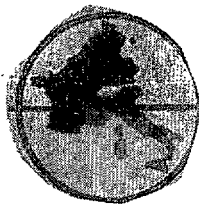

Regional policy in an integrated Europe

by Hans von der Groeben

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This document is based on a speech to the European
Parliament on May 6, 1969

November 1969

1. European integration and social policy

In the past few years the importance of regional policy for the development of the Common Market has become increasingly clear. This was why, after the merger in 1967 of the EEC and Euratom Commissions and the ECSC High Authority, the new single Commission set up a separate Directorate-General to deal with the tasks involved.

The Rome Treaty starts from the basic concept of a single market – an economic area featuring a free-market economy and free movement of the factors of production. It also calls for the removal of distortions of competition. The Commission's task has been to develop the idea of a common market where conditions resemble those on a domestic market and where there is effective competition. The adoption of this concept, in general terms, has been one of the Community's successes, particularly in view of the difference in the standpoints of the member states in 1958.

Competition is not an end in itself, however, and the regulation of competition is not sufficient in itself to resolve our problems and organize our future.

In its memorandum on medium-term economic policy, the Commission therefore submitted proposals for coordinating the main aspects of economic policy in the six member states. The object is to ensure that the economic factors which can be influenced by government action develop in such a way that the equilibrium between the national economies of the member countries is not jeopardized and the economic development of the Community is promoted. The Commission has also worked out proposals, referred to as the Barre plan, to ensure monetary stability. But even a system to regulate competition and the coordination of general economic and monetary policies are not enough to ensure the development of the Common Market. Structural differences between the member states have an adverse effect on the economy as a

whole and on the individual member states as well; they also endanger the development of the Common Market itself.

Differences in the components of costs and prices from one member state to another, which have already produced difficult monetary situations, are not only the result of diverging views on economic policy. They are due at least as much to serious structural differences. A decisive effort to even out and adjust regional and structural differences as far as possible must therefore also be made if a common economic policy is to be at all possible.

So the Community's future endeavours must be mainly concentrated on three points:

- the creation of conditions similar to those on a domestic market;
- the effective coordination of the main lines of economic policy through common economic and monetary policies;
- a common structural and regional policy.

The relationship between these three aspects requires us, now more than ever before, to start a broad discussion on the Community's regional and structural policy. There is no sense in having a coordinated economic policy if the structural and regional conditions in which it can be implemented are lacking. Therefore, over and above the Community's general responsibilities under Article 2 of the Rome Treaty¹, we have a special responsibility to ensure the development of regional policy in the Community.

¹ "It shall be the aim of the Community, by establishing a Common Market and progressively approximating the economic policies of member states, to promote throughout the Community a harmonious development of economic activities, a continuous and balanced expansion, an increased stability, an accelerated raising of the standard of living and closer relations between its member states."

2. The general economic context

It has become a commonplace of economic thinking that continuous growth can be assured only through an equally continuous adjustment of sectors and industries, i.e. we must transfer the factors of production as smoothly as possible from industries with low productivity and expansion potential to industries with higher productivity and more favourable growth prospects. This applies not only to agriculture but also to other industries.

In some countries estimates are available of the economic

advantages to be derived from such transfers. A comparison between the United States and the European Community shows that the Community does not lack highly productive industries. We do have industries as productive as those of the United States. The decisive disadvantage for the Community countries lies in the fact that too large a proportion of the working population is employed in sectors with poor productivity, and this keeps the overall productivity rate low.

The importance of structural factors for the economy has

come into the limelight recently, notably because of the succession of monetary crises. Structural measures are recognized as the only durable answer to many problems. Experts are increasingly aware of the extent to which the transfer of income to assist underdeveloped regions can increase inflationary pressures, and of the way in which an excessive number of mergers, occurring at the same time as an expansion in service industries, can exert an upward pressure on prices. Conversely, they understand that suitable structural measures can increase the flexibility of an expanding economy, and that a transfer of factors of production can increase output under conditions of full employment without causing price fluctuations.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to consider regional policy as no more than an instrument for mobilizing forces to support short term economic and monetary policy. If such were the role of regional policy, the authorities responsible for it would need to do little more than see to the earliest possible transfer of labour from the economically lagging rural areas to the existing industrial regions. From a purely economic angle, the existing productivity pattern would, other conditions remaining equal, militate in favour of this solution.

But such an example clearly indicates what must be the specific role of regional policy. It shows that neither short-term considerations nor concern to preserve the *status quo* can be meaningful criteria for regional development.

It is only in the long term that regional changes in the economy and the population produce results, and this is why the trend of productivity over the long term can be the only yardstick. But this trend must also be compared with the social costs caused by the regional changes.

The need to take a long-term view derives not only from the tempo at which regional patterns change but also from the set of instruments available to regional policy. The instrument of most importance today – and it will become more so – is undoubtedly the shaping of the infrastructure. Infrastructure is capital-intensive and its installations have

a long life. Medium- and long-term projections therefore have an especially important role in structural and regional policy.

Social-policy aspects

Because the geographical distribution of population and labour is an essential factor in regional policy, the latter's task cannot be confined to the economic field; it must also, at the same time, take account of social aspects.

Man is at the centre of our preoccupations. The way people wish to live, their aspirations, their relationship to their environment, and their participation in public life, are decisive in determining their housing and settlement habits, which in their turn influence urban and regional life and consequently the whole of town and country planning. Today these social policy factors have a strengthened role because the purely economic reasons for choosing where one lives are increasingly taking second place: more and more importance is being given to considerations such as climate, opportunities for recreation, and the housing situation.

As travel becomes easier and distances smaller, people tend to become less attached to their place of origin and more ready to move. In other words, their mobility increases. The geographical settlement pattern therefore becomes extremely flexible. The great structural changes discernible in the Community's economy, and particularly in agriculture, strengthen this trend. Regional policy must not simply register and accept these changes; it must positively encourage the development and shaping of new forms, and the research which will indicate how people live and how they want to live.

The vigour with which the drift to the towns continues will thus depend not least on the degree to which modern living conditions can be brought to the rural areas – better housing, social amenities and cultural facilities. The improvement of communications is another important instrument. We have thus to take a look at the whole future course of social developments – that which is foreseeable and that which is desirable – on the basis of economic forecasts and coordinated financial planning by the public authorities.

3. Current problems and Community regional policy

The relationships I have described above – between structures and growth, between regional transformation and long-term guidance – must be studied in their real context, which is that of the Community. That means examining the great structural changes which now face the Community, the tasks which regional policy will be called on to accomplish in order to meet the impact of these changes on present structures and, then, the Commission's role in carrying out these tasks.

One of the great structural changes confronting the Community today is the radical transformation of regions as a result of technical changes in transport and their direct impact on the provision of raw materials: for example, the

changeover to huge bulk-carriers in sea transport, and the increasing replacement of Community sources of raw materials by overseas sources. This means that, in comparison with the other continents with which it competes, the Community will be less and less able to rely on its own mineral resources, and the result will be that the human element will become more and more the decisive factor in choice of location in the Community countries.

The many changes occurring in internal transport through the use of containers, express goods services, pipelines, etc., make the distance factor less important in regional policy. These processes do not affect all areas to the same extent. They favour certain regions. In other regions they alter the

weight of the traditional advantages and disadvantages of location and consequently the relative competitive situation between the areas. In this field, it must be the Community's general task to take account of these changes in the individual regions or types of regions and assess the consequences of new technical developments, for instance in air freight.

A second field in which structural changes affect the Community is the distribution of resources. Structural changes in individual sectors are likely to gain in vigour. As a result of mechanization and automation, the farming industry will continue to set free a large quantity of manpower; in industry, the figures indicate that the ability to absorb additional labour is approaching saturation. As against this, the services sector will continue to expand.

Current hypotheses suggest that the Community's farming population, which in 1958 accounted for 20 per cent and in 1967 for 15 per cent of the total population, will be down to some 7 per cent by 1980. The industrial field, which at present accounts for about 44 per cent of the work force, will in percentage terms mark time or decline slightly. The percentage for the services sector, which currently employs 41 per cent, can be expected to rise very sharply.

In all member states the past 20 years has seen a great increase in the population living in towns, particularly medium-sized towns. A large part of this growth is due not to a natural population increase but to immigration. One of the aims of regional policy is to enable such urbanization to take place within the region, so as to avoid excessive migration and greater congestion in large cities. The achievement of this aim depends on the existing population pattern which varies widely from one member country to another. In some of the member states, the main task is still the setting up of large primary regional centres, while in other member states the formation of viable secondary centres constitutes the main problem. Many investment schemes hold out the promise of high economic returns for the economy, provided use can be made of existing transport and supply networks, such as those found in towns. However, for the Community, this general trend raises a number of questions, the answers to which could contribute to the long-term evolution of the methods and measures adopted.

These questions are, for example, to learn:

- what the constituent elements of the different types of urban centres are, taking account of the functions they perform;
- the extent to which the different types of urban centres are complementary and what sort of bonds link them;
- how relations with the hinterland are organized.

Three types of region

Taking two main criteria – the share of the farming, industry and services sectors in employment, and the density of population – the regions of the Community can, broadly speaking, be divided into three groups.

The first group is that of the industrialized regions, where the proportion of people engaged in farming is small, population density generally high, and the industrial structure well developed. This group accounts for 16 per cent of the area and 42 per cent of the population of the Community

(one third in the German Federal Republic, two thirds in Benelux, less than 10 per cent in France and Italy) and 42 per cent of the Community's population (60 per cent in Germany, 90 per cent in Benelux, about 30 per cent in France, and less than 20 per cent in Italy.)

The second group, which can be termed that of the semi-industrialized regions, has less than 15 per cent of its people engaged in farming and a population density of some 150 people per square kilometre. It accounts for about one third of the area and approximately 55 million people or 30 per cent of the population of the Community.

Lastly, there are the predominantly agricultural regions, where 20-40 per cent of the working population is engaged in farming and population density is for the most part 100 people per square kilometre. This group covers more than half the Community, and accounts for about 50m. people.

Within each of the three groups there are substantial differences which enable numerous subdivisions to be made. There is a particular need to introduce dynamic criteria by which one can distinguish between expanding regions and regions where the economy is marking time or declining. Such criteria are:

- the expansion and prospects of an industry;
- the natural conditions of the region;
- the age structure of the population;
- the extent and patterns of urbanization.

The essential conclusions that emerge from the above are that it is not possible to lay down general criteria for structural development in the Common Market and that a regional approach is necessary. This applies in particular to the ideas set out in the Commission's ten-year plan to reform agriculture.

Practical implications

A. Agricultural regions

The practical implications of these regional changes emerge clearly. In industrialized regions, and also in many semi-industrialized regions, a decline in employment in farming has a good chance of being offset by the expansion of industry and services. But this offsetting mechanism is a doubtful factor in agricultural regions. From 1950 to 1960, for instance, the total numbers employed declined in 34 of these regions. The decline was frequently associated with a movement away from the region and in certain cases with an absolute fall in the total population.

Migration from one region to another is not a bad thing in itself; like the changeover from one industry to another, it is necessary if overall elasticity of the economy is to be maintained. But it becomes dangerous if it widens the gap between the extremes in the economic and population structure of the regions. Politicians face difficult decisions where migration from thinly populated regions threatens to push them below a viable level; it could lead to whole regions lying waste. Although it is impossible to define this level clearly in the general adaptation and adjustment process, in 1962 eight agricultural regions had a population density lower than 50 persons per square kilometre and 15 a density lower than 75 people per square kilometre.

The Community's regional policy will have to distinguish

between two kinds of region: those which, as a result of good production conditions or a high degree of specialization, have a good chance of maintaining themselves as the Community's agricultural production centres in the longer as well as the shorter term, and those regions where the farming population has to struggle against unfavourable operating conditions, natural and climatic, and where the establishment of new industries is subject to major difficulties.

In the first category, i.e. the promising agricultural regions, the main task is to develop existing industries and services to create a dense enough network of urban service centres. In the second category, i.e. the agricultural regions labouring under difficult conditions, the authorities will have to assess whether migration from them has already reached such proportions that the setting up of industries, the strengthening of the infrastructure, and the modernization of farming can no longer be expected to breathe new life into them. In these most serious cases, the solution lies in promoting activities such as tourism, nature parks, water reservoirs, sanatoria, hospitals and health resorts, and possibly scientific research institutes. This is one of the advantages of the growing separation between work on the one hand, and habitat and leisure on the other.

Where the situation is less bad and there is, given the size and the age structure of the population, an alternative, agriculture can be reformed only in the context of a complete renewal of the region's economy. Comprehensive measures will be needed to improve the infrastructure, entailing heavy costs for the member states. These costs should, however, be compared with the expenditure which would result from a migration of population to the heavily built-up centres. As the expansion of indigenous industry in these regions will not be strong enough to support the cost of the restructuring process, their industrial development will largely depend on the expansion capacity and potential of the existing urban concentrations.

B. Industrialized regions

In the industrialized regions the problem generally consists in maintaining sufficient dynamism to adjust development to foreseeable changes. Care must be taken, primarily, to ensure that the economy evolves towards the services sector and in particular, through appropriate links between industry, research and universities, towards the more sophisticated areas of this sector.

In these sectors which are particularly rich in possibilities, the new employment created should where feasible be offered to workers who have become redundant in other sectors of the same region, so as to avoid any undesirable increase in the flow of inter-regional migration through the use of

labour from other regions. The authorities should also seek to create a diverse industrial structure – and so help to avoid future depressions – by a preventive economic policy based on long-term forecasting.

In these regions, the agricultural sector does not usually constitute a special problem. Jobs are available in sufficient number. The figures for Germany, for instance, show that agriculture in the highly developed industrial areas does not lag far behind the other sectors. This is frequently because farmers change over to crops which are highly specialized and, for the most part, require large amounts both of capital and of labour.

C. Semi-industrialized regions

In regions where industry is less developed and the farming population larger, the chief task is to develop infrastructure. The authorities should continue to encourage the setting up of new industries. Individual regions should be considered in relation to those next to them. Where semi-industrialized regions lie on the coast, the task is to promote industrialization through appropriate development of the infrastructure, both for sea borne trade, and for communications with hinterland markets.

In all these kinds of region, it will be impossible to carry out the adaptation process successfully, and consequently solve the problems of agriculture, unless new jobs in trade and industry can be created within commuting distance of the people concerned. This task is facilitated in that individual industries are today freer in their choice of location than in the past. Experience shows that only about 20 per cent – at the most 30 per cent – of the newly created jobs can be made available in new locations; the rest will be provided through an expansion of existing industries.

The setting up of new industries can be expected to prove a lasting success only if the places chosen are well provided with a good infrastructure of public amenities, schools, hospitals, shopping and trading facilities. Also, new industrial zones will in general be viable only if they can lean on a major urban centre.

The changeover from farm work to other jobs, particularly in industrial and semi-industrial regions, does not mean an abrupt structural change, but a continuous process of flexible adaptation over a period that is difficult to determine. The process will involve all kinds of farms whether they provide a full family income, the principal family income or a subsidiary income – and should aim at assuring farmers an income comparable to that in industry.

This process is often accompanied by less intensive land use. To guarantee success, adequate facilities should be available for vocational training and retraining, and workers should be encouraged to take advantage of these facilities.

4. The Community's role

The growing need for Community action

Without an active regional policy there can be no common policies in the form in which they are outlined in the Rome Treaty and in which they are coming to claim a major part of our attention now that the customs union has been completed.

The Commission's proposals for the reform of farming structures ("Agriculture 1980") show in striking fashion the extent to which structural changes are dependent on solutions to regional problems. Similarly, the increasing integration of the Community's economy in the world economy, i.e. the direct confrontation with its strongest competitors and the concessions it must make to the less developed countries to help promote their industrial progress, mean that an increasing number of sectors and industries in the Community will have a process of adaptation. As a rule, this will have an immediate impact on regional conditions and will make heavy demands on the economic and social structure, and consequently on the policy pursued, in these regions. The Community's policy on the structure of individual industries, its foreign-trade policy and its industrial policy are all directly concerned.

The need to achieve conditions in which common policies can be implemented and other policies coordinated is, however, only one of the reasons behind the call for a strengthening of the Community's role in the field of regional policy. The Community has also set itself the task of ensuring the harmonious development of these regions, irrespective of other considerations.¹

The main burden and responsibility for this task will undoubtedly fall on the member states. In the field of direct financial aid especially, the Community will never be able to do more than lend a helping hand. We have no intention of taking the place of the member states or hampering their efforts by useless paper work. Nevertheless, the required balance in the regional development of the Community cannot be assured if each member state pursues a regional policy confined to its national objective. The escalation in national subsidy policies shows what such a situation leads to. Other examples, such as member states' development of seaports or major infrastructure projects, reveal the great danger that uncoordinated action by individual states will lead to a waste of resources and to a distortion of the pattern of location at Community level. If the Community wishes to progress towards adapting its financial machinery to the

major future projects, it cannot for long avoid increasing the degree of coordination of regional policies.

The Commission's task

In the light of the major programmes mentioned, the Commission's task – notwithstanding the limitations of its resources – must be pursued on a wider basis. The Commission will shortly² submit a document on this matter, which will contain certain proposals on the most important problems as well as a detailed work programme.

Comments already made should have been enough to show that the weight of the Community effort should be placed on the coordination of objectives and the means to achieve them, if we are to succeed in the tasks arising from the structural development of the different types of regional need, particularly as regards agriculture. This problem is closely linked with the urgent need to coordinate the regional development aids granted by the member states. Parallel with this, work must be intensified on some matters of common interest.

A. *Coordination of aims and means*

- It should organize a joint study of future prospects, objectives and priorities;
- Member countries' regional policy objectives and priorities should thus be compared with prospects worked out with the member states at Community level;
- The methods used by the member states and, in the framework of the Treaty, by the Community institutions, should be compared in the light of the major aims of economic and social policy, with a view notably to solving specific regional problems arising from existing structures.

B. *Dealing with specific regional problems*

The rough calculations submitted in the Commission's memorandum on the reform of agriculture show what is at stake. If the changeover from work on the farm to occupations in industry is to take place on the scale regarded as necessary, a million new jobs will have to be created in non-agricultural sectors over the next ten years. Against a background of continuous economic growth, this figure – seen in the overall context – does not look frightening. However, if workers are set free in regions where there is little industry, an active job-creation policy must be pursued.

¹ Preamble to the EEC Treaty: "Anxious to strengthen the unity of their economies and to ensure their harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions and by mitigating the backwardness of the less-favoured. . ." Also Article 2, quoted on page 2.

² This document Note sur la politique régionale dans la Communauté – COM (69) 950 and annexes – was submitted to the Council of Ministers in October 1969.

The intensification of structural change also raises problems in industry. Regions where coalmining is the major industry must be redeveloped, and new industries must be set up to take over in areas where long-established industries have to lay off a large number of workers as a result of technical progress. A special problem is posed by the areas on the eastern periphery of the Community, which border on an almost completely impenetrable frontier.

Within the framework of its action the Community must apply, as effectively as possible, the policy instruments which it already possesses. This applies particularly to the coordinated development of the communications links decided by the Council on February 28, 1966. In accordance with the directives in this decision, consultation must take place if these projects concern several countries; and in view of the ever-increasing market interpenetration within the Six, this need does not only arise when the projects actually cross a frontier.

With regard to the coordination of energy policies, consideration of regional-development needs is no less necessary in respect of the provision of infrastructures as of pricing policy. Now that the energy supply is no longer so subject to geographical factors as formerly, the wider dispersal of economic activities is possible.

Another field where urgent problems arise, and which is closely linked to the questions already raised, is that of policy on regional-development aids. It is not difficult to foresee that the escalation of governmental aid (which is occurring and is deplored everywhere), would tend to worsen because of the need to create new industrial jobs in order to ease the situation in agriculture. It appears more necessary than ever that an effective coordination of the policies of the member states in the granting of such aid is achieved. Within the framework of the first medium-term economic policy programme, the Commission has set out in this field a number of principles which should be further developed and put into practice. However, it cannot be denied that an early solution to these problems will encounter many material difficulties, particularly:

- the generally acknowledged principle so that regional subsidies are accorded to firms to offset the disadvantages they suffer through investing in a less developed area;
- the regional advantages and disadvantages are often neutralized by the member countries' financial and tax arrangements, but it is difficult to assess the factors exactly. These problems as well as others are at present under study by the appropriate authorities. Although no definitive solutions are immediately being proposed, it appears that in order to combat an escalation of the aid granted, the following principles should be applied:
- the aid system in all member states should have roughly the same stimulating effect in regions with similar characteristics; the subdivision into agricultural, semi-industrialized and industrialized regions could serve as a basis for

this approach. But we should also consider each region's standard of living, employment, and development possibilities, as well as the economy's need for a general improvement in the regional pattern of development;

- a harmonized aid system should be the subject of regular joint examination. This could help to adjust the systems to jointly evolved criteria.

It is appropriate to observe that a comprehensive approach (i.e. in respect of all regions) to regional policy pursued in these two fields in the interests of coordination does not prevent the Commission from lending its support with a view to solving specific difficulties in particular regions. Included in this work are the regional studies for which the Commission is providing financial aid and technical assistance. From this a priority emerges, it is clear, in favour of regions situated along the Community's internal frontiers and for which solutions within the Community framework are needed. As an example of this, we can cite the studies carried out in the Aachen-Maastricht-Lège triangle, involving Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, and in the Twente-Westmünsterland region, astride the Dutch-German frontier.

C. Problems of common interest

The Commission's third field of activity, as noted above, concerns problems of common interest, which will be the object of joint study by national institutions and the Commission, with the final aim of achieving a common approach and, if appropriate, the harmonization of the policies introduced.

We should know more about the trend towards urban concentration mentioned above, and in particular the optimum structure of city centres dependent on services rather than on industry, and about their size and geographical distribution. We should assess the social costs of developing such centres, so that we can draw up an infrastructure policy that will be valid in the long term.

There are also the problems connected with provision of a transport infrastructure appropriate to a large economic unit. Ports and their significance for the development of coastal and other regions provide one example. Here, the Commission should take concerted action with the member states where needed. The major internal traffic arteries of the Community are also affected, particularly where they have economic repercussions reaching across national frontiers.

The Commission will have to continue to give particular attention to the frontier regions within the Community. Though they often form a natural economic area, they have so far suffered as a result of the incomplete development of the Common Market, and particularly the maintenance of frontiers, differences in the aims of member countries' economic and regional policies, and a lack of joint instruments. There is a need for coordination and close cooperation between the member states concerned and the Commission. Studies have been made on this subject, and work on implementation should start soon.

5. Urgent problems

In outlining the problems encountered in practice, the tasks to achieve and the work which has been undertaken, we can establish the framework and the aims of our future policy. We shall achieve an effective Community regional policy only if these aims are not only consolidated in the course of discussions with the member states and theoretically confirmed, but also, from the very beginning, compared with the situation as it exists and adapted and drawn up in the light of this reality.

The other practical problems with which we must contend – the regional aspects of the agricultural plan, the fixing of support costs, the rational employment of funds from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund and the situation in the coal-steel field – call for practical decisions which it is not possible to delay. That is why, in order that such action should be implemented in practice, it is proposed to undertake, in cooperation with the Commission, studies of several regions. The regions chosen will be particularly characteristic of the diverse situation within the Community and for which development plans exist, in order

to find out to what extent the planned solutions conform with the concepts set out in this paper and in the Commission's memorandum, whether or not these solutions contradict other projects planned within the Community, in what way the programmes will be implemented, and how they will be financed.

If this procedure proves satisfactory for some regions typical of the Community situation, it would make an eminently practical contribution to solving these problems as well as providing an essential precondition to further development and to the confirmation of our approach. The Community's regional policy is not only necessary and urgent but also a fascinating assignment. Although the adaptation process raises serious problems for the individual and society, it is also for the full utilization of resources and gives the individual new possibilities of shaping his life and developing his personality. It is for us to guide this process so that we attain these objectives and at the same time advance on the road to a free, just, and humane European society.

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