

SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE LIGHT OF THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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Introduction

Hungary already established relations with the European Commission as soon as in the days of the systemic change, and signed the association agreement in 1991. The Hungarian government was one of the first ones in East-Central Europe to hand in its application for the accession in 1994. In 1997, at the Luxembourg summit, Hungary was listed among the six countries of the “first round”. According to the Agenda 2000, the first round of the accession can take place around 2002–2003. However, I am more pessimistic; because of the problems about the European Monetary Union and the necessity of the institutional reform of the EU, I only expect the accession in 2006 or 2007, i.e. by the end of the programming period lasting until 2006, or in the beginning of the following period.

The preparation means a lot of things to be done also from the aspect of spatial planning. The definition of the concrete Hungarian spatial policy and spatial planning tasks is made difficult by the fact that we have to target a future state of a periodically changing process without knowing the exact date. In my opinion the regulation valid from 2007 will be relevant for Hungary as a member, so by the end of the present programming period Hungary should be in a position that allows it to actively influence the future reforms, like for example the Scandinavian countries did before their accession.

The place and role of spatial planning in spatial development

In Europe, similar answers can be given to the similar spatial problems and challenges, also, the regional co-operation and the participation in international networks would justify an international co-operation in spatial planning, still all that we can witness is a significant convergence of the spatial planning practices of the individual countries over the recent ten years, since the considerable

increase of the regional supports and the introduction of programming. As the expectations of the EU in the field of spatial policy and planning are mediated primarily by the operational principles of the Structural Funds, the bigger role the Funds played in the development of the individual countries, the stronger the process of “unionisation” was and vice versa, the Funds had no or hardly any effect on those countries that were not eligible for supports from these sources.

The European Commission is striving for consistency in the documents that it makes – irrespective of whether they are spatial policy documents made for the whole of the Union (e.g. *Europe 2000*, ESDP) or programmes made for the individual countries or regions (*Community Support Framework*, *Single Programming Document*). The content and terminology of these documents show many similarities. At the same time, their adaptation and implementation takes place in accordance with the national characteristics (laws, institutions, traditionally used technical terms), which is natural but not free from problems.

The differences can only be interpreted at the European level and the use of common money on the ground of commonly accepted principles can only be assessed if there are *generally accepted principles and a common professional language* in which communication takes place. The interpretation and “single” use of the new categories and concepts promote further integration, but it is inevitable also because the changes of paradigm in the recent years have hardly been followed by the “traditional” spatial planning.

Thus, beginning from the foundations, it is inevitable to interpret the categories of spatial development, spatial policy and spatial planning, as well as their interrelations.

The Council of Europe played the initiating role in this field, for the creation of a similar interpretation and practice. The Informal Council of Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning (CEMAT) is continuously working on the formation of common viewpoints and the statement of the recommendations. Formerly these ministers and the ministries behind them were mostly responsible for physical planning and urban planning, and the change of the attitude from this background is only slowly going on.

The first document accepted as a recommendation in this topic was the European Regional Planning Chart, also known as the Torremolinos Chart (1983/84). As the title of the document implies, the use and relationship of the concepts “regional” and “spatial” were not clear then, either, and “planning” was endowed with a lot of characteristics which are part of a much wider concept, of spatial development in my opinion.

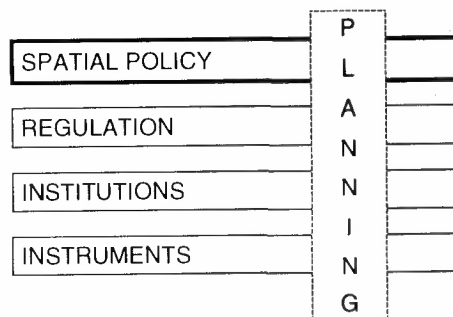
In my viewpoint, *spatial development means the conscious management of the use of space*, which consists of four (+ one) tightly connected subsystems. These are as follows:

- Spatial policy – responsible for determining the goals;
- Regulation – with a mediating, transmission task;
- Institutions – with executive, operational functions;
- Tools, from which spatial planning undoubtedly stands out.

In my interpretation, spatial policy means the definition of the intentions (objectives, priorities and actions) aiming at the conscious shaping of the spatial structures, and the tools and institutions necessary for their implementation. In the European Union this mostly means the working out and approval of the operational principles of the Structural and Cohesion Funds, but it also involves – among other things – the preparation of the different spatial policy documents (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Sub-systems of spatial development



Spatial regulation, as an element of management with transmission role, is the total of the conscious interventions (effects) into operation (developments and problems). The spatial development policy subsystem of the EU has to mediate in two directions: it has to assert the supranational public will towards the national, regional and local decision-making on the one hand, and has to feed back the occurring changes and non-desired effects, on the other.

The *legal system*, the rules and norms of operation make the hard core of the spatial regulation subsystem, but the spatial policy documents (e.g. ESDP) also play an important role and affect the thinking of the member states and the spatial units.

As a result of the division of labour, the different activities take place within different organisational frameworks. *The system of the separate units and frameworks of the functions and the competencies is actually the organisational and institutional system*. Its tasks are mostly execution and management. From the aspect of spatial development, in the European Union the Commis-

sion and the Directorate General XVI have an outstanding importance, but several other institutions – e.g. the European Parliament – also participates in the decision-making or the execution.

The (spatial) organisational and institutional system follows the spatial structure; it is usually well divided both vertically (EU; country; NUTS 2; NUTS 3; local level) and horizontally (e.g. settlement system).

The fourth subsystem is the *collection of possible* – indirect and direct – tools.

The tools of spatial development can basically be *indirect* and *direct* tools. Among the indirect tools, the *general economic policy tools* are the most important, which have considerable spatial relevancies, as well. In the European Union, among the indirect spatial policy tools the CAP/CARPE and its financial resources have an outstanding significance.

Direct tools are the financial constructions that follow regional aspects in the distribution, and spatial planning. We do not have to emphasise the importance of the Structural and Cohesion Funds, but planning, as the ultimate, active tool of spatial development, has to be mentioned separately. There are several factors that justify its selected place among the other tools. Planning is a tool, but it also has an important role in the definition and shaping of the objectives, thus it actively affects spatial policy, as well. When a plan becomes a norm, the plan itself directly regulates, thus it is *part of the regulatory system*. The institutions of planning (decision-making competencies) are important institutions of spatial planning.

The concept of spatial development integrates the conscious spatial interventions at different levels, so it can be interpreted at supranational, national, regional (macro-, meso- and micro-, or even NUTS-) levels. The opinions are more divided about the issue whether settlement development or in a bit broader sense, local development is part of spatial development or not.

Approaching spatial development from the aspect of the spatial types of eligible regions, spatial development integrates and involves the development of both rural and urban areas, including their special cases, e.g. industrial crisis regions, mountainous areas etc. If we deal separately with rural development now in Hungary, we must not forget about the other side, the development of urban areas, either, because just as towns and village are categories depending on each other, rural areas can also be only interpreted in their relationship to the urban regions.

Spatial planning trends in the European Union

The strengthening of the integration and the free movement of goods, capital and labour increase regional differences, and the increasing regional disparities act against the integration. A further deepening of the integration necessarily has to go together with the efforts aiming at the decrease of the disparities. The accession of new members has always raised and still raises new spatial problems to be solved; thus the enlargement of the community increased and the further enlargements will also increase the importance of spatial policy.

In the beginning, the years of the boom, the problems of the lagging behind and crisis regions seemed to decrease, thus no new efforts or efforts of other nature were necessary, so the efforts made at the creation of a harmonised spatial policy were unsuccessful. The taking over of de Gaulle and the French opposition against the increase of the integration also acted against a further strengthening of the spatial policy. Moderate results were achieved in the field of the institutionalisation of the spatial policy. In 1964, "regional policy" was a responsibility of the Economic Committee, and in 1968 it was given an independent directorate general, the DG XVI.

Following the death of de Gaulle, the accession of new members was put on the schedule, which made several spatial issues topical again. The accession negotiations with the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom projected the increase of the number of problem areas. The introduction of the "ceiling system" in 1971 aimed at spatial equalisation. The Paris Summit in 1972 also committed itself to the moderation of structural and spatial disparities. A report was made on the regional problems following the accession of the new member states. The member states committed themselves to the harmonisation and co-ordination of their spatial policies and made a decision upon the establishment of the Regional Development Fund.

The operation of the "new regional policy" and the Fund divided the member states into two groups: those against it (e.g. the FRG), being more and more the financing parts of the programme; and the potential beneficiaries, with Italy in the first place. The oil crisis and the quarrels between the United Kingdom and Germany pushed spatial policy into the background again.

After the election of 1974 in England, France and Germany, the integration negotiations and also the spatial policy were given a new momentum. In 1974, the *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)* was established. In the beginning it had a very limited effect, because its capital assets were small and quotas regulated the eligibility of the individual countries for support. Because of the quota system, the ERDF could not be an active agent of the spatial policy of the community; the member states preserved their role in this field. In 1975, the regional amendment of the "ceiling system" of 1971 took place.

Parallel to the accession negotiations with Greece, the capital assets of the ERDF were raised and 5% of the financial tools were taken out from the quota system, from the authority of the member states, and this sum was spent on the remedy of pan-European problems.

The accession of Greece (in 1982) and the start of the negotiations with Portugal and Spain were new challenges for spatial policy. The whole of Greece is still below the average level of development of the EC. IN 1970, the ratio of the ten richest and the ten poorest regions was 3:1; with the accession of Greece, this ratio was 5:1.

In 1984, regional policy and its financing were revised again. Twenty per cent of the Fund was spent on programme financing. The community programmes solving the problems affecting the whole of the EC were differentiated from the national programmes of community interest. Later the programme called Community Support Framework supplemented this.

In 1988–89, the spatial policy and the operation of the ERDF were reformed. The *Council of European Municipalities and Regions* was established, which, as a *consultative body*, takes part in the formation and implementation of spatial policy. The sum at the disposal of the Fund was raised and the six objectives on which the Structural Funds could be spent were defined.

The problems of the progress of integration and the start of the pre-accession negotiations with eleven countries, also, the experiences of the structural policy so far have led to other reforms.

The accession of any applicant state will increase the number of areas eligible for support, so the Committee wants to decrease the proportion of the population living in the beneficiary regions from the year 2000. They want to achieve this by the stricter enforcement of the eligibility criteria on the one hand, on the other, some regions and countries have developed to such an extent during the previous programming periods, due to the supports from the Structural Funds among other things, that they are taken out from the eligible ones. The regions and countries will receive a transitory support (phase-out), similar to our pre-accession programme, so that the sudden stop of the supports should not reverse the very favourable trends.

A more significant change is the decrease in the number of objectives. The former six (seven) objectives were replaced by three objectives. The one most important for Hungary, the “classical” Objective 1 has remained. More than two-thirds of the resources of the Structural Funds will be spent on this objective. The eligible regions are still those whose regional GDP per capita, on purchasing power parity, was less than 75% of the EU average in the last three years, thus the whole of Hungary will be eligible. An unfavourable change for Hungary is the decrease in the upper limit of the supports.

One can ask whether these changes do not question my statement that the enlargement always brings about the appreciation of the regional policy. My answer is that they do not, because the reforms before the enlargement came partly from the operational experiences so far, also, the increase of the significance of regional policy is demonstrated by the growing share of the Structural Funds from the community budget.

The strengthening of common regional policy necessarily increases the importance of spatial planning. Despite the fact that spatial planning is one of the responsibilities of the EU (EC Treaty, Chapter 2., Art. 130), the role of the Union in spatial planning is still ambiguous, and a spatial plan in the traditional sense has still not been made in a European scale.

In my opinion, the *chances of spatial planning at the EU level improved after the second half of the eighties*. The Single European Act (1986) explicitly specified regional policy among the community policies. The Act set as an objective the strengthening of economic and social cohesion, which is also a requirement for the further integration and the monetary union. It summoned the European Commission to strive for the *convergence of the living standards of the European regions* (“convergence objective”), which required the appearance of direct regional goals. *One tool for the achievement of these is spatial planning*.

In 1989–1994, the informal meetings of the ministers responsible for spatial development greatly contributed to the development of spatial planning on common principles. In 1990 and 1991, the Europe 2000 document was discussed. On the meetings a recommendation was made for the establishment of a spatial development committee. The Europe 2000+ document *in an explicit form commits itself for the necessity of spatial planning at European level*, and at that time it seemed that this opinion is more and more accepted in the members states, both in scientific and professional circles. In 1993 a decision was made on the working out of the document called European Spatial Development Perspectives (ESDP). The elaboration and official publication of this document is a very important milestone from the aspect of European spatial policy and planning.

The role and chances of spatial planning further increased after 1992, when the European Parliament took a stand on the “European spatial planning policy”. Chapter 14 of the Maastricht Treaty, called “Economic and social cohesion”, regulates regional policy and established the Committee of the Regions, presently only with advisory functions. The Treaty requires that every third year a report be made on the achievements in the field of social and economic cohesion. A new spatial policy tool is the Cohesion Fund, which gives supports mostly for the development of environmental protection and the Trans-European networks. The support can reach 80–85%. The Maastricht Treaty, by

committing itself to the importance of the creation of Trans-European (transport, telecommunication and energetic) networks, also defined planning tasks. High-proportion supports are operated in order to achieve that the individual member states plan and develop in accordance with the pan-European objectives.

The further increase of the integration thus requires the harmonisation of the spatial policies of the member states, and a considerable progress has taken place in this respect. However, despite the often-said intention, the question is still open whether there is a common action or land use plan, which should be made at the level of the Union, or the planning tasks should still be carried out in a decentralised way, at national or regional level, on the basis of the guidelines of the European Union. The prevailing view is still that the achievement of the European requirements can be secured by a decentralised, problem-oriented strategic planning that is adequate to the local characteristics. Instead of a supranational plan it is enough if the member states and the new applicants develop their settlement network in a way that does not contradict with the European principles, they adjust their transport development concepts to the Trans-European transport networks, develop their cross-border co-operation, decentralise decision-making and public administration, this way creating a greater chance for equalisation. The European Union has a positive incentive system affecting the meeting of these requirements.

Actually this view was reinforced by the discussion of the document called European Spatial Development Perspectives in Glasgow. In Chapter 4. B. of the Glasgow document it was laid down that *spatial planning is not a community competency*. The ESDP is not obligatory for the member states, either; its application is voluntary. At the same time, the Commission has responsibility so that the sectoral policies should not conflict each other and neutralise each other's effects.

In the European Union, the spatial plans are still made within the national frameworks, considering the community guidelines. In this sense, the "spatial plan" of the Union is the total of the national plans, which respect the common principles and the sovereignty of each other.

The future of planning is hard to forecast, because conflicting opinions and "interests" affect it. The British Euro-scepticism is afraid of any further pan-European competency. The strengthening of the Union-level planning is not far from the traditions of the French spatial planning. The Germans are afraid of a French-type centralisation, but the federal state recommends the strengthening of the planning practice of the EU. However, the also German *Länder* – some of which are bigger and stronger than a few member states – would feel unhappy about the further strengthening of Brussels, so if planning at the level of the Union becomes an issue of inter-governmental consensus, the *Länder* will

have to be involved in this; in general, all those NUTS 2 level regions that have their own “governments”, “parliaments” and legislative powers.

It is probable that the Union will operate in a similar way to the present federal states in the field of planning: in the preparation and approval of the Union plans, the large-scale autonomy of the nation states will remain. The Union level plans are made up from the plans of the nation states in a bottom-up way, with spatial policy co-ordination. The main characteristics of the Union plans will be the vertical division of power and responsibilities. We must not forget that this federal solution preserves the differences and does not lead to the making of a physical plan at the European level.

Spatial planning in Hungary

Spatial planning and especially physical planning in Hungary did not seriously lag behind the Western European trends even in the “socialist” era, and from the 1980s a considerable renewal could be seen.

In the first half of the 1980s, the re-regulation of the preparation and approval of physical plans – including the provision of the opinion-forming opportunity of the non-governmental sector – can be defined modern by the European standards. From the second half of this decade, however, in Hungary too one could feel that spatial planning became uncertain; at the same time, the efforts of the Hungarian spatial policy were adequate to the European trends, and the development-type planning gained a new momentum.

In 1985, the Parliament approved of the long-term guidelines of spatial development, building on the European experiences, and then the government worked out programmes for their implementation and established a financial fund.

The government wanted to launch a programme that creates everywhere the possibility of *development on own resources*. The potential beneficiaries of the supports were seven counties. We can see thus that similarly to the current spatial policy of the European Community, the government wanted to intervene in selected regions, mainly targeting the backward areas and declining regions. They planned to use 21 billion HUF in a five-year planning period. The *Regional Development and Organisational Fund* was created. From the first 3 billion HUF, 2,4 billion operated in a *decentralised* way – this proportion would be welcome today at the distribution practice of the central resources. They intended to use these sums as multipliers for the acceleration of the economic development of the backward regions and the relocation of the Budapest industry.

In 1989, the Council of Ministers approved of the long-term development concept of the North Hungarian region. Within this, the solution of the socio-economic problems of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county was given a special emphasis; also, concrete tasks were stated for Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Nógrád counties, as well. The action plan drafted the creation and further decentralisation of the single system of the Regional Development and Organisational Fund and the Employment Fund, and the extension of public utility work to infrastructure developments. In the economically backward regions, affected by central structural policy decisions, several measures were designed in order to encourage the enterprises: the reduction of profit tax, the normative introduction of severance pays, re-start and entrepreneurial loans and the animation of small and medium size enterprises.

Unfortunately the change of the institutional system could not keep up with the transitions, so spatial development did not follow the progressive changes either at governmental or lower levels. The uncertainty of the competencies of the individual ministries was the main problem. By the creation of the Ministry of Environment and Regional Development, the chance was given for the integration of the two activities, after the abolishment of the division of the institutions of spatial development and physical planning.

In the early 1990s, the designation of the beneficiary regions and the order of the use of regional development supports gradually modernised. There were experiments for the creation of concepts and programmes at regional level (South Transdanubia, Great Hungarian Plain). The introduction of the system of the prefects of the Republic can also be taken as a regionalisation effort. Physical planning activity was also carried out at national, regional, county and micro-regional level, but these were occasional, because of the lack of normative regulation.

The beginning of the 1990s, as a continuation of the previous decade, was a transitory period, and a major change only occurred in 1996. The Parliament, after a long preparation phase, approved of the *Act No. XXI. on Regional Development and Physical Planning* in 1996. This period was definitely prevailed by the need for the EU harmonisation.

The most essential elements of the Act on Regional Development of 1996 are as follows:

- The Act inaugurated new concepts among the general provisions;
- It defined the regional development and physical planning tasks of the central state organs, and established the National Regional Development Council;
- Several new elements appeared among the regional organs and their responsibilities. New institutions are the county and regional development

- councils and the local governmental associations for regional development purposes;
- The Act divided the financial tools of spatial development into central and regional resources, dividing in a 50–50% proportion the earmarked provisions of the budget for spatial development purposes;
 - It specified three types of the regional plans: regional development concept, regional development programme and physical plan;
 - It made a decision on the establishment and operation of the regional information system.

The Act No. LXXVIII of 1997, on the shaping and protection of the built environment, dealt with the physical planning of the settlements. The new act omitted some of the formerly used specifications and inaugurated new ones. The modernisation took place by the acquisition of the European experiences.

Following the change of government in 1998, a new ministry acquired spatial development and physical planning. Within the frameworks of the new ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (later re-named as Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development), primarily rural development had greater opportunities, and the operational experiences so far suggest that the role and importance of the bigger towns is underrated.

The need for the acquisition of the resources of the European Union made it necessary in Hungary to pursue a spatial policy compatible with the spatial policy of the EU, to create those institution and regulatory system which are suitable for the reception and spending of the Union money, and not least to work out planning documents which can serve as the basis of the negotiations with the European Union.

In the recent years a number of regional development concepts, programmes and physical plans have been made at micro-regional, county and regional level. Unfortunately, the division of functions among these is unsettled and in practice it often occurs that there is no harmony among them.

The regional tier is only a quasi tier both as regards the preparation and the approval of plans, which comes from the floating of the creation of the regions. However, opposite to our expectations, our planning obligations towards to EU will not strengthen the position of the regions, in fact, it might even make than more uncertain. In the case of the PHARE and the pre-accession programmes – and also after the accession – the government always has to *submit a national level planning document to the European Commission*, and it is a national competency to what extent and how the national plan is built upon the regional and county plans. At the assessment of our applications for support and our plans, the Commission primarily examines the harmony of the efforts of the European Union and those of Hungary, and the “regionalisation” of the plans is hardly

more than a formal element. This is also underlined by the fact that not only the appointment of the Hungarian planning and implementation organisations is the competency of the Hungarian government, but also the government is also responsible for the financial implementation and control.

In my opinion, it will be a result of the “fight” of the internal interests what role the regional and county level will be given in the formation and implementation of the programmes. In this fight, not equal parties will combat, so the result is easy to forecast. The central government will give the regions roles by which it seemingly satisfies the requirement of decentralisation and subsidiarity, but it will only decentralise to the regional level if that is also a centralisation at lower tiers, better serving this way the interest of the centre. As long as the central government itself does not know what they want, they can use the counties and the micro-regions against regionalisation.

Pre-accession programmes

For the practice of the operation of the Structural and Cohesion Funds, the EU announced the SAPARD and the ISPA programmes for Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The award of the supports is not automatic in these cases, either; the applicant countries have to prepare adequate plans and have them accepted by the Commission.

The *SAPARD programme* is for the community support of sustainable agriculture and rural development. According to preliminary estimations, Hungary can get approximately 12–13 billion HUF of support through this channel, provided that it has *adequate programmes*. It is an interesting experiment that we can see now: the county, regional and national concepts and programmes are being made simultaneously, without anybody providing the harmony among them. The present practice of planning is more like a tuning before the concert, but is certainly not up to the requirements of the full rehearsal.

The actions have to fit into a comprehensive programme, the basis of which is a six-year rural development plan. The preparation of this is underway in the Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development. The structure and formal elements of the plan are very similar to what is necessary in the case of the Community Support Framework, the difference being that their content is linked to agriculture and rural development. The way the plan is approved and can be modified is also similar to the procedures related to the CSF and the SPD. Within six months following the submission of the plan, the Commission is supposed to approve of a rural development plan. For the measurement of the

effects and for the sake of control, the rural development actions have to be subject to continuous monitoring and ex-post evaluation. The applicant countries have to submit annual reports to the Commission on the events that took place in the previous year. A monitoring committee has to be set up for the rural development programme.

The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund provide the resources. The amount of the Community contribution is usually 75% of the state support. In the case of profit-oriented activities, the state support cannot be more than 50% of the total costs.

The *ISPA programme* is also for the practising of the operation of the Cohesion Fund, primarily in the field of infrastructure developments and environmental protection. The ten applicant countries can have access to this resource in 2000–2006, but after the gaining of the membership this opportunity is naturally lost.

The amount or the support, as it is foreseen, is one billion Euro-s, from which Hungary can receive approximately 25 billion HUF per year. The concrete projects eligible for support are selected on the basis of the national programme for the acquisition of the “Acquis”. The programmes have to reach a minimum expenditure of 1.25 billion HUF each. The proportion of the support cannot be more than 85% in most cases, but it can reach 100% in the case of preparatory works (studies, experts), however, these works cannot exceed 2% of the total costs.

The involvement of private resources is also required. The applications have to contain a cost-benefit analysis, too. It is almost a commonplace now that the principle of evaluation, monitoring and control has to be asserted. The institutions for these have to be built out no later than 2002.

One project can only be financed from one source, thus a close co-ordination with the PHARE and SAPARD programmes has to be established.

Within the *PHARE programme*, those projects can get a maximum 25% support, which directly assist the EU accession. Local or governmental co-financing is a requirement, private resources are excluded. Cross-border projects, transport or environmental investments can apply. The size of the projects eligible for support has to exceed two billion Euros. The formerly written general rules apply for the programme under preparation: they cannot contradict the different policies and regulations etc. of the EU.

In the field of transport, the investments connected to the TENs and the development of combined freight traffic can be eligible for support. As regards environmental protection, the decrease of sulphur- and nitrogen-oxides, water and sewage treatment and investments aiming at the improvement of energy efficiency enjoy priority.

Hungary will be an Objective 1 region after the present reforms, as well, so until the EU accession Hungary has to prepare the document that the Hungarian government wants to submit to the European Commission, together with the application for support; this latter will serve as the basis of the Community Support Framework. The regulation of the Structural Funds clearly indicates that this planning document has to have a spatial view.

Hungary is recommended to follow the practice of Portugal. In Portugal, two very similar national planning documents were made. The national plan, building on constitutional bases, was approved of by the Parliament. The document submitted to the European Commission should not be had approved by the Parliament, because that document can change during the negotiations, and as practice shows, it does change, then ceases to exist in its original form and transforms into a Community Support Framework.

Presently there is not any kind of normative basis for the existence of such a plan and the circumstances of its preparation. The Act No. XXI of 1996 and the government decree assisting its implementation include the *spatial development programme at national level* (National Regional Development Plan), *but not a plan*. In principle, the national spatial development programme specified in the Act can be more detailed and in-depth than the document submitted to the EU; it can mention county level, in certain cases even micro-regional problems. It can make recommendations for the support of programmes of such small scale that cannot be treated at the level of the Union.

If the Parliament does not accept the plan to be submitted to the Commission, then a comprehensive document defining the main frameworks is needed. This is the document that the government decree in force calls Comprehensive Development Plan; *it defines for the medium term the range of action of the government and the individual sectors, it determines the use of the development resources of the state and it is indicative for the other actors*. This latter means that other initiatives can receive central support in a given period if they want to implement developments harmonising with this plan. During the period when the plan is in force, the use of the different central resources can take place in accordance with the strategic objectives approved in that plan, connected to the individual operational programmes.

The National Development Plan submitted to the Commission is a medium term *strategic programme*, negotiated and accepted in a broad circle, which *integrates the actions aiming at the achievement of the objectives into complex strategic programmes*. Accordingly, *it has a hierarchy of objectives and a compatible hierarchy of programmes*. As a *document co-ordinating the activities and resources*, it defines those strategic – and in some cases operational – programmes to which the presently separately working sectoral and other budgetary resources have to be organised.

Because the whole of Hungary will be eligible for support under Objective 1, the regional depth, specification is the NUTS 2 level, i.e. the regions. The basic unit of Objective 2 areas would be the NUTS 3 level, but, because the whole of the country is supported under Objective 1, the problems of the counties struggling with restructuring will have to be solved within these frameworks, too.

For the finalisation of the National Development Plan, and the Community Support Framework made jointly with the European Commission, it has to be clarified what kind of actions and developments should take place in the framework of national level sectoral programmes and which are the planning and implementation competency of the regional level. The clarification and regulation of this is the responsibility of the Hungarian government, because the European Commission delegates planning to the competency of the member state. Brussels clearly prefers the decentralisation of spatial development to the regional level, with clear and transparent decision-making and financial mechanisms, which are capable of the rapid distribution of significant resources in a way satisfactory for the Commission.

If the regional level strengthens and becomes capable of the implementation of regional development programmes, in addition to their preparation, the would-be *first Hungarian Community Support Framework can consist of centrally managed "sectoral" programmes and regional programmes implemented in a decentralised way*. The content of the regional programmes is influenced to a large extent by how much the programming and management competencies of the regional level will strengthen.

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