

The role of pre-accession assistance in the process of joining the European Union

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Abstract This paper primarily analyzes the classification of international organizations according to different criteria to see the specificity of the EU as a sui generis international organization. The authors specifically examine the legal order of the EU and the process of achieving full membership. They are interested in the EU accession process, particularly for countries in the Western Balkans like Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is covered by the Stabilization and Association Agreement. Candidate countries have access to various EU funds, which the authors analyze as pre-accession assistance. The study assesses Bosnia and Herzegovina's status in European integration and delves into the use of IPA funds in the country, including its withdrawal, scope, and limitations. The authors emphasize the importance of IPA funds for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Introduction

This paper analyses the theoretical concept of classification of international organizations to indicate those organizations with a specific character. The authors decided to view the European Union as a sui generis international organization for the necessary reasoning in this paper. In this context, a particular focus is put on two elements that, in our opinion, make the European Union a specific organization, namely the characteristics of its legal system and subjectivity (Phelan, 2012, pp. 367–371), and the multi-phase and complex process of joining its fully legal membership. This text refers to the financial aid provided by the European Union (EU) to countries interested in becoming full members (Pollack, 2019, p. 9). We will provide more details about

this specific segment later on. The volume and type of pre-accession aid are of exceptional importance for all the countries acceding to the European Union, especially for Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter referred to as the BiH), which, due to its complex structure, has additional challenges in the accession process. The IPA and other funds of the European Union are analyzed according to the components that have been implemented in BiH on its way to obtain full membership in the EU.

The research subject is the specificity of the EU *sui generis* international organization, its legal order, and the process of achieving full legal membership. The analysis focuses, in particular, on the specificity of the legal order of BiH and the realization process of obtaining full membership. The described processes are interesting because they can show the way to join the Western Balkan countries, including BiH, and highlight the challenges and opportunities that may arise during this journey. The research question is how BiH fits into the European integration process and the use of IPA funds in BiH with a description of withdrawal, scope, and limitations of this apparatus. The research aims at analyzing the status of BiH in the process of European integration and the use of IPA funds in BiH with a description of the withdrawal, scope, and limitations of this instrument. At the end of the research, we analyzed the importance of IPA funds for BiH.

Methodology

The paper adopts a method to investigate the trends and patterns of scientific publications on the topic of the paper. This method is suitable for research design because it allows for a quantitative and objective evaluation of the scientific output and impact of a research field. The paper uses data from various scientific works from journals categorized in Web of Science and Scopus and is cited several times. These databases were chosen because they contain high-quality journals that have a rigorous review process and a high impact factor, which means that the works published in these journals are often cited in other works. The criteria used in the selection of literature were:

- a) publication date between 2010 and 2020;
- b) language of publication: English, Serbian, or Croatian;
- c) categorization as scientific work.

The paper highlights the similarities and differences between the conclusions and results reached by different authors.

Types of international organizations

From Konstantin Granac "who was a pioneer in the study of international organizations" (Miščević, 2012, p. 68) until today, the question of the concept and type of international organizations has been continuously studied. Regardless of whether those who dealt with the law of international organizations belonged to the European-continental or Anglo-Saxon schools, similar potential classifications of international organizations (Archer, 2001, pp. 35–45) (hereafter MO) are possible. Concerning the above, they can most easily be divided according to the following

criteria: the breadth of membership, the procedure of opening for access, the method of duration, and the main areas of activity, according to the powers given both to it and to its most important bodies. Professors Račić and Dimitrijević state that

based on the width of membership, the International organizations can be divided into universal and regional and organizations of specially interested countries. According to the degree of openness, they are open and closed, according to their duration permanent and temporary, according to the field of activity general and specialized, according to powers, deliberative, operational and supranational (Račić, Dimitrijević, 1980, pp. 30–33).

Also, Dimitrijević states that international organizations can be insufficiently transparent, responsible, and democratic in their work and management, which can lead to corruption, abuse of power, and lack of participation and control by citizens, civil society, and national parliaments. (Dimitrijević, 2021). Our attention in this paper is dedicated to international organizations that are being viewed based on the breadth of membership, namely those that are a community of particularly interested countries. Following the above, as an example of such a *sui generis* international organization, in the following part, we will point to the European Union (hereafter referred to as the EU).

The European Union as a *sui generis* international organization

Since its inception, the EU has developed as a “self-governing, autonomous entity whose law could not be identified with the national law of the member states or with international law” (Košutić, 2006, p. 151). History has recorded several European integration ideas. “In a series of more or less successful, longer or shorter-term attempts at violent integration, the Roman, Napoleonic, and Hitlerian conquests represent only the most famous examples, which are spatially wide enough to be called European in the true sense” (Košutić, Rakić, Milisavljević, 2013, p. 10). Until the 1950s all of them had one fact in common. They were all violent and followed by an attempt to dominate one of the European states. The evolution of the idea of voluntary integration processes in Europe began to develop at the beginning of the 17th century¹ and had several stages until the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community and other communities in the middle of the 20th century. We want to point out, in particular, that the idea of voluntarism led to the creation of a specific national or international organization such as the EU today, although we must emphasize that this is not a generally accepted position. Laffan represented an undefined position on the nature and character of the subjectivity of the EU, who claims that the difficulty of its defining is based on the fact that “the EU swims between politics and diplomacy,

¹ Several historical figures were the originators of the idea of the voluntary European association. Among the most significant, we include Pierre Di Bois – court lawyer at the court of King Philip IV, Czech King Jirži Podebradski, mathematician Emrik Krise, Maximilian de Silly, chief minister of French King Henri IV, William Penn, an English Quaker, Opad de Saint Pierre, Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant, Saint Simon, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Richard Callegri, the Danish doctor Christian Herfort, Goethe, Heinrich Heine, Arstide Briande and others.

between the state and the market, government and management” (Laffan, 1997, p. 1) and that everything leads to the conclusion that it is something between the existing entities defined to date in international (public) law. “The European Union is a specific MO (*sui generis*) as a new form of relationship between states which legal basis for functioning is of a supranational or supranational character” (Halilović, 2013, p. 50). In our opinion, what sets it apart from other similar organizations are:

- specific legal order as well as;
- the multi-phase procedure of admission to full membership.

Not wanting to elaborate on the characteristics of the EU legal system in this paper, we will only state that in addition to real theoreticians, the courts, as a specific branch of government, are also actively dealing with this issue. “The determination of the EU by the courts is important for both the interpretation of the Founding Treaties and secondary European law. The problem is also special for constitutional courts that want to determine the relationship between national constitutional law and legal rules that arise in European supranational institutions” (Rodin, 1996, p. 244). Regardless of the preceding legal order, the EU as a *sui generis* IO can be defined as a set of legal rules whose most significant features are autonomy and supranationality, which is partially limited. Opperman believes it will “keep it forever in the zone between the federal state and the international organization, therefore, will always be suitable for dismantling” (Oppermann, 2005, p. 139–140). In this context, it is crucial to emphasize that the legal subjectivity of the EU was defined only after the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon. “Before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, the EC had a legal personality but the EU did not. Article 281 of the EC granted legal personality to the European Community, but the pre-Lisbon Treaties contained no provisions concerning the legal personality of the EU²” (Horvath, Odor, 2010, pp. 76–77). The issue of legal subjectivity significantly affected the entire legal order of the EU after the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon. Only then could the EU, as an independent entity, conclude international agreements with third countries, especially in the areas defined by the mentioned treaty. These changes will lead to the unquestionable fact that since then, the EU has been able to be a subject of international law and resort to all instruments of multinational action both at the regional and world level (Fabbrini, 2021).

When we talk about the procedure for admission to membership, it was, in our opinion, specific due to one specially conditioned characteristic — the geographical position of the candidate’s country. Thus, the states of Western, Central, and Southern Europe had a somewhat shorter, less politically conditioned process of joining and becoming full members of the EU than some former socialist countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe had. For the Western Balkan countries, a specific long-term process is planned. It reflects in the execution of the various phases of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (hereafter SAA). BiH itself has also been included in the SAA since 2006, and in December 2022, it officially received the status of a candidate country for the EU membership, even though it has not fulfilled all the conditions

² The legal personality of the EU practically replaced and succeeded the legal personality of the European Community.

required by the SAA. This leads the authors to the fact that it is about a political decision caused by global circumstances, as it once was during the admission of Bulgaria and Romania to full EU membership. In this process, all countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, used different types of available means to get as close as possible to EU standards in the process of stabilization and association and especially to achieve the greatest degree of harmonization of their law with the EU *acquis*, i.e. *acquis communautaire*. In our opinion, the EU's pre-accession aid in the case of BiH was an additional motive in its process of European integration, which motivated different levels of government in this dysfunctional complex state to devote themselves more seriously to fulfilling their obligations as a country including in the process of stabilization and association, and since the end of last year, officially as a country candidate. The entire procedure for becoming a full member of the EU can generally be divided into two parts:

- necessary material assumptions that must be fulfilled and
- following the multi-phase procedure that is conditionally linked to the first part, which
- involves material assumptions.

Furthermore, there is an implicit requirement for a country to be both a candidate and a European nation to qualify for membership in the EU. This has resulted in Morocco and Turkey being unable to join the EU throughout history. The previously mentioned EU accession procedure was defined in detail by the highest body of the EU – European Council, in Copenhagen, in 1993. It is important to note that “the state should meet the economic and legal criteria for joining the membership. The legal system needs to be unified with the communitarian law and all its assets must be included in”. (Košutić, Rakić, Milisavljević, pp. 166–167). However, in addition to the complicated procedure and the fulfillment of the conditions mentioned earlier, the candidate countries for the EU membership are supported directly and indirectly by the EU institutions to fulfill the set of requirements. As they work towards becoming a full member of the EU, they are given significant financial assistance opportunities available primarily through several pre-accession funds, suitable credits, and loans approved by the EU.

Pre-accession aid from the European Union

Although the EU institutions demand precise fulfillment of the established obligations of the candidate countries, it is necessary to emphasize that the candidate countries for EU membership are not left without the support of the EU itself in this process. The above-stated support takes place in two directions: political and financial. Although both types are necessary and mutually intertwined, our focus in the following text will be the volume and structure of financial assistance available to both candidate countries and potential candidates for EU membership. The EU institutions provide financial resources that must be used transparently and responsibly. The competent EU institutions closely monitor these resources to ensure strict compliance with usage rules. Four main groups form the EU funds, and those are:

1. Grants,
2. Subsidies, whose use is monitored by national or regional bodies,

3. Loan guarantees and equity and

4. Awards to winners in competitions such as within the framework of the “Horizon 2020” program.

Grants from the EU are approved for projects and programs that are related to the implementation of policies and programs of EU institutions in a specific country or region, in the case of BiH, most often for obstacles intended for the Western Balkans or, more specifically, BiH itself. Regarding approved funds, in the form of the subsidies mentioned earlier in coordination with national or regional bodies and authorities, they have the unique name of European Structural and Investment Funds. They occur in several modalities, namely:

- European Fund for Regional Development,
- European Social Fund,
- Cohesion Fund,
- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development,
- European Fund for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.

The status of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the process of European integration

Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter BiH) today, as a project of the international community confirmed by the Dayton Peace Agreement, is an independent state (Aćić, 2019, p. 25; Hartwell, 2019, p. 44). One of the primary strategic goals of BiH is to achieve full membership in the EU. For BiH, integration into the EU means taking an appropriate place in the European family of democratic countries. BiH and its people (Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks) share the goals, values, and principles of the EU and are committed to developing a society based on the system of values and achievements of European democracies. At the same time, they are determined to be an integral part of modern European political, economic, and security structures.

Bosnia and Herzegovina applied for EU membership in February 2016. Whether the state could carry out this act depended on the implementation of economic, social, political, and rule-of-law reforms, as well as the protection of minority rights. Bosnia and Herzegovina had to take a series of complex steps in the process of negotiations on the Stabilization and Association Agreement. This Agreement between the EU and its member states on the one hand and BiH on the other came into force on June 1, 2015. As a guarantee for the proper execution of the SAA, several organizations were created, such as:

- Parliamentary Committee for Stabilization and Association – a forum of deputies from the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Parliament;
- Council for Stabilization and Association – it consists of members of the EU Council and members of the European Commission together with representatives of the Council of Ministers of BiH, and is responsible for supervising the implementation of the SAA;
- The Stabilization and Association Committee – a body at the technical level that assists the Stabilization and Association Council in the performance of its duties and

- The Stabilization and Association Committee can establish sub-committees for appropriate implementation of obligations.

In 1997, Bosnia and Herzegovina established the essential political and economic prerequisites to cultivate cooperative connections with the European Union. In June 1998, the EU-BiH Consultative Working Group was established (Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2023). In June of 1998, Bosnia and Herzegovina took their first official step towards the EU membership by creating the EU/BiH Consultative Working Group (CTF). The CTF offers technical and professional assistance in administration, regulatory framework, and policy. In June of the same year, the EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina officially signed the “Declaration on Special Relations between the EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina.” The regional shift in terms of integration occurred in 1999, with the clear dedication of the Western Balkans to EU membership. Namely, the new Stabilization and Association Process (PSP) for the five countries of Southeast Europe, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, was proposed in May 1999 (Delegation of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Office of the Special Representative of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2021). In this regard, in June 2000, the EU member states decided to grant the status of potential candidates to all countries of the Stabilization and Association Process (PSP), including BiH.

The following year, begins the first year of the new CARDS program, specially designed for the needs of countries in the PSP. The Summit held in Thessaloniki in June 2003 held significance for Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the Summit, the PSP was established as EU policy towards the Western Balkans, and the EU’s perspective on the countries in that region was confirmed. Also, in November 2003, the European Commission prepared a Feasibility Study which assessed the capacity of BiH to implement a possible future SAA. In June 2004, the EU established the first European partnership for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Then, in October 2005, the European Commission evaluated BiH’s implementation of the reforms outlined in the Feasibility Study and deemed it satisfactory. As a result, the commission recommended starting SAA negotiations, marking a significant milestone in BiH’s journey toward the EU. In the month after, dialogs regarding the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Union (EU) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) began officially. By December 2006, technical negotiations of the SAA between the two parties were completed. However, the Agreement cannot be signed and concluded due to the insufficient progress that had been made in crucial reforms. In December 2007, the Stabilization and Association Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina was initiated in Sarajevo. This decision was made after the Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, determined that there was enough consensus among the country’s political leaders about necessary reforms. In January 2008, the visa facilitation and readmission agreements would have become effective.

In 2008, Bosnia and Herzegovina set its sights on joining the EU by establishing diplomatic relations and signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement. This agreement laid out the necessary steps for implementing reforms in various areas, such as legal, administrative, institutional, and economic, as a requirement for moving closer to the EU. In February 2008, the

European Council adopted a new European partnership, and Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the Framework Agreement on IPA funds. A dialogue regarding the cessation of visa requirements was initiated in May of that same year. On June 5, 2008, the European Commission introduced the Road Map, which established benchmarks for eliminating the visa system. The following month, on July 16th, the European Commission and BiH signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement and the interim agreement on trade and trade-related matters. After 15 days, BiH and the European Commission signed the Financial Agreement on the State Program for the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) for 2007. December 15, 2010, marked a significant milestone for BiH's journey to the EU as the visa-free regime was implemented for all BiH citizens with biometric passports. In June 2015, the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and BiH entered into force. On February 15, 2016, Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted a formal request for membership in the European Union to the Presidency of the Council of the EU, marking the first step in becoming a candidate state. Later that year, on September 20, 2016, the European Council invited the European Commission to provide their opinion on BiH's application for membership. Finally, on December 9, 2016, the Questionnaire from the European Commission was delivered to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Council asked the European Commission to prepare an avis (opinion on BiH's ability and readiness for the EU membership), which is prepared based on the analytical instrument of the EU enlargement policy, the so-called Questionnaire. In December 2016, a questionnaire consisting of 3,897 questions was sent to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The questionnaire aims to review the country's political, legal, economic, and administrative systems.

In February 2018, authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina responded to 3,442 questions from the European Union Questionnaire, which were submitted to President Juncker and Commissioner Hahn. In March 2019, they also submitted answers to an additional 665 questions. On May 29, 2019, the European Commission released an Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application to join the European Union, along with an Analytical Report outlining necessary reforms in areas such as democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights, and public administration. The Commission stated that negotiations for membership could only begin once Bosnia and Herzegovina meets the required criteria. Finally, on December 15, 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina was officially granted a candidate status for membership in the EU, at a summit in Brussels.

Use of IPA funds in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has gradually increased its involvement in the EU programs, which receive funding from the IPA funds. At the moment, BiH is participating in several programs, including COSME, Creative Europe, Customs 2020, Europe for Citizens, Erasmus+, Fiscalis 2020, Horizon 2020, the Third Program for the Union's actions in the field of health, and the INTERREG program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU provided BiH with 7 million euros for urgent public health needs and 73.5 million euros for socioeconomic recovery projects. Additionally, in May 2021, the EU mobilized 13.7 million euros in aid to help BiH procure

vaccines against COVID-19. Since 2007, BiH has been approved for over 600 million euros in IPA funds, but not all of the funds have been utilized (European Commission, 2018, p. 54–58).

The European Commission³ introduced a new pre-accession assistance instrument called IPA II during the budget period of 2014–2020. The proposed budget for IPA II is 14.1 billion euros. The new Regulation on the establishment of IPA instruments has abolished the previous division into five components and introduced policy areas:

1. Process of transition towards membership and capacity building.
2. Regional development.
3. Employment, social policies, and development of human resources.
4. Agricultural development.
5. Regional and territorial agreements.

BiH now has an access to funds from all five policy areas through the new pre-accession aid instrument, IPA II. The first draft of the Strategic Documents for IPA II for BiH outlines the key sectors and priorities for IPA III support for 2014–2020, along with specific conditions for using IPA III support for individual sectors⁴. However, the planning of IPA II was put on hold due to the unresolved case of “Sejdić and the Finns against Bosnia and Herzegovina⁵” and the absence of a coordination mechanism⁶.

Significance of IPA funds

The EU provides significant financial support to BiH. From 1996 to 2007, BiH was a beneficiary of the EU financial aid through the Phare, OBNOVA, and CARDS programs. (Central Agency for Financing and Contracting: SAFU, 2008, p. 11; Directorate for European Integration, 2023). Since 2007, BiH mainly receives aid from the EU through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), which is directly managed by the EU Delegation in BiH. The IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance – IPA 2007–2013) was established by the European Council Regulation no. 1085/2006 on July 17, 2006. It is an instrument consisting of five components designed to build institutions and the rule of law, promote human rights (including fundamental rights, minority rights, gender equality, and non-discrimination), facilitate administrative and economic

³ According to Article 57 of the Regulation of the European Commission no. 718/2007. From June 12, 2007. On the implementation of Council Regulation No. 1085/2006 establishing the IPA, the goal of the evaluation is to improve the quality, effectiveness, and consistency of aid from EU funds, as well as the strategy and implementation of the program. Evaluation can be ex-ante (evaluation before implementation), interim (during execution), and ex-post (after execution). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Commission is conducting an interim evaluation of IPA.

⁴ The document envisages support for eight sectors: good governance and public sector management, the rule of law, transport, environment, and climate change, integrated local government, education and human resource development, employment and social policy, and agriculture and rural development.

⁵ “Sejdić and Finci vs. Bosnia and Herzegovina” is the name of the court case that was conducted before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, following a lawsuit by Derva Sejdić and Jakob Finci, who, as members of national minorities, were prevented from being elected to the Presidency of BiH and the House of Peoples of BiH.

⁶ The coordination mechanism between different levels of government should ensure the transmission, application, and enforcement of European Union laws so that the state can act unanimously in matters related to EU integration.

reforms, encourage economic and social development, promote reconciliation and reconstruction, and enhance regional and cross-border cooperation. (Central Agency for Financing and Contracting: SAFU, 2008, p. 38). The last three components are designed to closely mimic the EU rural development funds to help countries prepare to manage them effectively. It will ensure that when these countries become full members, they are ready to handle the funds efficiently (Figure 1).

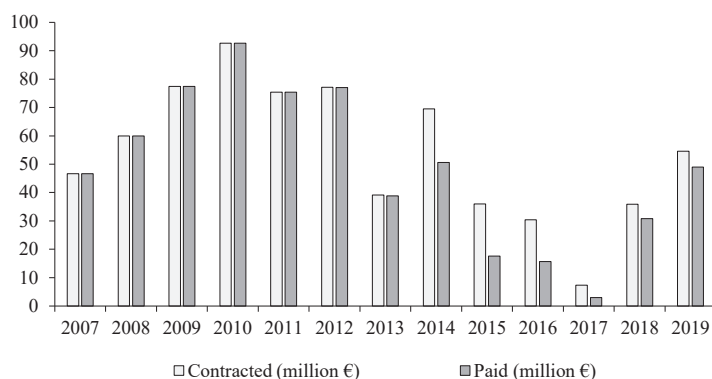


Figure 1. Summary overview of contracted and disbursed funds from the IPA for BiH (IPA I 2007–2013 and IPA II 2014–2020)⁷

Source: Directorate for European Integration (2020).

States must establish administrative capacities and structures that can take responsibility for managing aid funds. It is important to have well-defined and sector-specific strategies to obtain funding through IPA III's strategic framework. The IPA III plan aims to make small but significant adjustments to aid planning. It will prioritize the strategic and dynamic allocation of aid based on crucial membership criteria. In addition, it aims to boost sustainable economic development, investments, and help to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Source: Directorate for European Integration, 2023, p. 6). IPA III will provide support to beneficiary countries with a total budget of 14.2 billion euros, which is a significantly greater amount compared to IPA II and IPA I. Between 2007 and 2013, the budget for IPA was 11.48 billion euros. From 2014 to 2020, approximately 12.8 billion euros were allocated. Thematic priorities of the judiciary, are the fight against corruption, fight against organized crime, migration and border management, fundamental rights, democracy, and civil society (Directorate for European Integration, 2023, p. 16).

⁷ During 2014, money was approved and paid out through a special program of special measures for flood recovery and protection.

Throughout its growth and development, the European Union has established various aid initiatives for countries seeking to join the Union, as well as for developing countries and those under the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Pre-accession aid instruments are grants offered to countries aspiring for membership. These grants aim to assist in training these countries to meet all the necessary political, institutional, and socio-economic criteria for full membership. As time passed, these programs grew more complex and multiplied, presenting challenges regarding their diverse uses, programming, and monitoring. The Single Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) replaced the previous instruments, overcoming these problems. The IPA was created to assist individual countries based on their needs and progress. The allocation of funds is determined by assessments made for each country and region. IPA funds function as an instrument that depends, on the one hand, on the political priorities and positions of the EU concerning the issue of enlargement and, on the other hand, on the ability of the institutions in BiH to meet the political and technical criteria for accession, but also on the potential of the institutions to absorb the offered resources.

The target group includes organizations or individuals directly affected by a particular project and involved in its implementation phase. However, the end users are organizations and individuals who are not directly involved in the implementation of the project, those on whom the project has an indirect impact.

In the project planning phase, it is necessary to determine the target group and its end users. In doing so, it is crucial to predict that the target group is directly involved in the project and has measurable benefits from the project. Also, it is necessary to determine the number of members of the target group as precisely as possible because the value and significance of the project are measured by the positive effects resulting from the implementation of the project itself.

Conclusion

The progressive development of international law enabled the establishment of the EU as a sui generis International Organization. The EU has followed a specific legal order and implemented a multi-phase admission procedure, which has resulted in several stages of expanding the number of full members in the organization. The EU provides significant financial support to foundations and candidates for membership, mainly through IPA funds. Since 2007, Bosnia and Herzegovina has received 1,045,760.00 KM through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). A significant portion of this 701,083,000.00 KM has been used under the supervision of the EU Delegation to BiH. The IPA is comprised of five components and designed to assist in establishing institutions and the rule of law, promoting human rights (including fundamental rights, minority rights, gender equality, and non-discrimination), implementing administrative and economic reforms, fostering economic and social development, promoting reconciliation and reconstruction, and facilitating regional and cross-border cooperation. The IPA III program has a budget of EUR 14.2 billion to assist countries that will benefit from it. Thematic priorities are justice, the fight against corruption, the fight against organized crime, migration and border management,

fundamental rights, democracy, and civil society. Whether or not IPA funds can be utilized depends on the political will to meet the EU membership requirements (such as achieving candidate status) and having the necessary technical capabilities to access these funds. The instrument of pre-accession assistance (IPA) offers significant opportunities for the institutional and socio-economic development of society in areas where our country is lagging in the European integration process. However, the results so far in using the IPA funds indicate that institutions at all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina must provide much larger support and involvement in the political and technical sense. The costs of becoming a candidate country go beyond meeting political and economic criteria. It also includes building up the administrative and technical capacities necessary for utilizing IPA funding to its full potential. Many other countries that receive IPA funds also face similar issues, as demonstrated by the ratio of approved and utilized IPA funds outlined in the Multiannual Indicative Financial Framework (MIFF) for the 2007–2013 period. Despite numerous publications and efforts by governmental and non-governmental institutions on IPA funds, data shows a need for more education on how to withdraw approved funds. It will contribute to an even greater added value of the EU funds approved for the countries by providing more incentives for changes in their societies, legal systems, and economies to the mutual benefit of the European Union, the beneficiary countries of the IPA program, and their citizens. The methodology used in the work also contains certain shortcomings. Studying data from only a handful of scientific journals is not sufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the scientific literature on this subject. One drawback of this methodology is that it only considered papers that were cited, potentially missing important papers that were not cited in other research.

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