

**Dr. Inge Gräßle**  
**Vorsitzende des Haushaltskontrollausschusses**

Abschlussrede

Seminar des Europäischen Rechnungshofs

Accounting for Europe - issues in accountability and audit structures in the EU  
am 14. Oktober 2014

---

I have a liking for going the extra mile, or, to translate a nice German saying, to “brush hedgehogs”.

I have very much appreciated listening to some of today’s presentations and comments, and seeing that a lot of you also like to brush hedgehogs.

I am grateful to the Court of Auditors for having showed us how complex the EU system has become. But, we know our hedgehogs. Unfortunately, we do not know yet how to approach the new “animals” on the scene – ECB, EFSF/ESM. We smell them, we are annoyed by the mess they cause, from time to time they come close to us, but when we show them the comb to brush them, they escape.

That should not prevent us from examining them and the accountability gaps they face. Therefore, let’s have the courage to take a closer look at them – many thanks to the Court for that.

I regret that the experienced European institutions – the Court of Auditors, the Parliament, experienced with complex constructions and desperate cases of insufficient transparency – were not asked to contribute to this new universe, and to allow for synergies between the existing instruments and the new ones, which are nevertheless built up for us all, and which are – once again – paid for by the European taxpayer. I am sure history will show that this was a big and costly error.

I would like to assure you that the messages of today will not be lying dormant in the minutes of this event – they will feed our reflections at least in the budgetary control committee.

Our to-do list is long. Let me look at our dear European Union. We see that getting the right information is still a challenge. During the discharge procedure – provided for in the Treaties as Parliament's duty – we receive about 12.000 pages of information – without taking into account the budget itself, of course. Really useful are only about 10%. The elephant in the room is shared management. We need to address the weaknesses of our instruments in this field, the lies and incapacities of the lower management levels in the Member States, the fundamental NON-understanding – *non compris* – of rules, and why and how to follow them and to improve the system instead of paying back some – very small – sums of money compared to the overall envelopes.

Spending through international partners is another issue, spending by states and trust funds.

Not to forget financial instruments – these very dear leftovers of the current Commission President. There is a risk of unjustified preferential treatment of the private sector – and even I as a conservative politician am worried about it.

We will lose a lot of money and a lot of reputation, because there are still some of us who believe in miraculous creation of money. Who will clean up?

We all will do it, believe me. And most of us are the ones who warned to put such high hopes into these instruments. These instruments will produce additional accountability gaps in the new MFF.

Just to complete our to-do list: intergovernmental agencies without financing from the EU budget need to be at least accompanied. I welcome somebody from the OHIM in the audience. And we need faster procedures for financial corrections – under the current system it takes up to 10 years for an error to be corrected.

I would like to call on all EU institutions to do more for accountability. Some institutions – among others the one I am representing here – built up internal procedures which are burdensome with a nice side effect – preventing accountability. The argument is not to give information about failures to the public – to prevent a possible anti-European mood.

I would like to tell you: this mood exists because others than us put cases on the table which we try to keep below this table. The effect is highly damaging.

Therefore: please let us do our job. Let us do all we can to always clean up.

And let us also look back: over the past decades, accountability in the EU seemed like driving a car always looking ahead, never looking in the rear mirror – preparing the next budget, spending the next funds, giving statistics on how much was spent, blaming the Commission for money unspent and reinitiate the cycle.

The Commission has now a big opportunity – with a “real reform commission” ahead: The Commission President-designate broke up the Commission’s silos on the level of Commissioner portfolios. I would like to tell him: continue! Look at the internal Commission structures – and I am sure that you all have plenty of good ideas what to do.

I am sure that the European institutions are able to do “lessons learnt”. I am willing to do so and would be happy if you could join us brushing our hedgehogs.