

Speech

by COMMISSIONER NEVEN MIMICA

**International conference
European development aid after 2015
What is at stake?**

Opening session

**European Court of Auditors
Luxembourg
20 October 2015**

President Caldeira; Minister Schneider; Honourable Chair of Development Committee Ms Mc Avan; Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, Ms Faremo,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to represent Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker at this important and timely conference.

This conference is a very welcome initiative from the European Court of Auditors. In this European Year for Development, it is one of the first opportunities to address the new global environment for development policy.

Last month, after a difficult – some might say tortuous - three-year process, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This was a great moment and a significant success – especially at a time when the multilateral model of governance is being seriously questioned.

The 2030 Agenda outlines a new framework for national and international action for global poverty eradication and sustainable development. It has good governance at its core. The primacy of domestic action is clearly established. The importance of policies has been underlined and a commitment to policy coherence has been reiterated by all.

I count it as a great step forward that we now have in place a universal agenda. This is not just because we should no longer place countries into categories of givers and receivers, haves and have-nots. But it is also because a universal agenda acknowledges our shared responsibilities and our shared destiny.

The new Agenda is certainly universally challenging – including for the EU. Within the EU, we are in the middle of discussing and assessing exactly what the Agenda means for us – both within our borders and in our relations with others.

And we know well that the true test of the Agenda will not lie in the statements made in New York, but in the real improvements that must occur in peoples' lives everywhere.

The Agenda is very broad. We could debate the substance over many days. But I want to focus on one cross-cutting issue which is both central to successful implementation and – I hope – relevant to this conference and the work of the European Court of Auditors.

That issue is accountability. Throughout the negotiations on both Financing for Development and the 2030 Agenda, the EU was firm and consistent on the centrality of accountability to successful implementation.

We had a fair degree of success in getting the language we wanted included in the adopted texts.

Why did the EU call for accountability so consistently? I see openness, transparency and accountability as immensely valuable at all stages of implementing the new Agenda.

First, at the planning stage. The 2030 agreement refers in several places to the importance of engaging all stakeholders in the implementation of the Agenda - not just national governments, but parliaments, local authorities, the private sector, civil society groups, ordinary citizens, academia. If SDG are universal, we should all contribute to achieving them.

National governments faced with the new Agenda – including EU Member States - have to deal with a number of challenges. What new actions are needed? How do they adjust their existing national plans? What financial and other resources can they rely on? How do they measure results?

Early engagement in planning serves many purposes – and many of them are beneficial to governments themselves. Broad stakeholder engagement can help governments identify the key priorities for action. It can inject a healthy degree of realism into national plans and help to manage citizen expectations. It can help governments by spreading the responsibility

for implementation out to where it belongs – with multiple stakeholders.

Implementation will be helped by a clear division of responsibility - for instance, between national governments and local authorities. And needless to say, with responsibility comes accountability.

We also need broad engagement at the monitoring stage. For an agenda that strives to leave no-one behind, we need to hear the voices and opinions of all on whether the Agenda is delivering what it is supposed to.

Broad engagement in monitoring permits useful mid-course corrections, based on what is really happening and not assessments from capitals.

It also has a useful side-benefit of making people feel they are being listened to – not long after the event, but when it matters – and this can help society to bond – or to heal.

Of course, transparency and accountability are essential parts of final review and evaluation. If planning and monitoring have been sound and broad-based, with appropriate indicators, this stage will be not so much a case of putting governments on trial, but an honest assessment of successes and failures.

I know - this image of transparency and accountability might be too perfect. The real world does not work like that. But, at a time when we are being aspirational in what we want to achieve – I see no inconsistency in being aspirational in how we go about our task.

Finally, I want to say a few words about financial rules and systems. The new 2030 Agenda – quite rightly – puts greater emphasis on governments' own responsibility to mobilise and spend their resources effectively and efficiently.

The international community has undertaken to play its part by addressing cross-national issues, such as international tax reform and illicit financial flows. But all governments need to develop rational tax structures and systems, budget and expenditure mechanisms and appropriate oversight. For this reason, I am happy to note that the European Union itself has recently agreed on greater transparency in cross-border tax rulings.

I am very aware of the importance of financial rules and systems in this context. Together with my colleagues, I am keen to explore, in the context of the EU's financial regulations and their interpretation, the best way to cooperate with key actors in development cooperation.

Alongside the respect of rules and procedures, the question of performance is also highly important. I know that the European Court of Auditors attaches high importance to its performance audits. The Commission is committed to striving for better performance and is looking innovatively at ways to improve efficiency and impact, working closely with other EU institutions.

I am aware that the Court is engaged in international cooperation for the development of the public audit profession worldwide. I applaud this work and can only see it increasing in scope and importance.

We are now part of a global and interconnected community with shared challenges and complementary knowledge and skills. The European Court of Auditors have a central role in that global community – one that is often below the political radar of high level UN conferences – but which is absolutely essential to the achievement of what we all strive for. Accountability – from village level in Mali to sophisticated financial systems in Europe and elsewhere – means a better, fairer world.

I am honestly very excited by the opportunity that the 2030 Agenda offers to us all – across the world - to focus on what matters, reassess our current efforts, make important changes for the better and make progress

towards the end of extreme poverty and to a sustainable future.

The hard work begins now with exchanging our views on how to move forward. So I look forward to this very timely conference. It is a rich agenda and I know we will learn and share a lot. We have reached a point where we really do need to use each event to take a step in the right direction.

The European Commission looks forward to working closely with all of you in making our landmark aspirations a reality.

Thank you.