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ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND PROTECTION OF ITS FINANCIAL INTERESTS

Abstract: The idea of establishing the European Union had emerged before the First World War, when Dimitrije Mitrović drafted a platform on unification of Europe. The then goal of unification was to prevent war in the European region through mutual dialogue and cooperation. After the Second World War, it was realized that the goal of establishing of such a community should not only be political, but also economic interests. In the beginning, the European Community members had been economically stronger countries, however, in the following years, economically weaker countries also joined; hence, it was necessary to build mechanisms to maintain its fiscal stability.

Countries that want to join the European Union must meet certain criteria defined in 1993, which are known as the Copenhagen criteria. Two years later, the criteria were expanded, thus the obligation of all EU membership aspiring countries is to harmonize their institutions and legislation with the EU *acquis* contained in regulations adopted at the level of the said community. During the accession process, countries receive technical and financial assistance through the pre-accession funds. In order to protect itself from misuse of its funds, the European Union passed several regulations in 1990s.

Financial stability is of crucial importance for the functioning of the Community, but it is quite certain that it has been threatened by the access of less economically developed countries. However, countries in the process of stabilization and accession to the European Union should not only implement the regulations of the said community related to the protection of its financial interests, but should also create an institutional framework that would allow for such protection as well as implement regulations that would allow for efficient fight against corruption at the national level. Fulfilment of the requirements for membership is a test of the ability of future member states to protect the interests of the European Union and to adapt to new challenges.

Key words: accession, European Union, protection of financial interests, national legislation, challenges.

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Introduction

According to the Treaty of Rome, the European Economic Community had had mainly economic goals. These included the establishment of a common market and the gradual harmonization of economic policies of the member states. The common market, which was later expanded to the inner market, was defined through the four basic freedoms: free movement of goods, free movement of persons, free movement of services and free movement of capital.²

Nevertheless, the most radical reform of goals and partly of the structure of the very communities was implemented through the Treaty on European Union, which entered into force on 1 November 1993. This treaty is known as the Maastricht Treaty. The said Treaty established the European Union, while the European Economic Community, in accordance with the changed goals, was renamed into the European Union.³

The European Union is, in fact, a community of European states. This is corroborated by the treaty on its establishment as a legal basis for its foundation and existence. The first one had been the Treaty of Paris signed in 1951, pursuant to which the European Coal and Steel Community was established. It was followed by the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 and the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.

The founders and the first members of the European Community had been economically stronger countries.⁴ Over time, the number of European Union member states has gradually increased. The first enlargement of the European Union membership happened in 1973 and the last one in 2013. Today, the new challenges to the EU financial system primarily result from a desire to expand the European Union to the East. Costs related to the integration of less wealthy groups and states intensify conflicts over the allocation of costs among stakeholders and states within the old Community.⁵ Taking into account the possibility of financial destabilization resulting from the accession of new states, which, compared to the existing member states have far less economic power, the EU member states have felt the need to protect the financial interests of the said community and their own interests.

² R. Vukadinović, *Osnovni pojmovi o institucijama i pravnom poretku Evropske unije* (Basic conceptions of institutions and legal order of the European Union), Komisija za harmonizaciju pravnog sistema SRJ sa regulativom Evropske unije i Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu Beograd, Belgrade 1998, p. 9.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴ These countries are Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

⁵ Verner Vajdenfeld, Wolfgang Besels, *Evropa od A do Ž* (Europe from A to Z), Fondacija Konrad Adenauer, Belgrade, 2003, p. 49.

The need for the protection of financial interests of the European Union had emerged long before the first enlargement of the Community, but eventually it grew stronger as the EU membership expanded. However, the adequate protection of its financial interests happened in 1990s, when the Convention on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests was adopted⁶ as well as the Regulation on the protection the European Communities' financial interests.⁷ However, one should also bear in mind the fact that the financial interests of the European Union are also protected by taking anti-corruption measures in member states, since committing corruption offenses may also jeopardize the financial interests of the European Union. Accordingly, the EU membership candidate countries are required to ratify and harmonize

⁶ Convention on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests (Official Journal C 316 of 27/11/1995). The text of the Convention in English language can be accessed on the following website: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ.do?uri, 5/6/2014>.

⁷ Regulation on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests, which defines measures and procedures of administrative control over the spending of the EU funds was passed in 1995 (Council Regulation (EC, Euroatom) No 2988/95 of 18 December 1995 on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests, Official Journal of the European Communities, 23/12/1995. No L312/1). The text of the Regulation in English language can be accessed on the following website: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?Uri=OJ:L:1995:312:0001:0004:EN:PDF, 5/6/2014>. The said Regulation was amended in 1996 by the Regulation concerning on the spot checks and inspections carried out by the Commission in the order to protect the European Communities' financial interests against fraud and other irregularities (Council Regulation (EROATOM, EC No 2185/96 of 11 November 1996 concerning on the spot checks and inspections carried out by the Commission in the order to protect the European Communities' financial interests against fraud and other irregularities, Official Journal on the European Communities No L292/2, 15/11/1996). The Regulation stipulates the mandatory cooperation of the member states in criminal law matters in order to protect the financial interests of the European Union, as well as liabilities of administrative authorities of the member states regarding the cooperation with the Commission when carrying out spot checks and inspections relating to the spending of the EU funds. The text of the Regulation in English language can be accessed on the following website: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:1996:292:0002:0005:EN:PDF, 5/6/2014>. In addition to the aforementioned regulations, it is important to mention the Regulation of the Council of 1997, which regulates the mutual cooperation of the competent authorities of the member states and cooperation of the competent authorities with the Commission in order to ensure proper implementation of regulations in the field of customs and agriculture, and to protect the financial interests of the European Union (Council Regulation (EC Regulation) No 515/97 (Official Journal L82, 22/3/1997). This Regulation was amended by the Council Regulation No. 807 of 2003 (Official Journal L122, 16/5/2003) and the Council Regulation No. 766 of 2008 (Official Journal L218, 13/8/2008). The text of the Regulation with changes and amendments can be accessed on the following website: http://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/documents/legal_framework_documents_consolidated/515_97_en.pdf, 5/6/2014.

their national legislations with the EU Criminal Law Convention on Corruption, which was also adopted in 1990s.⁸

Protection of the financial interests of the European Union is not an exclusive obligation of the member states, but also of the EU membership candidate countries, since in the period of acquiring the status of a candidate country, potential EU members use its funds through IPA⁹ funds. To protect the financial interests of the European Union, it is not enough to harmonize national regulations with the EU *acquis* contained in the Conventions and other legal documents. Considering that the implementation of the budget of the European Union is decentralized, it is necessary that countries, not only member states, but also candidate states, establish an efficient systems of internal control and liability mechanisms to ensure the effective protection of the financial interests of the European Union.¹⁰

⁸ The EU Criminal Law Convention on Corruption was adopted in Strasbourg in 1999. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, whose legal successor is the Republic of Serbia, adopted the said Convention by the Law on Ratification of the European Union's Criminal Law Convention on Corruption in 2002 ("Službeni list Savezne Republike Jugoslavije – Međunarodni ugovori", No. 2/2002 and "Službeni list Srbije i Crne Gore – Međunarodni ugovori", No. 18/2005.

⁹ Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance represents a mechanism of financial assistance to potential candidate countries and candidate countries for EU membership in the EU accession process for the purpose of developing their institutional capacity, cross-border cooperation, economic, social and agricultural development. The new Regulation establishing Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for the period 2014-2020 was passed in 2014 (Regulation (EU) No 231/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (Official Journal L77/11, 15/3/2014). The text of the Regulation in English language can be accessed on the following website: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/financial_assistance/ipa/2014/231_2014_ipa_2_reg.pdf, 5/6/2014. The Regulation No. 236 of 2014 is important for the use of the EU pre-accession funds, which regulates common rules and procedures for the use of these funds in the EU membership potential candidate and candidate countries (Regulation (EU) No 236/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 laying down common rules and procedures for the implementation of the Union's instruments for financing external action). The text of the Regulation can be accessed on the following website: http://europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/financial_assistance/ipa/2014/236_2014_cir.pdf, 5/6/2014. It is also important to mention the Regulation on the specific rules for implementing Regulation No. 231/2014 establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession assistance for the period 2014-2020 (Commission implementing Regulation (EU) No 447/2014 of 2 May 2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 231/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession assistance (IPA II) Official Journal of the European Union L 132/32, 3/5/2014. The text of the Regulation in English language can be accessed on the following website: http://ec.assistance/ipa/2014/20140502_commission_implementing_reulation_ipa2_en.pdf, 5/6/2014.

¹⁰ See more in: A. Rabrenović, Odgovornost za trošenje finansijskih sredstava Evropske unije (Responsibility for spending of European Union funds), in: 50 godina Evropske unije, Institut za uporedno pravo, Vlada Srbije, Kancelarija za pridruživanje EU, Belgrade, 2007, p. 187.

Enlargement of the EU Membership

The European Community has gradually expanded its membership. For the first time it had been on 1 January 1973 by joining of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom. After the first enlargement, Greece joined on 1 January 1981 and five years later, on 1 January 1986, Spain and Portugal. The next enlargement was on 1 January 1995, when the European Community received Austria, Finland and Sweden.¹¹ We have witnessed the greatest enlargement of the European Union so far – admission to the membership of ten countries on 1 May 2004. Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia became members of the European Union then. This enlargement followed after many years of negotiations and comprehensive reforms in certain areas. There is no doubt that the fulfilment of the legal requirement relating to the harmonization of national legislation with the EU *acquis* was the most difficult task for these countries, especially in the part concerning the adoption and implementation of economic measures necessary to transform the planned economy to market economy.¹² The Republic of Croatia, which joined the European Union in 2013, had to fulfil the same requirements.

The admission of Central and Eastern European countries was preceded by the signing of the so-called European treaties on 16 December 1991, when the treaties with Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland had been signed. Similar treaties were signed in 1993 with Bulgaria and Romania, and several years later, in 1995 and 1996, with the Baltic countries and Slovenia. Directions and specific measures for further development of relations with the countries of this region were identified at several European Council summits. Among them, it is necessary to mention the summits in Copenhagen, Essen, Cannes, Madrid, Luxembourg, Berlin, Helsinki, Nice, and a document entitled *Agenda 2000*.¹³ The criteria or requirements to be met by candidate countries in order to be admitted to the European Union are set out in the conclusions of the Council of the European Union adopted in Copenhagen in 1993. In formal terms, the conclusions of the Council and thus, the criteria contained therein represent the unilateral statement of will of the EU member states, which determines the basis on which negotiations on the accession of the new EU countries will be led.¹⁴

¹¹ R. Vukadinović, *Osnovni pojmovi o institucijama i pravnom poretku Evropske unije* (Basic conceptions of institutions and legal order of the European Union) op. cit. p. 11.

¹² A. Čavoški, *Preduslovi i postupak uključivanja Državne zajednice Srbije i Crne Gore u Evropsku zajednicu* (Prerequisites and procedure for the accession of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro to the European Community), Institut za uporedno pravo, Belgrade, 2005, p. 25.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 27.

¹⁴ P. Vukasović, *Kopenhageški kriterijumi* (Copenhagen criteria), in: *Pristupanje Državne zajednice Srbija i Crna Gora Evropskoj uniji*, Institut za uporedno pravo, Belgrade, 2005, p. 7.

The Copenhagen criteria and subsequent annual European Commission reports on their fulfilment can be considered legal and institutional guarantees that candidate countries will be able to meet the obligations arising from their membership in the European Union. These criteria are general: they bind all candidate countries and their contents are non-negotiable.¹⁵ A country that seeks membership in the European Union must achieve the following: stability of institutions ensuring democracy, the rule of law as well as respect and protection of human and minority rights, the existence of a functioning market economy able to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the European Union, ability to meet the obligations arising from the membership in the Union, which includes the acceptance of goals of political, economic and monetary unity.¹⁶ The third one of the above-mentioned requirements is actually a general requirement set by every international organization. It concerns the acceptance of the organization's goals and capability of a potential member to carry out the obligations that the membership implies. In majority of the older classic international organizations, it has been assumed that each sovereign state, by the very fact of its own sovereignty, acquires the ability to meet the obligations arising from membership. In the case of the European Union, such an assumption does not apply. Obligations imposed to a country by the EU membership are so numerous, comprehensive, complex and demanding that the ability of sovereign states to execute them cannot be assumed in advance. Such ability must be determined for each candidate individually. Protection mechanisms elaborated in detail that will prevent any threat to the values embodied in the requirements for the EU accession must be incorporated in the very institutional solutions. The EU Council monitors progress that each candidate country achieves in meeting the criteria, and adopts the corresponding conclusions.¹⁷

One of the common economic goals of the member states is the protection of the financial interests of the European Union, which actually does not protect the financial interests of some supranational organization, but the financial interests of the member states. Therefore, the protection of the financial interests of the Union should be understood not only as a condition for membership, but also as a prerequisite for its survival.

The Protection of the Financial Interests of the European Union

The need to protect the financial interests of the European Union has been a priority for the governments and parliaments of the member states since

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 8.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 9.

1960s. In August 1976, the Commission filed an application for the amendment to the Treaty establishing the European Community in order to facilitate the adoption of common rules in relation to the criminal law protection of the financial interests of the European Union as well as methods of detecting and prosecuting violations of these provisions. Subsequently, in 1983, the commission formed by the European Community prepared a draft agreement in relation to the criminal law protection of the financial interests of the Community. After many debates, it was not adopted. However, the EU member states realized how important the protection of its financial interests was and in 1988, a special unit for coordination of the protection of the financial interests was established – UCLAF (Anti-Fraud Coordination Unit) as a Community institution responsible for preventing and combating activities harmful for the financial interests of the European Community.¹⁸ In 1994, the European Parliament adopted a resolution that represented the starting point for the Commission to adopt specific rules relating to the harmonization of national legislation and the protection of the financial interests of the European Union as well as for prescribing sanctions for behaviour that threatens them. The basis for the adoption of a legal act, which protects the financial interests of the Union was created by the enactment of the new statute of the unit for fight against financial fraud and horizontal legislation regarding sanctions, i.e. harmonization of criminal codes. The Commission compiled the Handbook for the Protection of the Financial Interests of the European Union and the Convention on the Protection of the European Communities' Financial Interests was adopted in 1995 with two additional protocols and it is known as PIF Convention.¹⁹ It envisaged harmonization of legal acts of the member states regarding methods of preventing criminal offences committed to the detriment of the financial interests of the European Community. The first protocol of the Convention stipulated the corruption offences committed by or against the officials of the European Community,²⁰ while the second protocol provided for anti-money laundering, the liability of legal person and

¹⁸ By the Decision of the Commission of 1999, instead of the Anti-Fraud Coordination Unit (UCLAF), the European Anti-Fraud Office was established (OLAF). Commission decision establishing the European Anti fraud Office (OLAF) 1999/532/EC, ECSC, Euroatom (Official Journal of the European Communities L 136/20, 31/5/999). The text of the Decision can be accessed on the following website: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:1999:136:0020:0022:EN:PDF>, 5/6/2014.

¹⁹ Convention on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests (Official Journal C 316 of 27/11/1995).

²⁰ The Protocol to the Convention on the Protection of the European Communities' financial interests (Official Journal C 313, 23/10/1996). The Protocol can be accessed on the following website: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri>, 5/6/2014.

procedural provisions.²¹ The European Commission, through specialized agencies, such as OLAF,²² become a very important body for coordination between member states in relation to cases of crime prevention and combating. Principles regarding the financial interests of the European Union are set out in the Council Regulation of 1995 and 1997. They are related to the cooperation of administrative bodies in order to prevent unlawful behaviour that threatens the financial interests of the European Community.²³ As it can be concluded, the need to protect the financial interests of the European Union had emerged a few years prior to its first enlargement. Responsibility for the spending of the EU funds is the issue that is on the list of priorities of both of its institutions and member states, which provide substantial funds to its budget.²⁴ Although there is no doubt that the responsibility for spending the EU funds belongs primarily to the EU institutions, the fact that almost 80% of the EU budget is spent by national administrations speaks of complexity of the problem and the need to strengthen the overall accountability for the expenditure of its funds. In this regard, in the past decade, the European Union took a series of measures to strengthen accountability mechanisms, both within its institutions and national administrations that use its funds.²⁵

The EU Budget and Obligations of the Member States and Candidate Countries

In general, it can be said that the current financial and budgetary system of the European Union is laid on relatively stable grounds; however, they still get “shaky” every time there is an enlargement. The reason for this is that new members have significantly less economic power in relation to the oldest members of the Union. In addition, they mainly base their economic activity on agricultural production, which in most cases is much ruined due to the consequences of

²² European Anti-Fraud Office. Founded in 1999 as a specific independent body carrying out investigations concerning financial frauds to the detriment of the European Union. For more information on this body, visit the following website: http://ec.europa.eu/anti_fraud/index_en.htm, 5/6/2014.

²³ Quoted from: A. Lungu, F. Nastase, C. Botan, I. Cospanaru, E. Calistru, M.M. Manea, Guide to the Protection of the Financial Interests of the European Union, Revised and completed edition, Transparency International Romania, OLAF, Lupta Antifrauda (DLAF) Fight Against Fraud, 2010. The text can be accessed on the following website: www.transparency.org.ro/proiecte/proiecte_incheiate/2010/proiect/2010/proiect_3/Guide%20to%20the%20protection%20of%20EU%20financial%20interests.pdf, 5/6/2014.

²⁴ A. Rabrenović, *Odgovornost za trošenje finansijskih sredstava Evropske unije (Responsibility for spending of European Union funds)*, op. cit., p. 186.

²⁵ See more in: A. Rabrenović, *Ibid.*, p. 193.

former implementation of the command economy, but also due to some natural factors. That is why great resources are allocated from the EU budget, primarily from the Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, which are provided to assist the development and promotion of agriculture in the new EU member states. All this represents an additional burden to the EU budget and consequently to the budgets of the oldest and economically most stable European economies.²⁶ It is therefore necessary that in their national regulations all EU member states provide for measures to protect the financial interests of this community. Countries seeking membership in the EU are expected to harmonize their legislation with the EU *acquis* during the pre-accession negotiations. This is especially important for the possibility of using the pre-accession funds of the European Union, which provide assistance to the candidate countries in the accession process.

The European Union has its own income and expenditures. Its revenues are used for financing of the EU administration, activities to reduce inequalities in the economic development of the member countries and investment in the development of agricultural areas. Revenues are collected by the member states on behalf of the European Union. The source of its revenues is 0.73% of gross national income of all member states, which makes 2/3 of the total EU budget. The contribution of a state is calculated according to solidarity and paying capacity. Besides, the Union's revenues are also traditional own resources, which mainly include the import duty paid on products from countries outside the European Union as well as a percentage of harmonized revenues from the value-added tax, which are collected in the member states. The Union budget revenues also include taxes from the salaries of employees employed in its institutions and contributions from countries outside the European Union paid within certain programmes as well as fines charged to companies that do not abide by the rules and regulations of the European Union in their business operations.²⁷

The EU budget finances various activities such as rural development and environmental protection, protection of external borders, human rights, as well as the work of the European Union agencies. The Commission and the member states are responsible for the implementation of the budget. The Commission carries out the budget allocation, while the member states manage the EU funds in the amount of 76% of the budget.

Most of the EU budget is spent to stimulate economic growth and job creation as well as to reduce economic inequalities between regions, on agriculture, rural development, fishery and the environmental protection, fight

²⁶ S. R. Stojanović, *Finansiranje Evropske unije (Financing of the European Union)*, Službeni glasnik, Belgrade, 2008, p. 32.

²⁷ For more information visit the following website: <http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/money/revenue-income/>, 12/06/2014.

against terrorism, organized crime and illegal immigration.²⁸ Countries with the official status of candidate for membership in the European Union use its pre-accession funds and upon joining the Union, they have the ability to manage other funds. It is therefore, essential that countries seeking EU membership, in the process of pre-accession negotiations, harmonize their national legislation with the EU *acquis* contained in its regulations. The protection of the financial interests of the European Union also represents one of the requirements for membership in the said community. Therefore, the national legislations of the countries seeking EU membership should be harmonized with the Convention on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests and its accompanying protocols, the Regulation on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests and the EU Criminal Law Convention on Corruption and other regulations adopted at the Union level, which also protect its financial interests such as regulations regulating the cooperation between administrative authorities of the member states in the value added tax matters.²⁹

Conclusion

The need for protection of the financial interests of the European Union had first emerged in the 1960s. However, over time, this need has been growing stronger. The reason for this has been primarily the EU's gradual enlargement. The European Community had been first enlarged in 1973, when Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined. Although economically developed countries became the EU members that year, the need to protect the financial interests still existed. Three years after the first enlargement, the Commission submitted a request for the amendment to the Treaty establishing the European Community in order to enable the member states to adopt common rules relating to the protection of its financial interests. It was only after the adoption of the Resolution of 1994 by the European Parliament that the starting point was created for the Commission to adopt regulations with which national regulations would be harmonized and which would regulate sanctions in order to effectively protect the financial interests of the European Union. Subsequently, in 1995, the Convention on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests was adopted with two additional

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ The EU Council Regulation on administrative cooperation of member states in the field of value added tax No. 1798/2003 of 7 October 2003 is important for this field, which regulates the mandatory cooperation of the member states in the fight against tax offences. There are also the Regulation (EC) No 1798/2003 of 7 October 2003 on administrative cooperation in the field of value added tax and repealing Regulation (ECC) No 218/92 (Official Journal L 264, 15/10/2003). The text in English language can be accessed on the following website: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32003R1798:EN:HTML> 6/5/2014.

protocols. It regulates the obligation of harmonization of legal acts of the member states regarding the methods of preventing criminal offences committed to the detriment of the financial interests of the European Community. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that countries seeking the EU membership, which have the status of a candidate, in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria and stabilization and accession agreements signed with the European Union are required to harmonize their national legislations with the EU *acquis* contained in its legal documents. That is why candidates for membership in the European Union must demonstrate a certain level of preparedness at the national level to provide adequate protection of the financial interests of the European Union before the accession. However, harmonization of national legislation with the legislation of the European Union is not only a requirement for membership in the European Union. The protection of the financial interests of this community is primarily a requirement for its survival. The EU budget is also composed of revenues collected on the territory of the member states (a part of the gross national income and value added tax). Because of the responsibilities towards their own citizens, the member states should pay more attention to the protection of the financial interests of the European Union. However, one should be careful not to exhaust this protection by prescribing criminal sanctions and cooperation between the competent authorities in criminal matters. Efficient protection is also reflected in the establishment of mechanisms of internal and external financial control at the national level, which will deal exclusively with the allocation of funds from the European Union. Given that the EU membership candidate countries are using funds from pre-accession (IPA) funds, they should establish an effective system of protection of the financial interests of the Union at the very beginning of the use of these funds. The fact that the financial stability of the Union gets disrupted whenever new member states join it, which are usually economically weaker countries, should be a sufficient reason for the member states to jointly contribute to its strengthening.