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Poland in Europe 2020

The establishment of the Europe 2020 Strategy was inspired by the European Union's willingness to move decisively beyond the crisis. It is a set of conditions for the EU to remain a powerful world player with a more competitive economy and higher employment. The key word that has influenced not only the Europe 2020 Strategy, but also the backbone of the current European discourse, which serves to reach the Europe 2020 goals, is growth. However, it is not about growth under just any circumstance. The Europe 2020 growth should be smart, sustainable, and inclusive, which means more investment in education, lowering carbon economy, and also creating new jobs and reducing poverty as well.

There are five crucial target areas in the Europe 2020 Strategy for the whole European Union. The first target is reaching a 75% employment rate for people between 20 and 64 years old. Next, spending on R&D should reach 3% of the European Union's gross domestic product. The third point is climate and energy change, such as lowering greenhouse gas emission, tipping the balance to renewable sources, or increasing energy efficiency. Last but not least is education, which should be the most important part of the Europe 2020 strategy. Key points of this target include lowering the level of early dropouts and spreading higher education through people between age 30-34. Finally, the last point is to decrease the number of people facing poverty or social exclusion.

Additionally, the tools committed to increasing growth and jobs include deepening the single market, increasing the budget for research, job creation, and EU's poor innovation level, and using external tools to trade in open and fair markets. The current policies of the European Union have shown that due to certain countries being more powerful than other ones, the EU has been recently only paying lip service to the Europe 2020 Strategy. The example of the currently discussed budget for 2015 illustrates this, as the council has radically cut the payments and commitments aimed at research and innovation adopted by the commission. For instance, it radically cut the commitments for Heading 1a (Competitiveness for growth and jobs) by about € 0,3 bn and the payments by about € 1,3 bn.

Each EU country has other Europe 2020 targets that are said to be "custom fitted" for the challenges and opportunities of the member states. When it comes to Poland, the crucial targets are employment, R&D spending, emission reduction, and renewable energy at a 15% threshold. There are also more ambitious goals, especially when it comes to early school dropout rates and higher education, which, again, should be the most important targets of the European 2020 Strategy.

Taking into account the Europe 2020 goals, the Polish government published documents on the process of reaching

the targets set for Poland. The main issues touched upon by the Council (which also published similar documents) are the budget – lowering the budgetary deficit; lowering unemployment rates through steps towards improving the youth education focus to fit the needs of the job market and through including more elderly people in life-long learning programs; pension schemes, like KRUS reform or the miners pension scheme; supporting R&D in the private sector through a deep tax reform; and the energy sector. Nevertheless, both of the documents lack any focus on hard data and do not give precise policy directions for the government.

Still, the Commission and Eurostat regularly update their data for each member state to emphasize its lack of progress in reaching the Europe 2020 targets. When one takes them into account, for instance, Poland still has too low of an employment rate, does not spend enough on R&D, has a high greenhouse gas emission (which is the one of key issues in this region), and has a low share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption.

Nevertheless, Poland has already overpassed EU target of people between age 30-34 with higher education, and soon will reach the Europe 2020 goals, as the younger generation has a better possibility to study at universities. Furthermore, Poland has been continuously decreasing the level of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Indeed, the biggest challenges for Poland are the energy goals. Due to a possible shale gas revolution (although its level is very often exaggerated by its supporters) and the fact that coal miners in certain parts of the country remain an influential part of the society, structural reform of the mining sector continues to be negatively perceived by whole regions. All of these issues make it very difficult for the Polish government to become a poster child for the European Union-driven green revolution. Thus, Poland is one of the loudest EU states emphasizing that green economy cannot harm counties economies.

The Europe 2020 Strategy goals are questionably ambitious and difficult for certain countries to reach. The recent calls by green energy groups and countries to increase the social and green aspects of the Strategy do not go hand-in-hand with the backbone of European Union politics – its budget.

To change or improve the Europe 2020 Strategy in Poland and the EU, one has to firstly understand the commitments in both projects in order for the current Strategy to remain feasible and reachable.

That means more investments in growth – the favourite word of the current EU discussion in all member states.



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