there were a number of problems related to: lack of harmonisation between the European financial system and the national one, between European legislation procurement and the national law

„In the *Monitoring Report Romania 2005*, the European Commission identified areas that required increased efforts by central and local authorities to prepare for accession: the legislative assessment, monitoring, management and control of financial and administrative capacity of institutional structures. A special attention was given to the real necessity of the existence of coordination between key players and regional and inter-ministerial coordination“³¹.

Generally, the concept of regional development expresses the „measures taken to boost and diversify economic activities, stimulate private sector investment and contribute to

²⁹ Dan Sergiu Bogoi, Ionuț Eugen Drăcea, Dan Florentin Sichigea, Dezvoltarea regională în teoria și practica economică, în „Finanțe - Provocările viitorului“, Year V, Issue 5/2006, p. 228; [online] available at http://www.financejournal.ro/arhiva_detalii.php?idR=5

³⁰ Ibid., p. 59

³¹ M. Costea, S. Costea, Integrarea României on Uniunea Europeană: provocări și perspective, Iasi: Institutul European, 2007, p. 193.

reducing unemployment, measures aimed at improving the welfare of the population in a certain state³².

Therefore, the regional policies represent the way in which the state works to solve the economic problems of regions.

The economic and social cohesion of the European Union has, above all, a solidarity character and focuses on three objectives: convergence; regional competitiveness and employment; European territorial cooperation. In the period 2007-2012, Romania received a total of 19.668 billion euros from 12.661 billion euros which represent funds belonging to the convergence objective, 6.552 bln. Euro being allocated through the Cohesion Fund and 0.455 bn. were allocated to the European territorial cooperation³³.

According to the information from the Table below, we may observe that during 2007 and 2013 Romania received 19,21 billions of euro, over 50% of them of regional developments programmes.

Table no 1: The amount of structural and cohesion funds in Romania

	2007-2013	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total amount of structural and cohesion funds (billions of euro)	19,21	1,28	1,85	2,51	3,03	3,26	3,51	3,77
European Regional Development Fund	8,98	0,60	0,86	1,16	1,42	1,53	1,63	1,79
Cohesion Fund	6,55	0,44	0,64	0,86	1,03	1,11	1,19	1,28
European Social Fund	3,68	0,23	0,36	0,49	0,58	0,63	0,69	0,70

Source: Ministry of Economy and Finances, Romania, 2013

Urban development have been granted with 1117.8 million (30% of total), useful for the eight areas of regional development in Romania, from that amount benefiting about 400000 inhabitants. To the development of regional transport infrastructure have been allocated from structural funds about 758.35 million EUR (20.35% of the total allocation - second only to urban development), distributed in whole interventions for the rehabilitation and upgrading of roads. Regarding healthcare infrastructure we can observe 50 health institutions rehabilitated, upgraded, equipped, the allocated funds amounting to 173.58 million euros

³² A. Gorun, I. Ghizdeanu, H. T. Gorun, Gabriela Radu, România și politici regionale, Târgu-Jiu: Academica Brâncuși, 2013, p. 26.

³³ For more details, see V. Boștinăru, Ultimii pași-absorbția fondurilor structurale și de coeziune 2007-2013, Bucharest, 2013, p. 36, [online] available at www.victorbostinaru.ro.

(ERDF allocation), which implies an average expenditure of 3.471 million EUR/ medical unit³⁴.

As we can observe, during 2007 and 2013, in the field of regional development, Romania has absorbed 14.9% of allocated funds. Regarding operational environmental programmes transport and competitiveness of the total allocation, the absorbed funds were 7.1%, 1.0% and 9.8%. On the human resources, the absorption rate was 13.4%, while that of administrative capacity building and technical assistance the rates were 2.9% and 4.6%³⁵.

The EU statistics show us that Romania has registered an average rate of absorption of 17.3%, placing us on last place, after Slovakia with 27.8% and Bulgaria - 24.0%. The highest average rate of absorption of the countries presented is found in Lithuania (48.0%) and Estonia (46.8%), but the amounts allocated to these countries are relatively small 6.8 bln. Euro and 3.4 bln. euro. Poland has a specific situation, because while the amount allocated to this country is 67.2 bln. Euro, it has reached an average rate of absorption of 39.0%. The same is true in the case of the Czech Republic allocated a sum of 26.5 bln. Euro and an average absorption rate of 26.5%. The amount allocated for Hungary is 24.9 bln. Euro and recorded an average rate of absorption of 35.3%. According to the *2011 Annual Report of the Fiscal Council*, in December 2011, the highest rate of absorption of European funds in Romania was through the Operational Programme for Regional Development - 24.95% and lowest for Transport Operational Programme - 3.06%³⁶

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³⁴ D. Antonescu, *Politica de dezvoltare regională a României în perioada postaderare*, Bucharest, 2013, [online], available at <http://www.studii-economice.ro/2013/seince130516.pdf>

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ A.P. Costache, Absorbția fondurilor europene - o viziune macroeconomică, in 'Romanian Journal of Statistics', Issue 6/2012, [online] available at http://www.revistadestatistica.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/RRS_6_2012_A4_ro.pdf

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