

Author: Anna Solner

Supervisor: Prof. dr hab. Jacek Sroka

Summary of the doctoral thesis entitled
Protection of EU Financial Interests in Cohesion Policy from a Public Policy Perspective

The primary objective of this doctoral thesis was to critically assess the policy-oriented perspective when analyzing the protection of EU financial interests within the realm of cohesion policy, with a specific focus on optimizing this process. The analysis drew upon Harold D. Lasswell's staged model of the political process, which posits that any public issue, including a policy under scrutiny, undergoes a series of developmental phases, commencing with the identification of an issue, progressing through policy formulation and approval, and concluding with evaluation.

The theoretical framework for this analysis was based on the concept of the public policy cycle, which provided a structured foundation for organizing research findings, identifying problems, and developing central policy solutions. This framework allowed for an exploration of how and why the policy aimed at safeguarding EU financial interests within cohesion policy was conceived, implemented, and assessed. Questions pertaining to agenda-setting, policy proposal development, decision-making processes, and the optimization of policy implementation (particularly in terms of efficiency) were thoroughly examined.

The genesis of this doctoral dissertation stemmed from the significance of the topic discussed, the research problem at hand, and the aspiration to produce both theoretical and practical enhancements of the examined public action. The overarching goal was to enhance the effectiveness and legal compliance of the instruments employed for safeguarding EU financial interests within cohesion policy, thereby facilitating the better utilization of European funds.

In her research, the author conducted a comprehensive examination of the policy for protecting EU financial interests, encompassing both national and EU-level protection models. Various research methodologies were employed, including historical analysis to trace the evolution of the subject and scope of protection, statistical-documentary analysis to scrutinize data from reports and relevant documents, and comparative methods to contrast solutions implemented in individual Member States concerning the protection and the optimization of actions.

In order to attain the research objective the author, in line with the thematic scope, initially provided the fundamental theoretical context related to Public Policy theory, Governance, Europeanization, and explanations of issues pertinent to EU cohesion policy and financial interest protection. These preliminary chapters served to clarify terminological aspects associated with the primary subjects of the study.

The second part of the thesis delved into in-depth considerations regarding the political process of safeguarding EU financial interests, following the phased model of public policy formation. This progression began with an analysis of the policy agenda in consecutive chapters and culminated in an evaluation. This approach facilitated the development of recommendations for an effective policy model and the validation of the research hypotheses.

The analysis conducted revealed, among other insights, that the policy-oriented approach aids in identifying criteria for the optimization of the EU financial interest protection system, and that the fulfillment of these criteria significantly impacts its efficiency. The EU financial interest protection policy is a multifaceted process, involving various actors, instruments, procedures, and interactions. While formal-legal decisions are central to its execution (legislation being a primary implementation tool), they cannot be considered in isolation; the circumstances leading to their adoption also play a crucial role.

The formulation of the financial interest protection policy is profoundly influenced by Europeanization, involving the transfer of standards and organizational approaches from the EU level to the national level. The policy is characterized by the participation of numerous stakeholders and is managed at multiple levels (European, national, regional, local), aligning with governance theories that elucidate this multidimensional and multi-level approach to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of it.

Despite EU and national institutions responsible for preventing financial irregularities possessing the necessary authority for effective EU financial interest protection within cohesion policy, evident gaps and inconsistencies persist. Existing regulations and measures do not yet ensure optimal coordination and protection, necessitating further adjustments.

The EU financial interest protection policy represents an ongoing process, rather than a one-time endeavor. It continuously evolves and adapts, with policy development being an iterative process aimed at achieving specific desired objectives through continuous reassessment. Consequently, policy formation is an intricate, dynamic, and multifaceted process.

Keywords: public policy, governance, Europeanization, EU financial interests, cohesion policy, irregularity, fraud.

