
The External Public Audit in the Member States of the European Union: between Standard Typology and Diversity

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Abstract

The premise of the research is represented by the importance of the external public audit, as a specific activity that the supreme audit institutions carry out at the level of the public sector entities, in order to provide to interested parties, assurances regarding the management of the public resources of these entities. The research objectives are two-dimensional and the research methodology is qualitative and interpretive. The first dimension aims to identify the conceptual connotations of the external public audit in the specialized literature. The second dimension represents a multicriteria comparative analysis regarding the typology of the external public audit carried out by the supreme institutions of the European Union member states. The study is carried out regarding all the 27 member states, information regarding the United Kingdom, which has recently left the European Union, being also presented and analyzed. The research results showed that, although the applied audit methods vary, convergent elements have been identified, so that the typology of the external public audit also validates the European Union "unity in diversity" motto, at the level of the specific activities of the supreme audit institutions in the community area.

On the background of an area of undoubted importance, but limited in terms of research, this scientific demarche represents a major challenge for both the academic and the socio-economic environment. Thus, the conceptual valences of the external public audit will be complemented and an increase of credibility and relevance will be generated in the manner of supervising the public financial resources' management of the public sector entities at the level of the European Union member states, in the context of the economic turbulences and the rising demand for public services manifested at European and international level.

Key words: external public audit; public sector; supreme audit institutions; member states; European Union; typology

JEL Classification: H83, M42

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Introduction

The premise of the research is represented by the importance of the external public audit, as a specific activity that the supreme audit institutions carry out at the level of the public sector entities, in order to provide to interested parties, assurances regarding the management of the public resources of these entities.

In this context, the present research brings to the foreground a number of considerations regarding the concept of external public audit and addresses its typology between the "financial audit – performance audit – compliance audit triptych" and diversity. The research horizon targets the types of audits of the supreme institutions in the European Union member states, from a multidimensional perspective.

The research also considers how the external public audit typology is addressed within the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions (abbreviated ISSAI), elaborated by the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (abbreviated INTOSAI).

We consider that the research of the external public audit, as a specific activity of the supreme audit institutions, by reference to the community and international framework, highlights current issues, especially from the scientific point of view, but also as a practical matter, which has determined the selection of the research area and theme.

We believe that this approach will strengthen the role of the external public audit and of the supreme audit institutions in overseeing the public financial resources management and will provide stakeholders with an innovative comparative analysis regarding the external public audit typology in the community area, from a perspective oriented towards the "standard typology – diversity" approach, under the aegis of the European Union's "unity in diversity" motto. Complementary, the innovative approach will contribute to the credibility increase regarding the supervision of the public financial resource management at the level of the countries in the community space, in the context of the economic turbulences with negative impact on the public financial resources.

Structurally, the paper begins with an introduction. The first section of the paper is dedicated to the conceptual approaches regarding the external public audit, and the second section presents the research methodology. The

third section describes the study results on the external public audit typology in the member states of the European Union, and at the end of the paper, the conclusions, the limits of the study, as well as the future research directions are presented.

1. Conceptual approaches regarding the external public audit

The research approach aims to identify the interest of the academic environment regarding the study of the external public audit, by querying the databases.

Thus, as a testimonial, by querying the Web of Knowledge database, using the keywords "public sector audit" and "supreme audit institution", only 34 articles which contain these keywords in the title were identified. Therefore, we notice from the beginning that the specialized literature is limited regarding the research of the external audit in the public sector, although its importance is undoubted.

Moreover, the World Wide Web query using the keyword in Romanian ("audit public extern") highlights about 654,000 results related to this concept, while a search by the concept in English ("external public audit") reveals about 239,000,000 results, which denotes the limitation of the external public audit approach in Romania.

Our findings are supported also by Johnsen's research (2019, p. 121), which shows that the specialized literature on public sector auditing outside the Anglo-American and North-European contexts is limited.

In Romania, Ispir (2008, p. 107) considers that the external audit in the public sector is usually invoked as the audit carried out by the national supreme audit institution (abbreviated SAI), respectively from outside the government structure, and its sphere of activities includes, in general, the certification of accounts (the financial audit) or the public bodies' internal control systems' evaluation, as well as of the internal control system of the government as a global system.

According to Bobeș (Tăvală) (2016, p. 71), the activity of external audit in the public sector is essential in ensuring the accountability regarding the public funds management in the sense that, although the responsibility of using the public funds, in terms of

legality and performance, lies with the authorizing officers, the external public audit has the role to evaluate the financial management of the public entities and to issue recommendations and measures for its improvement.

Moreover, Mățiș, Gherai and Vladu (2014) point out that the audit carried out by the supreme audit institutions is an activity with impact on the societal trust in public sector entities, since the management of public resources impacts the citizens lives.

At international level, in the view of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (abbreviated OECD), the external audit carried out by the supreme audit institutions is traditionally known as aiming at the public expenditures' supervision.

Also, Bonollo (2019, p. 468) highlights the importance of the audit carried out by the supreme audit institutions for the reform of the public sector, emphasizing that through it, the supervision of the use of public resources and the responsibility are ensured. Extending the reasoning, Morin (2010, p. 25) shows that the supreme audit institutions oversee the correct use of the public funds.

For Sacer, Zager and Sever (2011, p. 81), the external public audit (the governmental audit) is noted as an essential condition for the economic, effective and efficient spending of the public money. Moreover, this point of view is convergent with that expressed by Ramirez (2010, p. 95), who points out that the external audit in the public sector plays an essential role in determining the compliance with the three principles (economy, efficiency and effectiveness), both at the level of the administrations themselves, as well as the level of public entities.

In a recent paper, Cordery and Hay (2019, p. 128) highlight the important role of the supreme audit institutions in ensuring the public sector accountability. At the same time, the authors approach the typology of the external public audit, showing that the main activities of the supreme audit institutions focus on the audit of the public sector entities' financial statements, the compliance assessment, providing consulting to parliamentary committees and performing performance audits.

Also, Slobodyanik and Chyzhevskya (2019, p. 472) approach the external public audit by referring to its ability to increase the responsibility of the public entities towards the society, regarding the resources use and

the performance related results. As a result, as Pierre and Licht (2017, p. 226) highlight, the supreme audit institutions are gradually becoming important agents of the public management reform.

From another perspective, Campos (2019, p. 77) regards the external audit in the public sector as a guarantee of the democratic state and the rule of law.

Moreover, at the level of the national specialty literature, Oțetea, Tița and Ungureanu (2015, p. 622) have highlighted the key position of the supreme audit institutions within the institutional framework of the democratic nations.

In terms of typology, by reference to the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions (abbreviated ISSAI), elaborated by the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (abbreviated INTOSAI), ISSAI 100 (The Fundamental Principles of Public Sector Audit) highlights the three main types of audit for the public sector, respectively: the financial audit, the performance audit and the compliance audit, defining them as follows:

- the financial audit – focuses on determining whether the financial information of the audited entity is presented according to the applicable financial reporting and regulatory framework; this objective is achieved by obtaining sufficient and adequate audit evidence, in order to allow the auditor or the audit team to express the opinion on the financial information of the entity, determining whether they contain or are free of misstatements, caused by fraud or errors;
- the performance audit – focuses on determining whether the operations, the programs and the institutions function according to the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness and whether there is room for improvement; performance is evaluated in relation with certain criteria, the causes of deviations from these or other problems being analyzed; in essence, the purpose of this form of audit is to answer the audit questions and to issue recommendations to improve the aspects concerned;
- the compliance audit – focuses on determining whether the activities, transactions and financial information are, in all significant aspects, in accordance with the authorities governing the audited entity (regulations, budgetary resolutions, policies, codes and rules, agreed terms or general

principles that govern the financial management of the public sector and the civil servants conduct).

Within the same standard, it is shown that the supreme audit institutions may carry out missions on any relevant subject for the management responsibilities and for those charged with the governance and the proper use of public resources. These actions may include, among others, reporting on the results of public service provision activities, the compliance with the internal control standards and also the projects' real-time audits. Equally, the supreme audit institutions may conduct combined audits, which include financial, performance and/or compliance issues.

The research shows that the presented conceptual approaches converge towards the importance of the external public audit and the role of the supreme audit institutions in monitoring the management of public financial resources and implicitly the sustainability of the public sector.

2. The research methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of the research, we will use the specific means of the scientific investigation. The research methodology is qualitative and interpretive.

The scientific demarche envisages the analysis of the main approaches in the specialized literature. At the same time, the descriptive-conceptual perspective will follow the coordinates on the basis of which the theme is addressed within the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions. The scientific demarche is complemented by an analysis on the typology of the external public audit in the European Union member states, based on the logical and comparative analysis by countries, through the successive processing of the information disseminated by the European Court of Auditors ("Public Audit in the European Union", 2019, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/book-state-audit/en/>). The study is carried out regarding all the 27 member states, information regarding the United Kingdom, which has recently left the European Union, being also presented.

The first stage of processing focuses on grouping the supreme audit institutions in the European Union area, in relation to the types of audit missions they carry out, in three categories: SAls applying the standard typology (we consider the standard typology as being represented by the "financial audit – performance audit –

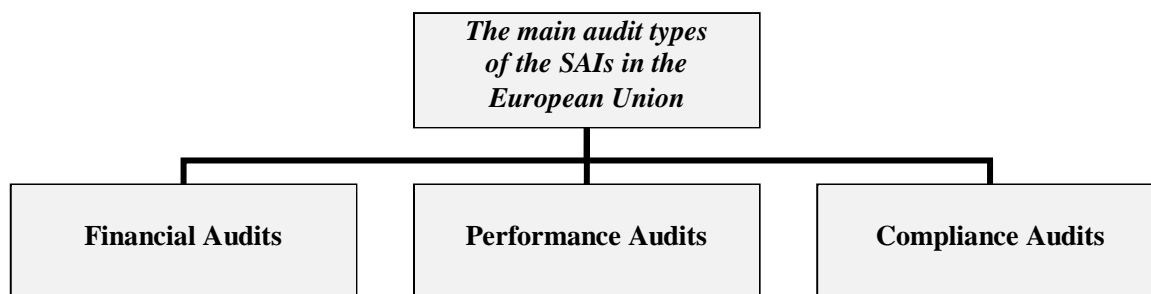
compliance audit triptych") and/or performs combined audits (audit activities involving several types of missions); SAls that perform more types of audits compared to the standard typology; SAls that perform fewer types of audits compared to standard typology. The second stage of processing, aims to correlate the analysis with the integration year of the states in the European Union, and the third stage takes into account also the age of the supreme audit institutions in the member states, determined by reference to the year in which they became active.

The bibliographic sources envisaged for carrying out the research include: books, studies and articles published in prestigious journals, different reports issued by the authorities in the field, international standards specific to the addressed subject, as well as specialized sites consulted in order to strengthen the investigative approach. Also, we will resort to tools such as: participatory and non-participatory observation, data and information collection and processing, analysis, synthesis, deductive reasoning, comparison, exemplification, but also mapping.

3. The multi-dimensional analysis of the external public audit typology in the member states of the European Union

The main types of audit of the supreme institutions from the European Union (*Figure no. 1*) were described in the first edition of the paper "Public Audit in the European Union" (European Court of Auditors, 2019, p. 14). Thus, it is shown that *the financial audits* involve the documents, reports, procedures, records, internal control systems and internal audit examination, in order to verify that the financial statements present a correct and an accurate image of the financial position and if the results of the financial activities comply with the accepted accounting standards and principles. If we refer to *performance audits*, they involve examining the programs, operations, management systems and procedures used by the bodies and institutions that manage public resources, in order to evaluate their economic, efficient and effective use. *The compliance audits* verify if the economic and financial management of the audited entity, activity or program complies with the applicable legal and regulatory provisions.

Figure no. 1. The main audit types of the supreme audit institutions from the European Union



Source: Projection after the European Court of Auditors (2019), "Public Audit in the European Union", p. 14.

Also, within this report of the European Court of Auditors, in the section dedicated to Romania, it is stated that "the audit missions carried out by the Romanian Court of Accounts take the form of: financial audits of the execution accounts, performance audits, compliance audits and external public audits of the community funds". We mention that the last form of audit referred to, relates to the specific missions of the Audit Authority, as independent operational authority, organized within the supreme audit institution of Romania.

Regarding the categories of external audit, Ispir (2008, p. 205) shows that the supreme audit institutions in the EU countries carry out a wide range of audit/control activities, each of them being individualized by specific activities and own approaches, which gives them distinct identities.

In order to achieve the research objectives, based on the public information available in the official documents of the European Court of Auditors, we grouped the supreme audit institutions (abbreviated SAIs) from the European Union member states, in relation to the typology of the audit missions carried out, as follows (Table no. 1):

1. SAIs applying the standard typology. We consider the standard typology to be represented by the "financial audit (abbreviated FA) – performance audit (abbreviated PA) – compliance audit (abbreviated CA) triptych" and/or combined audits (audit activities involving several types of missions);
2. SAIs that perform more types of audits compared to the standard typology;
3. SAIs that perform fewer types of audits compared to the standard typology.

Table no. 1. SAIs classification according to the typology of the audit missions performed

No.	SAI categories	The categories corresponding countries	External public audit types
1.	SAIs applying the standard typology and/or performing combined audits	<i>Belgium</i>	FA, PA and audits on legality and regularity.
		<i>Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, France, Portugal</i>	FA, PA and CA.
		<i>Czech Republic</i>	FA, PA and audits of legality.
		<i>Slovenia</i>	FA, PA, CA and the most often a combination of two types of audit.
		<i>Italy</i>	Financial-economic audits, PA, <i>ex ante</i> CA.
		<i>Poland</i>	FA, PA (planned and ad hoc), regularity audits and integrated audits, which include both financial and regularity and performance issues; subsequent follow-up audits.
		<i>Hungary</i>	FA, PA, CA and subsequent follow-up audits.

No.	SAI categories	The categories corresponding countries	External public audit types
2.	SAIs that perform more types of audits compared to the standard typology	Bulgaria	FA, PA, CA and specific audits .
		Cyprus	FA, PA, CA, technical audits, environmental audits, special investigations .
		Finland	FA, PA, CA, audits of the fiscal-budgetary policy, subsequent follow-up audits .
		Germany	FA, PA, CA, selective audits, horizontal audits, exploration studies, subsequent follow-up audits, general or management audits, ex post audits, real-time audits .
		Greece	FA, PA, CA, ex ante audits, pre-contractual audits, ex post audits, subsequent follow-up audits .
		Malta	FA, PA, CA, investigation audits, IT audits, subsequent follow-up audits .
		Romania	FA, PA, CA, community funds' external public audits .
		Spain	FA, PA, CA (if different types of audits are combined, it results: <i>regularity audits</i> – focus on the objectives of the financial audit and the compliance audit; <i>comprehensive audits</i> – cover all these types of audits); subsequent follow-up audits; horizontal audits .
3.	SAIs that perform fewer types of audits compared to the standard typology	Austria	Combined audit (FA and PA).
		Ireland, Luxembourg, (United Kingdom), Netherlands	FA and PA.
		Sweden	An annual FA, evaluating the correctness of the financial statements and PA; subsequent follow-up audits .

Source: Processing by the European Court of Auditors (2019), "Public audit in the European Union"

The research of the information presented in **Table no. 1**, highlights that in addition to *the standard typology*, the supreme audit institutions in some countries of the community area also carry out *other types of external public audit* missions, such as: specific audits or special investigations, technical audits, environmental audits, fiscal-budgetary policy audits, selective audits, horizontal audits, exploration studies, subsequent follow-up audits, general or management audits, real-time audits, ex ante and ex post audits, pre-contractual audits, IT audits, as well as community funds' audits.

The standard typology is represented by the "financial audit – performance audit – compliance audit triptych" and/or combined audits (audit activities involving several types of missions), being performed in the case of the supreme audit institutions in Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary.

The specific audits or the special investigations are carried out in countries such as Bulgaria and Cyprus, being missions conducted at the request of the legislature (through its members and/or commissions), of the ministers within the executive, of the individuals or the organizations, but also of the police for assistance in the investigation of some potentially criminal cases.

It is also noted that within the SAI of Cyprus, technical audits and environmental audits are also carried out. If *the technical audits*' mainly concerns are related not only to the public procurement practices, the construction projects in progress, the leases of the real estate properties intended to house the offices of the public administration, but also to the IT systems of data processing, *the environmental audits* involve a combination of financial, performance and compliance audits regarding a particular topic related to the environmental governance.

The fiscal-budgetary policy audits are carried out in Finland and are intended to evaluate these policies. *The selective audits* involve in-depth examinations aimed at collecting evidence on a certain aspect of the audited subject audited, these being specific to Germany.

The horizontal audits are carried out not only in Germany, but also in Spain, and involve auditing a representative sample of entities within the same public subsector or from different subsectors, which have common characteristics and objectives and aim the same time horizon, in order to draw conclusions regarding specific topics in the fields of public administration.

If we consider *the general (or management) audits*, they are also practiced in Germany, and they aim to provide an overview of the financial management of the audited authority.

Using the sequential approach, we have also identified the following typology of the missions performed by the SAIs in the European Union member countries:

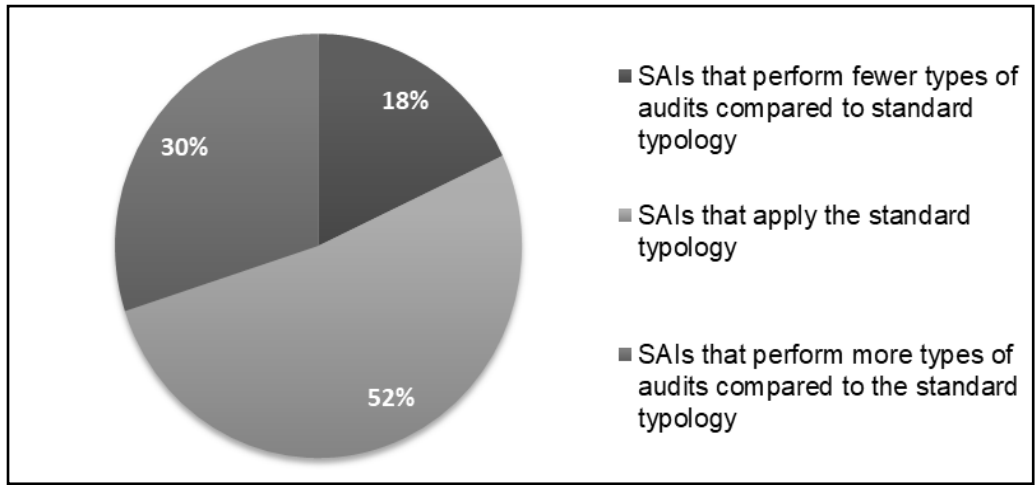
- *The exploration studies* are specific actions that are practiced by the SAI of Germany. These can be considered as documentation actions, as they aim to obtain in-depth information on certain problematic or interesting aspects, with the primary purpose of preparing new audit missions;
- *The ex-ante audits of the public entities and expenditures* are used by SAIs from countries such as Greece or Italy, being carried out in order to avoid certain illegitimate actions or to approve or reject, as appropriate, the relevant payment orders;
- *The pre-contractual audits* are specific SAI missions in Greece, which are carried out prior to the conclusion of high value contracts, assigned by the state or by any public entity;
- *The real-time audits* are a category of missions in Germany, which permit SAI to examine the multitude of decisions involved in major programs, separately and at each stage of the project, facilitating the detection, at an early stage, of the deficiencies, and the timely information of the decision-makers;

- *The ex-post audits* are verification measures practiced by SAIs from countries such as Germany or Greece, which are carried out with the main purpose of evaluating the legality and regularity of revenues and expenditures legality and regularity, but also the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of policies, programs, measures or the public administration functioning;
- *The subsequent follow-up audits* are aimed exclusively at the subsequent and systematic follow-up of the audits results, by verifying the way and degree of implementation of the measures or the recommendations made following the conclusions and findings related to the previous missions. These types of checks are carried out by the SAIs in countries such as Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Spain, but also Sweden. The results of this verification form are recorded in subsequent follow-up reports, and in some cases, some SAIs publish annual reports on this subject. In Romania, these actions are called follow-up missions or for monitoring the recommendations implementation.

The analysis made based on the information disseminated by the European Court of Auditors shows that half of the SAIs in the community area apply the standard typology and/or carry out combined audits. Basically, it is the case of the SAIs in 14 countries (Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary) from the total of 27 EU member states, which means 52%. In contrast, 30% of the SAIs in the European Union carry out more audit types than the standard typology. These include the Romanian Court of Accounts, together with the SAIs in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Greece, Malta and Spain.

Regarding the SAIs which perform a limited typology of missions compared to the standard typology, the research carried out highlighted 18% of the SAIs in the European Union, namely those in member states such as Austria, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden and Netherlands (*Figure no. 2*). The same situation is found also in the case of the United Kingdom, which has recently left the EU.

Figure no. 2. The structural analysis of the SAIs in the community area



Source: Authors' processing, 2020

The geographical distribution of the member states on the map of Europe, grouped by the three categories of

SAIs identified through the present research, is presented in *Figures 3, 4 and 5*.

Figure no. 3. Member states in which SAIs apply the standard typology and/or perform combined audits



Source: Authors' processing, 2020

Figure no. 4. Member states in which SAIs perform more types of audits compared to the standard typology



Source: Authors' processing, 2020

Figure no. 5. Member states in which SAIs perform fewer types of audits compared to the standard typology



Source: Authors' processing, 2020

The analysis of the information released by the European Court of Auditors also revealed that the SAIs in Austria, Ireland, Luxembourg, (United Kingdom), Netherlands and Sweden do not mention the compliance audit missions. Diametrically opposed, in addition to the financial audit, that is carried out in all the supreme audit institutions in the European Union states, we have also identified the performance audit, which indicates that, at the community level significant importance is given to aspects related to economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In order to identify the degree of consolidation of the external public audit missions in the member states of the European Union, we have continued the research by correlating the typology of the missions carried out by the supreme audit institutions with the states integration year in the European Union. The member states from 1993 and the four enlargement stages from 1995, 2004, 2007 and 2013 were taken into account (Table no. 2).

Table no. 2. The classification of SAIs according to the typology of the audit missions carried out and the states integration year in the European Union

Member states at the founding of the EU/ Stages of EU enlargement	SAIs that perform fewer types of audits compared to the standard typology	SAIs applying the standard typology and/or performing combined audits	SAIs that perform more types of audits compared to the standard typology
Member states in 1993	<i>Ireland, Luxembourg, (United Kingdom), Netherlands</i>	<i>Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Portugal</i>	<i>Germany, Greece, Spain</i>
The extension stage in 1995	<i>Austria, Sweden</i>	-	<i>Finland</i>
The extension stage in 2004	-	<i>Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary</i>	<i>Cyprus, Malta</i>
The extension stage in 2007	-	-	<i>Bulgaria, Romania</i>
The extension stage in 2013	-	<i>Croatia</i>	-

Source: Authors' processing, 2020

The results of the two-dimensional analysis *the states integration year in the European Union – the typology of the audit missions* showed that the member states from 1993 cover the whole range of categories of SAIs, while the states that joined in 1995 (Austria, Finland, Sweden) and those that joined in the 2004 enlargement (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) cover only two categories of SAIs. The states that have joined the European Union through the last two enlargement stages (2007 – Bulgaria and Romania and 2013 – Croatia) cover only one category.

From another perspective, in the case of the 12 founding countries of the European Union by the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, (United Kingdom), Greece, Portugal, Spain), we notice a quasi-equal distribution between the three categories of SAIs. In contrast, in the countries that joined the community space in the enlargement phase of 2004, we note that

most supreme audit institutions (from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary) apply the standard typology (financial audit, performance audit and compliance audit and/or combined audits).

The research results showed that the states that joined during the enlargement stages of 2004, 2007, 2013 borrowed from the experience of the senior states in the European Union, being oriented either on the actions specific to the standard typology, or towards a wider palette of missions. Between the latter, the Romanian Court of Accounts is also found, which, as the White Book attests (Romanian Court of Accounts, 2017, p. 99), in the process of rallying to the requirements formulated by the European Union, has benefited from the support of Spain and Germany SAIs.

In the followings, we considered interesting to carry out the analysis taking into account also the age of SAIs in the member states of the European Union, which was determined by reference to the year in which they

became active. Thus, through recourse to the public information of the European Court of Auditors, to which we have already referred in the paper, by processing

the data, we have ordered the member countries according to the seniority in activity of their SAIs (Table no. 3).

Table no. 3. The classification of SAIs according to the typology of the audit missions performed and their age, by reference to the years since they are active

No.	EU member states	Member states at the founding of the EU/ Stages of EU enlargement	The year from which SAI is active	SAIs that perform fewer types of audits compared to the standard typology	SAIs applying the standard typology and/or performing combined audits	SAIs that perform more types of audits compared to the standard typology	The age of SAI
1	Sweden	1995	2003	x			17
2	Luxembourg	1993	2000	x			20
3	Malta	2004	1997			x	23
4	Bulgaria	2007	1995			x	25
5	Slovenia	2004	1994		x		26
6	Czech Republic	2004	1993		x		27
7	Slovakia	2004	1993		x		27
8	Croatia	2013	1993		x		27
9	Romania	2007	1992			x	28
10	Latvia	2004	1991		x		29
11	Estonia	2004	1990		x		30
12	Lithuania	2004	1990		x		30
13	Hungary	2004	1989		x		31
14	Spain	1993	1978			x	42
15	Denmark	1993	1976		x		44
16	Cyprus	2004	1960			x	60
17	Germany	1993	1950			x	70
18	Italy	1993	1948		x		72
19	Austria	1995	1948	x			72
20	Ireland	1993	1923	x			97
21	Poland	2004	1919		x		101
22	Portugal	1993	1849		x		171
23	Greece	1993	1833			x	187
24	Belgium	1993	1831		x		189
25	Finland	1995	1825			x	195
26	Netherlands	1993	1814	x			206
27	France	1993	1807		x		213

Source: Authors' processing, 2020

The research has shown that the SAIs in the community area, which have a maximum age of 20 years, are

institutions that perform fewer types of audits compared to the standard typology. This is the case of the SAIs of

Sweden and Luxembourg, which are also the only supreme audit institutions in the European Union that started their activity after the accession.

From the diametrically opposite perspective, the supreme audit institutions in Malta and Bulgaria, which have a working age of 20 to 25 years, carry out more types of audit compared to the standard typology.

For the age bracket between 26 and 30 years, we observe that the supreme audit institutions apply mostly the standard typology and/or carry out combined audits, with the exception of the Romanian Court of Accounts, which also performs external public audits of the community funds.

In contrast, in the case of the supreme audit institutions older than 30 years, but below 100 years, we notice a balanced distribution between the three categories. Regarding the SAIs with a working age of over 100 years, we notice that most of them apply the standard typology and/or carry out combined audits.

The results of the three-dimensional analysis *The states integration year in the European Union – the age in activity of the SAIs – the typology of the audit missions* showed that the senior states in the European Union, but whose supreme audit institutions started their activity after the accession are oriented towards a narrower typology of missions, while the countries whose supreme audit institutions are older in activity, perform mainly either the actions specific to the standard typology or a wider range of missions.

Conclusions

The research of the assertions and the conceptual valences of the external public audit shows that it is complex, but insufficiently debated in the academic sphere. The external audit in the public sector approaches interfere regarding its importance in monitoring the management of public financial resources.

In this context, the external public audit can be defined as the whole of the specific activities of the supreme audit institutions, through which the supervision of the correct use of the public sector resources is realized, in the sense of spending them in compliance with the five fundamental principles "L.R.E.E.E." (legality, regularity, economy, efficiency and effectiveness), aiming to protect the financial interests of the state and the public sector,

as well as increasing the responsibility of public entities towards the stakeholders, both in terms of the resources use and in relation to the performance related outcomes.

The results of the research revealed that the supreme audit institutions in some countries of the community area carry out, complementary to the standard typology (represented by the "financial audit – performance audit – compliance audit triptych"), also other types of external public audit missions, among which we mention: specific audits or special investigations, technical audits, environmental audits, fiscal-budgetary policy audits, selective audits, horizontal audits, exploration studies, subsequent follow-up audits, general or management audits, real-time audits, *ex ante* and *ex post* audits, pre-contractual audits, IT audits, as well as audits of the community funds.

At the same time, based on the information disseminated by the European Court of Auditors, we have identified that, at the level of the European Union, there are supreme audit institutions (from Austria, Ireland, Luxembourg, (United Kingdom), Netherlands and Sweden) without mentions referring to compliance audit missions, with regard to their activity.

From the comparative analysis by countries, carried out on the typology of the external public audit of the European Union member states, it was found that, although the audit methods vary, certain common elements were identified, of which we mention the accomplishment of the financial and the performance audit missions by all the SAIs at community level, as well as other elements of convergence, in relation to the classification criteria considered.

The research results revealed that the states that joined the European Union during the enlargement stages of 2004, 2007, 2013, borrowed from the experience of the senior member states in EU, being oriented either on the actions specific to the standard typology, or towards the realization of a wider palette of missions. Additionally, in relation to the age in activity of SAIs, the results of the analysis showed that the senior member states in the European Union, whose SAIs started their activity after the accession, are oriented towards a narrower typology of missions, while the countries whose supreme audit institutions are older in activity, perform mainly either the actions specific to the standard typology or a wider range of activities.

Therefore, the research performed on the typology of the external public audit validates the European Union "unity

in diversity" motto, also at the level of the SAIs' specific activities in the community area.

Regarding to the limits of the research undertaken, we consider that they are related not only to certain barriers regarding the approach of the external public audit in the specialized literature, the heterogeneity of the reports of SAIs in the European Union member states, but also to the limitation of the study at the

level of the community area countries.

As future research directions, we intend to continue the investigative approach by extending the comparative analysis on the typology of external public audit at the level of the candidate and potential candidate countries for accession to the European Union and, subsequently, at the level of all the states in the geographical region of Europe.

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