

## Speech by the President of the Hellenic Parliament, Mr. Constantine An. Tassoulas

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much, Mr. President of the Court of Audit, for inviting me to address today's event in which you announce what you have called the new philosophy of the Court of Audit.

Before the new philosophy of the Court of Audit, and while I have served in public affairs for a long time through many offices, I had not solved the tragic dilemma, faced by those who perform public function, exercise public power, of prioritizing between effectiveness and legality. Of course, the richness of the Greek language and the “sugary” approach which the political dialogue has taken in recent decades have convinced many that these two can be reconciled and resolved so that we can easily have both effectiveness and legality.

But often the relentless reality is very different, and I must confess to you that from my experience thus far I was more in favour of the concept of effectiveness, without of course being driven by blatant tendencies to set aside legality; where legality often results in formalism or an overly pedantic process that sweeps away any notion of swiftness and effectiveness. I had thought about it a little and had come to the conclusion that this complexity of procedures is so great in order to ensure transparency, which, in fact, enhances the ingenuity of fraudsters and disables those who are honest and want to be creative.

Having confessed these insidious quests Mr. President, I am filled with optimism by the new approach of the Court of Audit, in which I had the pleasure and the honor to participate only briefly. You have been very generous; we have not played a decisive role in these initiatives, they are initiatives of yours, of the Court of Audit, and we are really optimistic because there seems to be a crossover between these two principles of effectiveness and legality, without effectiveness undermining legality and without legality obstructing effectiveness.

You talked about the Port Fund of an area; I will use a nautical term that reminded me of the way in which this institutional change is taking place in the Court of Audit hand-in-hand with the legislative branch: “Dead slow ahead”; we are moving forward in a calm way, we are not making revolutionary moves, but we are moving forward having examined the data, and this calm change is something that obviously guarantees an improvement in financial management.

Laws 4700/2020 and 4820/2021, passed in the summers of June and July 2020 and 2021 respectively, were passed with a solid majority in Parliament and with a large turnout. In other words, there was an interest of the political system in the formulation of the new Procedural Law as well as the new Organic Law of the Court of Audit. The new provision, included in the Procedural Law of 2020, which was subsequently included in the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, is a provision that enhances both the audit collaboration and the exchange of views; a modern expression would be the interaction between the Parliament and the Court of Audit. In the past the Court of Audit would send its annual report to the President of the Parliament and they distributed it according to the object of the audits to the standing committees, that is if the audit was related to the Ministry of Commerce, the President would then send it to the Production and Commerce Committee. Following the summer of 2020, after law 4700 was passed

that is, the Committee on Institutions and Transparency has assumed responsibility. Accordingly, the President of the Court of Audit sends the Court's annual audit and the Parliament, through the competent Committee when a discussion takes place, can propose prioritizations to the already decided audits, being prepared since the annual audit has been sent earlier; and not only that, but the Parliament can also propose additional audits, a maximum of three, regarding, in particular, issues of improving the management adequacy of the State mechanism.

There was a concern whether this innovation, which originates from the democracies of Europe and other countries, would convert the Court of Audit, on the basis of the number of parties in Parliament today, either into the sixth opposition party in Parliament, or the second party of the coalition. The purpose was not for the Court of Audit to become a conduit for our prevailing obsession with complaint, nor for it to become a gravedigger to any management-related irregularity. So, again the issue of the middle ground was raised, the permanent torment of our public life. Curiously, this was achieved very soon and we see that, between the first and the second year, there is a clear co-understanding of the role of the Court of Audit and its new cooperation with Parliament.

Thucydides in the Peloponnesian War, describes this ancient problem, i.e., everyone seeing things with their own eyes. During the plague described wonderfully by Thucydides, Athenians remembered a little old poem, which said in a kind of prophetic manner that «ἤξει Δωρικός πόλεμος λοιμός ἄμα» meaning that there will be war with the Dorians and plague will follow with it. Back then, they did not write these things, nor did they have Facebook, fortunately, but there was a question: What did they mean? Plague or famine, disease or hunger? So, everyone then interpreted this prophecy as a prophecy of sickness and Thucydides writes that «πρὸς ἃ ἔπασχον τὴν μνήμην ἐποιοῦντο». That is, they adapted their memory to what they had suffered, and Thucydides says below, if later there is a war with the Dorians and it brings hunger along, they will say that the verse was a famine with "i". It is the power to see things through your own perspective, through your own passions. This power, we have renounced, and I dare say that it was soon realized that the purpose of these new audits and this new collaboration are different in that they are mainly aimed at the supreme purpose, as provided for by the new law of the Court of Audit, to improve financial management. Two examples I will give you before I close: The issue of direct awards is not examined on the basis of headlines or complaints which, even if proven to be unfounded, never restore the morale and status of the falsely accused. Direct awards are scrutinised on the basis of the prospect of proposing remedial actions and methods of avoiding abuse of this mechanism. The use of external experts by the Public Sector is not used to say that the President of the Parliament hired three external expert geologists, while there are geologists in Parliament and, therefore, he is prone to doing special favors, but to define clear borderlines between the ostensible and the justified use of this mechanism. In other words, the contribution of the Court of Audit is not incendiary but remedial, and of course, here ensues another phase when such audits percolate down and offer proposals for correction of such public activities; then, parliamentary scrutiny will not just expand, but it will expand productively because it will be able to hold the government accountable as to why it does not make use of this report so that in matters of direct awards the situation becomes more much more solid and much more standard based on the directives that have been received. Thus, we have a very positive development. I therefore welcome the new philosophy of the Court of Audit, a mechanism that has greatly contributed to the financial integrity of the country, an institution which is the first supreme court of the country; and one of the first cases that

I recall from my memory is a case which is related to the distribution of public land after the revolution of 1821, when someone was given a tower in Mantinea and the Counselor of the Court of Audit concluded that this concession by the State of a tower to an apparent combatant, happened «φυλαχθέντων των τύπων». That is, procedures were observed. Of course, since then things have changed; we do not limit ourselves to procedures, we look at other things and with this new philosophy two seemingly contrasting values have been brought together, equally respected, effectiveness and legality.

The problems, of course, remain and there are some which are unsolved and I close with an unsolved one that I give as food for thought to understand that the range of action can never be described by the range of legislative provision: My office in Parliament is large enough, six meters high, with the vestibules, it is about 80 square meters and has been declared a monument. It had been declared a monument before I took office. It is lined with tiles of high artistic value "iznik". This style comes from Nice in Bithynia; it is a painted tile that has been developed in the east since the 16th century. The office has marble, it has heavy furniture and it is time to undergo cleaning. The description of the thorough cleaning, "microfiber cloths should be used, deionized water, special sponges for removing stains from melamine foam, the washing to be done with gentle circular movements, clockwise first and counterclockwise alternately, though. The surface to be wiped with a clean dry and very soft cloth, which will not discolor, or with a clean microfiber cloth. Pay attention to the frequent change of water so that it is always clean; and the list of exhaustive details goes on. You realize that these are done because a simple cleaner with a little water cannot clean it; it is a monument. There was a competition, the most economical tenderer offered a price, he was asked to make a further discount, he made a discount, they brought it to me to sign; curiously, I asked, because something reminded me of his last name, where the contractor comes from. They replied, he is from Ioannina, my constituency that is, and I have not signed it and I am still waiting for your opinion!

Thank you