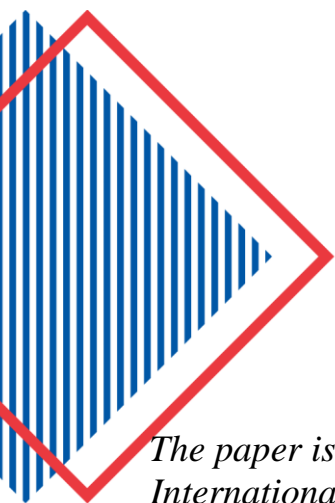


COMPARISON OF PARADIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES IN LIBEREC REGION AND LOWER SILESIA REGION

Vít Dostál, Bartłomiej Ostrowski



The paper is published thanks to the support of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) within the project Sharing Know-How in Paradiplomacy: The Visegrad Dimension.



Introduction

This paper compares the regional paradiplomacy of two neighboring entities – Liberec Region and Lower Silesian (Dolnośląskie) Voivodeship. It studies the legislative framework, planning, management, implementation and tools, monitoring and evaluation of paradiplomacy. It focuses on the key similarities and differences and tries to identify the roots of the main differences.

1. Legislative Framework – Regional level

The main statutory representative of Liberec Region is the governor, who concludes international cooperation agreements. He is accountable to the assembly (region's legislative body), which approves agreements by an absolute majority vote. Liberec Region does not have a dedicated commission within the council (region's executive body) or assembly committee for international affairs. There is therefore less political debate.

Regional paradiplomacy is conducted by the Press and External Relations Department, which is staffed by eight people. However, international relations falls under the remit of the head of the department and one other employee. The work comes under the department of the governor's office.

The main statutory representative of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship is the marshal, who is the chairperson of the five-member management board. The marshal is elected by an absolute majority in the sejmik – regional parliament. The marshal signs cooperation agreements with regional communities in other countries. Such agreements require the approval of the foreign minister. All agreements concluded by the marshal have to comply with the sejmik resolution on the voivodeship's foreign cooperation priorities, state foreign policy and the regional self-government's remit. The International Cooperation Committee is a sejmik committee that reviews all the voivodeship's foreign activities. If the voivodeship wishes to join an international association, the sejmik has to adopt a resolution by an absolute majority of all the members of the sejmik. It also requires the approval of the foreign minister.

Regional paradiplomacy is conducted by the Unit for International Cooperation, which employs 11 people, including the director. In addition the voivodeship runs a regional office in Brussels, where three people work, again including the director.

In both regions, the head of the region is responsible for the region's foreign cooperation. The regions undertake the aspects of cooperation that lie within their own competences.

The main difference between the regions is that the Polish region requires MFA approval before it can conclude an agreement with a foreign partner. MFA approval is also

required if the region wishes to join an international association. In the case of Liberec, the Czech region, MFA consent is not necessary. Liberec Region does not have a regional parliamentary committee that deals exclusively with foreign cooperation matters.

2. Planning

Liberec has no specific document dealing with regional paradiplomacy. External relations are mentioned in the Liberec Region Development Strategy. In the section about the strategic goal of territorial development and civil society in the region, it says that "enhancement of international and trans-border cooperation and the creation of trans-border and international projects as well as international networks of cities and regions" are among the activities contributing to regional development.

Cooperation with St. Gallen and Saxony is well-established and there is always a jointly agreed plan of activities for one, two or even three years. The plan exists partly because of pressure from the partner regions, who requested prior discussions on joint endeavors to ensure the cooperation produces the expected results. Cooperation with other partners is more flexible, ad-hoc and is usually tied to specific events.

The sejmik has a statutory obligation to adopt a resolution (by absolute majority) on "Priorities of the Voivodeship's Foreign Cooperation." The resolution sets out the main objectives of foreign cooperation; geographical priorities for future cooperation; and intentions to join any international regional associations. The resolution requires the foreign minister's approval.

The Unit for International Cooperation and the sejmik's International Cooperation Committee produce their own annual work plans. Cooperation with partner regions is set at the working level. In the case of cooperation with Saxony, a cooperation working group meets once a year to determine the scope of cooperation in different fields. The voivodeship holds regular activities every year, such as a general knowledge competition and a summer language school with a partner region in Russia – Leningrad Region.

Cooperation with foreign partners varies in intensity and depends on many factors. Some partnerships produce cooperation plans.

In the Polish region the regional parliament is legally obliged to adopt a resolution on the voivodeship's foreign cooperation priorities. It sets out the geographical directions, objectives and tools of cooperation. Liberec Region has no such document. Paradiplomacy forms part of the region's development strategy.

3. Management

The Liberec Region Press and External Relations Department is responsible for paradiplomacy and publishing reports on foreign trips as well as the promotion and presentation of the region abroad, the implementation of the region's foreign relations, creating the concept of the region's external and foreign relations and organizing the reception of foreign delegations by the governor, other members of the board and the regional council, including protocol. It also has to keep records of the region's foreign activities, draft and negotiate partnership agreements on cooperation with foreign regions, EU institutions or other foreign bodies, coordinate activities relating to the implementation of these agreements, assess the region's foreign relations and cooperation and report to the members of the board and council. Other responsibilities include communicating and cooperating with embassies, the foreign ministry, Czech Centers abroad, embassies and the European Institutions in Brussels. It also monitors the EU agenda and is responsible for the Brussels representation and for organizing foreign trips and providing the council with a proposal of all foreign business trips and keeping records of travel reports.¹ Thus, the dedicated department both coordinates and implements foreign relations. Liberec Region's interests in Brussels are formally managed by Euroregion Neisse. It contracts out the representation of its region's interests.

According to the Organizational Regulations of the Marshal's Office of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship, the Unit for International Cooperation is responsible for:

- ✚ developing, organizing and coordinating cooperation with European regions and regions in non-European countries, within the framework of the foreign cooperation conducted by the region;
- ✚ preparing, coordinating and implementing visits to the voivodeship by delegations from regions the voivodeship cooperates with;
- ✚ preparing, coordinating and implementing foreign visits by representatives of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship;
- ✚ drafting documents constituting the basis of the foreign cooperation undertaken by the voivodeship;

The Regional Office of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship in Brussels functions as a subordinate body to the marshal's office. The regional office in Brussels monitors the progression of EU policies relevant to the region, such as EU Cohesion Policy, European Transport Networks Policy (TEN-T), Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), European Energy Policy (EPE), Research and Innovation Policy; lobbies for the region's interests in the EU institutions and builds informal networks by participating in cooperation

networks; and supports regional partners raising funds under EU programs and promotes them in Brussels.

The executive foreign cooperation departments in the two regions have the same responsibilities. In both regions the executive department reports directly to the head of the region.

Since 2003 Dolnośląskie Voivodeship has maintained an independent regional office in Brussels. The office's task is to monitor issues that are important to the region in the context of the EU. Liberec Region currently has no office in Brussels and its interests in the EU are represented by Euroregion Neisse, which is based in the city of Liberec.

4. Implementation and tools

Liberec Region pursues international contacts in the following areas: environmental protection, agriculture, tourism transport, Czech minorities abroad, development assistance, education and university collaborations, culture, medical services, innovations and crisis management.

Liberec Region has a small number of functional partnerships. However, some international contacts are conducted in the absence of a formal partnership (e.g. contacts with Israel or on the EU level). There are also clear distinctions between the existing partnerships:

- ✚ Cooperation with neighboring regions is focused on practical issues relating to the spatial proximity. These include transport, road infrastructure, medical services, crisis management and regional tourism and environmental issues.
- ✚ Relations with St. Gallen and Saxony center on exchanging best practices in various areas. Interestingly, the exchange is now mutual, unlike in the 1990s. The Swiss partners are for example interested in the public libraries system.
- ✚ Cooperation with the non-EU regions has stagnated and has almost disappeared. Liberec Region has no functional cooperation with the Chinese province or Russian region.
- ✚ However, it has recently established cooperation with Vinnytsia Oblast, where the focus is on sharing Czech experience with Ukraine, development assistance and humanitarian aid.

Cooperation with directly neighboring regions concerns transport, environmental protection, tourism, education, economy cooperation, the labor market, etc. Cooperation with other countries focuses on cultural issues, education, exchanging experiences of the functioning of self-

¹ "Náplň činnost. Oddělení tiskové a vnějších vztahů," Liberecký kraj. Available online: <https://kancelar-hejtmana.kraj-lbc.cz/page806> (accessed on July 17, 2020).

government, economic promotion, support for innovation, etc.

Dolnośląskie Voivodeship has 16 bilateral partnership agreements with regions in nine countries: Free State of Saxony – DE, Hradec Králové – CZ, Liberec – CZ, Lower Saxony – DE, Dnipropetrovsk Region – UA, Ajaria – GE, Leningrad Region – RU, Brandenburg – DE, Västmanland – SE, Kirovohrad – UA, Anhui – PRC, Emilia Romagna – IT, Republika Srpska – BiH, Pardubice – CZ, Olomouc – CZ, Středočeský Region – CZ

Dolnośląskie Voivodeship is a member of 11 international associations. Within these organizations, the region implements substantive projects, develops common positions with other partners, exchanges knowledge and lobbies for common interests within the EU and with central governments. The international associations are:

European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation NOVUM, European Network for Cooperation of Regions in Research and Innovation (ERRIN), Network of European Regions for Youth (ERY), European Network of Regional Culinary Heritage (ARGE), Central European Transport Corridor - EGTC, METREX European Network of Regions and Metropolitan Areas, European Social Services Network (ESN), Association for Regional Studies (RSA), ALDA – European Association of Local Democracy, CLIMATE-KIC - Community of Innovation and Knowledge for Climate Change, Odra Partnership - informal initiative of voivodships and federal states located along the Polish-German border.

The objectives of foreign cooperation and the tools for achieving them are similar in both regions.

Dolnośląskie Voivodeship has more partnership agreements, especially with regions outside of Europe. Dolnośląskie Voivodeship is active in international local government associations. Liberec Region is not, apart from being a member of the Nisa Euroregion, which brings together cross-border authorities in Czechia, Poland and Germany

5. Monitoring and evaluation

Liberec Region reports its international activities in the region's annual reports. Foreign relations are also monitored by the region's assembly. The department issues an internal annual report summarizing its achievements in international cooperation and outlining its plan for the following year. This report is approved by the council.

In the case of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship, the Unit for International Cooperation issues annual reports on the implementation of regional paradiplomatic activities. The report is approved by the sejmik's International Cooperation Committee, then published on the internet. There is no structured, external evaluation process relating to regional paradiplomatic activities.

Both regions produce an annual report on the implementation of paradiplomacy activities. The report is adopted by the regional parliament. In neither region is paradiplomacy professionally evaluated and nor are there any indicators for assessing achievement in paradiplomacy activities. External experts are not used to evaluate foreign cooperation results either.

Conclusions

The way paradiplomacy functions in both regions is broadly similar. In the case of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship, the foreign ministry has to consent to the region's foreign activities. In the case of Liberec Region, there is no such requirement. Owing to its larger population and budget, Dolnośląskie Voivodeship carries out more paradiplomatic activities in cooperation with partners in Europe and beyond.

Both regions should consider introducing professional and structured mechanisms to evaluate paradiplomacy activities, which they currently lack. Such evaluations would contribute to better accountability and oversight of regional paradiplomacy and could focus political attention on paradiplomacy more.