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What About the Lisbon Strategy?

One of Poland's few private-public partnership initiatives, the Polish Lisbon Strategy Forum has held its Second Congress on "Poland and Europe in View of Future Challenges". One tends to have ambivalent feelings about the future of the most important strategic plan of the EU after hearing the statements of crucial figures involved in the Lisbon Strategy: Germany's Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Prof. André Sapir, head of a research group at the European Commission level responsible for assessing work progress.

First, four years after the Lisbon Strategy was announced, its goal, i.e. transforming the EU into the most competitive and active world economy based on knowledge and innovation, seems to be as distant as it was in 2000. Prof. Sapir attributes this state of affairs to the weakness of implementation instruments and the extremely ambitious goals.

Second, the four-year experience with the Lisbon Strategy has disclosed the weaknesses of Europe, which may hamper improvement in the long run. Chancellor Schröder stated emphatically that the European social welfare system, of which he personally was proud, would be adjusted to the new conditions that will emerge in the global economy. Other officials voiced opinions in the same spirit. In my view, it is a vicious circle what we observe, both in Poland and in the EU: in both cases the excessive development of the welfare system limits economic growth. Slower growth in turn hampers implementation of social welfare needs and these tend to grow exponentially.

Third, the goals and priorities of the Lisbon Strategy, although undoubtedly just, are too many. I think that fragmentation of limited forces and resources into many areas at the same time is not the best of methods. Focusing on a single priority, for instance on the acceleration of economic growth, would be more efficient and the results of its effective implementation would take care of many other goals.

The frequently observed priority of national policies over the implementation of a Lisbon Strategy is a crucial barrier to the implementation of this strategy. This is an obstacle to creating and consolidating a single European market, a pillar of European economic integration. Care for particular national interests can be understood, but this ruins the interests

of the organization as a whole. The process of abandoning national egotism is still in progress within the old EU so it is no wonder that the new countries imitate these behaviors.

Prof. Sapir stated in Warsaw correctly that critical months are coming for the success of the Lisbon Strategy. If member countries open their markets broader and modernize their economies, if instruments to implement the strategy are strengthened, if entrepreneurship and innovative approaches are stepped up, there are potential chances that a success can be achieved.

Viewing the issue from a distance it should be considered whether administrative management of development processes can be as effective as the economic processes across the Atlantic based on totally free private initiative.