

Kraków, 29 November 2024

**POSITION
OF THE PAWEŁ ADAMOWICZ UNION OF POLISH METROPOLISES
ON THE FUTURE OF COHESION POLICY**

The Union of Polish Metropolises expresses its concern regarding reports on the proposed shape of the cohesion policy reform for the years 2028-2034, which is set to move towards increased centralisation at both the level of the European Commission and the Member States. This approach would entail, among other consequences, the discontinuation of operational programmes directly managed by regional self-governments (*województwo*).

It should be noted that Poland is among the Member States that have demonstrated the highest effectiveness in achieving the budgetary and substantive objectives established under cohesion policy programmes in recent years. The programme implementation system has been consistently decentralised. Under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, approximately 41% of the funds allocated to Poland were expended through regional operational programmes managed by regional authorities. In the 2021-2027 financial perspective, this share in the total pool of funds has increased and has reached ca. 44%, which is ca. EUR 33.5 billion. Moreover, Poland has been widely applying the instrument of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), with urban functional areas and their local authorities playing a pivotal role. 95 ITI collaborations have been established across the country with a total allocation of ca. EUR 4.5 billion.

It is the regional governments and entities representing functional urban areas that have the deepest understanding of the development potential and needs of specific territories and are best placed to involve all key stakeholders in the development processes. There is a reason why the Polish legislator decided that they should shoulder the responsibility for preparing key strategic documents for the regions (regional development strategies, supra-local development strategies). A natural consequence thereof should be to guarantee that regional authorities and metropolitan unions participate in the programming and implementation of cohesion policy at least to the same extent as before.

The solutions in place so far have been fully consistent with the principle of subsidiarity enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, as well as aligning with the concept of multi-level governance as promoted by the European Commission. A fundamental shift in the logic of developing and implementing the cornerstones of cohesion policy would prevent the use of the valuable experience gained through years of cooperation between central, regional, and metropolitan authorities. The lines of cooperation named above require further strengthening, especially with a focus on metropolitan centres (due to the ongoing process of metropolitanisation, but not only).

The above arguments highlight the potential of regions and cities, along with their functional areas. The announcements of reforms, which could be seen as indicative of statist inclinations, will dampen this potential.

Centralisation and the discontinuation of the creation of regional programmes managed or co-managed by regional authorities may result in:

- reducing the already insufficient role of regional and city authorities in programming the Multiannual Financial Framework, thereby misaligning support with the needs of individual countries and regions;
- reducing the scope of support for cities and regions, thereby stifling their development potential;
- reducing the resilience of the implementation system to political volatility. In the event of political tension between central and local authorities, this could result in a significant curtailment of local authorities' access to cohesion policy funds.
- weakening the role of cities and regions, leading to a loss of their administrative and substantive capacity, which was largely enhanced through co-managing development policy with the use of EU funds.

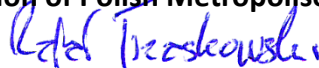
In light of the foregoing, the Union of Polish Metropolises urges that:

- the principles of subsidiarity and multi-level governance be upheld for the implementation of EU funds after 2027;
- the utilisation of a separate part of cohesion policy funds be continued to be entrusted to regional authorities at a level no lower than before;
- territorial instruments, in particular ITI, be maintained;
- cooperation between regional authorities and entities representing functional urban areas be strengthened and that these actors be involved at the programming and implementation stages.

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