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## **POLISH REGIONAL POLICY IN THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION - PROBLEM AREAS AND SUPPORT AREAS**

### **1. Introduction**

Throughout the 1990s, Polish regional policy was predominantly a centrally conducted interregional policy with no counterbalance in the form of an intraregional policy, despite the many socio-economic changes that occurred at that time. The absence of intraregional policy was mainly due to the non-existence of an entity to implement it and of a regional budget to finance it. The budgetary means allocated to the centrally conducted regional policy were meagre both in terms of needs and by the European Union (EU) standards.

As a result of the territorial-administrative reform of Poland introduced on 1 January 1999, voivodeships have been established as mixed central government/self-government units responsible for carrying out regional policy. Also, there started the process of setting up a new, more systematised model of programming and implementation of regional policy in Poland in an effort to align it with EU standards. Under this model, and following one of the EU rules, viz. the concentration principle, support should be concentrated on areas showing poor economic performance, backward and stagnating, which are termed problem areas in the European Union.

Scientific interest in problem areas started when disparities in the socio-economic development of individual regions and countries were first described. This notion is directly connected with a distinction made in regional studies and spatial planning between poor and rich, developing and stagnating, strong and weak, or crisis-prone and expansive regions (cf. Zagożdżon 1988; Szlachta 1993). Despite its common use, the term has never been defined in an unambiguous, universal way. In the literature, problem areas are defined as lacking a feature (or features), or their definition is given for the purposes of a concrete study. Usually, however, the term problem areas is understood to denote ones characterised by a low level of economic development, poor growth dynamics, and adverse social effects of the transformation process (cf. Ciok 1996; Bański 1999, 2001).

The research on problem and support areas is directly connected with regional policy. Areas with a slower rate of economic growth, an unfavourable economic structure, and suffering adverse

social effects of economic change are the principal object of interest to active regional policy. It should be emphasised, however, that there are few works on problem areas in the literature on regional policy. Most publications are concerned with changes occurring in the policy of regional development, e.g. Porter (1990); Robertson (1996); Weidenfeld, Wessels (1997); Keating (1998); Martin (1998); Kudłacz (1999); Dunford, Smith (2000); Grosse (2000); Pietrzyk (2001); Rudnicki (2000); Szlachta (ed., 2000); Gorzelak, Jałowicki (2001); Szlachta (2001a, 2001b); Szomburg (ed., 2001). There is also a large group of works devoted to the analysis of regional differences in economic development, e.g. Hart, Sally (1995); Lodkowska-Skoneczna, Pyszkowski, Szlachta (1996); Dziemianowicz (1999a, 1999b); Chojnicki, Czyż (2000); Hallet (2000); Czyż (2001); Kudłacz (2001); Orłowski (2001). However, there are no works among those above that would apply the results of their regional analyses of socio-economic structures to problem areas as delimited by administratively adopted criteria, including those set in the EU regional policy objectives.

In the European Union problem areas are identified on the basis of socio-economic criteria that an area must meet to qualify for the assistance connected with the adopted objectives of regional policy.

Under the new system of regional policy programming and implementation being developed in Poland, the notion of a support area was introduced and defined as "an area distinguished because of its development problems, being a target of specified measures taken by the Council of Ministers, government administration, and local government units ..." (cf. § 2, section 1, point 4 of the Principles of Regional Development Support Act of 12 May 2000, Law Gazette no. 48/2000, position 550).

The advancing process of Poland's integration with the EU and the country's approaching membership of this organisation means that Poland is going to come under EU regional policy, and hence to gain access to its Structural Funds. It is, therefore, urgent for Poland to adjust procedures involved in the programming and implementation of regional policy to the Union standards. This also embraces the delimitation of problem areas.

The aim of the present study is to compare ways of the identification and spatial distribution of problem areas distinguished in terms of NTS 2 and NTS 3 units currently in force in Poland that meet the criteria set in the objectives of the 2000-2006 EU regional policy, and support areas delineated under the new system of regional policy programming in Poland.

The research procedure involves: (1) an analysis of ways of the identification and spatial

distributions of problem areas in a multivariate space on the basis of EU criteria, (2) an analysis of ways of the identification and spatial distributions of support areas delimited on the basis of criteria set in the government document *The Support Programme for the Years 2001-2002*, and (3) drawing conclusions from the comparison of the two systems. Use was made of published and unpublished data of the Central Statistical Office (GUS) in Warsaw and EUROSTAT.

## **2. Regional policy in Poland after the public administration reform**

In the communist period, regional policy in Poland was of minor importance; it was reduced primarily to actions conforming to the ideological and political priorities currently in force. During the economic recession of the 1980s and the unsuccessful attempts at reforming the socialist economy, regional policy was even abandoned altogether (cf. Węclawowicz 2002).

At the start of the transformation, after 1989, the liberal assumption was adopted that the market economy and its market mechanism would solve all economic problems, including the proper allocation of resources. In the conditions of the 'shock therapy' implemented in the Polish economy and its focus on macroeconomic targets, there was no room for regional policy, whose function was limited to that of a tool for counteracting the spatial concentration of unemployment (cf. Bagdziński, Maik 1994). This meant a regional policy model of the intervention rather than promotional type which persisted over the next years through *ex post* measures.

The effects of the rapid socio-economic changes occurring in Poland in the 1990s included gradually widening interregional differences in the level and dynamics of development and, in consequence, a change in the spatial distribution of growth and recession areas. This fact as well as the appearance of heretofore unknown phenomena like a deep economic recession of extensive areas and the advancing process of Poland's integration with the European Union, initiated by the signing of the European Agreement which had opened the way for EU pre-accession assistance, forced the authorities to change their approach to problems of regional development (cf. Kudłacz 2001). As a result, on the motion of the Parliament the government prepared a *Report on regional policy* with an appendix on *Processes of regional diversification in the years 1990-1994*, which documents the Parliament accepted on 29 March 1996 while obliging the Council of Ministers to introduce new institutional solutions and draw up the conception and programme of the State's regional policy. Emphasis was put on the necessity to decentralise public administration and create regions endowed

with suitable powers which should be an intermediate level between the self-governing commune and the State centre (for more details see Rudnicki 2000: 104-116). Accommodating the legislators' remarks and suggestions, the Council of Ministers adopted documents that provided a basis for the country's regional policy: *Poland's regional development, 1990-1995* and *An outline of the State's strategy of regional development*. Regional issues were also included in official documents prepared in connection with the advancing process of Poland's integration with the European Union. The two most important are *The National Integration Strategy*, adopted by the Council of Ministers on 28 January 1997, and *The National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis*<sup>1</sup>, drawn up in 1998 on opening the accession negotiations. These documents list regional policy measures, among other things, which they describe as priorities in the adjustment process. Attention is also paid to the role that assistance funds, and later EU Structural Funds, can play in Poland's regional development. This is reflected in Poland's negotiating position on *Regional Policy and Co-ordination of Structural Instruments*, which states: "... Poland takes the position that on achieving EU membership the entire country will fall under Objective 1 of the European Union's economic and social cohesion policy and will take full advantage of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund according to the rules worked out for the Member States ..." (cf. *Negotiating position ...*, 2002). Following the timetable, negotiations on this subject opened on 6 April 2000 and closed provisionally on 1 October 2002. The final result of the negotiations will largely depend on how well the Polish side has prepared the programme and institutional foundations of regional development policy that are to provide a basis for the expenditure of the structural means, including *The National Development Plan for the years 2004-2006*<sup>2</sup>, and on the ultimate decisions of the European Union concerning the amount of means granted the new members within the framework of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund.

The assumptions included in the above documents and obligations that have arisen in the course of the negotiations provided a starting point for designing a new approach to regional policy in Poland. The territorial-administrative reform introduced on 1 January 1999 has defined a clear-cut division of public tasks among the relevant structures in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, including local government authorities at the poviats and voivodeship levels (see Fig. 1). The reform

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the rules, *The National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis* undergoes an annual evaluation and correction (cf. *National Programme ... 1998; Interim Report ... 2001*).

<sup>2</sup> After Poland has joined the European Union, this document will provide a basis for negotiating a Community Support Framework for our country.

has produced voivodeships as units of a mixed central government/self-government character and the chief entities carrying out regional policy. Voivodeship local government has a statutory duty to formulate a strategy of the voivodeship's all-round, balanced development, and to conduct regional policy. This process has to be planned and implemented in co-operation with the local governments at the poviats and commune levels, which, as Potrykowska (2000) observes, emphasises local development as a basis for regional policy. Unfortunately, although given strictly defined tasks, voivodeship local government was not endowed with suitable financial means allowing it to pursue efficient intraregional policy, which was a direct impediment to the implementation of objectives of the State regional policy (cf. Gilowska 2000).

A significant step taken to systematise Polish regional policy and adjust it to EU standards was the Principles of Regional Development Support Act passed on 12 May 2000. It specifies the rules and forms of support for regional development, as well as standards of co-operation on this matter of the Council of Ministers and central government organs with local government authorities and social partners. Under the provisions of Article 3 of the Act, regional development is to be supported under the National Strategy for Regional Development (NSRD) and initiatives of a voivodeship's local government, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. The Act defines the organisation of Poland's regional policy (see Fig. 2):

- The government's basic document for the planning of its regional policy is the National Strategy for Regional Development (NSRD), which defines: the directions and priorities of State's regional development policy; the period for which the Strategy is to be effective; anticipated expenditure from public funds; principles and criteria of financial support for *Voivodeship Programmes* from the State budget; and estimates of the minimum extent to which individual tasks or *Voivodeship Programmes* have to be co-financed from budgets of local government units and by private entities. It is devised by the minister responsible for regional development (at present, it is the Minister of Economy) in co-operation with voivodeship governments taking into account strategies of voivodeship development worked out by voivodeship diets (cf. Szlachta 2000). The *National Strategy for Regional Development, 2001-2006* was approved by the Council of Ministers and came into force on 28 December 2000 (see Fig. 3).

- The government document defining concrete dimensions of regional policy, especially the scope and form of State support for local governments, is the *Assistance Programme*, which provides details of the priorities defined in the NSRD. This document is the government's response

to *Voivodeship Programmes* drawn up by the regions.

- The next stage in the designing of regional policy is direct negotiations between the minister responsible for regional development and a voivodeship government represented by the voivodeship's marshal. The result is a *Voivodeship Contract*<sup>3</sup>, a legal document determining concrete terms of the State's financial support for the given voivodeship.

The Principles of Regional Development Support Act also defines the rules and procedure of regional policy financing, but it fails to stipulate any increase in the level of income of voivodeship local government, which should be considered a basic barrier to its correct implementation. Another weak point is the low level of co-ordination of the policies of government agencies and goal-oriented funds (22 mentioned in the Act) with development plans devised by local governments (cf. Pyszkowski 2000)<sup>4</sup>.

The Principles of Regional Development Support Act in its present form is, on the one hand, a legal document defining the principles and forms of support by the State budget of multi-year investments and actions taken in the voivodeships. On the other hand, however, Gorzelak (2000) claims that it has created a model of a centralised State where regions are endowed with limited powers and relatively scarce means of their own, and the central government is busy with a host of small problems and tasks that would be part of the remit of strong regional governments in a decentralised system. The Act has also drawn much criticism for its focus on the detailed procedures of a voivodeship government 'petitioning', in Gilowska's (2001) term, for financial means at the disposal of the central administration, rather than on what should be the substance of regional policy. One might even go so far as to claim that in accordance with the provisions of the Act, it is the central administration that is to conduct regional policy, while voivodeship governments, deprived of sufficient financial means of their own, are only there to implement it. This has nothing to do with creating voivodeships as entities responsible for their regional policy, and it is certainly a far cry from the standards obtaining in Europe. In the opinion of Hausner (2001), the biggest threat resulting from the Act is drawing up separate plans for EU assistance and domestic means earmarked for regional development when voivodeship governments lack their own adequate funds.

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<sup>3</sup> The government and voivodeship governments concluded *Voivodeship Contracts for the years 2001-2002* in June 2001; as early as 2002 they were extended to the end of 2003, but owing to the State's budgetary problems they were renegotiated in June 2002.

<sup>4</sup> A detailed analysis of the provisions of the Act can be found, e.g. in Rudnicki (2000) and Gross (2000).

As a result, as Węclawowicz (2002) observes, the objectives of a voivodeship's regional development are in fact imposed 'from above', as evidenced by the *Voivodeship Contract*, a document that mainly lists means allocated to investments indicated by the government.

The above remarks show that it is imperative to correct Polish legal regulations in such a way as to allow the implementation of regional policy in accordance with EU standards and the absorption of means from the Structural Funds after our country has joined the Union. The amendments, following partly from the adjustment of the Polish law to the *acquis communautaire*, should be made with a view to achieving at least four goals:

- increasing the autonomy of voivodeship local government, including its financial self-reliance and the possibility of managing means from the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund; this goal is supposed to be accommodated in this year's amendments to the Public Finance Act and the Local Government Income Act;

- increasing local government units' own incomes, using every single legal means available, while reducing goal-oriented subsidies and subventions (which contribute a majority of means to local government budgets at present);

- simplifying the implementation procedure of *Voivodeship Contracts*, which will be made possible by this year's anticipated amendment to the Principles of Regional Development Support Act; and

- sorting the government institutions engaged in regional policy and integrating entities active in the regional and spatial spheres.

Apart from legal problems, an additional barrier to the proper implementation of the new regional policy model in Poland is the difficult situation of the State budget, which shows a deficit of more than euro 10 billion. As a result, right at the beginning, in March 2001, the government *Assistance Programme* was amended, but this step failed to bring the document closer to reality, and the implementation of the *Voivodeship Contracts* signed for the years 2001-2002 is still threatened because of the shortage of financial means. This is corroborated by the following facts: in 2002 the term of the contracts (signed the previous year) was extended to the end of 2003, while in June 2002, on the government's motion, they were renegotiated and their expenditures cut.

### **3. Identification of problem areas of regional policy in Poland by the criteria of the European Union**

#### *3.1. Problem areas in EU regional policy in the years 2000-2006*

The areas embraced by EU regional policy are delimited on the basis of socio-economic criteria laid down in the policy objectives, which are formulated every time the EU budget is drawn up. Such areas are termed problem areas under a specified objective of the regional policy (cf. Szlachta 2001a). Since the administrative-territorial divisions in the particular member states are different, problem areas under the given objectives are identified on the basis of the so-called nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (NUTS, from the French *la nomenclature des unites territoriales statistiques*). The NUTS system developed by EUROSTAT has provided a basis for assigning the administrative units in each of the member states to NUTS units. Thus, in each state three regional levels and two local levels are distinguished (cf. Rudnicki 2000):

**Level 1 (NUTS 1)** - covers the largest unites which are the basic regional units in the given country (77 units);

**Level 2 (NUTS 2)** - covers those regions which form the first tier of the division of the largest regions of level 1 (206 units);

**Level 3 (NUTS 3)** - covers those regions which form the second tier of the division of the largest regions of level 1 and are parts of regions of level 2 (1,031 units);

**Level 4 (NUTS 4)** - covers territorial units of the intermediate level between the local and the regional levels that occur in six of the EU states (1,074 units); and

**Level 5 (NUTS 5)** - embraces communes or units of a corresponding local level (98,433 units).

The NUTS classification is employed when collecting statistical data on which regional socio-economic analyses are based. It is also used when allocating the means from EU Structural Funds for problem areas.

The objectives and priorities of the regional policy the European Union is pursuing at present were set on 16 July 1997 when the European Commission published a document entitled *Agenda 2000: For a stronger and wider Union*, which was approved at a Berlin 1999 summit meeting of the fifteen member states. In the present programming period, i.e. the years 2000-2006, the objectives of EU regional policy have been limited to three, with the criteria of problem area identification strictly

defined statistically in most cases (cf. Council Regulation No. 1260/1999, Szlachta 2000):<sup>5</sup>

**Objective 1** - stimulation of areas lagging behind in their socio-economic development; it is the most important objective of EU regional policy which receives 70% of the structural funding available. The identification of problem areas under this objective is carried out at NUTS 2 level and embraces:

(1) areas where per capita GDP was below 75% of the Community average for the previous three years according to data available on 26 March 1999 (the Berlin summit), i.e. in 1994, 1995 and 1996;

(2) French overseas departments, the Azores, the Canary Islands, and Madeira;

(3) areas in Austria, Finland and Sweden so far falling under Objective 6, i.e., support for areas with especially low population density;

(4) areas under the PEACE programme in Northern Ireland; and

(5) areas in Sweden indicated in Protocol 6, an appendix to Sweden's Treaty of Accession to the EU.

Areas that will stop fulfilling the above criteria are entitled to transitional support (for 6-7 years) under this objective.

**Objective 2** - support for socio-economic transformation in areas facing structural difficulties. Several kinds of problem areas are distinguished:

- Industrial areas: those at the NUTS 3 level that meet three criteria:

(1) a mean unemployment rate for the last three years higher than the EU average;

(2) the proportion of industrial employment equal to or higher than the EU average for all the years starting with 1985; and

(3) a drop in industrial employment since 1985.

- Rural areas: those at the NUTS 3 level that meet two out of the four criteria:

(1) a population density of under 100 persons per km<sup>2</sup>; or

(2) the proportion of agricultural employment equal to or higher than double the EU average in each year since 1985; and

(3) a mean unemployment rate higher than the EU average for the last three years; or

(4) a drop in the population since 1985.

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<sup>5</sup> The complete list of documents defining the legal foundations of EU regional policy in the years 2000-2006 is available on the [www.inforegio.org](http://www.inforegio.org) Internet site.

- Urban areas: densely populated ones satisfying additionally one of the following criteria:

(1) the proportion of long-term unemployment in the unemployment structure higher than the EU average;

(2) a high poverty level, including bad housing;

(3) marked deterioration in environmental conditions;

(4) a high crime rate; and

(5) a low education level of the population.

- Fisheries-dependent areas: coastal areas in which the proportion of employment in the fisheries sector is substantial while its restructuring leads to a fall in employment.

- Other: areas selected on the basis of the following criteria:

(1) areas bordering Objective 1 regions or industrial and agricultural areas under Objective 2;

(2) agricultural areas showing features of demographic senility, or with a dwindling labour market in farming; and

(3) areas affected by serious structural problems or a high unemployment rate brought about by the restructuring of one or more farming, manufacturing or service enterprises.

Areas that will stop fulfilling the above criteria are entitled to transitional support (for 6 years) under this objective.

**Objective 3** - support for regions not covered by Objectives 1 and 2 that need help to adapt and modernise their systems of education, training and employment. The objective is thematic rather than territorial and focuses on the modernisation of labour markets.

Employing the above criteria, the European Commission delimited problem areas in the member states. They can avail themselves of means from the Structural Funds to carry out tasks under the particular objectives of EU regional policy (e.g., the Commission Decision of 1 July 1999 drawing up the list of regions covered by Objective 1 of the Structural Funds for the period 2000 to 2006 (1999/502/EC) (*Official Journal of the European Communities* L 194/53.27.7, 1999).

### 3.2. *Identification of problem areas in Poland*

The identification of problem areas, in accordance with EU directives, should be carried out in terms of universal NUTS regionalisation. In fulfilment of the provisions of the *National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis* and obligations it has assumed in its negotiating position on the

Statistics section, Poland introduced the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics on 13 July 2000. In accordance with the rule applying to the candidate countries until their accession, these units are termed NTS to differentiate them from the NUTS units in the EU states (cf. Szlachta 2001b). As in the EU, this system also embraces five levels:

- **level 1 (NTS 1)** - the entire territory of the country (1 unit);
- **level 2 (NTS 2)** - corresponds to voivodeships (16 units);
- **level 3 (NTS 3)** - corresponds to subregions absent from Poland's system of territorial division, it has been created solely to meet the NTS requirements (44 units);
- **level 4 (NTS 4)** - corresponds to poviats poviats-ranking towns (373 units); and
- **level 5 (NTS 5)** - corresponds to communes (2,489 units).

From the point of view of regional policy and the delimitation of problem areas, the relevant levels are NTS 2 and NTS 3 (see Fig. 4).

The identification of problem areas is limited by a lack of statistical data and equivocal EU criteria, e.g. in delimiting urban problem areas. The procedure embraces the following:

- **Objective 1 areas** (support for the development and restructuring of the economy) are identified with reference to NTS level 2 (voivodeships) on the basis of per capita GDP (at PPS) expressed as a percentage of the EU average (as of 31 December 1998). All regions with the index below 75% (i.e., 15,159.8 dollars per head) are treated as Objective 1 areas.

At present all the Polish voivodeships meet this EU criterion and on Poland's joining the Union are eligible for financial assistance from the Structural Funds under Objective 1 of EU regional policy (see Table 1, Fig. 5).

- **Objective 2 areas** (support for socio-economic transformation in areas afflicted by structural problems) are identified with reference to NTS level 3 on the basis of selected socio-economic indices (see Table 2) and in Poland are limited to two types of problem areas: industrial and rural.

*Industrial areas* have to satisfy three criteria at once:

- a mean unemployment rate higher than the EU average as of June 2000 (i.e., 8.2%);
- the proportion of industrial employment equal to or higher than the EU average as of September 1999 (i.e., 28.3%); and
- a drop in industrial employment in the years 1997-1999.

Eighteen problem areas were distinguished that meet all the above criteria for industrial areas (see Fig. 6). They form a compact belt stretching from the south of Poland along its western part to

the northern subregions. The belt includes three enclaves: the city of Wrocław and the Wrocław subregion, the city of Poznań, and the Tri-City subregion of Gdańsk-Sopot-Gdynia. Outside the belt lies only the subregion of the city of Łódź. These problem areas comprise some of Poland's industrial districts, including the extractive, heavy and textile industries, which are undergoing intensive restructuring and in which detrimental social effects of the transformation have accumulated, e.g., the Upper Silesian Industrial District, the Wałbrzych district, and the Łódź district (see Stryjakiewicz 1999).

*Rural areas.* Their identification should be carried out in terms of two different sets of statistical criteria laid down by the EU. Hence two types of rural problem areas were distinguished:

TYPE ONE:

- a population density of under 100 persons per km<sup>2</sup> as of 31 December 1999; and
- a drop in the population in the years 1997-1999.

The above criteria were only satisfied by seven subregions of eastern and central Poland. They form a compact area embracing the central and northern parts of the so-called 'eastern wall' as well as the farmlands of northern Mazovia and the eastern part of Łódź Land. The spatial distribution of these units, corresponding largely to the rural problem areas (lagging in their development) delimited by Bański (2001), is presented in Fig. 7.

TYPE TWO:

- the proportion of agricultural employment equal to or higher than double the EU average as of September 1999 (i.e., 9.6%); and
- a mean unemployment rate higher than the EU average as of June 2000 (i.e., 8.2%).

This set of criteria allowed the identification of 37 NTS 3 units as problem areas (see Fig. 8). Considering the fact that level of agricultural employment is much higher in Poland than in the EU, the entire territory of Poland, with the exception of the major metropolitan areas, fulfils the criteria for rural problem areas set under Objective 2. As a result, the areas distinguished coincide fully with those delineated by Kulikowski (1987, 1992) and Bański (1999, 2001) as rural problem areas, while also including those that these authors have not considered.

When comparing the two types of rural problem areas, one can state that the one distinguished on the basis of the second set of criteria is more favourable in terms of the number of units eligible for financial support from the EU Structural Funds, and as such it should be employed to delineate rural problem areas in Poland. It should be emphasised, however, that the set of problem areas thus

obtained can hardly be treated as objectively reflecting regional differences in the state and level of Polish agriculture.

## **4. Identification of support areas of Polish regional policy**

### *4.1. Support areas in Polish regional policy*

When defining the organisational and competence framework of the new model of programming and implementation of regional policy, the Principles of Regional Development Support Act passed by the Parliament on 12 May 2000 has introduced, among other things, the notion of a support area to Polish regional policy. Their delimitation is foreseen for the initial, pre-accession period of policy implementation. After Poland has joined the European Union, i.e., in the second period of policy implementation, the government counts on all the voivodeships becoming Objective 1 regions under EU regional policy. By this assumption, the entire territory of the country will become an Objective 1 area, and hence there will be no need to delimit support areas.

The legislators have provided that the directions and priorities of regional development support as well as general rules of delimiting support areas are defined by the *National Strategy for Regional Development*. Detailed aims of regional development support and objective criteria of identifying support areas are listed in the *Assistance Programme*. On the basis of these documents, voivodeships' governments enter into *Voivodeship Contracts* with the government and prepare *Voivodeship Programmes* which they then proceed to implement.

The *National Strategy for Regional Development* adopted on 28 December 2000 states that the introduction of support areas is in accordance with the concentration principle, one of the EU-backed principles of conducting regional policy by a state. "... Taking into consideration the limited financial means, the State's regional policy concentrates intervention measures on a geographically defined area ..." called a support area, that is, an area where the state intervenes in accordance with the provisions of the Act (Council of Ministers' Resolution No. 105 of 28 Dec. 2000 on the adoption of the National Strategy for Regional Development, Monitor Polski 43/2000, position 851, p. 1427).

The list of support areas is established every time in the *Assistance Programme* after taking into account the financial possibilities of the State budget and specified targets and priorities of regional

intervention. A support area may be one at the voivodeship level (NTS<sup>6</sup> level 2), groups of poviats, or subregions (NTS 3), and poviats (NTS 4). It is assumed, however, that the basic area of concern to regional policy is the voivodeship. The rule adopted when delimiting support areas is doing so in a way that allows an integrated implementation of the objectives and priorities of the *National Strategy for Regional Development*. In cases justified by a concentration of structural problems which threatens an area with socio-economic marginalisation, it is also possible to refer to detailed priorities and courses of action outlined in the *Strategy*.

#### 4.2. Identification of support areas in Poland

The executory document for the *National Strategy for Regional Development for the years 2000-2006* that provides detailed criteria of support area delimitation is the *Assistance Programme*. The first such document, drawn up for the years 2001-2002, was prepared by the Council of Ministers and came into force by its ordinance of 28 December 2000.

The very rapid pace of government work on the *Assistance Programme for the years 2001-2002* and the resulting numerous drawbacks of this document made it necessary to amend it, which was done on 11 April 2001. The amendment was in line with earlier announcements<sup>7</sup> and was the effect of an analysis of long-term programmes of individual ministries in terms of whether they justified the inclusion of their territorially oriented tasks into the *Assistance Programme*, in terms of changes in the assistance funds and their structure in the 2001 Budget Act in relation to the draft budget, and changes resulting from corrections in assistance funds made by the European Communities. Of no little importance was also the experience of the two months of implementation of the *Assistance Programme* currently in force as well as negotiations between the government and voivodeship authorities concerning *Voivodeship Contracts*.

The *Assistance Programme for the years 2001-2002* foresees the implementation of the strategic objective of the *National Strategy for Regional Development*<sup>8</sup> and all its priorities while defining the

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<sup>6</sup> A statistical unit corresponding to the NUTS system introduced in the European Union.

<sup>7</sup> An announcement to that effect was included in the minutes of the Council of Ministers meeting of 28 December 2000, i.e. the one at which the initial version of the *Assistance Programme for the years 2002-2002* was adopted.

<sup>8</sup> The strategic objective of the *National Strategy for Regional Development for the years 2000-2006* to which all measures instituted in support areas must be geared is "creating conditions for improving the competitiveness of regions and preventing the marginalisation of some areas in such a way as to promote Poland's long-term

territorial range of these measures:

#### PRIORITY A

##### **Extension and modernisation of infrastructure improving regions' competitiveness**

Specific targets:

- (a) development of supra-local technical and social infrastructure;
- (b) development of metropolitan functions of the largest cities;
- (c) development of infrastructure of an information society.

Activities under this priority can be carried out throughout the country.

#### PRIORITY B

##### **Restructuring regions' economic basis and creating conditions for its diversification**

Specific targets:

- (a) encouraging the location of investment in the region and supporting the development of small and medium-sized businesses;
- (b) encouraging the creation and absorption of innovations, including the transfer of modern technology;
- (c) development of tourism and recreation, and protection of the cultural heritage.

Activities under this priority can be carried out throughout the country.

#### PRIORITY C

##### **Development of human resources**

Specific targets:

- (a) rise in employment, development of human resources and education.

Activities under this priority can be carried out throughout the country.

#### PRIORITY D

##### **Support for areas in need of activation and threatened with marginalisation**

Specific targets:

- (a) activation of rural areas;
- (b) renewal of the urban economic base.

Activities under this priority can be carried out in support areas identified on the basis of at least one

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economic development, its economic, social and territorial cohesion, and its integration with the European Union" (Council of Ministers' Resolution No. 105 of 28 Dec. 2000 on the adoption of the National Strategy for Regional Development, Monitor Polski 43/2000, position 851, p. 1428).

of the following criteria:

(1) per capita GDP in the voivodeship (NTS 2) below 80% of the national average (1998 data),  
or

(2) an unemployment rate in poviats (NTS 4) higher than 150% of the national average in each of the previous three years (as of 31 March or 31 December of the years 1998, 1999 and 2000<sup>9</sup>, in a variant allowing a poviat to qualify as a support area).

On the basis of the above criteria, 161 poviats (NTS 4) were distinguished as Priority D support areas. Their list was published in an appendix to the *Assistance Programme for the years 2001-2002* (see Fig. 9). The areas cover entirely the voivodeships of eastern and north-eastern Poland, the so-called 'eastern wall': Podkarpacie, Lublin, Podlasie, Warmia-Mazuria, and Świętokrzyska Land. Also included were numerous poviats of Pomerania, West Pomerania and Kujawy-Pomerania in whose agricultural structure state farms used to constitute a substantial proportion; areas of depopulation and high concentration of adverse effects of industrial restructuring in the voivodeships of Lower Silesia, Opole and Lubuska Land; and individual poviats of Łódź and Mazovia voivodeships. Their spatial distribution closely resembles the system of peripheral areas surrounding the three core regions of Poznań, Warsaw and Silesia that has been obtained in an analysis of regional disparities in Poland made by Czyż (2002).

## PRIORITY E

### **Development of co-operation among regions**

Specific targets:

(a) development of transborder co-operation.

Activities under this priority can be carried out in support areas identified by the criterion of statistical units (basically NTS 3) adjoining the country's land or maritime border.

On the basis of this criterion, 17 subregions (NTS 3) and selected poviats (NTS 4) of Opole voivodeship were distinguished as Priority E support areas. Their list was published in an appendix to the *Assistance Programme for the years 2001-2002* (see Fig. 10). The areas form a compact ring of frontier subregions (NTS 3) along all the borders of our country. An exception is the Opole subregion from which three poviats, Namysłów, Kluczbork and Olesko, have been excluded. This solution should be regarded as unsuitable on two counts: (1) it introduces an imbalance in the

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<sup>9</sup> With the provision that the date for which the 1999 unemployment rate was established should be identical with the one adopted for 2000.

opportunities of frontier subregions by restricting the eligibility of three poviats of the Opole subregion for support, and (2) it introduces two kinds of basic units (subregions - NTS 3, and poviats - NTS 4) as Priority E support areas. What seems justified, in turn, is the decision made while amending the *Assistance Programme* to strike Łosice powiat in Mazovia voivodeship from the list of Priority E support areas. Its continued inclusion in the list would fix the heterogeneity of basic units constituting support areas under this priority and would fail to meet the criterion of the statistical unit in question adjoining the country's border.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

When comparing the ways of identification and spatial distributions of problem areas delimited on the basis of EU criteria with those of support areas indicated in the *Assistance Programme for the years 2001-2002*, one can state the following:

(1) The identification of problem areas in Poland is carried out using two statistical indices (per capita GDP and the unemployment rate) that are part of a system of indices employed to delimit problem areas under EU regional policy, which must be considered a correct solution in view of Poland's future membership of the European Union.

(2) The drawing up and implementation of regional policy in accordance with EU principles concerns two levels of statistical units: NUTS 2 in the case of Objective 1 and NUTS 3 in the case of Objective 2. Support areas under the priority *Support for areas in need of activation and threatened with marginalisation* are delineated at the powiat level (NTS 4), but the criteria applied refer to both voivodeships (NTS 2) and poviats (NTS 4). In turn, support areas under the priority *Development of co-operation among regions - development of transborder co-operation* are identified at the levels of subregions (NTS 3) and poviats (NTS 4) while using criteria applying to subregions (NTS 3). This heterogeneity of the basic units in terms of which support areas are identified is incorrect from the point of view of the criteria of EU regional policy. Wide inter-regional disparities among Polish poviats justify the use of this level of statistical units (NTS 4) in delimiting support areas. However, combining two such levels under one criterion should be treated as wrong and in urgent need of correction.

(3) Support areas have a smaller spatial extent than problem areas identified by the criteria of EU regional policy. This is justified by the difficult situation of the State budget and the budgets of

local governments, which are the principal sources of financing regional development in the pre-accession period.

(4) The territorial extent of support areas overlaps fully with that of rural problem areas.

(5) Support areas correspond in 95% to industrial problem areas; in terms of priorities:

a. there is a one-third overlap between those under the priority *Support for areas in need of activation and threatened with marginalisation* and industrial problem areas; and

b. there is a 55% overlap between those under the priority *Development of co-operation among regions - development of transborder co-operation* and industrial problem areas.

The results of the analysis show unequivocally that Poland's present level of socio-economic development and the regional differences in this respect will make our country eligible for the objectives of EU regional policy, and hence for financial assistance from the Structural Funds. By the criteria of this policy currently in force, most of the Polish NTS 2 and NTS 3 units qualify as problem areas under the various objectives.

It should be kept in mind, however, that the process of EU enlargement will produce a change in the present Union means, and because of increased budgetary expenditure for assistance to the new member states, there can also be changes in the criteria of problem area identification. That is why it is hard to tell at present on what scope of assistance from the Structural Funds Poland may count, and whether all its voivodeships will qualify as Objective 1 areas, as they are believed to do today.

The mean annual absorption of means from the EU funds by Poland, starting with the year 2004, is estimated at euro 4.7 billion<sup>10</sup> (divided between the Structural Funds, 70%, and the Cohesion Fund, 30%) (cf. Kuźniewicz 2001). However, obtaining such a substantial support for the Polish problem areas will entail Poland's fulfilling the additionality principle, that is, the co-financing of investment and ventures carried out in those areas at a level of 25-30%. Poland will be very hard put to perform this obligation, taking into consideration the fact that the outlays for regional policy over the years 1997-1999 amounted to between 1.44% and 2.25% of the State's budgetary expenditure, even today being lower than EU appropriations allocated to Poland under the three pre-accession funds: PHARE 2, ISPA and SAPARD, and that the current financial situation of Polish local governments is difficult.

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<sup>10</sup> During the present (November 2002), final stage of the accession negotiations, EU representatives have signalled a limitation of means from the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund allotted to the new member states by more than euro 2 billion.

For Polish problem areas to make the most of the chance that EU regional policy offers them through its means, it is still necessary to take many more measures, both legislative and organisational, and take them now. The most important include:

- increasing the budgetary outlays for regional policy to a level that would ensure Poland eligibility for the European funds and an ability to conduct its own regional policy.

- defining the legal status of the pre-accession and structural funds through an amendment of the Public Finance Act;

- adjusting the Polish regional policy system to the organisational rules in force in the EU, including the rules of identification of problem areas; and

- amending the Regional Development Support Act and the Local Government Income Act so as to increase the financial independence of voivodeship self-government and simplify the procedure of entering into *Voivodeship Contracts*.

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