Evaluating the Results Regarding the Implementation of the Development Policies of The European Union

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Abstract

Evaluation is a significant tool used for understanding what works and what does not, but more important why, and under what circumstances. In the context of the significant changes that now arise in European economies, but also the increasingly complex and dynamic environment, evaluation is necessary more than ever to help us learn from previous experiences. This paper uses methods of empirical analysis to assess the results of the implementation of the development policies of the European Union. The results obtained may be of interest to both researchers and decision makers. These results show the increased absorption rate for both programming periods but highlight significant differences between groups of countries.

Key words: evaluation, European Union, development policies
J.E.L. classification: F63

1. Introduction

The results obtained by EU states and regions following the absorption of structural funds and the use of financing instruments are analyzed mainly by the EU institutions, but also by specialists in order to measure their impact on economic growth and development, and reduce the gaps between founding states of the EU and the new entrants, between the regions at different stages of economic and social development, as well as the changes required in the formulation of objectives from one programming period to another. According to the OECD (2009), evaluation involves a systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results, the purpose of which is to determine the relevance and achievement of objectives, efficiency, and in terms of development, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

Viewed as a process, evaluation, in all its forms, allows the analysis of the benefits of an intervention financed by various financial instruments by reporting on impact, efficiency, effectiveness, relevance taking into account the needs of beneficiaries by comparison with the planned results. Measuring the physical progress of a program depends on establishing and developing some performance indicators, classified as follows: output indicators, result indicators, and impact indicators.

At EU level, five criteria have been outlined so that the evaluation is in line with the aims pursued in this process, called the "Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria", formulated by the OECD (1991). These criteria are relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Evaluation is an important part of the implementation process by which results are measured, but future directions are also outlined and objectives are formulated based on the deviations found.

Pavel (2013) states that the evaluation of the impact of European strategies is done by evaluating the related policies that are implemented through funding programs, in order to obtain a more accurate picture of the process and can be: qualitative, quantitative, formative, ascriptive, internal, ex - ante, ex - post, intermediate, of impact, of implementation, objective based, goal free evaluation, comparative, meta-evaluation (evaluation of the evaluation). The methods used are

numerous, such as: modelling, cost-benefit analysis, regressive analysis, econometrics, input-output analysis, case study, survey, interview.

According to the EU Department of Regional Policy (2010), the choice of the European policy evaluation method is an important step after the decision on the evaluation topic and objectives is taken. The choice of the appropriate evaluation method is important, but each method has its limitations, requiring a combination of evaluation methods and / or models to determine the impact of the different tools used.

There are many methods and models for assessing the impact of European policies on economic development, many of which are used by both the European institutions to quantify the effects of measures taken and the investment of funds used, and by independent researchers and institutions. In order to be applied, it is necessary to combine the quantitative criteria expressed by indicators, the qualitative ones expressed by descriptors and the intermediate ones expressed by scores. In the evaluation activity it is necessary to define the indicators and the data used, the values of the indicators being obtained following the systematization of the data by centralizing, grouping and applying various calculation methodologies on the collected data.

In this paper we aimed to realize an evaluation of the results regarding the implementation of the development policies of the European Union through various specific instruments, with emphasis on the comparisons made between the periods of programming but also between member countries.

2. Theoretical background

According to the EU Evaluation Guide (2013), from the point of view of European policy evaluation, an indicator can be defined as the value given by measuring an objective, a mobilized resource, an effect obtained, a context variable, success that produces quantified information in order to help actors involved in public intervention to communicate, negotiate or make decisions.

The literature in the field shows that there are multiple evaluation methods that can be used. However, some of these are more often used either because of their ease or because of the clearer results offered. Thus, Joint Researches Centre (2016) shows that investments produce direct effects that can be quantified, but also indirect and induced effects that can be approximated using modelling methods. One such method is the Computable general equilibrium (CGE) method, developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC). One of the models developed in this method is the RHOMOLO model, used to analyse the impact of European regional policies since 2010. This is a recursive dynamic spatial computable general equilibrium model covering a wide range of tools, from investment support to transport, human capital or in research and development. It is constantly being revised and improved to expand the coverage area, the last one dating back to 2016.

Evaluating the options for Cohesion Policy from 2014-2020, Brandsma et al. (2014) perform a simulation of the impact results by 2023. In the field of investments in human capital, the authors estimated that it will be a positive result especially in Central and Eastern Europe. Increased investment in research and development will lead to regional GDP growth of 1.2% in the Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Portuguese regions in 2013-2023, with the least developed regions experiencing an estimated average growth of 1.2%. Improving transport infrastructure will lead to interconnection in the Single Market, increased exports, reduced transport costs, all of which will lead to an increase in regional GDP, especially in the less developed regions, and implicitly in the regions adjacent to them. In conclusion, the authors estimate that Cohesion Policy will positively influence GDP growth by more than 2% in Poland, Latvia, Croatia and Estonia, between 1.5-2% in Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia and Bulgaria, between 1-1, 5% in the Czech Republic, Romania and Portugal and less than 1% in Malta, Slovenia, Cyprus, Spain and Italy; the estimate shows that GDP will not fall in any state. However, we must keep in mind that the study carried out by these authors did not anticipated the period of economic turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the forecasts and estimates made have been seriously affected and have undergone significant changes

3. Research methodology

The research methodology used in this paper considers, in particular, the analysis of data provided by various international bodies, with regard to the results of the implementation of the development policies of the European Union. For the analysis we also use the graphical representation, which facilitates the realization of comparisons from one year to another, but also between the member countries of the European Union.

The sample of countries considered for analysis consists of the 27 member countries of a European Union, and the period of analysis considered is 2007-2020. The choice of the analysis period was made in such a way as to include the two programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 for the Regional Development Policy.

4. Findings

In the programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, the Regional Development Policy is financed from the EU budget on the basis of the objectives set for each period, through the various types of financial instruments, the most widely used being the Structural and Investment Funds. One way of evaluating is to compare the amounts allocated with the amounts absorbed, for each objective, for each programming period.

Table no. 1 Amounts allocated and absorbed at EU level by Cohesion Policy objectives (2007-2013 and 2014-2020)

Objectives	**Total amounts (Mld.Eur)**	
	allocated	**absorbed**
2007-2013		
1. Convergence	377,62	374,52 (95%)
2. Regional competitiveness and employment	54,47	54,19 (97%)
3. European territorial cooperation	7,77	7,74(96%)
TOTAL 2007-2013	439,45	436,45 (99%)
2014-2020		
1. Strengthen research, technological development and innovation	60,70	35,45 (58%)
2. Improving access to and quality of information and communication technologies	17,98	8,46 (53%)
3. Increasing the competitiveness of SMEs	121,03	61,78 (58%)
4. Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy	46,00	23,94 (52%)
5. Promoting climate change adaptation and risk prevention and management	49,64	30,21 (61%)
6. Conserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	84,25	46,64 (55%)
7. Promoting sustainable transport and improving network infrastructure	63,05	41,27 (65%)
8. Promoting the sustainability and quality of jobs and supporting worker mobility	30,49	31,90 (64%)
9. Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and all forms of discrimination	61,58	34,38 (56%)
10. Investing in education, training and lifelong learning	39,06	25,04 (64%)
11. Improving the efficiency of public administration	5,59	2,79 (50%)
Outermost regions and sparsely populated areas	0,85	0,22 (26%)
Multiple thematic objectives	83,77	70,34
Technical support	21,49	15,15
REACT - EU	39,45	2,25
TOTAL 2014-2020	730,14	411,24 (57%)

Source: own processing after (European Commission, 2016) (European Commission, 2022a) (European Commission, 2022b) Note The amounts absorbed for the period 2014-2020 are according to the mid-term evaluation, reported on January 14, 2022

Data for the 2007-2013 programming period (Table no. 1) show that, at EU level, the absorption rate through the Structural and Investment Funds was 99%, but the importance is given by the results of the investments made. In the final evaluation report, the European Commission (2017) published the following results: a total of 98,7 million people benefited at EU level (36% inactive people, 33% employed, 30% unemployed), of which 51,2 million were women (52% of the total beneficiaries); 9,4 million people got a job, of which 0.3% were self-employed, 8,7 million people got new skills; 276.000 beneficiaries used European funding. From a macroeconomic point of view, EU-level GDP growth and productivity were up to 0,25% (1,5% growth in Central and Eastern Europe and 0,5% in the EU-15). Also relevant are the issues that have hampered the use of financial instruments. According to the European Court of Auditors (2018), the late adoption of the legislative framework, also valid for the implementation period 2014-2020, has led to the late adoption of operational programs, leading to overlapping programming periods. European Commission technical assistance came late, only 13 months before the end of the eligibility period, with the beneficiary Member States making significant progress on the projects. The final absorption rate at the end of 2017 was 97,2%, with 4,4 billion euros not spent. Some measures focused on absorption and compliance with the rules, less on results. It is difficult to quantify the impact of each measure as there was no obligation for states to report data to the Commission, which is corrected for the 2014-2020 programming period. For the Convergence Objective, the total amount allocated was 377,62 billion euros through five Structural Funds. To this target has been added 0,96 billion euros for developed areas that have exceeded the eligibility threshold, called "non-convergent regions", through the EFF. The Objective of Regional Competitiveness and Employment included allocations through the ESF (European Social Fund) and the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), and the Objective of European Territorial Cooperation - through the ERDF.

The European Commission (2022a) publishes data for the 2014-2020 programming period, the total amount allocated is 730,14 billion euros, of which 535,06 billion euros are from the EU budget, the rest being national contributions. The highest total amount is allocated to the objective of Increasing the competitiveness of SMEs, of 121,03 billion euros, in the next place in terms of the total amount of the allocation being the objective Conservation and protection of the environment and promotion of resource efficiency, with an allocated value of 84,25 billion euros. 21,49 billion euros are earmarked for the efficient use of allocated funds for Technical Assistance. In 2021, under the Cohesion Policy, an additional theme was added - Promoting crisis remediation and resilience - related to the new REACT - EU funding, adopted in response to the coronavirus pandemic for which 39.45 billion euros has been allocated. At the beginning of 2022, for all objectives, the absorption exceeds 50%, the total amount absorbed being 411,24 billion euros, representing 57% of the total allocated value. Relevant are the concrete results obtained by financing the various types of activities, recorded by the end of 2021, by objectives (Table no. 2) (European Commission, 2022a).

Table no. 2 The impact of the use of structural funds at EU level on objectives - completed projects (2014-2020)

Objectives	Results (% of Proposed Value)
1. Strengthen research, technological development and innovation	ERDF – 56.583 beneficiary companies (43,62%); 5.304 new research beneficiaries (18,6%)
2. Improving access to and quality of information and communication technologies	EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) - agriculture –1.192.680 innovative projects, 2.989 interactive projects (21,3%)
3. Increasing the competitiveness of SMEs	ERDF – 2,9 million households - access to broadband connection (29%); improving access to health services – 1,6 million people (100%)
4. Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy	EAFRD -2,3% rural citizens (17,42%)
5. Promoting climate change adaptation and risk prevention and management	ERDF - new SMEs 64.967 (45,12%), new jobs 95.325 (31%); start-ups 19.400
6. Conserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	EMFF (European Fisheries and Maritime Fund) - 9.698 modernized farms (38,33%); 105.788 new young farmers supported (59,52%)

7. Promoting sustainable transport and improving network infrastructure	All funds – 1.002 new jobs (19,21%)
8. Promoting the sustainability and quality of jobs and supporting worker mobility	EMFF – 1,3% of actions to reduce carbon emissions (2,1%)
9. Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and all forms of discrimination	ERDF- 3,66 million people protected from floods; 6,14 million people protected from forest fires
10. Investing in education, training and lifelong learning	EMFF – 8,53% farms supported in the field of risk management
11. Improving the efficiency of public administration	ERDF recycling 1,8 million tons of waste (34%), 7,3 million people access to water and sewer (58%)

Source: (European Commission, 2019b) (European Commission, 2022a)

The data showing the progress and the impact registered is due to the specific evaluation methodology that was imposed by law at the beginning of the 2014-2020 programming period, as opposed to the previous implementation period in which the evaluation was not carried out uniformly at EU level, was not applied on objectives and the data collected were not used effectively. The final evaluation of the results will be possible after 2023, according to the European Commission (2019b) the funds can be implemented within a period of three years after the adoption of the budget, therefore the deadline is set for the year 2023 (N + 3 rule) (European Commission, 2019b).

The European Commission (2016) states that the programs implemented during 2007-2013 took place in the context of various challenges. These included, on the one hand, the deep global economic and financial crisis and, on the other hand, the need to build the economy, infrastructure and administrative capacity of 13 Member States that have joined since 2004, for the most part being the first programming period completed. The ex-post evaluation of the ERDF and the CF (Cohesion Fund) 2007-2013 provides evidence that Cohesion Policy has responded effectively to these challenges and delivered a wide range of positive results. Based on monitoring data, it is estimated that approximately 1 million jobs have been created. In addition, macroeconomic models estimate that Cohesion Policy for the period 2007-2013 will generate an additional 1 trillion euros in GDP by 2023. The added value of EU Cohesion Policy is certain through the following results: through trade effects, Cohesion Policy has a net positive impact on the GDP of each EU region at the end of the financial year, even on major taxpayers, with a long-term expansion until 2023. In the context of the economic crisis and pressures on the public investment budgets of less developed countries, Cohesion Policy has allowed SMEs to withstand and even expand during the crisis and to invest in transport and waste and water management. used to meet major policy objectives. The results of the 2007-2013 ex-post evaluation confirm many of the improvements made to the 2014-2020 regulations, as many of the many aspects have become visible to practitioners and are found in the evaluations. The 2007 ex-post evaluation 2007-2013 brings greater analytical depth to these issues and examines several thematic areas that have not been examined in depth before. It also provides a reference framework for assessing in the coming years how issues are addressed in an efficient and proportionate manner, as well as the elements that will need to be maintained or strengthened after 2020.

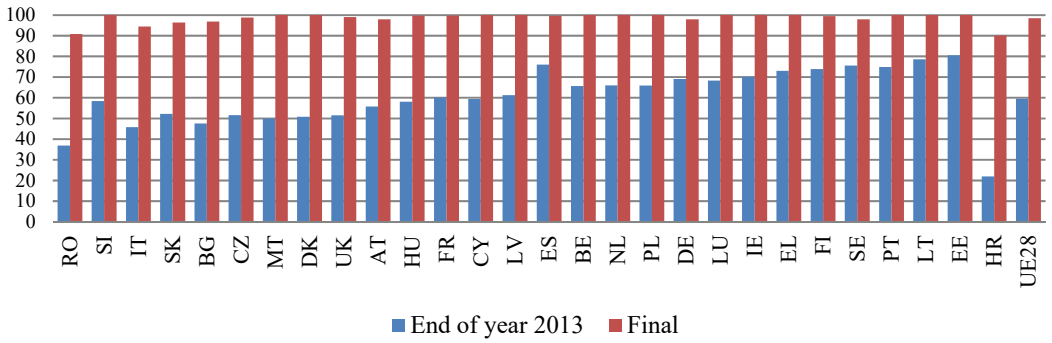
Ex-ante evaluation of the impact of Cohesion Policy for the implementation period 2014-2020 based on RHOMOLO modelling is carried out in the study Evaluation of policy options for Cohesion Policy 2014-2020. Investments in infrastructure, human capital development and climate innovation are considered separately, but also in combination to get an overview of the overall effect. Corroborating the data for the period 2013-2020 published by Eurostat (2022) at the beginning of the year with the data resulting from the simulation by the RHOMOLO model, it can be concluded that for the period 2013-2020, the data obtained from the simulation are completely contradicted: the increase for the first group of states is between 7% and 25%, for the second group - between 13% and 23%, for the third group - between 5% and 26%, and for the last group - between 4% and 40%, with the exception of Italy, whose GDP fell by 4%. The same trend as in Italy was followed by Greece, with GDP falling by 5 percent in 2013-2020.

The evaluation of the impact of the use of structural funds at EU level for the period 2007-2013 by the European Commission was carried out in 2016, highlighting the main achievements at EU level, but also for each country, taking into account two of the three funds of the Policy Cohesion -

ERDF and CF, ESF having a separate evaluation. The results of the evaluation were published in the Commission document entitled Ex post evaluation of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund 2007-13.

In terms of implementation, funding has been allocated to 440 operational programs (322 for ERDF - CF and 118 for ESF) starting in January 2007 and ending in December 2015, with the last payments being made in 2017. The implementation rate by absorbing ERDF and CF funding varied from country to country (see Figure no. 1). The year 2013 was the middle of the period set for payments through the Structural Funds of Cohesion Policy, so the analysis taking into account two stages of absorption, the mid-term stage and the final stage is useful to observe the capacity of states to submit projects and recover delays. It should also be noted that a number of countries (Italy, Denmark, Austria, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, Ireland, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom) did not benefited from the CF for the 2007-2013 programming period.

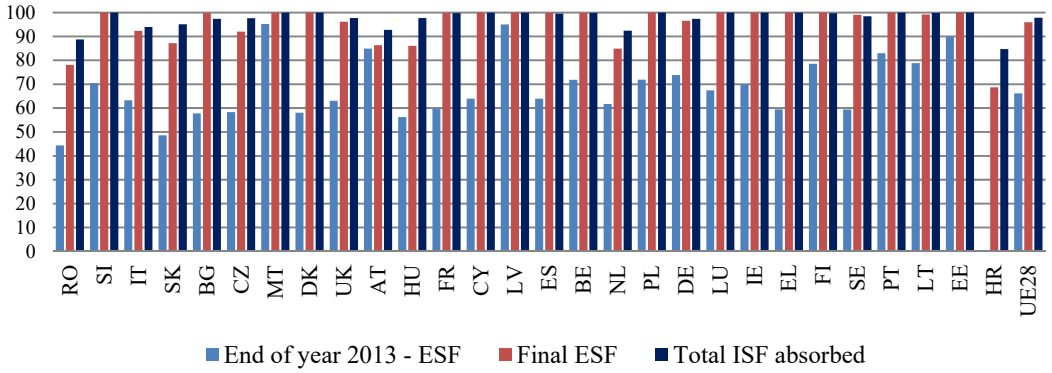
Figure no. 1. Amounts absorbed (%) of total ERDF and CF funds allocated for EU-28 (2007-2013)



Source: own processing after (European Commission, 2022b)

The period up to the end of 2013 shows the absorption rate of the total ERDF and CF allocated, noting that there are differences between the implementation rates both in the middle of the period and in the reduction of the gaps along the way. The analysis of the absorption rate in the middle of the period shows that the highest value is for Estonia, of 80,53%. Also, 15 states have a rate above the EU28 average of 59,5%, the rest of the states being below the European average, on the last places being Romania, with 37% and Croatia with 22%. The maximum values, of 100%, of the final absorption rate for ERDF and CF correspond to a number of 14 states, above the EU28 average, of 98.51%, are situated 6 more states. The highest recovered value of the period belongs to Croatia, of 68%, followed by Romania, of 54% and Malta, of 50% (final absorption of 100%). On the last places in terms of the total absorption rate for ERDF and CF are Romania (90.87%) and Croatia (90.1%).

Figure no. 2. Amounts absorbed (%) of total ESF funds and total (%) ISF absorbed (2007-2013) for EU-28

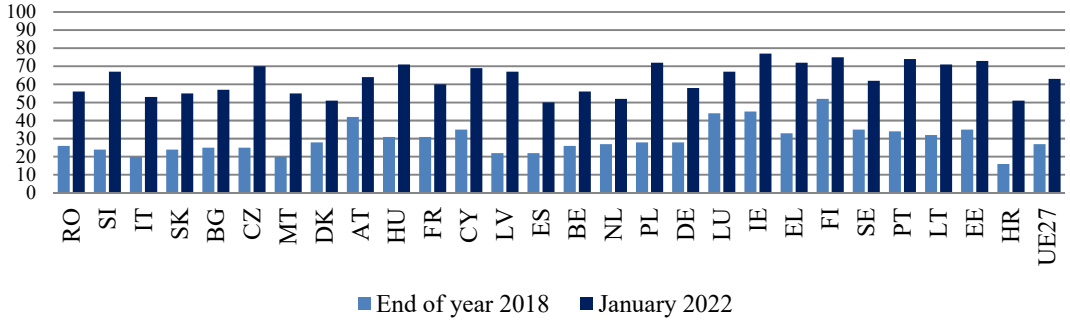


Source: own processing after (European Commission, 2022b)

At the middle of the implementation period, a number of 13 countries have the ESF absorption rate above the EU-28 average (66.15%), of which Latvia and Malta have values above 90%, 95% and respectively 95.19%. The rest of the countries are below the value of the EU average, the lowest value being that of Romania, of 44.32%, also below 50% is the absorption rate of Slovakia, of 48.55%. A special situation is for Croatia, which joined the EU on 1 July 2013, receiving funding from the CF and the ERDF in the form of pre-accession funds from 2008 and the ESF from 2014, so that at the end of 2013, the amount absorbed through ESF is 0. The average absorption at EU-28 level was 96%, above this average being a number of 20 states, of which 11 states with a value of 100%, below average being 8 states, the last two being Romania (78.08%) and Croatia (68.67%). During the period, Croatia (68.67%) recovered the most, followed by Bulgaria (42.11). The lowest absorption rate for the second half of the period was Austria followed by Malta, Latvia, Estonia and Portugal, the total absorption rate of the three states being 100%. Malta and Latvia have applied for maximum ceilings since the beginning of the period, with at the end of 2013 applications for 95% of the allocated amounts. The 2007-2013 programming period is characterized by a high absorption rate at EU level through the Structural and Investment Funds allocated to Cohesion Policy, of 97.86%. A number of 17 states had values of absorption above the average rate, of which 11 states with a rate of 100%, on the last places below the European average being Romania and Croatia, the penultimate one with an advance of 4%.

For the period 2014-2020, the interim data published in January 2022 provide an image of the capacity to implement the objectives of the Cohesion Policy through ISF (Internal Security Fund) by analysing the values of the amounts absorbed at the end of 2018 (mid-programming period) and 2022 (Figure no. 3).

Figure no. 3. Amounts absorbed (%) of total allocate fund through ISF in2018 and 2022, UE-27

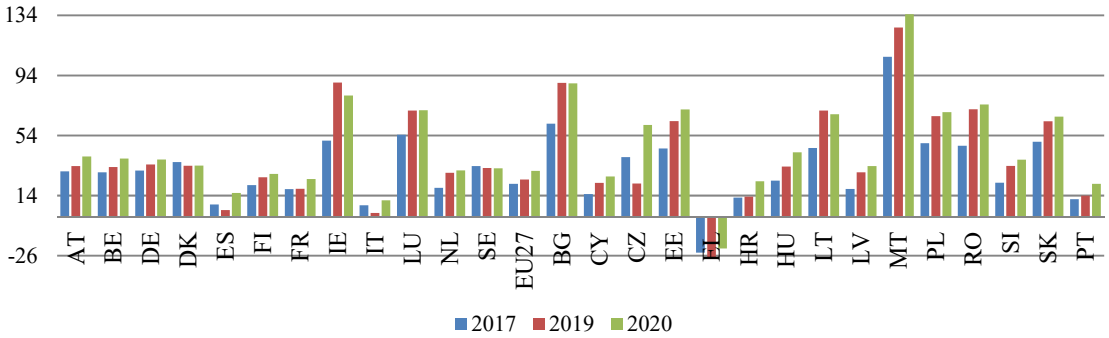


Source: own processing after (European Commission, 2022b)

At the end of 2018, the average value of absorption through the ISF for the EU-27 is 27% (mid-programming period), rising to 63% in early 2022. The highest absorption rates, above the EU-27 average, are for Finland (52%), Ireland (45%), Luxembourg (44%), Austria (42%), another 8 countries have an average above 30%, another 3 countries below 30%, but still above the EU-27 average. The lowest absorption rates in 2018 were for Croatia (16%), Malta and Italy, (20% each), Romania having 26% and Poland 28%. In 2022, the absorption rate at EU-27 level increased to 63% as values increased for all countries. A total of 15 countries exceed the EU average, with the highest values for Ireland (77%), Finland (75%), Portugal (74%) and the lowest in Spain (50%), Croatia and Denmark (51%), Romania having a total absorption of 56%, and Poland of 72%. The highest value recovered during the period is Latvia, 55%, the lowest - Austria, 22%.

Analyses of the impact of the use of structural funds on the growth and development of the economy can be made in the light of changes in the values of GDP and GDP per capita. Data on the evolution of GDP in EU countries for the period of implementation of Cohesion Policy, 2007-2013 (2017 being the last year in which payments were made for the programming period), as well as for the period 2014-2020 (year taken into account being 2020) can be also a method of analysis on economic and social development (Figure no. 4).

Figure no. 4. Change (%) in EU-27 GDP in 2017, 2019 and 2020 compared to 2007 (2007 = 0%)

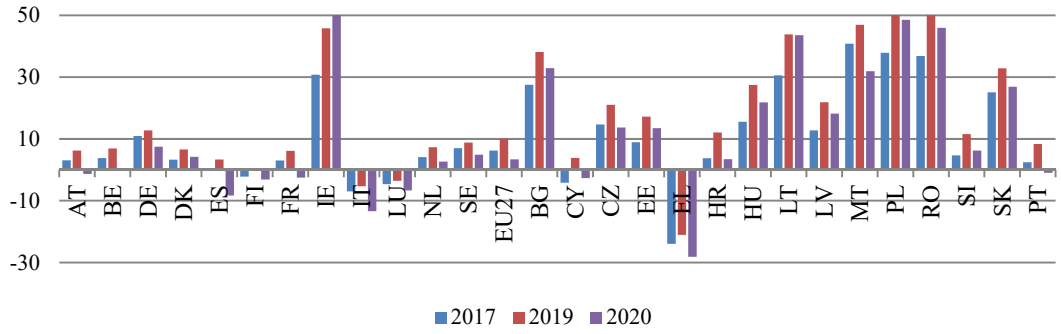


Source: own calculation from data extracted from (Eurostat, 2021)

It is observed that the evolution of the GDP of the EU-27 Member States in relation to the value for 2007 is different, positive, increasing at different rates, with lower values in 2020 compared to 2019 for all states except Greece. Negative values are recorded for Greece reporting the values of 2017, 2019 and 2020 to the value of 2007. The highest increase, of 106.39% in 2017 and of 134.77% in 2019 is that of Malta. The smallest increasing neing og Italy's 7.54% in 2017 compared to 2007 and 10.91% in 2019. In 2020, most EU countries, except Ireland (+8.53 %), Bulgaria (+1.62%), Lithuania (+1.55%) and Sweden (+0.24%), recorded lower GDP values compared to 2019, the largest decrease being the Czech Republic. Compared to the average value of EU-27 GDP growth (we considered for the whole period analyzed 27 states to be able to compare the data at the level of 2020), in 2017 a number of 17 states exceed this value, in 2019 and 2020 being 19 states. In 2020, EU-27 GDP is lower with 5.79% compared to 2019. The low GDP growth for some countries and the decline for others in 2020 show that the economic growth trend may be affected when unforeseen situations arise at European or global level. The impact of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is negative to a greater or lesser extent, demonstrating that, at EU level, economic growth cannot be sustained under any fluctuating under the influence of unpredictable factors.

The evolution of the GDP per capita values compared to the GDP per capita value from 2007 as reference year, for 2017, 2019 and 2020, can determine conclusions regarding the economic development of each state, GDP per being an indicator to measure the development, and the comparison from the point of view of the value of this indicator between states reveals the convergence at European level (Figure no. 5).

Figure no. 5 Change (%) of GDP per capita of EU-27 countries in 2017, 2019 and 2020 compared to 2007 (2007 = 0%)



Source: own processing after (Eurostat, 2022)

During the analyzed period, having as reference the values of GDP per capita of each state at the level of 2007, there are both increases and decreases of the indicator, in different proportions. Greece has registered significant decrease in the three reference years. Three other states, Italy,

Luxembourg and Finland, have a GDP per capita decrease of between 7% and 0.16% in the three years, with the exception of 2020, when Italy's decrease is 13%. In 2017 and 2020 Cyprus had a registered a reduction in GDP per capita, the value for 2019 being positive, increasing compared to the reference year 2007, of about 4%. Values below the level of 2007 are for Spain, France, Austria and Portugal. The rest of the states have higher GDP per capita values compared to 2007, the highest increases being in Malta (40.85%) in 2017, Poland (52.28%) in 2018 and Ireland (52.72%) in 2020 The lowest positive values are for Spain (0.21% and 3.36%) in 2017 and 2019, and Belgium (0.36%) in 2020. Significant increases of more than 20% in 2017 were in Poland, Romania, Ireland, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Slovakia (between 37.89% and 25.8%), in 2019 - Romania, Malta, Ireland, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia and the Czech Republic (between 50.74% and 21.05%), and in 2020 - Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Malta, Slovakia and Hungary (between 48.5% and 21.81%). By 2017, the countries with significant growth were eligible with all regions for the Convergence objective, with the exception of Ireland which had two regions eligible for the Competitiveness and Employment objective. For the 2014-2020 programming period, countries with GDP per capita growth above 20% compared to 2007 are on the list of countries with regions eligible for CF, ERDF and ESF, with the exception of Ireland whose regions are regions of transition. According to the European Commission, phase-in assistance was provided until 2013 to regions whose GDP was below 75% of the EU-15 average in the period 2000-2006, but above this threshold after 2007 (European Commission, 2022c).

It is clear that there is economic growth in all EU countries, one of the drivers of growth is the funds allocated to economic development, but one of the main directions of Cohesion Policy is to reduce the gaps between European regions by promoting economic convergence, based on less developed regions. For the analysis of the narrowing of the gap between Member States, we considered it useful to measure the GDP per capita variation in 2007, 2017, 2019 and 2020 taking into account the GDP per capita values of Luxembourg, which are the highest for the period analyzed (2007 – 88120 euros, 2017 – 84020 euros, 2019 – 85030 euros, 2020 - 82250 euros). In 2007, the gap between Luxembourg and the second country in the EU ranking, Denmark, is 47.56%. The most accentuated gap is between Luxembourg and Bulgaria (of 94.55%), in front of Bulgaria being Romania, with a value of 93.13%. From the 26 countries measured, the last half of the ranking includes the states that joined the EU in 2004 (in descending order of values - Slovenia, Malta, Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland), followed by Croatia, which joined in 2013 (standing between Slovakia and Hungary) and Portugal, which joined in 1986 (between Slovenia and Malta). At the level of 2017, the place of Denmark is occupied by Ireland, the difference compared to Luxembourg being 35.81%. On the last two places of the ranking are located, as in 2007, Bulgaria (difference of 92.72%) and Romania (difference of 90.15%), being able to observe a reduction of the gap, but of small value. In the last half of the ranking are about the same countries, with Malta rising in the first half of the ranking, with Greece entering 5.17% compared to 2007. All EU-27 countries are reducing their difference from Luxembourg, except Greece. The largest decrease is in Ireland, of 17.39%. For 2019 and 2020, the situation is the same in terms of ranking as in 2017, in terms of calculated values being increases for all states, which means that the gap with the state with the highest GDP per capita continues to reduce, but the rate of reduction is very slow.

5. Conclusions

The main purpose of the European Structural and Investment Funds is to encourage sustainable socio-economic convergence, resilience and territorial cohesion. The second Strategic Report at the end of 2019 (European Commission, 2019) reveals that 72% of available ESI resources were committed. Projects already funded have a growing impact in key policy areas, such as: more than 1,6 million businesses - including farms - are supported; 300.000 new jobs are created by supported companies; 26 million people have received training, education or job search assistance; 8,3 million households will have access to better broadband; over 3.900 km of railway lines are built or rebuilt; 60 million people benefit from ongoing projects in the health sector, the results of which are constantly growing as various projects are carried out.

The process of measuring the implementation of development policies at EU level has an important role to play in determining economic growth, reducing intra- and inter-Community gaps, setting future directions for action, and comparing the level of economic and social development between the European Union and other countries of the world. Evaluation involves the use of indicators by specific methods, depending on the theme and objectives pursued, by institutional bodies or independent researchers.

The Structural and Investment Funds are allocated from the EU budget in the light of different allocation criteria, based on objectives set at Union level for a programming period, based on national programs, to which are added national contributions. In order to shape an overview at EU level, it is necessary to develop a specific, unitary evaluation methodology. An important component of the evaluation process is the choice of indicators used so that the results correspond to the theme and provide a real picture of the effects produced, the aim being to identify the key components on which future interventions are needed.

For EU countries, the analysis of GDP and GDP per capita shows that the trend of economic growth is positive since 1990, with periods of fluctuating growth, periods of global economic crisis affecting the pace of growth and highlighting the fact that, from an economic point of view, European construction is influenced by the global state of the economy or unforeseen situations, as evidenced by the decline in GDP per capita of most European countries in 2020 compared to 2019, amid the economic crisis caused by the COVID pandemic - 19. Determining the factors that led to the growing trend during the pandemic for Ireland and Lithuania may be the basis for formulating specific policies to achieve enhanced economic growth in other European countries as well, with the loss of development gains requiring immediate action.

6. References

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