

Danuta Hübner

Chair of the Committee on Regional Development

"Building the future cohesion policy in partnership"

EPP Meeting of the European Parliament Committee on Regional Development and the Committee of the Regions Committee for Territorial Cohesion Policy

21st September 2011

European Parliament, Brussels

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe needs growth. All European policies have to be harnessed to deliver growth. Regional policy is particularly well tailored for this task. It is our investment policy, it is focussed on mobilizing development potential across European territory. Growth will come from below, from investment decision made at local and regional level. Our responsibility - of European institutions and national governments - is to decide on a decent budget for 2014-2020 and to agree on a legal framework conducive to growth, mobilizing all levels of European governance and partners, avoiding new administrative burdens.

We are meeting at a moment when the European Union cohesion policy enters the last stage of preparing itself for the next period of investment. The awaited publication of the European Commission proposals for regulations on structural funds is going to define the framework conditions of cohesion in the years to come (2014-2020). The new programming period, supposed to coincide with the life cycle of the EU2020 Strategy, is an important phase, which might very well decide the future of the European integration process. European People's Party and the elected representatives who belong to it intend therefore to play an important part in the decisions to be made. Contributing to this objective is the reason for us to have gathered here.

The EU2020 strategy forms an important point of reference for a discussion on the cohesion policy, as it highlights the principle of multilevel governance, which is important for all of us involved in the creation and implementation of

regional development policy. With this strategy, the EU intends to confront the current situation, caused by the prolonged crisis but also to respond to the challenges of globalisation. This strategy, however, does not offer a brand new perspective. Actually, the first steps along the path it offers us have been taken already few years ago, before the crisis stroke. Undoubtedly however, without the crisis all the challenges that we now face would not become such an insurmountable obstacle. Not to put too fine a point on it, everything that is important for the future of Europe depends and hinges on our capacity of putting the Union on the path of sustained growth.

The notion of multilevel governance has not appeared in European politics by accident. Indeed, it comes from a clear vision and understanding what is the best way towards effective growth. Lisbon Strategy was saved from utter failure through i.a. the contribution provided by cohesion policy and its multilayered nature. In order to become successful, the EU2020 strategy has to be based on an active role of European citizen and an involved society. As a consequence of accepting such a premise, it must not exclude anybody from the pursuit of common European objectives. Multilevel governance and partnership, so well known from European regional policy experience, ought therefore to become the very core of governance and delivery of the strategy. Partnership contracts, envisaged for the new programming period of the cohesion policy, are an indispensable tool in this respect, and their shaping will be therefore of great importance for the proper implementation of the strategy.

What stems from the above, is what hopefully no-one in this room needs reminding of. That is, if the ownership of the strategy is restricted to national governments and European institutions, EU2020 will simply not be delivered. Regional and local levels of European governance are already today its important co-owners, capable to harness policy tools they have at their disposal as well as the enthusiasm of all partners: business, academia and civil society. Regional and local communities have the capacity to translate European general strategic goals into their own territorial specificities. In short, more networking and cooperation is absolutely necessary in order to get us out of the crisis and put our economies on the long-term growth track.

Multilevel governance is not a simple one off task to achieve. Cohesion policy is a political, social and economic policy and it is as multidimensional as it is multilevel. All these dimensions have to be fully understood, grasped and embraced, so as to fully exploit all the synergies possible. This is what is inextricably linked to what is branded as the integrated approach.

The most common understanding of multilevel governance is, so to say, vertical, i.e. based on perception of the various existing levels of decision-making (European, national, regional, local). In turn, the best-perceived dimension of this vertical understanding is of course the need for the European institutions and national authorities to comprehend, that they have to share the ownership of the governance process with the lower echelons of power. I am certain that all of us are already doing their utmost to convince the respective governments and commissioners of the sheer necessity of such a point of view.

However, that is not everything. The “vertical” multilevel governance is built not only in the top-down manner, through grandiose gestures of devolution of authority on behalf of the high and mighty. Even though their powers might be important, not everything depends on them and on the efforts to make them lend their ears to the rightful demands of local and regional communities. In fact, these communities need to improve organising themselves for building the multilevel governance bottoms-up. One shining example of such an action is of course the famous Covenant of Mayors on the issue of climate change. Moving from this starting point, we need many more examples of things being done that way, and let me name just a few. We need to encourage smart growth and sustainable development on a regional basis, including in particular the sustainable use, preservation, and revitalisation of natural assets. We have to equip neighbourhoods and communities with tools to preserve open space and to create recreational amenities. We need to work with developers in order to provide more examples of successful residential and commercial developments that feature such amenities, particularly in reconverted brown field sites in urban areas. Of course many more such examples could be mentioned, as the list is virtually endless. Nevertheless, the aforementioned might perhaps represent good points of departure.

Mention of the Covenant of Mayors brings me also to that other, frequently underestimated understanding of the multilevel governance, one that might be named horizontal. As this example teaches us, it is not enough if only some of the decision-makers on a given level are taking part in the process. Of course, for such participation to be made generally applicable and common, one would need binding legal requirements in the first place. However, equally important is the political will, or even awareness of the need, if these come in an amount capable of making a difference.

Both the problem and the solution just mentioned are of course not exclusive to the regional or local authorities. In fact, one might perceive the co-operation of EPP in the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions - the latter of which has not really been allowed to use its full potential so far - as an important embodiment of horizontal multilevel governance of European institutions. On the other hand, important as it might be, it is an example of horizontal co-operation of important part (though still just a part) of only two institutions. Presence of representatives of the Council - and, even more so, of its Presidency - as well as of the Commission is therefore of tremendous importance. Recently I have reminded the Commissioner on Regional Development of the necessity, underlined in the European Parliament resolution of 14th December 2010, to develop a guide for public and private actors on how to implement the multilevel governance principles in practice. This would holistically encompass promotion of economic, social and territorial cohesion in a coherent and integrated framework. It is also a reminder to us, that these are not only public authorities that matter, if an integrated approach is to be achieved. This truth is best understood on the regional and local level. All these arguments show conclusively, that multilevel governance is possible to be achieved also in its horizontal meaning, if only enough hearts and minds are convinced to the idea.

Of course, exercising multilevel governance in all its dimensions through a well orchestrated efforts between all levels of governance and all policies is not undertaken for the sake of itself. It is important for the already-mentioned synergetic effects, for tapping the unused potential of the cohesion policy, for the ever better use of our resources, for improving the financial discipline, and

last but not least for further simplification of the cohesion policy, achieved while ensuring appropriate functioning of management and control systems. Multilevel governance is important as a proof of the proper, all-encompassing nature of cohesion. Programmes aiming at better mobilization of endogenous growth potential in the regions and creation of jobs across the EU stand particularly to profit from it. That notwithstanding, on a small continent like ours we cannot afford leaving even minor pockets of territory with deficit. Multilevel governance shows the way towards achieving just that, confirming the increasingly focused nature of the cohesion policy and expenditure. These are essential to deliver sustainable jobs in the EU and to invest in infrastructure, entrepreneurship, innovation and research and information technologies for knowledge-based economy - all key drivers of economic growth.