



EUROPEAN
COURT
OF AUDITORS

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Speech

Luxembourg, 12 October 2017

Speech by Klaus-Heiner Lehne, President of the European Court of Auditors

Special event on the occasion of the
conference of international auditors
marking the ECA's 40th anniversary

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Royal Highnesses, Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, dear friends,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all here to Luxembourg on the occasion of the European Court of Auditors' 40th anniversary.

And I am particularly pleased to personally welcome:

- their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Grand Duchess of Luxembourg and the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Xavier Bettel, along with other high-ranking Luxembourg representatives;
- the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, together with our key interlocutor in the Parliament, Inge Gräßle, the Chair of the Budgetary Control committee, and other representatives of the Parliament;
- our former colleague, the President of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid; the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and Commissioner Oettinger.

Last but not least, I would like to welcome my predecessors, the former Presidents of the European Court of Auditors, Vitor Caldeira, Hubert Weber and André Middelhoek.

Public auditing and financial accountability are deeply rooted in the broader concept of **democratic accountability**.

The creation of the Court through the Treaty of Brussels in the seventies shows this **convergence** between the requirement of independent external audit and the goal of full democratic accountability.

We would not be here today, were it not for a determined campaign for a European Audit Institution, in large part led by the European Parliament, in an alliance with the supreme audit institutions in the Member States. One particularly imposing parliamentary figure stands out from those early days, and it is Heinrich Aigner, to whom I would like to pay tribute tonight.

Forty years ago, in October 1977, the nine founding Members of the Court, having taken their oath of office before the Court of Justice, arrived at rue Aldringen. They had to start their work more or less from scratch and deal with numerous questions, ranging from audit work to the recruitment of staff. It was only later that the Court became a formal institution as we know it today. In the meantime, the Court of Auditors' next meeting will be its 1072nd!

Ladies and gentlemen

I speak for all the Members of the Court when I say that I'm honoured that you all made it here to share this anniversary with us.

This year has been a turning point for Europe. Rather than staring into the abyss, twenty seven European leaders gathered in Rome, reaffirming their common future.

President Juncker, just one month ago, with Europe's economy finally bouncing back, you provided a roadmap for the months and years to come. It is a bold one. We need to be forward-looking and **bold, not apologetic** in our actions.

In particular, we need to be more **confident in our values and confident in our potential**.

Debating what sort of Union we want to live in is good, and even essential. But perpetual self-doubt and even self-flagellation only add to the confusion felt by many citizens, and plays directly into the hands of populists.

It is only with a **strong sense of purpose** that the EU and its Member States will be able to set the agenda worldwide, be it on trade, be it on climate change, be it on confronting terrorist threats and managing migration flows.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As President of the European Court of Auditors I can assure you that we are determined to **fully play our part** in such a reinvigorated European Union.

We are determined to be an **independent voice**, capable of meting out praise where things work, but also to highlight uncomfortable truths where things are not working properly.

A former President of the European Court of Justice, Hans Kutscher, put it with an almost British sense of understatement when he swore in our first batch of Members in 1977: "it is no secret that the activity of those bodies responsible for the supervision of budgets is **not always a source of joy** for those involved". However, he argues rightly that such control must be "welcomed with gratitude".

As Heinrich Aigner put it perfectly: the control exercised by the Court of Auditors should be “**not punitive but constructive**”.

We are determined to ensure that every euro spent at EU level brings clear **added value**. And with a potentially shrinking budget, this will no doubt be a challenge in **all** spending areas.

We must ensure that **all** EU spending is accountable and independently audited. I don't think that, in the long term, our citizens, businesses, and national authorities need additional budgets – the Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets has described this as a “Galaxy of Budgets”. Rather, the citizens expect a single, flexible, transparent budget based on the **Community method**.

We must also be in position to make the **right product** available **at the right time**. In the last months we have taken decisive steps to make our Work Programme more strategic and to modernise our Annual Report.

I want us also to better **communicate** our work in the media and to make ourselves more understandable to citizens.

Finally, we aim to **cooperate even more closely** with the national Supreme Audit Institutions, and with the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

Let me assure you that **the Court of Auditors is not an ivory tower** but an **open house**:
Open to cooperate with you at all levels in keeping with our independence,
Open to understand differences and attempt to bridge them,
Open to learn from others and to innovate in our daily work.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank Presidents Kaljulaid, Juncker and Tajani for their tributes and inspiration, and will finish with some **words of gratitude**.

First, Your Royal Highness, to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and its government, for providing an exceptional setting for, and support to, our daily work, for which we are very grateful.

Second, I would like to thank all our **colleagues from Supreme Audit Institutions** in the Member States – and I'm glad to see so many of you here -, and of course to the other **Institutions of the European Union** for the excellent relations we have.

Last but not least, I want to pay a big tribute to all current and former **Members of the ECA** and all past and present **members of staff** for their contribution to the Court's work.

You have invested your energy here over the past four decades; **you are**, so to speak, **the backbone** of this Institution.

Thank you for your attention.