

## REGIONS DEVELOPMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EU

### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of the paper is to describe and compare the approach to the development of regions based on the implementation of European structural and investment funds (hereinafter as “ESIF”) in 2004 – 2006 and 2007- 2013 on the example of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter as “SR”).

**Design/methodology/approach** – The methodology of the paper is based on the historic method, where the authors compare the approach of two programming periods of the ESIF implementation in the Slovak Republic. Due to the up to date theme of the paper it is very important to have in mind also the circumstances occurring in the European Union (hereinafter as “EU”).

**Findings** – It is important to note that the contributions from the ESIF do not replace public or equivalent structural expenditures by EU Member States, but are considered as a supplement to support the overall development and competitiveness. The objectives of the ESIF will be pursued through the seven-year programming framework and are divided into the current priorities of the programming period with a defined system of management and control of their use. For these reasons, the article will focus on the characteristics of the EU regional policy, the importance of the ESIF as a tool of regional policy, regional development and raising competitiveness.

**Research limitations** – Research limitations are currently in the fact, that stage of summarizing of the implementation period 2007 – 2013, is in charge of the Slovak Government and in its final absorption period, so the analysis is not final.

**Practical implications** – Practical implications of the paper are the identification of limitations of the previous periods of ESIF that should have been eliminated in the upcoming period 2014 – 2020.

**Originality/Value** – Originality of the paper is limited due to missing the final evaluation of the implementing period 2007 – 2013. Authors started to analyse the effects of the ESIF funds on the regional development and competitiveness of the Slovak Republic.

**Keywords:** ESIF, regional development; please two add more

**Research type:** viewpoint.

### JEL classification:

R10 - General Spatial Economics

R58 - Regional Development Policy

### Introduction

Slovak Republic has become the EU Member State from the 1st May 2004. Thus it became eligible for beneficiary of ESIF. By this time, the priorities set by regional policies and implementation of the ESIF were in the final stage of the programming period 2000 – 2006, for the Slovak Republic the possibility to utilize ESIF lasted for 3 operational years (2004-2006). For this reason, Slovak Republic had limited possibilities of financial possibilities to use ESIF in the so called shortened programming period.

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For the second programming period in 2007 - 2013 Slovak Republic had diametrically different options in the use of ESIF even as a full Member State it could affect at a greater extent the setting of regional policy of the EU, and also to apply for a substantially larger financial aid package for the entire programming period.

The aid from ESIF for SR is a very important source of funds to help the development and competitiveness of less developed regions. On the basis of set criteria for allocating ESIF, the regional policy of the EU for SR was important. As an assessment of the economic performance eligible under Cohesion policy of the EU that constitutes of a summary of the objectives, measures and instruments to be able to reduce regional disparities territorial throughout not only EU but also SR. Benefits from ESIF under regional policy objectives of the EU could be used only when embodied in the concept of purposeful activities. SR as well as the other Member states strived to eliminate the negative consequences of the territorial uneven development and uneven on-going structural changes.

In order to achieve effective use of ESIF allocated to the regional and cohesion policy Member States cooperate closely with the European Commission (hereinafter as "EC") in meeting the objectives. This form of cooperation is called "partnership". The partnership requires the cooperation of both parties in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programs. Implementation of operational programs is in responsibility of Member States at the appropriate territorial level, in accordance with the institutional system specific to each Member State.

It is important to note that contributions from the ESIF not replace public or equivalent structural expenditure by Member States, but works as a supplement to support the overall development. The objectives of these ESIF will be pursued through the seven-year programming framework and are divided into the current priorities of the programming period with a defined system of management and control of their use. For these reasons, in this article we focus on the characteristics of the regional policy of the EU, the importance of the ESIF as a tool of regional policy and comparison of the management strategic approach applied in last 2 programming periods. At the end we try to compare the level of competitiveness between different time periods.

## **Theoretical background**

In this part of the article we introduce basic definitions of terms relating to the ESIF, which are used for the purposes of regional policies of the EU. Regional policy is always linked to the time period in which under clearly defined rules is used the aid for less developed regions. Eligible entities can use funds from the ESIF, the Member States of the EU. The EU affects the regional policy of its member countries and candidate countries applying the settings of regional policy shaped by consensus and accepted by all its members (Okáli, 2004).

Regional policy can be understood as "a set of objectives, measures and instruments leading to the reduction of too large differences in socio-economic level of individual regions, thus expresses a kind of instrument of solidarity." (Wokoun, 2003). Finally, we can understand regional policy as a centrally managed effort of redistribution of resources between regions due to (in accordance with) the criteria that confirm the integrity, fairness and superiority (Okáli, 2004).

From the above mentioned definitions, regional policy makes it clear that it is necessary the existence of a financial instrument that would be able to fulfil individual objectives and thus can be called regional policy as a strategic investment policy, which focuses on all regions and cities in the EU in order to promote their economic growth and improve the

quality of people's lives. In this powerful financial instrument of EU regional policy are currently the ESIF. Thus regional policy can be understood as a structural policy, which seeks to have the structural changes at the level of individual sectors, sub-sectors, disciplines and areas that would strengthen the homogeneity of the integration space thereby avoiding undesirable disparities.

In order to be able to effectively use ESIF and to meet its target, it was necessary to control their spending in a way that was accepted by all EU Member State. Therefore, to prepare for management of the whole seven years' period, during which the outflow of resources from the ESIF must comply with all EU regulations as well as the proposed use of resources for a particular member country must comply with the basic principles and rules of the current regional policy.

The main objective of the regional policy of the EU is financial solidarity, the comprehensive harmonious development by strengthening economic and social cohesion, reducing disparities between the levels of development of Member States and the backwardness of the least-favoured regions or islands, including rural disadvantaged areas of the EU Member States (Euractiv, 2010).

All steps intended to lead to a successful regional policy and the EU Structural Funds are therefore conditional on the implementation of all fundamental principles of management. It is therefore very important from a strategic point of view educate staff involved in the preparation of the program period, as one of the functions of personnel management, which presents a summary of activities providing increased capacity, personal development and work capacity.

In the system of the ESIF occurs change in the programming period especially in the structure and nature of the management approach of the Member States and EC. This change is effected by the current regional policy of the EU, which is valid for the whole of the next programming period. In these cases, there is a conversion of an existing operator and management model, which is supported by the organizational structure.

The difference between two programming periods from the management approach is shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Differences between two programming periods from the management aspect**

	Programming period 2004-2006	Programming period 2007-2013
Structural funds	ERDF	ERDF
	ESF	ESF
	EAGGF	
	FIFG	
	IS	
Cohesion Fund	✓	✓
EAFRD	X	✓
EFF	X	✓
Communitarian programmes	✓	✓
Pre-entry funds	PHARE	IPA
	ISPA	
	SAPARD	
Solidarity fund	✓	✓

Explication: ERDF – European Regional Development Fund, ESF – European Social Fund, EAGGF - European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, FIFG - Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance, CIS – Communities Initiatives, PHARE - Poland and Hungary Assistance for Restructuring of their Economies, ISPA - Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession, SAPARD - Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development, IPA - Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, EAFRD - European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, EFF - European Fisheries Fund.

Source: own proceedings according to Pawera, 2013

The need for such changes results directly due to changes in the environment and circumstances occurred in EU. In these cases, we believe that it is necessary within the framework formed by the organizational structure and a new management model shall apply the following selected principles of its creation. The new managerial model should have been simple, flat, and flexible, team, network, further should create conditions to ensure high quality and management process as a whole and should create conditions for the globalization of the activities of the organization (Rudy, 1997).

The above mentioned principles applied in developing the organizational structure are designed to efficiently manage the entity responsible for the operation of using the ESIF in the Member State. During these transformation processes, it was important to set the process of application of selected principles and the application of project cycle management methodology, which is a toolkit of project preparation and project management. By applying the project cycle management leads to improvement of project planning, which had an overall positive impact on achieving the result the effective use of ESIF and thus the success of the implementation of regional policy (Gozora, 2012).

Besides the changes and adjustments in the strategic documents, management bodies and their organizational structures, came through changes also the real executors of programs, so employees in central state administration bodies, the governing authority or intermediate body governing bodies. It was therefore necessary to ensure that strategic human resource management whose primary business was the correct alignment of interrelated programs and practices to address long-term issues relating to staff, as well as a guide to successful action to promote effective management of the entity (Kachaňáková, 2003).

In the management of the ESIF we are speaking about the strategic management because of the fact that the use of resources from the ESIF must have been pre-assessed by the defined ex- ante conditions of the allocation of financial resources identified by sectoral areas. The previous programming period was considered as lagging behind compared to the same comparator sectors of EU Member States. Therefore, in the context of strategic management it was necessary to know the initial position where could be seen an answer as analytical and strategic documents. This starting position crucially depended on what had been done in the past and how to respond to ongoing changes in the past (Papula, 2012).

When creating regional policy, the EU Member States realized that without targeted coordination should just focus on economic development and competitiveness in developed areas of the Community. Less developed regions of EU Member States would increasingly be lagging behind, which could threaten the cohesion of the Community. Therefore, the objectives of the EU in this area can be understood as goals for the elimination of disparities. Proportional development of the regions can be achieved by promoting balanced and sustainable economic and social progress, achieved in particular by introducing an area without internal borders and strengthening economic and social cohesion. The goal to achieve develop regions is also the prerequisite for raising competitiveness.

The introduction of ESIF was conditioned by the effective implementation of EU regional policy, which is one of the most important policies of the EU. For the most part, the Community tries to use it to meet its stated objectives. The main task of this policy is to balance disproportions in economic growth in various regions of the EU and encourage their development. Regional policy can be understood as the management activities of the state institutions and territorial scope, which aims at creating favourable conditions for dynamic and versatile development of the regions with the maximum use of their geographic, human and economic potential. It can therefore be regarded as an indicator of performance goals and objectives for regional development (Rajčáková, 2005).

## Research methodology

For the assessment and evaluation of regions as well as to assess and determine the suitability of selected tools of EU regional policy for regions, the methodology of NUTS (Nomenclature des unités La Territoriales Statistiques) is applied (European Parliament, 2010). The NUTS are the territorial statistical units which were created by the "Eurostat" (the EU Statistical Office ). The main aim of the methodology is the creation of a single NUTS classification of territorial units within the EU. The NUTS methodology was also used for statistical monitoring and analysis of social and economic situation in regions of the Community. Through NUTS we obtain statistical indicators necessary for the preparation and evaluation of EU regional policy. The NUTS system identifies five categories of regions that exist in Slovakia and in the light of the criteria NUTS divided along the lines of Table 2.

**Table 2. Regional classification according to NUTS**

Regional unit	Number of regions	Name of the region
NUTS V	2933	Municipality in Slovakia
NUTS IV	79	District in Slovakia
NUTS III	8	Region in Slovakia
NUTS II	4	Bratislava region, west Slovakia, Central Slovakia, East Slovakia
NUTS I	1	Slovakia

Source: own proceedings according to NSRR

Tools and evaluation criteria of assessment of the regional policy of the EU are reflected in the implementation of regional aid in the framework of specific programs. The programmes financed with the ESIF can generally be divided into two basic categories. The first category consists of projects, respectively of EU initiatives as a whole. The second category consists of regional development projects which are submitted by the EU Member States based on their national development plans. The second category covers about 90 % of the ESIF utilization.

## Research results and findings

### *The reform of EU regional policy in the years 2007- 2013*

The reform of regional policy for the period 2007 - 2013 had as its goal the elimination of some of the problems that have been discovered in the implementation of programs for the period 2004 - 2006. Therefore, to increase the effectiveness of regional policy has been designed in:

- promote a more strategic approach to planning;
- further decentralize the responsibility towards the base partnerships in the Member States and local authorities;
- improve the quality and performance of programs co-financed through clearer and more rigorous monitoring mechanisms, and a stronger, more transparent partnership;
- simplifying the management system by improving the degree of differentiation, proportionality and transparency and to ensure sound financial management.

### *Strategic approach*

EU Council with the European Parliament assessment adopted on a recommendation from the EC an overall strategic document for the cohesion policy defining the priorities for EU Member States and their regions. This strategic document is called "Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs - Community Strategic Guidelines for the period 2007 - 2013" (Community Strategic Guidelines) (Europa, 2007).

This strategic document defined the implementation of regional policy of the EU and should strengthen the political accountability. It wanted to achieve more precise definition of the desired level of synergy between the cohesion policy and the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas goals and also included a Cohesion Policy to harmonize the general guidelines for economic policy and the European Employment Strategy. Furthermore, the strategic document determined to support by ESIF, defined the framework and procedures and the proposals for the creation of national strategic documents, as in the case of the Slovak Republic "national strategic reference framework" (NSRF).

### *Decentralization and simplification of the main aspects of EU regional policy*

The reform focused on a review of the delimitation framework, types and distribution of responsibilities among the various aid agencies tasked with managing the EU budget and to oversee proper implementation of programs. General provisions were set for the management and control system, the functions of the authorities in control of each program, the entity verifying the expenses of audit bodies, as well as the Audit Committee. The simplification was required in the following five aspects:

- planning process;
- management of funding;
- control of funding;
- compliance with the additionality principle;
- partnership and harmonization.

The process of programming was simplified at:

- the political level as each Member State should have elaborated its own national document where its strategic policy was defined in the form of the National Strategic Reference Framework (hereinafter as "NSRF") strictly according to the rules of Strategic Guidelines of the EU and discussed it with the EC. The NSRF sets the framework for the creation of thematic and regional operational programs. In comparison with the Community Support Framework in the period 2000 - 2006 there was a document management tool;
- the operational level as the EC, acting in accordance with the NSRF national and regional programs for each Member State. The approval was preceded by the interim consultation, so the approval by the EC was a formal process of adoption of these documents.

The most fundamental simplification occurred in reducing the number of funds to three versus six funds over the period 2004 - 2006. The relations between the different programs and the funds were simplified as well. The Coherent rule was applied, stating that One program means one fund. Only on the level of 5 % of the Fund might contribute to activities related to another fund if they were directly involved in the program. please check this sentence – hard to understand.

### *Greater concentration*

In an effort to greater concentration on strategic priorities of the EU wanted to reform EU regional policy transfer attention to the regions least-developed Member States and regions, particularly in the new Member States. The concentration of cohesion policy priorities for the period 2007 - 2013 occurred mainly in drawing up development programs on the Lisbon goals - growth, competitiveness and employment, Gothenburg goals - sustainable development and the objective of creating institutional capacity in regions in less developed member countries. Focusing on microgeographic level of municipalities, districts and communities in Objective 2 for the period 2000 to 2006 was reviewed. The new objective regional competitiveness and employment respected the experience that solved the problems of the weakest parts of the regions (European Commission, 2005).

### *Improvement of the quality and the performance*

The Results of the effectiveness of regional policy of the EU indicated that the need to focus more on better determined by the desired effect. Permanent debate with the European institutions held each year to review progress and effects of national and regional programs had picked transparency and strengthen a sense of accountability to citizens and institutions and so the effectiveness of cohesion policy. EC should include an annex with recommendations for further action. Every year since 2007, each Member State should have included in its annual report on converting the national reform program a concise section on the contribution of the operational programs.

By the end of 2009, and by 2012, Member States submitted a strategic report containing information:

- Implementing the objectives of cohesion policy;
- Pursuing the priorities for cohesion;
- Fulfilling the tasks of the Funds;
- Achieving the objective of promoting competitiveness and creating jobs.

The EC included each year in its Annual Progress Report section of Member States' progress in achieving the EU goals by the EU Council. In 2010 and 2013 the EC strategic report summarized strategic reports of the Member States submitted it to the Council of the EU and subsequently the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Rating of programs was a triple format, hence before, during and after finishing.

**Table 3. Operational programs, funds and ESIF (EU contribution)**

Operational program	Fund	ESIF (EUR)
1. Regional operational program (ROP)	EFRD	1 554 503 927
2. Environment (OP ŽP)	EFRD, CF	1 820 000 000
3. Transport (OP D)	EFRD, CF	3 160 154 595
4. Information society (OP IS)	EFRD	843 595 405
5. Research and development (OP VaV)	EFRD	1 209 415 373
6. Competitiveness and economic growth (OP KaHR)	EFRD	968 250 000
7. Education (OP V)	ESF	542 728 760
8. Employment and social inclusion (OP ZaSI)	ESF	941 301 578
9. Health (OP Z)	EFRD	250 000 000
10. Bratislava region (OP BK)	EFRD	95 207 607
11. Technical aid (OP TP)	EFRD	97 601 421
Total allocated		11 482 758 666

Source: Ministry of Finance SR. 2015

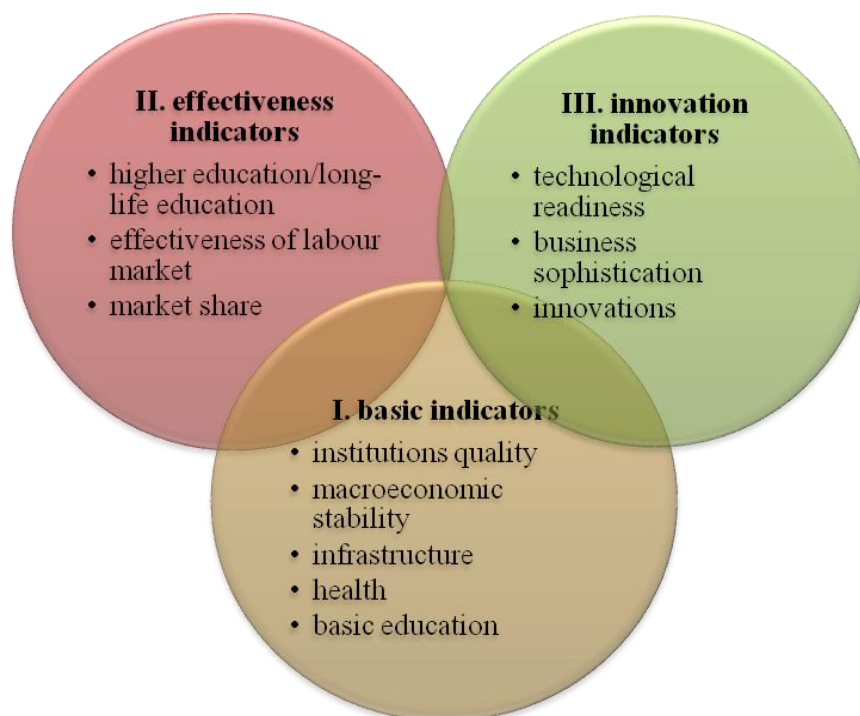
## Regional Competitiveness Index - RCI index

For comparing regional competitiveness between different parts of the Community produced by the EC is Regional Competitiveness Index (RCI). For the first time it was published in 2010 and its main task is to monitor the strengths and weaknesses of regions at NUTS II level. It is based on the methodology utilized by the World Economic Forum (hereinafter as "WEF") for the Global Competitiveness Index (hereinafter as "GCI") and covers a wide range of evaluated criteria. These include, innovation, quality of institutions, infrastructure including digital network) as well as the measurement of health and human capital. The aim of the evaluation criteria is to prove or confirm if European regions are able to set the proper priorities to increase their competitiveness, i.e. to choose relevant priorities for their development strategies. This allows regions to find out what it should focus and it is expected to increase even, of critical importance when discussing future cohesion policy.

The structure of the observed indicators consists of 11 pillars, which are divided into three main groups:

- basic indicators;
- indicators of effectiveness and
- indicators of innovation.

Basic indicators are considered as the engine of the economy and create the so-called basic pillars. With the gradual development and the progress in the competitiveness of the economy it gets to more effective ones. In the last group, and the group of innovation are also indicators that derive from the previous and reflect the real level of economic development. They are linked to each other and also influence each other. The following diagram illustrates the three main groups of indicators and their contents.



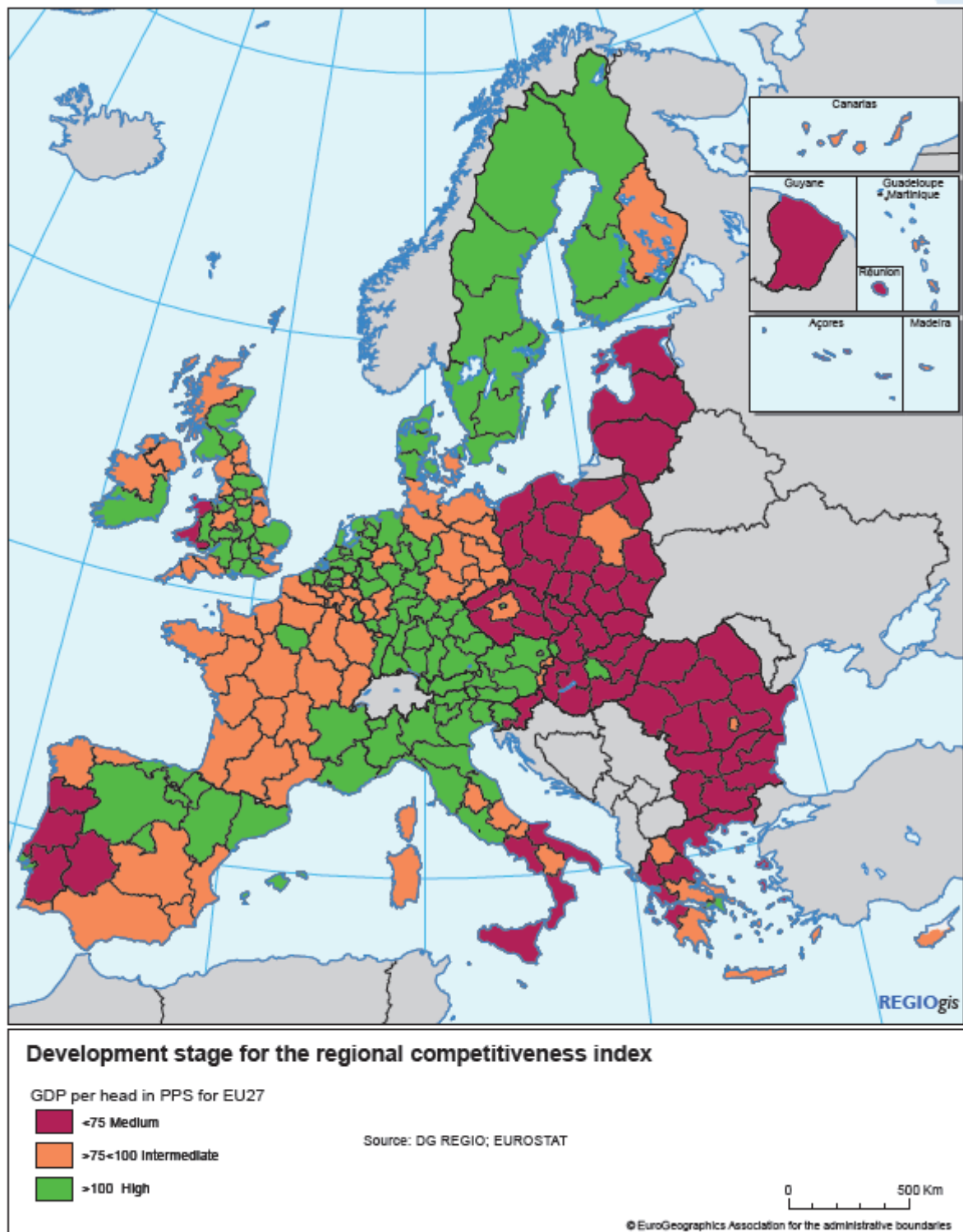
Source: own proceedings by EU Regional Competitiveness Index Report 2010

**Figure 1. Basic indicators of individual and regional competitiveness index (RCI)**



It is believed that if the economy is performing well in the innovation indicator, will be successful also in the dimensions of efficiency, but also in the basic dimension, whereas the first two groups are considered to be useful in attaining the level of innovation.

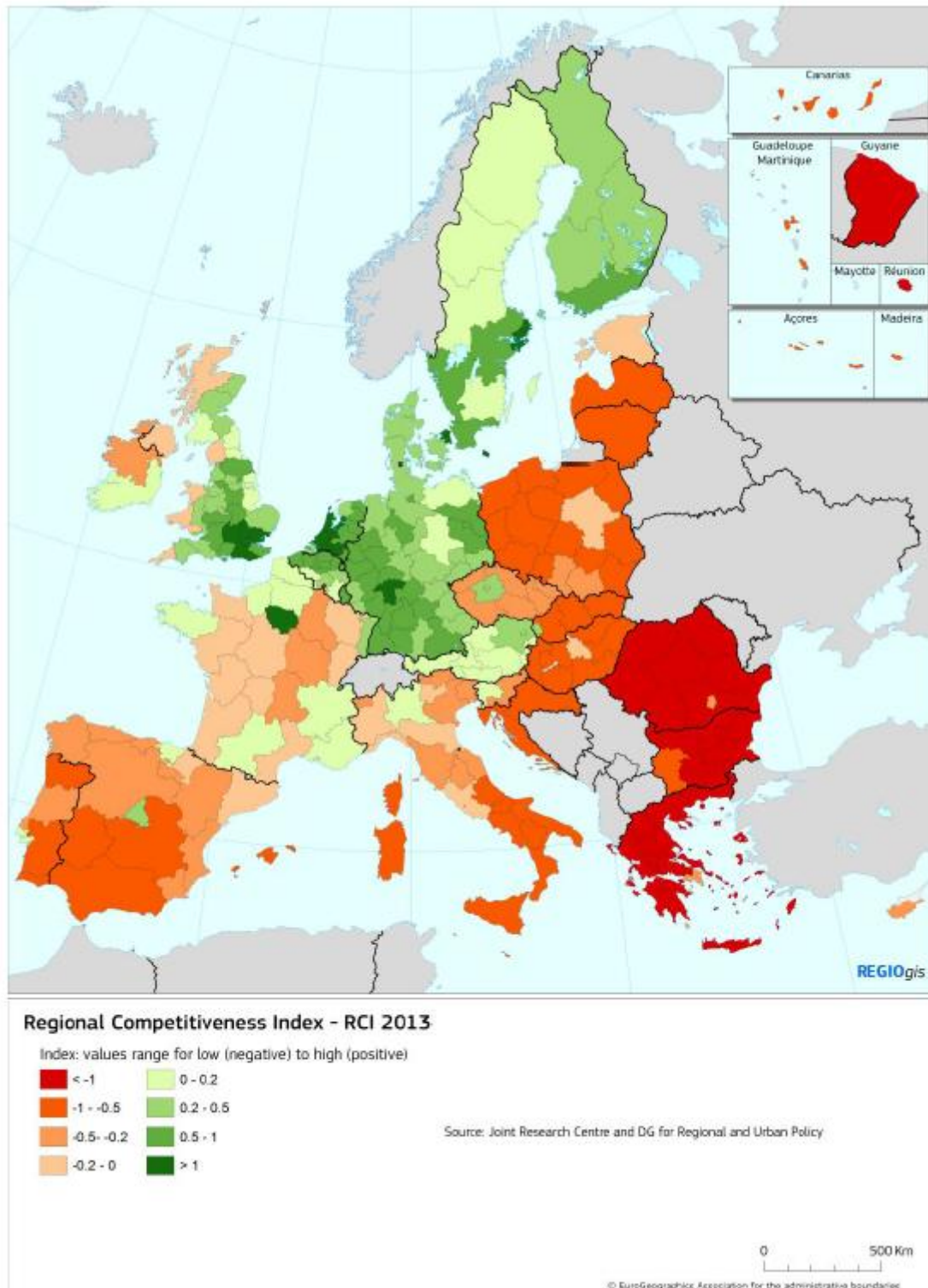
Individual indices of three main groups are calculated as arithmetic averages in those groups for individual indicators. The higher the achieved value, the more competitive is the economy.



Source: Dijkstra, Annoni and Kozovska, 2011

**Figure 2 Stages of development of the RCI in 2010**

As the figure 2 shows, the whole territory of the Slovak Republic except Bratislava region belongs to the medium stage of development in the first stage of creating the RCI and as in the initial phase of calculating this index. Solely the Bratislava region belongs to the intermediate stage of development.



Source: Annoni and Dijkstra, 2013

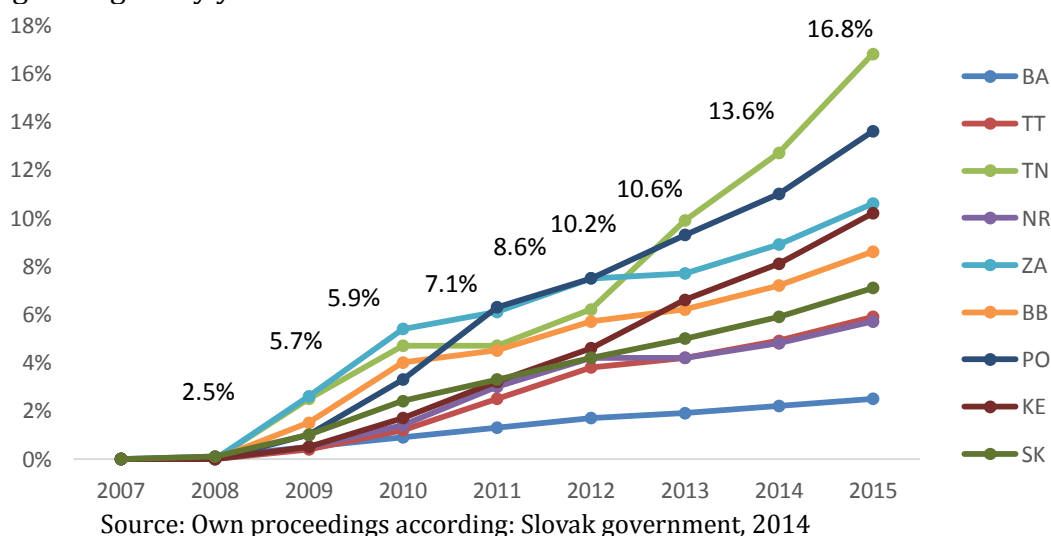
**Figure 3. RCI 2013**

The last RCI from 2013 shows the same stage of development as compared with the development assessed 4 years ago. The same stage is illustrated in the regional composition. Bratislava region has higher stage of development and the other Slovak regions are at the same level of lower stage of development.

The economic performance of individual Slovak regions and the nature of the projects conducted on the territory of the Slovak Republic reflects the geographic distribution of the utilization of the ESIF at the level of NUTS III. Given the low share of spending in the Bratislava region it was drawn around 7 % of total funds at the end of 2013. The reason was also limited on the eligibility of spending of ESIF, as Bratislava region is an area of the smallest but most powerful economy in comparison with other Slovak regions (Level GDP in the Bratislava region compared with other regions more than two higher and classified into categories NUTS 2). Trnava and Nitra use of ESIF also means lower volume and to approximately 8%, respectively 10%, mainly due to a higher economic level and orientation of agricultural production. The largest volume of ESIF was spent in the region of Trenčín (around 17 %) mainly due to the high concentration of large infrastructure projects in the region, which resulted in 76 % of the total expenditure allocated to the infrastructures in the region. A relatively high expenditure on infrastructure have also been reported in Žilina and Prešov regions, which accounted for 61 % of the total expenditure. These regions were involved in the disbursement of around 16 %, respectively 14 % of the total allocation. Banská Bystrica and Košice regions participated by approximately 14 %, respectively. 12% where as in the case of previous region's largest share of funds drawn amounted expenditure on infrastructure (50.5% resp. 53.6%).

The implementation of ESIF has a significantly positive impact on the development of the Slovak economy as well as on individual regions. The proof is the additional GDP growth in Slovakia, which has started since 2009, and was expected to reach the cumulative additional growth of the GDP at current prices at 5.0 % in 2013 and to grow up to 7.1 % by the of 2015.

The Effect of using the ESIF can be measured by using the effect of the additional real GDP growth, which reflects the results of the implementation of funds at regional levels. During the period 2007-2008 only the minimal additional GDP growth was recorded because of the low use of funds. Since 2009 sets the dynamic increase in the spending, resulting in a noticeable difference in GDP growth, mainly in Trenčín (the highest growth in 2013 by 3.1%), Žilina (the highest growth in 2010 by 2.4 % ), Prešov (the highest growth in 2011 by 2.5%) and Košice (the highest growth in 2013 by 1.8 %). In view of the SR have been recorded as a whole is growing every year between 0.7 and 1.2%.



**Figure 4. Cumulative additional GDP growth due to use of ESIF per capita**

## Conclusions

The EU regional policy is important for SR and helps to equalize the disparities between regions. Its significance can prove summary of the practical part of this paper.

SR in the programming period 2007 - 2013 to the exemption rule  $n + 2$ , respectively for some OP  $n + 3$  still drawn at 63.24%. The greatest efficiency in the disbursement of EU ESIF was achieved 82.64 % OP Health, Regional OP reached the level of 76.83 % and OP Employment and Social Inclusion 74.01 %. OP together so far implemented more than 8,950 projects that enhance regional competitiveness and living standards.

It should be noted that the SR in using of EU ESIF is among the countries with the worst position in the EU position. By the end of 2015 respectively. In an effort to combat the waste of EU tightens rules on what projects even more expensive and increases the difficulty of obtaining it. Nevertheless the management organization of programming period 2007 - 2013 is working more effective than the previous one regarding the needs of SR.

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