



First President opening speech

INTOSAI Working Group on Evaluation of Public Policy and Program

**Videoconference
7-8 July 2021**

Dear colleagues,

I am delighted to meet you all and it is with great pleasure that I am opening this year's meeting as First President of the French Cour des comptes and Chair of the INTOSAI Working Group on evaluation of public policies and programs.

This meeting is particularly important for several reasons:

- First, this meeting is the first INTOSAI Working Group meeting I attend since my appointment as First President of the French Cour des comptes. It is with great pleasure that I have taken up my duties as Chair of our Working Group.
- I regret that the pandemic forces us to hold this meeting by videoconference. I deeply regret this as we were supposed to hold our last year seminar in Lima, Peru. This year again, the health crisis forbids us to meet together but hopefully next year will be possible in Bern, Switzerland. I would like to express my warm thanks to our Peruvian colleagues who were supposed to host last year event. I am convinced that we will be able to hold this meeting in the future in Lima as planned.
- As I said, I am particularly happy to meet with you and to be able to have an exchange with you. Since my appointment, I have unfortunately not been able to travel abroad, although this was one of my initial, firm intentions. Our Working Group occupies a privileged place in the international cooperation of

the French Cour des comptes and I am pleased that this webinar gives us the opportunity to introduce ourselves and to exchange on the major topic of evaluation.

I will let my colleague Rémi Frentz, director of International relations for the French Cour des comptes introduce the agenda of this webinar and give you an update on the activities of our working group for the past year in a moment. But, before that, I would like to share with you my vision of the evaluation and how the French Cour des comptes is developing its constitutional evaluative mission.

As some of you may know, in 2008, the evaluation mission of the French Cour des comptes was raised at the Constitutional level, as part of its role towards Parliament and Government. I think it is a very rare, if not unique, example of the mention of evaluation in a constitutional text.

It is true that the implementation of an evaluation practice has been an important intellectual and practical challenge for our institution, as it has been for many other SAIs, but the French Cour des comptes succeeded in empowering itself with this new mission.

However, in France, the increasing use of evaluation, undertaken by more and more actors, is an asset that is still insufficiently used by the public authorities. In our country, Parliament, Government, ministries, public agencies and local authorities can carry out their own evaluations but they only partially take into account their results. As a result, they too often launch and implement reforms without a prior evaluation of the existing situation. Unfortunately, it happens frequently that action still precedes reflection. If it is true that the French culture of public policy evaluation has progressed in recent years, this evolution remains too weak and too slow, and more regrettably, without drawing enough consequences.

When I was appointed as First President of the Cour des comptes last year, I clearly said that I wanted the French SAI to do more in that domain and to become the reference body in France for the evaluation of public policies.

In my view, the current period calls for further progress in the exercise of this still recent mission for the French Cour des comptes.

- First of all, the unprecedented health, economic and social crisis that we have been experiencing since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic forces us to constantly question the effectiveness of public action. Faced with shifting public policies and finances, we must always ensure that the response provided by the authorities is relevant and will meet its objectives and have concrete and positive impacts as expected.
- Secondly, our fellow citizens expect ever-greater transparency and ever more objective and documented information on the public policies implemented, in an unfortunate context of fake news disseminated throughout the world.
- Finally, we have within our reach new tools for conducting these evaluations. I am thinking in particular of the prospects offered by open data and machine learning, which will eventually profoundly change our working methods. The development of evaluation work therefore requires a technical and human investment, but we are convinced that it can lead to more enlightened and more effective public action better understood by our citizens.

To make progress in this area, we need to increase the number of partnerships, exchanges of best practices and training. This is also why, as part of the French Court's JF2025 strategic transformation project, which was presented last February, we are proposing several paths to achieve these ambitions.

Today, less than 5% of the French resources are devoted to evaluation. Our objective is to multiply this proportion by four in the next five years, to reach 20% of our resources devoted to the evaluation of public policies.

To achieve this, we are planning to establish partnerships with other public bodies or university teams. The regional chambers of accounts, which currently only participate in the Court's evaluations, would be given their own mandate in this area by Parliament.

In addition, the Court has proposed :

- to allow the Government and Parliament to refer to the Court for an opinion, in order to evaluate the quality of the content of the impact studies carried out by the ministries prior to the drafting of bills and reform proposals;
- to allow the Government, Parliament and local authorities to refer to the Court and the Regional Chambers of Accounts for an opinion prior to major national and local investment projects.

I know that our role in providing advice on public finances and their trajectory, and our view of public policies and their effectiveness, are recognized and useful. But they must be strengthened. Far from diverting us from our audit missions, these evolutions will enrich them. New fields of evaluation must be invested: for instance, I am thinking of the environmental footprint or the protection of personal data. These are contemporary public policy issues in which we are entitled to play a greater role.

In conclusion, I hope that our outcomes will inspire and be used by a growing number of Supreme Audit Institutions. SAIs do not have a monopoly on evaluation but we do believe they have important assets in this respect: among such assets, their institutional positioning provides guarantees of independence, and their in-depth knowledge of public actors and activities makes their advantage invaluable. Undoubtedly, this benefit strengthens their obligation to be successful.

I wish you all fruitful work during the webinar. I hope that the contribution of evaluation to the public debate will be ever more useful, in each of your countries

and beyond. You can always count on the support of the French Cour des comptes and this Working Group.