

## THEORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF POLITOLOGY

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### THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS AND ITS ROLE IN EU COHESION POLICY DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract.** The Cohesion Policy and the Committee of the Regions as its institutional instrument are among the most effective components of the EU functioning. There are used the method of system-structural analysis, descriptive, generalization and historical ones. The Committee of the Regions formation peculiarities are highlighted as an effective mechanism for the Cohesion Policy implementation, outlines the responsibility spheres of the institution and the commissions that allow them to be ensured. Attention is also paid to cross-border cooperation functioning aspects, which strengthens regional development and helps to solve some common problems, such as the transport infrastructure of neighboring states. After the Russian-Ukrainian war started, the Committee focuses on supporting the affected regions of Ukraine, helping with their recovery. Another initiative of the Committee is the organization of summer camps for Ukrainian children for their psychological and emotional support. The activities of the Committee are effective and widely diversified.

**Key words:** Committee of the Regions, region, institution, Cohesion Policy, cross-border cooperation, EU, development program.

**Introduction.** The European Union is an organization that aims to build a socially oriented model of society. The democratic state development is impossible without the effective functioning of its regions. The Committee of the Regions is an effective component of the EU's regional development policy, the Cohesion Policy. The effective development of one country regions contributes to the increase of regional development of the neighboring states adjacent territories in compliance with the legislation and sovereignty, in this way cross-border cooperation is implemented. This is in the field of interest of a number of scientists. Thus, M. Fontes reveals the role of cross-border cooperation and the Cohesion Policy in the effective functioning of the transport infrastructure. The problems of encouraging youth entrepreneurship in rural areas are highlighted in the works of A. Astromskienė (Astromskienė et al, 2014). The cross-border development of the «Danube» Euroregion takes place in the studies of K. Czako (Czako et al, 2014), and the «green» initiatives of the EU aimed at protecting the environment – in the publications of G. Messina (Messina, 2021). The Neighbourhood Policy and the Committee of Regions role in its implementation are revealed by G. Oikonomou (Oikonomou, 2018). Hogenauer AL investigates the peculiarities of questioning EU affairs by regional parliaments (Hogenauer, 2017). The Ukrainian scientific school, represented by S. Fedonyuk (Fedoniuk, 2020), O. Pikulyk (Pikulyk, 2020) and others, are also studying the experience of implementing the EU regional development policy.

**The purpose and tasks of the research.** The purpose of this work is to characterize the peculiarities of the EU Committee of the Regions functioning as an institutional component of the Cohesion Policy. To achieve this, a number of tasks have been set, such as outlining the essence and of the institution structure, highlighting its main tasks and spheres of influence, analyzing the Committee

of the Regions cooperation with the main EU development platforms, revealing the peculiarities of supporting the institution of Ukraine after a full-scale invasion.

**Research methods.** In the process of researching the main aspects of the Committee of the Regions functioning, some scientific research methods were used, namely the method of system-structural analysis, descriptive, generalization and historical ones, each of which is a system of techniques and means that make it possible to solve scientific tasks. The essence of the method of system-structural analysis highlights the fact that the object of research, the Committee of the Regions, is considered as a single entity (system) taking into account the specifics of the structure, interrelationships, relationships of all structural components of the European Union, identifying the role of each of them in the overall communication process. The descriptive method makes it possible to single out the units of researched objects analysis for the purpose of their further study and interpretation, such as the study of the peculiarities of the Committee's support for Ukrainian children in modern realities.

The method of generalization is a way of moving to a higher degree of abstraction by identifying common features (properties, relationships, development trends, etc.) that are characteristic of the processes and phenomena of the studied area. When studying the activity of a political institution, this method allows to determine the peculiarities of its development, trends in the implementation of the results of its activity in the EU, in particular, regional initiatives in the field of the Cohesion Policy, to highlight the main directions and priorities of interregional communications of countries.

The use of historical and comparative-historical methods makes it possible to track the development trends of the research problem, observe the dynamics of the researched object, as well as the study of scientific opinion concerning the coverage of the features of the creation and functioning of the Committee of the Regions and its role in the EU Cohesion Policy. The set of scientific research methods that were used in the study of the specifics of the Committee of the Regions' activities allow for the optimal organization of the scientific process and contribute to the achievement of the research goal.

**Results and the discussion.** Regional policy is an important tool of the European Union. At the beginning of the formation of the common market, regional policy was envisaged only as a perspective concept, declared in the preamble of the Treaty of Rome. The concept of the EU regional policy changed in the future, as did the role of individual regions and territories in the development of the European community. Until the mid-1970s, it was, first of all, in the hands of national authorities, later the role of the regions became more tangible.

The European Committee of the Regions represents the interests of local and regional authorities of the EU. This institution is headed by the president – Vasco Alves Cordeiro, since June 2022. In total, the organization has 329 members and 329 deputies from all EU countries, elected at the local or regional levels. Meetings take place in Brussels 6 times a year to discuss legislative initiatives and approve resolutions for further EU actions. The administration of the Committee of the Regions is headed by the Secretary General, its powers include responsibility for the preparation and implementation of decisions of the structural units: the Plenary Assembly, the Bureau, the Conference of Presidents and the President himself. Currently, these duties are headed by Petr Blizhkovski (About, 2023).

The national delegations which are the members of Committee of the Regions are presented from each of the 27 EU states. All of them reflect the overall political, geographical and local or regional balance of each state. The EU Council officially appoints the Committee of the Regions members, upon proposal of the member states. Each national delegation elects a chairman and appoints a coordinator. The coordinators' role is to liaise between the Committee of the Regions administration and the members of their national delegation. There are some differences in quantity members from member states. Thus, Belgium has 12 representatives, Bulgaria – 12, Czech Republic – 12, Denmark – 9, Germany – 24, Estonia – 7, Ireland – 9, Greece – 12, Spain – 21, France – 24, Croatia – 9, Italy – 24,

Cyprus – 6, Latvia – 7, Lithuania – 9, Luxembourg – 6, Hungary – 12, Malta – 5, Netherlands – 12, Austria – 12, Poland – 21, Portugal – 12, Romania – 15, Slovenia – 7, Slovakia – 9, Finland – 9, Sweden – 12 (Members, 2023).

The main task of the Committee of the Regions is to bring EU citizens and EU institutions together by encouraging citizens to participate in various events and debates. The Committee helps to bridge the gap between the work of EU institutions and its citizens.

The Committee of the Regions is a political institution, as it is an assembly of local and regional representatives of the EU. Every year, the Committee representatives make about 250 visits, visiting representatives of European and international institutions, heads of states and governments, majors of regions, and also participate in dozens of events and official ceremonies. Issues of organizing visits are the responsibility of the Protocol Service.

The Committee of the Regions has six areas of responsibility:

- 1) local democracy, subsidiarity;
- 2) mobility and transport, trans-European networks;
- 3) environmental protection, energy and climate changes;
- 4) education, youth, culture and sports;
- 5) health care, employment and social affairs;
- 6) economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The Committee adheres to three main principles: closeness to people, multi-level self-government, subsidiarity.

The Committee of the Regions consists of six commissions (groups of members) that prepare conclusions and resolutions for consideration by the Plenary Assembly:

- Territorial cohesion policy and EU budget (COTER);
- Economic policy (ECON);
- Natural resources (NAT);
- Environmental protection, climate change and energy (ENVE);
- Citizenship, governance, institutional and external affairs (CIVEX);
- Social policy, education, employment, research and culture (SEDEC) (Our work, 2023).

A number of EU platforms and networks are used to implement and influence the Committee of the Regions. These include Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), EU 2020 Monitoring Platform, Subsidiarity Monitoring Network, Atlas of Decentralized Cooperation for Development, Network of Regional Hubs, Euro-Mediterranean Assembly (ARLEM), Multi-stakeholder Platform on SDGs, Governat of Mayors, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, Cities and Regions for Integration.

CORLEAP and ARLEM initiatives in the field of good neighborhood policy are used to share practical experience. In 2003, the implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy was announced and started. It is aimed at strengthening cooperation with neighboring countries, including through Committee of the Regions activities. In particular, the Committee announced two initiatives. The first – the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) – is aimed at the eastern borders of the EU: EU countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine. Bilateral projects are aimed at the development of regions between the EU and each of the partner countries, and multilateral cooperation is mainly a platform for political dialogue, energy negotiations, security and economic integration. The second initiative – the Assembly of Local and Regional elected Representatives from the EU and Mediterranean countries (ARLEM) – covers the EU and 15 countries close to the Mediterranean, such as Egypt, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Palestinian Authority, Monaco, Montenegro. It is aimed at strengthening interregional cooperation. This initiative has observer status of the Union for the Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (Oikonomou, 2018).

In addition to these initiatives, the Committee of the Regions is also a political platform and forum for the development of local democracy and inter-institutional cooperation and has a direct impact on another EU policy – the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (Pikulyk, Balak, 2020). Further cross-border cooperation of the Committee include involvement in the integration of new member countries through Joint Consultative Committees and Working Groups; cooperation with the OECD and the Council of Europe to strengthen political dialogue with local and regional governments in the EU.

The Committee is a part of the EU legislative initiative, in particular, its commissions prepare feedback on EU legislative proposals, the Committee members gather for plenary sessions to vote and approve these feedbacks. The Committee of the Regions involvement is also important in local and regional administrations, not just in Brussels. In its activities, the Committee promotes the need for political dialogue and cross-border cooperation. It organizes consultations of local and regional administrations, experts to study their opinion on discussed issues. Intra-regional groups are the forms of special interest groups among the Committee members to discuss local or regional issues, sometimes even from different countries.

The Committee of the Regions uses a tender system to fulfill its purpose. To join the tender, a corresponding application should be leaven. CoR uses two types of contracts in its activities:

- low-valued (up to 60,000 euros), to which at least three candidates are involved;
- medium-valued (from 60,000 to 140,000 euros), to which at least five candidates are involved

(Our work, 2023).

In accordance with Art. 163 of the Financial Regulation and P. 3 of Annex I FR the Committee of the Regions it is required to publish a list of contracts annually. For transactions value more than 15,000 euros, the subject and amount of the transaction should be indicated (table 1).

Moreover, the largest amount of funds in 2022 was allocated for digitization of local and regional initiatives, while the smallest amounts covered the costs of translation into the languages of some small EU countries.

The Cohesion and Regions' Cross-Border Development Policy are ones of the foundations of the EU functioning. When, after the implementation of the transport infrastructure based on the EU Trans-European Transport Network, the expectations in Portugal and Spain did not come true, the reason was less developed cross-border regions. To avoid this, new transport infrastructure was built.

Table 1

**List of some specific contracts based on a framework contract of CoR in 2022\***

FW Contractor LE Name List	LC Contract Amount (Eur)
the most expensive projects	
PRAC SIS	1.714.043,93
Computer Task Group IT Solutions SA	1.341.008,46
NETCOMPANY-INTRASOFT SA	1.282.106,64
Instant News Services, VASS EU Services, C-DEV SA, INSPIIRO.ME	1.075.895,58
EQUANS Services	760.452,61
the most cheapest projects	
ACOLAD Latvia SIA	17.512,10
ACOLAD Luxembourg SA	16.201,29
AVATAR OU*	15.816,78
BPOST	15.300,00
Stichting Europees Instituut Voor B	15.242,50

\* Source: European Committee of the Regions. (2023). About. Retrieved from <https://cor.europa.eu/en/about/Pages/default.aspx>.

Geographically, the territory covered NUTS3 level regions: 18 from Portugal and 7 from Spain. The involvement of INTERREG programs made it possible to solve existing disparities and eliminate them (Fontes, 2014).

In 2011, the European Committee renewed the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. This is a comprehensive development plan that focused on a certain geographical area: Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria. The primary goal was to enable long-term cooperation between the countries belonging to the Danube River basin, increase economic development, improve transport infrastructure to overcome territorial disparities in development through the Cohesion Policy measures. In general, the implementation of the Strategy gave positive results, but there were noticeable differences in regional approaches (Czakó, 2014).

Almost  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the total population of the EU lives in rural areas. During the 2014–2020 program period, attention was paid to young people involved in agriculture or other types of employment in rural areas through the support of micro and small entrepreneurship. The European Parliament encouraged the involvement of young people in rural areas in member states, creating new promising sources of income. The urgency of the problem is evidenced by the fact that a third of young people aged 15–24 are unemployed in Lithuania, which is one of the highest indicators in Europe. That is why in 2014–2020, conditions were created to support young people in entrepreneurship, focusing on attracting investments, commercial activities in rural areas on more favorable terms (Astromskienė et al, 2014).

In 2020, the political priorities for the development of the Committee of the Regions for 2020–2025 were announced (Bringing Europe closer., 2020). There are three main priorities of it functioning:

1) Bringing Europe closer to people: democracy and the future of the EU;

This means engaging with local and regional politicians through local dialogues, increasing women's participation in politics, young locally elected politicians, listening and responding to citizens; three-dimensional democracy: European, national and regional or local; observance of EU fundamental values and identities such as freedom, local democracy, rule of law, human rights and equality; citizens' trust in 1 million EU local and regional leaders: working hand-in-hand within the EU's main political families, relations with regional or local networks, associations and Brussels offices, working with the enlargement countries and the EU's neighbors, improving the EU's democratic architecture through the conference on the Future of Europe, synergies between regional, national and EU parliaments, EU inter-institutional relations.

2) Managing fundamental societal transformations: building resilient regional and local communities;

This includes green development, which includes sustainable growth, global advocacy on biodiversity and climate change, climate-neutral EU by 2050. The latter provides for zero pollution, circular economy, protecting biodiversity, rural development, energy efficiency, clean mobility, European Green Deal. Transformations include strengthening resilience in local communities, migration, demographic change, digital EU regions and cities, UN sustainable development goals. Strengthening resilience in local communities will include improving European coordination, sustainable EU recovering for all communities, managing disasters in regions and cities. Migrations will provide comprehensive, humanitarian and fair, supporting integration, fight human trafficking. Among the demographic changes, it is worth noting managing population aging, decline and depopulation, brain drain, quality employment, social rights and work-life balance. Digitalisation means education, training and skills, tackling the digital divide, infrastructure and connectivity, digital public services and incentives for local business, 5G deployment at local and regional level.

In Europe, cities are the most dynamic for implementing energy policy and technological development. The implementation of the Green Deal proposed by the European Commission in accordance

with the Paris Agreement will contribute to the use of clean energy resources, the development of a circular economy, the restoration of biodiversity and the reduction of emissions. The plan should operate in 2021–2027 and has a budget of 100 billion euros. The main goal is the prospective involvement of all territories and administrative levels of the member countries and the achievement of climate neutrality by 2050 (Messina, 2021). The Committee of the Regions should be actively involved in implementing this, playing a strategic role at the local level. This will make the Program viable for the digitization needed to promote energy transformation and environmental literacy.

### 3) Cohesion: place-based EU policies.

Economic, social and territorial cohesion is fostered and respected in all EU policies that affect people and their places of living. Cohesion is not about money, but about values. Attracting private investment, tackling disparities in Europe, multi-level governance and partnership, simplification of EU policies, showcasing cohesion's added value in the daily of people, renewed European economic governance, cross-border cooperation, adequate European investment. The last direction will include smart mobility, support for all regions and cities, tackling the urban-rural divide, Cohesion Policy, rural development, saving of EU resources, innovation and entrepreneurialism, investing in sustainable transport across the EU, adapting local economies.

Democracy and the future of the EU remains the priorities of the Committee of the Regions. A new chapter for EU democracy, alongside communication campaigns on the Cohesion and the Green Deal, are forming a major initiative for the Committee and its members. The main goals of this in 2023 are to assist local and regional elected representatives and local authorities to support representative and participatory democracy in view of the European elections in 2024 and beyond; reinforcing European values, youth participation and gender equality; and promoting the active involvement of citizens and local and regional authorities in EU policy shaping (Our goals, 2023).

The European Union cannot tackle social, economic and territorial disparities through the Cohesion Policy alone. All EU initiatives and policies, like the post-COVID recovery plan, should fight against inequalities and promote the Cohesion. It must be a fundamental value of the EU. The Cohesion Policy should remain the main tool for a harmonious development of every European region. However, all EU policies should tackle disparities among territories in accordance with the principle not to harm to cohesion, introduced in 2022 by the European Commission's 8th Cohesion Report. A principle that needs to become reality through a direct involvement of the Committee of the Regions, in line with the request made by the European Parliament (All European policies., 2023).

In recent years, the Committee has faced new challenges, as well as European and global security in general. When in 2022 the Committee was forced to respond to a full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine, unacceptable from the point of view of a democratic society. This somewhat changed the priorities of the EU's regional development, and there was a revision of the tools and audience targeted by the EU's Cohesion Policy. The Committee expressed unquestionable support for the integrity of Ukraine and included Ukrainian children in youth exchange projects.

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in Marseille, at the Committee of the Regions summit on March 2–3, 2022, representatives of EU regional and local authorities agreed on a Declaration of EU Regions and Cities on Solidarity with Ukraine. At the next meeting on March 30, 2022, CoR members developed concrete measures for further implementation. Mr. V. Klychko, the head of the Association of Ukrainian Cities and the mayor of Kyiv, was announced as an honorary member of the Committee of the Regions. Info-Support Hub for Regions and Cities was created to implement specific initiatives. The main areas of such support were:

- European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine;
- humanitarian aid to Ukraine;
- positioning and advocacy;
- summer camps for Ukrainian children (CoR Stands in Solidarity., 2022).

The purpose of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine is to coordinate joint measures for the reconstruction of the state, strengthen cooperation with the «Ukrainian reconstruction platform», disseminate information and accelerate dialogue at the local and regional levels to promote reconstruction, provide expert assessment for the reconstruction of cities and regions after Russian destruction.

Among the requests for humanitarian aid are appeals from the «Kyiv of the Future» and «Children of Nikopol» charitable funds; construction and transport materials transferred to the city of Kharkiv; humanitarian support for children and elderly people with disabilities for the Ovidiopol community of Odesa region; assistance to Chortkiv community of Ternopil region.

Positioning and advocacy consists in defending the interests of Ukraine and its regions on the international and European arena, the development of the aforementioned Declaration, the integrity and freedom of Ukraine.

Summer camps for Ukrainian children are an initiative of the European Committee of Regions and the Association of Ukrainian Cities. It was launched in 2022 and is aimed at the visit of Ukrainian children to cities and regions of Europe that are safe to meet, study, and communicate with their peers. The initiative is aimed at children and young people of primary, secondary and higher education aged 6–17 and accompanying persons at the rate of one adult per ten children. The duration of the camp is 4–5 weeks or more, depending on the capabilities of the host country. Such visits are free for Ukrainians, as all expenses are borne by the host parties and local investors. This initiative is based on the Concept of summer activity camps for children and young people from Ukraine. The result of this activity is that more than 1250 children visited the cities of Nîmes, Athens, Rome, Tampere, Gdańsk, Pontimao and EU regions such as Preili, Wielkopolska, Lubelskie, Maramures, Podkarpackie, Pomorskie, Bavaria, Łódź (Concept of summer activity., 2022). In order to further adapt Ukrainian children to a peaceful life and provide them with the necessary psychological and emotional support, it is planned to involve other cities and regions of Europe, organize information and consultation sessions, and involve stakeholders with relevant experience in this area to support local and regional initiatives in their activities. In order to spread information about EU activities of this kind, the Committee website has links to relevant booklets.

**Conclusions.** The Committee of the Regions, as an EU institution, includes representatives from all EU member states and has clearly defined spheres of influence. The committee consists of commissions, which, in turn, act according to the defined competences. Thanks to inter-territorial and cross-border cooperation, the Committee has the opportunity to contribute to the solution of urgent issues in various areas, such as the development of transport infrastructure, the involvement of young people in entrepreneurial initiatives in rural areas. In 2022, the Committee of the Regions offered support to the regions and territorial communities of Ukraine affected by the Russian invasion, initiatives were launched to improve the health and support of Ukrainian children. The Committee of the Regions is an effective and active tool of the EU Cohesion Policy.

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