

Convergence Instruments of Western Balkan Countries

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ABSTRACT – *The fundamental objective of the EU regional policy is to reduce differences in development between regions in Europe. EU is directing structural funds to the regions which need help, and in that way EU helps to raise the level of employment and living standards. Financing is based on 4 main principles of regional policy. For the candidate countries are intended the pre-accession instrument IPA. Candidate countries have problems in using that intended resources due to inefficient public administration.*

New member countries allocate the majority of resources from the ESF (European Social Fund), ERDF(European Regional Development Fund) and the Cohesion Fund, with special emphasis on growth, employment and European territorial cooperation. These objectives also form the basis of the financial perspective 2014. - 2020. During that financial perspective the total amount for regional policy in EU budget will be near to 32%.

KEY WORDS: *EU, ERDF, ESF, Cohesion fund, regional policy, convergence, Western Balkan countries*

Introduction

Western Balkan countries were affected by political and war turbulences in early 90s, and that situation largely determined their further economic development. These countries, characterized by economic and social crisis, are searching for a way to improve living standard population. Also, fundamental objective of these countries is accession to the EU. In the accession, these countries must use the pre-accession funds. Also, it is very important to examine the allocation experience of new EU member countries.

Recent trends in the European Union, marked by several rounds of enlargement, have led to regional disparities and the growing gap between developed and underdeveloped regions and counties. To reduce these regional disparities it is necessary to introduce the concept of regional policies and instruments of implementation. The preamble of the Treaty establishing the European Community (also known as the Treaty of Rome) called for the strengthening of the economy in Europe and ensures the harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions, and concern for the less developed regions. Implementation of regional policy objectives is achieved through 4 main instruments: ERDF, ESF and Cohesion fund. Pre-accession instrument IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) is available for candidate countries of the Western Balkan.

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This paper aims to define basic characteristics and instruments of EU regional policy, analyze financial perspective 2014-2020 and to show the level of exploitation of the Structural Funds and pre-accession programs in new member countries, candidate countries and potential candidate countries from Western Balkan.

EU regional policy

Regional policy is an instrument of encouraging adaptation to new developments and common policies, and includes financial support for projects of restructuring the problematic areas. Reducing regional disparities is an essential condition for every economic and political progress of the EU. Comparing the development of different regions, usually as a criteria is taken into account the value of GDP per capita, unemployment rate, etc. One of the most important objectives of the European Union is to achieve economic and social cohesion. (Kandžija; Cvečić, 2008.)

As general objectives, along with the already mentioned economic and social cohesion, can be defined also: (Kandžija; Cvečić, 2010.)

- The representation of awareness of regional issues in other public policies;
- Coordination of regional policies in the countries;
- Providing financial instruments to encourage the development of less developed areas.

The most important elements that negatively affect the achievement of these goals are: High concentration of economic activities and population in the central metropolitan areas; Significant regional differences in the level of GDP and employment; Limited availability of certain services in the regions and cities; Socio-economic problems in remote and isolated areas. (Belić, 2008.)

Regional policy is based on five main principles (Kandžija; Cvečić, 2010.)

1. Concentrations: available resources are concentrate on regions whose GDP per capita does not exceed 75% of the EU average;
2. Co-financing: Member States of the structural funds must supplement national funds and loans from the European Investment Bank;
3. Programming: The Commission tries to focus national policy priorities with conditioned program of regional development;
4. Partnership: all stages of policy implementation should be carried out in cooperation with national authorities, regional and local authorities and the relevant economic and social partners.
5. Subsidiarity – deciding down to the level closest to the citizen.

For quality establishment and implementation of regional policy, member states should establish a proper legal framework that assumes budgeting and financing for regional development. For the realisation of this condition it is necessary the functioning of the institutions in the member states that manage financial resources of funds. Regional policy requires a high level of harmonization with other common policies such as social and market competition policy. (Škabić – Kersan, 2005.)



When development of different regions is compared, usually as criteria is taken in consideration the value of GDP per capita, unemployment rate, etc. Indicators of development are observed at the level of the statistical regions NUT, which are comparable in population across the EU. (Bajo and Alibegović, 2008.)

Table 1. Categories of NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) regions according to population

Level	Minimum population	Maximum population
NUTS I	3 000 000	7 000 000
NUTS II	800 000	3 000 000
NUTS III	150 000	800 000

Source: Bajo, A., Alibegović, J. 2008.

According to the classification given in Table 1. EU territory is divided into 92 regions NUTS I, 269 NUTS II regions and 1 293 NUTS III regions.

Regional policy can be observed from two viewpoints. Redistributive regional policy aims to reduce the developmental differences with a key role of the state. An active policy aims to encourage economic growth and competitiveness by recognizing endogenous development and solving the causes of unequal development. Here is the key role of regional actors. (Moussis, 2009.)

The financing of regional policy is conducted with three funds: European Regional Development Fund; European Social Fund; Cohesion Fund.

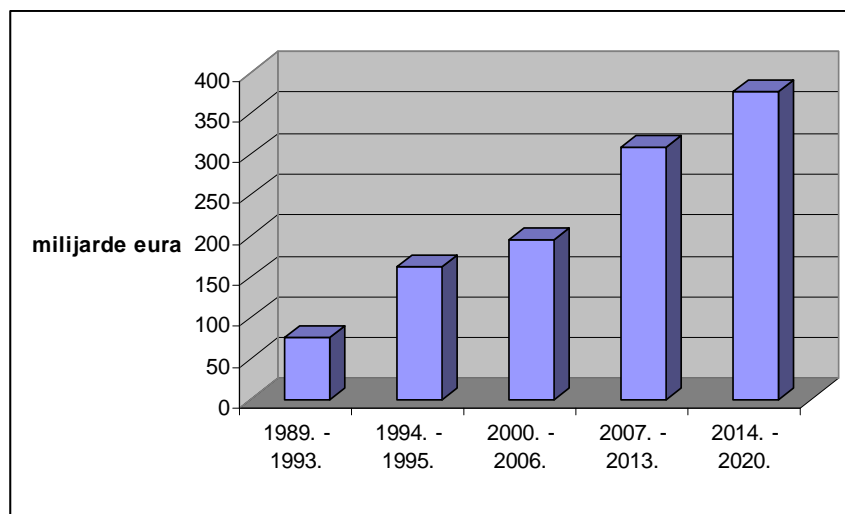
Structural Funds finance multi-annual programs which make development strategy prepared in cooperation of regions, Member States and the European Commission. Regional policy is a major user of the EU budget funds. That share reached, from initial value of the 11.5% (1984.) to a value of 32% in the financial initiative 2014th - 2020. Increasing regional disparities are reflected in the fact that 10% of the population live in the richest regions, which include 19% of EU27 GDP, while the poorest 10% includes 1.5% of GDP. (Belić, 2008.)

Regional policy key goal is reducing regional disparities within the EU countries based on different rates of unemployment and the different heights of the GDP. Achieving economic and social cohesion is a precondition for economic and social growth.

4. Cohesion policy within the financial perspective 2014– 2020.

Cohesion and regional policy have been defined with the aim of reducing economic and social disparities between the Member States by helping regional development. Cohesion policy has contributed to prosperity in the EU. It has to become, considering the economic crisis, a driving force for economic development and competitiveness. Cohesion policy has in the past 10 years directly helped the opening of more than one million jobs. From cohesion funds was also co-financed the construction of more than 2000 kilometres of highways and 4,000 kilometres of railway lines. Cohesion fund also helped to establish around 800 000 small and medium-sized enterprises.

Figure 1. Budget resources for cohesion policy in the previous budget period



Source: European Commission, DG Budget

Data from Figure 1 shows the constant increase in funds for cohesion policy from the year 1989. to 2014.

According to the European Commission's proposal for the next seven-year budget period, for cohesion policy is intended up to 376 billion Euros. For direct support of the development and competitiveness of all European regions are aimed the remaining 336 billion Euros. Total amount for cohesion policy will be aimed at slightly more than 32% of the European budget.

Table 2. Structure of the cohesion policy in the period of 2007. - 2013.

2007. – 2013.	
Operative goals	ERDF i ESF
Convergence	
Abandonment of convergence	
	Cohesion fund
Regional Competitiveness and Employment	ERDF i ESF
European territorial cooperation	ERDF

Source: European Commission, DG Budget

European Commission has proposed a number of important changes in the design and implementation of cohesion policy: Focusing on the priorities of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe 2020; Rewarding success; Support for integrated programming process; Focus on results - monitoring to achieve agreed objectives; Strengthening territorial cohesion; Simplification of execution.

Table 3. Cohesion policy structure for the period from 2014 to 2020

2014. – 2020.		
Ultimate goals	Categories of regions	Fund
Investment in growth and jobs	Less developed regions	ERDF i ESF
	Transition regions	Cohesion fund
European territorial cooperation	Developed regions	ERDF i ESF
		ERDF

Source: European Commission, DG Budget

Unlike the previous budget period, within the perspective of the 2014-2020., number of targets is reduced and the focus is put entirely on growth and employment, and European territorial cooperation.

According to the proposal of the European Commission, 162,6 billion Euros, (48,3% of the total), is intended for regions with GDP per capita below 75% of the European average. This category includes all three Croatian statistical regions.

For the more developed regions, whose GDP is above 90% of the European average, is planned 53,1 billion Euros (15.7%). The European Commission has introduced a category for transition regions, whose GDP is between 75 and 90% of the European average and for them it provided 39 billion Euros (11.6%) of the funds for cohesion policy. For territorial cooperation is intended 11.7 billion Euros (3.48%), and for the Cohesion Fund 68.7 billion Euros (20.4%) of which 10 billion is reserved for the transport network. Amount of approximately one billion Euros is planned for remote areas and regions with low population density (Northern region).

The most important instruments of cohesion policy in the financial perspective 2014th – 2020th are European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund.

ERDF aims to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion by removing imbalances between regions. The Fund supports local and regional development focusing on the following areas: (Omondi; Pipero; Napini, 2005.)

- Research, development and innovation;
- Improving access to information and communications technology;
- Climate change and the transition to a low-carbon;
- Business support to small and medium-sized enterprises;
- General economic interest services;
- Telecommunications, energy and transportation infrastructure;
- Increasing institutional capacity and efficient public administration;
- Health, education and social infrastructure;
- Sustainable urban development.



In more developed regions and those in transition, for example, at least 80% of ERDF resources at national level must be allocated for energy efficiency and renewable energy, innovation, and to support small and medium enterprises. In less developed regions investment priorities are wider, reflecting higher demand for development. They must allocate at least 50% of ERDF resources for energy efficiency and renewable energy, innovation and to support small and medium enterprises. The focus on sustainable urban development has also enhanced and it should be achieved by investing at least 5% of ERDF resources. For innovative activities in the field of sustainable urban development from the ERDF is allocated 0.2% of the annual budget. 50% of the funds intended for the most remote and rarely populated regions must be allocated to activities that contribute to the modernization and diversification of the economies of the region with special emphasis on research and innovation, information and communication technology, and competitiveness of small and medium enterprises. (Belić, 2008)

European Social Fund is the main EU financial instrument for investing in human resources. ESF increases the employment opportunities for citizens, promote better education and it improves the situation of people at poverty risk. Fund is focused on four thematic objectives: Employment and support labour mobility; Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty; Investment in education, skills and lifelong learning; Increasing institutional capacity and efficiency of public administration. At least 20% of the ESF must be allocated for promoting social inclusion and combating poverty. Programs must also concentrate funding on a limited number of priority investments to determine the details of each thematic goal. (Kandžija; Cvečić, 2008)

Cohesion Fund (Cohesion Fund, CF) is financing projects which improve the environment and develop transport infrastructure within the trans-European transport networks. Cohesion Fund is open for Greece, Portugal and Spain, and after 2004. for new member states.

Interventions that can be financed from the Cohesion Fund are: Trans-European transport network (Trans-European Transport Networks); Transport infrastructure (outside the TEN-T) contributing to environmentally sustainable urban and public transport, interoperability across the EU transport networks and encouraging inter-modal transport systems; Environmental infrastructure in order to adopt EU standards for environmental protection; Effective use of energy and renewable energy sources. (Kandžija; Cvečić, 2010)

Funds for the European territorial cooperation, within the framework of the financial perspective 2014th – 2020th can be allocated in the following way: 73.24% for cross-border cooperation; 20.78% for transnational cooperation; 5.98% for inter-regional cooperation.

Financial perspective 2014–2020 is focused on 11 thematic areas.

These thematic areas are:

1. strengthening research, technological development and innovation;
2. increasing access, use and quality of information and communication technologies;
3. increase the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, agriculture and fisheries sectors;
4. supporting transition to a low carbon economy in all sectors;
5. adaptation to climate change, prevention and risk management;



6. environmental protection and promoting resource efficiency;
7. promoting sustainable transport;
8. promotion of employment and labour mobility;
9. promoting social inclusion and combating poverty;
10. investment in education, skills and lifelong learning;
11. strengthening institutional capacity and efficient public administration.

Allocation of European funds in western Balkan candidate and potential candidate countries

IPA is the main instrument for pre-accession assistance to candidate countries and potential candidates. IPA covers the period of 2007-2013 and it replaced previous assistance programs ISPA, PHARE and SAPARD. IPA was established in 2007th by Council Regulation no. 1085/2006. The financial value of the seven-year period is 11.468 billion Euros. Allocation of funds to the beneficiary countries is contained in the multi-annual indicative financial framework adopted for a three year period. The main objective of the IPA is to help the candidate countries and potential candidate countries in the harmonization and implementation of the *acquis communautaire* and to prepare them for the use of structural funds.

Most of the funds are intended for Turkey, Croatia and Bosnia.

Table 4. Indicative amount of IPA funds allocated for the period 2011-2013

Country	Amount planned (in mil €)
Croatia	430
Iceland	28
Macedonia	304,76
Turkey	2586,9
Albania	257,73
BIH	314,22
Montenegro	91,28
Serbia	587
Program for multiple users	520,97
Cross – border cooperation	214,28
Total	5538,75

Source: www.safu.hr

Mentioned funds should act as a catalyst to encourage reforms in the potential member countries and to support the countries on the path to European integration. EU aid will have a direct impact on the daily lives of citizens by contributing to improvement of the rule of law, governance, social conditions and economic prosperity in a situation of global economic crisis which affected all the regions of Europe.

These countries have right to use the IPA funds until they become members of the EU.



The European Commission has earmarked for Croatia the amount of 910,2 million Euros in the period until 2012.

Table 5. IPA financial allocations for Croatia in period of 200-2012 (amounts in millions of Euros)

IPA components	2007.	2008.	2009.	2010.	2011.	2012.
Transition Assistance and Institution Building	49,6	45,4	45,6	39,5	39,9	40,9
Cross – border cooperation	9,7	14,7	15,9	16,2	16,5	16,9
Regional development	45	47,6	49,7	56,8	58,2	59,3
Human Resources Development	11,4	12,7	14,2	15,7	16	16
Rural development	25,5	25,6	25,8	26	26,5	27,3
Total	141,2	146	151,2	154,2	157,1	160,4

Sources: *www.safu.hr*

The funds allocated to Croatia through the IPA program are growing from year to year, and for the year of 2012 the planned amount was up to 160,4 million of Euros. The funds are directed primarily toward the transition assistance and institution building and regional development.

Table 6. Implementation of IPA funds in Croatia

IPA component	Budget (mil of €)	% contracted	% granted
IPA I. – 2007.	45	90%	50%
IPA I. – 2008.	42	27%	20%
IPA I. – 2009.	42	11%	11%
IPA II. – 2007. – 2009.	8	64%	36%
IPA III – 2008. – 2009.	143	29%	7%
III a - Transport	54	20%	4%
III b –Environmental protection	54	25%	2%
III c – Regional competitiveness	35	48%	20%
IPA IV – 2007. – 2009.	38	71%	9%
IPA V. – 2007. – 2009.	51	12%	0%
TOTAL	512	35%	13%

Source: *Lejour; Merver; Verweij, 2010.*

The biggest problem in the Croatian pre-accession period is inadequate public administration at all levels - from the lowest operational level, which is characterized by lack of skills and knowledge, as well as lack of motivation and poor mobility of employees, up to the highest political levels, where there are individuals without the necessary management competence and knowledge. These difficulties resulted in contracting only slightly more than one third of the total funds available through the five IPA components.

Croatia is still facing with a regional underdevelopment, centralization and the key issue - unprepared and insufficiently competitive economy and especially the sector of small and



medium enterprises. IPA funds should help the sector of small and medium enterprises to adapt and to strengthen their competitiveness, but only under the condition of good ability to use potential funds. (www.safu.hr)

IPA funds granted to the Republic of Serbia for the period of 2007-2013 is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. IPA funds granted to the Republic of Serbia for the period of 2007 - 2013

Component	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Transition Assistance and Institution Building	181.4	179,4	182,5	186,2	190,5	190	203,1
Cross – border cooperation	8,2	11,4	12,2	11,7	11,3	12,1	11,6
Total	189,6	190,9	194,7	197,9	201,8	202,1	214,7

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/sources/docgener/informat/Serbia>

During the budget period from 2007. to 2013. in Serbia were granted funding related to the use of IPA components I and II, transition assistance, institution building and cross-border cooperation. Total absorption of IPA funds in Serbia is over 95%, which ranks Serbia among states with the highest rate of utilization of IPA funds.

Signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) is an important strategic step for Bosnia and Herzegovina on its path to EU membership. During a transitional period of six years, Bosnia and Herzegovina will improve its legislation towards the most important rules of the EU internal market

Table 8. The financial assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina from IPA in period from 2007 to 2010

Year	Program	Available	granted	% contracted
2007–2010	Component I. Transition Assistance and Institution Building	295.279.276	165.695.785	56.11%
2007–2010	Component II. Cross – border cooperation	10.319.302	4.766.385	46.19%

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/sources/docgener/informat/Bosnia>

During the period from 2007 to 2009 for Bosnia and Herzegovina has been allocated the amount of about 266 million Euros through IPA funds, and for the period from 2010. to 2013. about 434.1 million Euros. The total value of the current financial assistance within the first two components of IPA funds has shown that Bosnia and Herzegovina still has plenty to work on the development of its own institutional capacity.

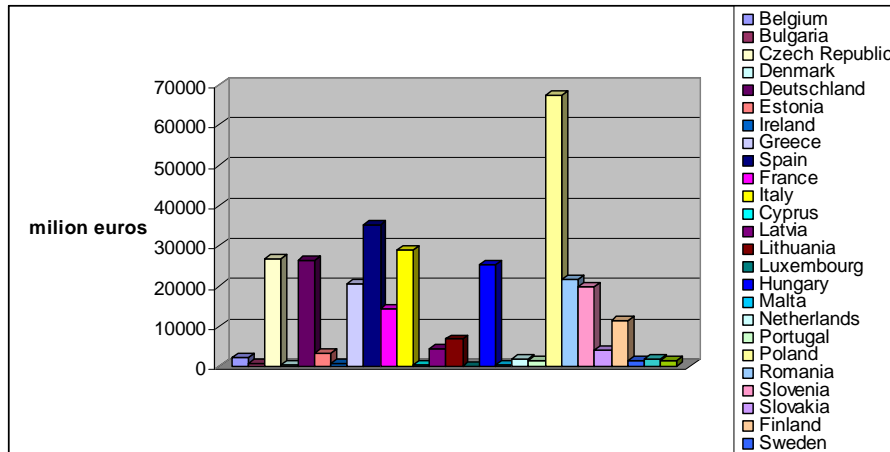
Until now, Bosnia and Herzegovina has used about 50% of the approved budget, which shows a clear focus on the further process of strengthening their own capacity and further development of the institutional framework. These indicators provide a course of action for the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



The next section outlines allocation of structural and Cohesion funds in new member states: Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia.

During the observed budgetary period the biggest resources were allocated in Poland (67 billion Euros).

Figure 8. Allocation of EU cohesion funding



Source: Regional Policy – InfoREGIO, 2011

During the study period, Bulgaria allocated 6.8 billion Euros.

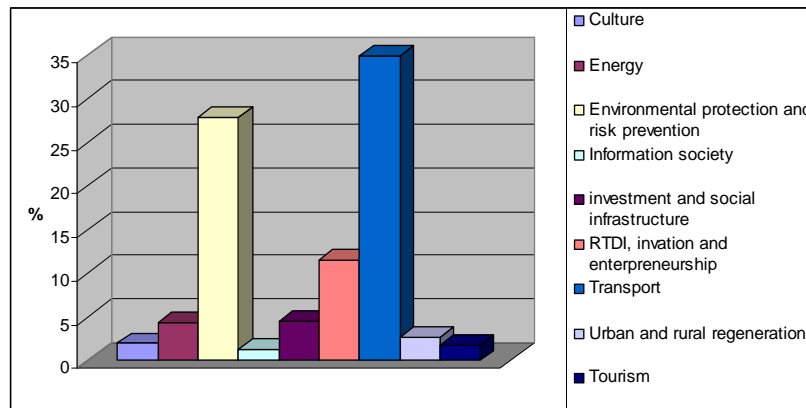
Table 9. Allocated resources in Bulgaria from certain funds

Fund	Total
ERDF	3 205 132 218
ESF	1 185 459 863
Cohesion fund	2 283 036 163

Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy

Bulgaria allocated majority of resources from ERDF.

Figure 9. Areas of Bulgaria allocation from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund

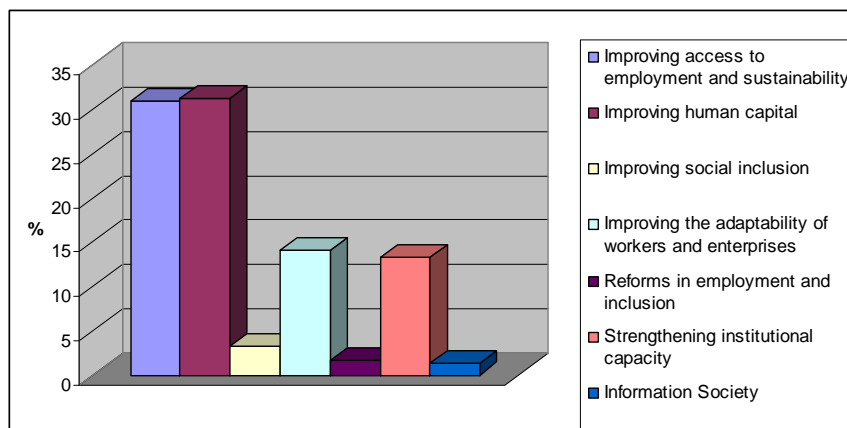


Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/sources/docgener/informat/Bulgaria>



Observing the direction of funds from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund, it is evident that Bulgaria is focused on the areas of transportation, environmental protection and risk prevention and RTDI, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Figure 10. Areas of Bulgaria allocation from the ESF



Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/sources/docgener/informat/Bulgaria>

During the study period, Bulgaria's budget from ESF was focused in the areas of improving access to employment and inclusion, environmental protection and risk prevention, increasing the adaptability of workers and enterprises and strengthening institutional capacity.

In the period from 2007 to 2013, Romania allocated 21,5 billion Euros from the EU structural funds. (Table 10)

Table 10. Allocated resources in Romania from certain funds

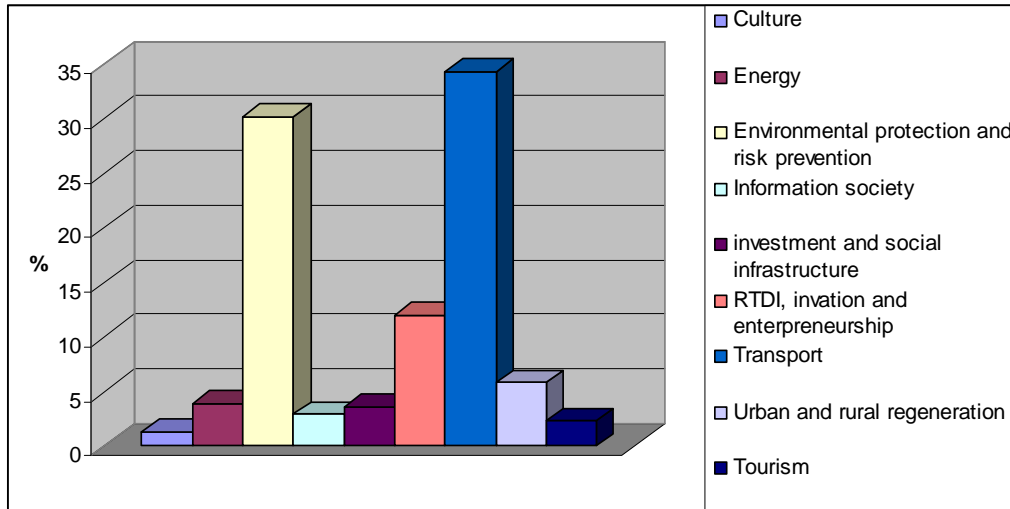
Fund	Total
ERDF	7 739 813 871
ESF	3 684 147 618
Cohesion fund	6 552 423 028

Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy

Romania allocated majority of resources from ERDF.



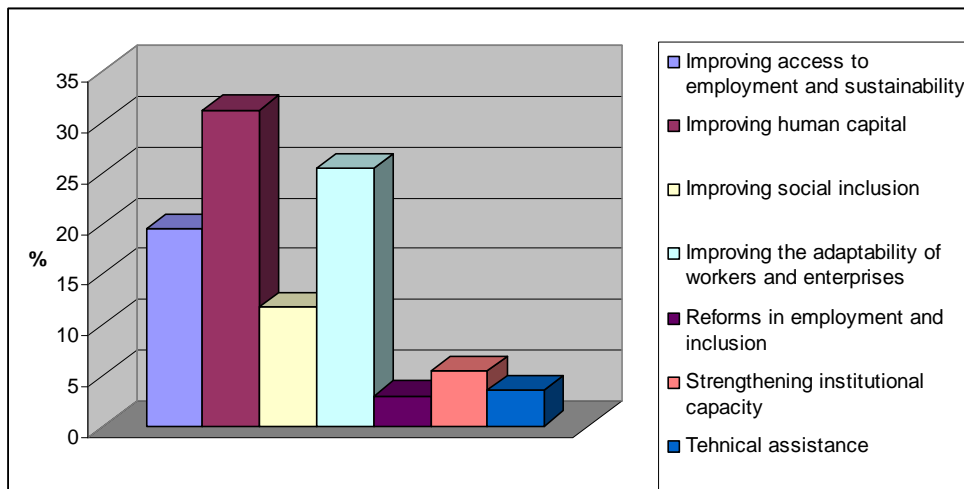
Figure 11. Areas of Romania allocation from the ERDF and Cohesion fund



Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/sources/docgener/informat/Romania>

Majority of resources in Romania were allocated for environmental protection and risk prevention, transportation and RTDI, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Figure 12. Areas of Romania allocation from the ESF



Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/sources/docgener/informat/Romania>

In the observed period, Romania's ESF resources are largely allocated to the areas of improving human resources, improving adaptability of workers and enterprises and the improvement of access to employment and sustainability.

During the study period, Slovenia allocated 4,1 billion Euros from EU structural funds. (Table 11)

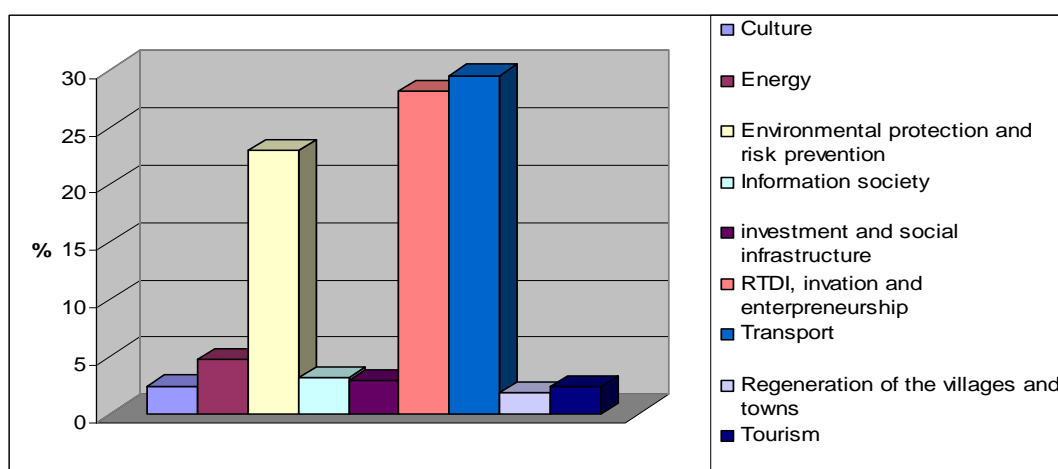
Table 11. Allocated resources in Slovenia from certain funds

Fund	Total
ERDF	1 933 779 408
ESF	755 699 370
Cohesion fund	1 411 569 858

Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy

Slovenia allocated majority of resources from ERDF.

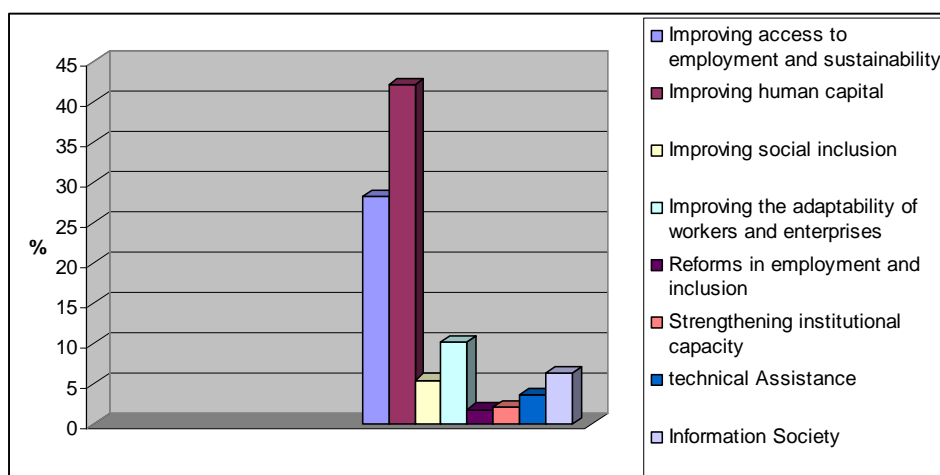
Figure 13. Areas of Slovenia allocation from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund



Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/sources/docgener/informat/Slovenia>

Most of the funds from the ERDF and Cohesion Fund Slovenia allocated to RTDI-areas, innovation and entrepreneurship, transportation and environmental protection and risk prevention.

Figure 14. Areas of allocation of Slovenia from the ESF



Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/sources/docgener/informat/Slovenia>



Most funds allocated from the ESF, Slovenia has focused in the areas of sustainability and improving access to employment, improving human resources and increasing the adaptability of workers and enterprises.

Conclusion

Regional policy is an instrument of encouraging adaptation to new development and common policies, and includes financial support for projects of restructuring the problematic areas. Reducing regional disparities is an essential condition for every economic and political progress of the EU. Financing of regional policy is conducted with three funds: European Regional Development Fund; European Social Fund; Cohesion Fund. IPA is the main instrument for pre-accession assistance for candidate countries and potential candidates. IPA covers the period of 2007-2013 and it replaced previous assistance programs ISPA, PHARE and SAPARD.

The main objective of IPA is to help the candidate countries and potential candidate countries in the harmonization and implementation of the *acquis communautaire* and to prepare them for the use of structural funds.

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Instrumenti konvergencije Zapadnog Balkana

REZIME – Osnovni cilj regionalne politike koju sprovodi Evropska unija je da se smanje razlike u razvoju između različitih regiona Evrope. EU usmerava strukturne fondove ka regionima kojima je pomoć potrebna radi podizanja nivoa zaposlenosti i životnog standarda. Finansiranje se zasniva na 4 osnovna principa regionalne politike. Za zemlje koje su kandidati za pristupanje EU predviđeni su IPA fondovi. Zemlje kandidati imaju problema u korišćenju dobijenih sredstava zbog neefikasne državne uprave.

Nove zemlje članice alociraju većinu sredstava iz ESF (Evropskih Socijalnih Fondova), ERRF (Evropskih Regionalnih Razvojnih Fondova) i Kohezionog Fonda sa posebnim akcentom na privredni rast, zaposlenost i evropsku regionalnu saradnju. Ovi ciljevi ujedno čine osnovu finansijske perspective za period 2014-2020 godine. Tokom tog perioda ukupan iznos sredstava predviđenih za regionalnu politiku će biti oko 32%.

KLJUČNE REČI: EU, ERDF, ESF, Kohezioni Fond, regionalna politika, konvergencija, zemlje Zapadnog Balkana

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