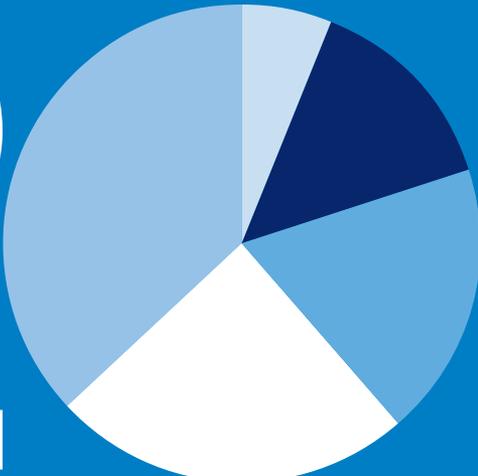


THE
ESS
REPORT

2012



EUROPEAN
STATISTICAL
SYSTEM

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Austria.

Authors: Lukasz Augustyniak,
Philippe Bautier and Delia
Monica Bistreanu, Eurostat

Layout: Claudia Daman,
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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013

ISBN 978-92-79-25420-8

doi:10.2785/33343

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Printed in Belgium

PRINTED ON ELEMENTAL CHLORINE-FREE BLEACHED PAPER (ECF)

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FOREWORD

by *Walter Radermacher and Konrad Pesendorfer*

Are you a student about to write a thesis on the process of European integration? Or a teacher who has to explain Europe to their school class? Maybe your children have recently asked you how many people are out of work in your country? Or are you one of the people who work with statistical figures on a daily basis – a politician, an economist? If so, then our publication might be just what you were looking for.

Statistics play a decisive and continually growing role in the life of today's society. European policymakers and citizens alike keep requesting more and more information on areas such as globalisation, well-being and climate change. The ongoing financial and economic crisis has also clearly demonstrated the need for reliable and trustworthy statistics on the “real” European economy and the financial sector for the proper functioning of the EU economic governance.

Independent, impartial and timely data have become a solid part of democracy on our continent, just like the existence of multi-party political systems and the equal voting rights for all citizens. With huge amounts of data of varying quality available on the internet, we



WALTER
RADERMACHER
Chief Statistician,
Director-General,
Eurostat, European
Commission

would like to make it clear, that we are referring to European Statistics as produced and released by *official* data producers, such as the national statistical authorities and Eurostat.

The brand “European Statistics” represents the highest quality of statistical information. Common agreed principles and standards, most developed methodologies and modern technologies are applied to produce this



*KONRAD
PEENDORFER
Chairman, ESS
Partnership Group,
Director-General,
Statistics Austria*

information. European Statistics are based on facts and observations. For citizens, decision makers, researchers and journalists this guarantee of quality makes a difference when the daily flow of information turns into a flood.

The quality of European Statistics does not only refer to its reliability, but also to its comparability across Member States. Producing harmonised high quality European Statistics is

the main objective of the European Statistical System (ESS), uniting the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) of EU Member States with those of the European Free Trade Association EFTA (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) and Eurostat.

The aim of the ESS Report is to take you behind the scenes and allow an insider's view into the world of statistical production on our continent. The Report will give you an annual overview of the most important developments in European Statistics and also shed light on the process of their modernisation.

In this first edition of the ESS Report, you will be able to find out more about the organisation and structure of the ESS, learn about some of its key achievements in 2012 and also about an increasingly important area of statistical production – the measurement of the well-being of EU citizens. Denmark and Cyprus summarise the main results of their European Council Presidencies, and the role and aims of the European Statistical Programme for the years 2013-2017 are explained. The final article deals with the plans to make the system even stronger for the future. ■



Meeting of the Directors-General of the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat, held in Prague in September 2012

WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN STATISTICAL SYSTEM?

Statistics were present from the very beginning of the construction of the European Union. In 1953, a statistical service of the European Coal and Steel Community was created. In 1958, when the European Community was founded, it became a Directorate General of the European Commission.

The expansion of the European Union and the development of new community policies brought forth an increasing demand for high-quality, comparable European statistics. This meant that a closer cooperation between Eurostat and the NSIs was needed and thus, at the beginning of the 1990s, the foundations of the European Statistical System (ESS) were laid.

The ESS was constructed as a partnership between Eurostat, NSIs and other national statistical authorities, i.e. institutions producing European statistics and part of national statistical systems. Today, it includes the 27 EU Member States and the countries that belong to the European Free Trade Association (EFTA): Liechtenstein, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. At European level, the ESS coordinates its work with candidate countries and other Commission services, agencies, and collaborates with the European System of Central Banks (ESCB). It also cooperates with international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The mission of the ESS is to provide all the citizens of the European Union with independent, high-quality information on the economy and society on European, national and regional levels and make the information available to everyone for decision-making purposes, research and debate. The Member States collect data and compile statistics for national and European purposes while Eurostat leads the way in the harmonisation of statistics in close cooperation with the national statistical authorities.

Both Eurostat and the national statistical authorities of the ESS follow the principles set in the European Statistics Code of Practice.

The Code of Practice (CoP) contains a set of 15 principles that guide European statistics, among which: professional independence, impartiality and objectivity, limited burden on respondents, cost effectiveness, accessibility and clarity. The CoP represents an important tool to reinforce the quality of statistics.

The European Statistical System Committee (ESSC) is the highest authority for the ESS. It is made up of the Heads of the Member States' NSIs and is chaired by the Director-General of Eurostat. Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway, through the Agreement of the European Economic Area (EEA), and Switzerland through the Agreement between the EU and the Swiss confederation on cooperation in the field of statistics, fully participate in the ESSC without the right to vote. Other participants are observers. The ESSC meets four times per year and its task is to provide professional guidance for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics and to discuss strategic issues for the development of the ESS.

To support the work of the ESS, two specialised entities were created in 2008: the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) and the European Statistical Advisory Committee (ESAC). ESGAB is an independent advisory body composed of experts possessing outstanding competence in the field of statistics. Its task is to provide an overview of the ESS as regards the implementation of the CoP. ESAC, on the other hand, represents users and other stakeholders of European statistics, such as the scientific community, social partners and civil society as well as institutional users, such as the Confederation of European Business, Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament. Its role is to ensure that user requirements are taken into account in developing Statistical Programmes of the ESS.

Over the years, the European Statistical System has developed together with the European Union and now stands as a point of reference for high quality European statistics. ■

Headquarters of the European
Parliament in Brussels



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE EUROPEAN STATISTICAL SYSTEM IN 2012

Statistical priorities and achievements of the ESS in 2012 were closely linked to the policy needs of the EU, as European statistics played a key and growing role in the definition, monitoring and assessment of European policies. It would be impossible to mention all the achievements of the ESS in 2012. Therefore, this article does not mention the highlights of daily statistical production, but instead focuses on a selection of important new results, which demonstrate the ever stronger link between statistics and European policy making.

EU2020 strategy

The Europe 2020 strategy, adopted by the European Council in June 2010, aims at establishing a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy with high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. The key objectives of the strategy are expressed in the form of five headline indicators and quantitative targets, which enables easy assessment of the progress.

Great efforts on the part of the ESS have gone into the development and production of indicators used for the monitoring of the EU2020 strategy. Those indicators, reflecting the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the strategy, cover employment rate, research and development expenditure, early leavers from education and tertiary education, population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy and energy consumption.

As José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, declared in a recent conference organised by Eurostat: “Sound statistical analysis underpinned by robust

statistics is key for steering the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy. Statistics are almost all over the Strategy starting with its headline quantitative targets that embody its overall objectives.”

The EU2020 strategy indicators can be found in a dedicated section on the Eurostat website.

Economic governance

The economic and financial crisis demonstrated the need to strengthen economic and budgetary coordination in the EU. On a statistical level, the reinforcement of economic governance implies that politicians and decision makers possess the most relevant, timely, and reliable economic information. In 2012, important achievements were reached by the ESS in the domain of economic statistics.

As regards financial data, significant progress was made in the implementation of a preventive approach to reinforce the quality of public finances statistics. In line with the audit-like powers given to Eurostat by the European Council in July 2010, a number of the so-called “upstream dialogue visits” has been conducted in the Member States. The purpose of these visits is to gather information on the accounting, auditing, control and reporting systems in place and to assess their strengths and weaknesses. The publication by Eurostat in February 2012 of the very first news release on quarterly government debt across the EU greatly improved the dissemination of short-term public finance statistics. Based on comparable statistics produced by the NSIs, this gives decision makers more timely information on one of the most crucial financial indicators.

EUROPE 2020 HEADLINE INDICATORS FOR EU27

REFERENCE PERIOD

	UNIT	2005	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Target
75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed								
Employment rate - age group 20-64	% of population aged 20-64	68.0	70.3	69.0	68.5	68.6	68.5	75
3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D								
Gross domestic expenditure on R&D	% of GDP	1.82	1.92 ^(*)	2.02 ^(*)	2.01 ^(*)	2.03 ^(*)	(:)	3
Greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced by 20% compared to 1990 The share of renewable energy sources in final energy consumption should be increased to 20% Energy efficiency should improve by 20%								
Greenhouse gas emissions	Index 1990 = 100	92	89	83	85	(:)	(:)	80
Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	%	8.5	10.5	11.7	12.5	(:)	(:)	20
Primary energy consumption	1 000 tonnes of oil equivalent (TOE)	1 704 354	1 683 452	1 596 185	1 646 839	(:)	(:)	1 474 000
The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of 30-34 years old should have completed a tertiary or equivalent education								
Early leavers from education and training	% of population aged 18-24	15.8	14.8	14.3	14.0	13.5	12.8	10
Tertiary educational attainment	% of population aged 30-34	28.0	31.0	32.2	33.5	34.6	35.8	40
Poverty should be reduced by lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion								
People at risk of poverty or social exclusion ⁽¹⁾	Thousand	123 892 ^(*)	115 694	113 773	116 309	(:)	(:)	(:)
> People living in households with very low work intensity	Thousand	39 112 ^(*)	34 269	34 223	37 862	(:)	(:)	(:)
> People at risk of poverty after social transfers	Thousand	79 070 ^(*)	80 661	80 179	80 749	(:)	(:)	(:)
> People severely materially deprived	Thousand	51 729 ^(*)	41 440	39 764 ^(*)	40 925	(:)	(:)	(:)

Last update: 15/04/2013

⁽¹⁾ People are counted only once even if they are present in more than one sub-indicator

^(*) estimated

^(*) Eurostat estimate

: = not available

Another interesting development has been the publication, since September 2012, of the main components of the flash estimate of euro area inflation, which are food, alcohol and tobacco, energy, non-energy industrial goods, and services.

Finally, a very important element of the economic governance reform is the early identification of internal and external imbalances in the economies of the Member States. In February 2012, the Commission published its first annual Alert Mechanism Report containing an economic and financial assessment based on a list of indicators largely produced by the ESS and called “Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) Scoreboard”. The MIP Scoreboard consists of eleven economic, financial and structural indicators, such as the unemployment rate, debt in the private sector and house price developments – all of crucial importance in detecting potential problems and macroeconomic imbalances in Member States.

The scoreboard indicators can be found in a dedicated section on the Eurostat website.

Quality of life

The year 2012 marked an important step in the further development and production of statistics devoted to the measurement of well-being and the quality of life of European citizens. Statistical efforts focused on defining new indicators, which would supplement the measurement of pure national economic performance by complementing it with a “social” dimension and setting. The article entitled “Progress in the measurement of well-being and quality of life at EU level” comprehensively deals with this issue on pages 23-24.

Environmental sustainability

Sustainable development in Europe means a gradual transformation towards an energy and resource efficient economy in all 27 EU Member States. It means using natural resources and energy more efficiently and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental impacts. In



the past couple of years, statistical efforts of the ESS focused on the development of indicators, which would allow a reliable measurement of environmental sustainability across the European Union.

In June 2012, in connection with the United Nations conference on sustainable development called “Rio+20”, using the latest data received from Member States, Eurostat released, in a form of a concise brochure, a collection of sustainable development indicators. This publication, called “Figures for the future - 20 years of sustainable development in Europe”, presents in an understandable way data on 70 diverse indicators, which are used to measure and monitor the EU

sustainable development strategy. Among those indicators are, for instance, the number of cars per inhabitant, the projected population in 2060 in Europe, waste generation per person, and changes in bird numbers in the EU.

The book is accompanied by four short videos, which can be found on the Eurostat website and on YouTube.

Measurement of environmental sustainability has to be linked to the measurement of economic performance. Environmental economic accounts (EEA) provide such a tool. In February 2012, the UN Statistical Commission - under a strong leadership of the ESS - has adopted EEA as a worldwide methodological standard. In a session of the European Parliament, Jo Leinen, chairman of the Environmental Committee, said: "Environmental accounts are a missing piece of the puzzle in terms of better understanding economic activities. I am pleased that the EU is taking a step towards properly accounting for its natural capital. This is an important contribution to a new welfare index, comprising economic, environmental and social progress in a society".

Improved comparability of data

The role of the ESS includes a continuous improvement in the comparability of national

data across the Member States. Examples from two important areas illustrate this function in 2012: national accounts and the measurement of well-being.

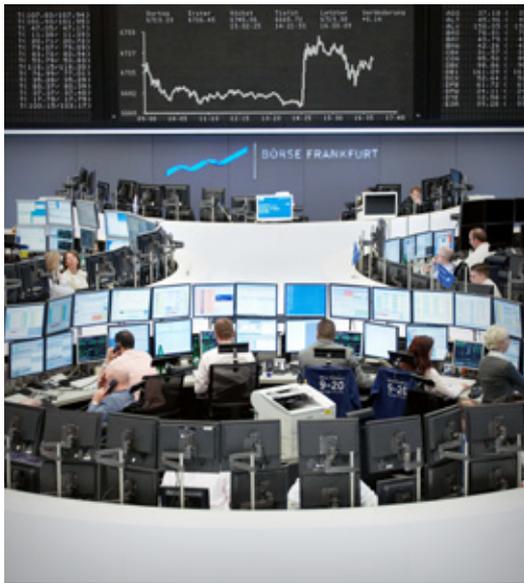
The system of national accounts is the basis for the measurement of the economic activity of an entire nation and the European Union as a whole. The regular updating of the national accounts methodology is crucial to warrant full comparability of data between countries and to bring the accounts in line with the changing economic environment and the needs of users. The new European System of National Accounts (ESA 2010) is based on the changes to the United Nations System of National Accounts, updated in 2008.

The main methodological changes in the ESA 2010 relate to the recognition that expenditure on research and development is of a capital nature to the capitalisation of military expenditure, and to more detailed analysis of contingent liabilities, mainly pension schemes and public- private partnership projects. The implementation of ESA 2010 in the ESS is scheduled for 2014.

An important impetus for new conceptual work of the ESS came in 2009 from the European Commission's communication "GDP and beyond – Measuring progress in a changing world" and the Report by the Commission on



European Council meeting, held in Brussels in November 2012



the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (the so-called “Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi commission”), also from 2009, which provided 12 recommendations on how to better measure economic performance, societal well-being and sustainability.

Being able to measure progress of European societies together with their attitudes towards happiness is instrumental both for European policymakers and the national governments of each Member State. This means that the GDP as the main indicator of economic performance needs to be complemented by other indicators capturing social and environmental aspects.

As a follow up at ESS level, an expert group on the quality of life created in 2012 has established a preliminary list of quality of life indicators, covering the different dimensions of quality of life, and bringing together objective and subjective data. An initial set of data on the quality of life of European citizens can be found on the Eurostat website.

DGINS conference in Prague

Also in 2012, the ESS organised its DGINS (Directors-General of the National Statistical Institutes) conference in Prague. This annual conference is the most important forum in the

European Union for discussions about the future and development of the ESS. The topics of last year’s event were “Meeting new needs on statistics for a green economy” and “Coordination of statistics and geospatial information”.

ESS Directors-General acknowledged the importance of statistics for measuring the green dimension in the development of the European economy and society, and for showing how a green economy is beneficial for the well-being of current and future generations, in particular with the potential creation of green jobs, products and services.

They also agreed that the work on statistics for a green economy should build on existing ESS initiatives, such as the EU Sustainable Development Indicators, the work of the so-called Sponsorship on Measuring progress, well-being and sustainable development, the progress made in the area of environmental accounts and the work on resource efficiency indicators.

The Directors-General also stressed the fact that especially in the area of classifications, coordinated ESS efforts were needed to further progress in the development of statistics for a green economy, which would meet required quality standards and provide relevant and reliable information. ■



ROLE OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL

The role of the Presidency of the Council is to set up a detailed work plan for a given period, establish the agenda of Council meetings, chair these meetings, and also facilitate the dialogue both at the Council meetings and with other EU institutions. For instance, the latter task means that it is responsible for all communications between the Council and the Parliament on legislative initiatives, involving also the Commission.

The Presidency function rotates among Member States on the basis of a schedule defined well in advance. Each country holds the Presidency for a period of six months. To improve coordination and to ensure continuity of the work of the Council, countries set up so-called “trio Presidencies”, meaning that three countries, which will ensure three successive Presidencies, establish a common basic programme with shared priorities.

The country ensuring the Presidency has an important function and the opportunity to influence developments at Union level. This is illustrated, for instance, by an early access to information, a privileged position as the immediate interlocutor of the Commission services and the European Parliament, as well as the possibility to focus discussions into areas that are of high interest for the Presidency.



INTERVIEW WITH JAN PLOVSING, HEAD OF STATISTICS DENMARK

Compared with your initial goals, how do you assess the actual achievements of the Danish Presidency in statistics?

I think it is fair to say that we came a long way during our Presidency. We achieved three Presidency compromises in the Council Working Party on Statistics (CWPS) - on ESA 2010, on the European statistical programme 2013-2017 and on European statistics on Demography.

Due to the important proposals for legislation, we increased the number of meetings to eight and deliberately extended meeting hours. Furthermore, we worked intensively between meetings and introduced written hearing summaries, which helped facilitate the discussions in the CWPS. I am convinced that these efforts contributed to the achievements of bringing forward these important dossiers.

Please, describe each achievement and explain its impact on the ESS and its benefits for the users.

One of our main achievements is that we managed to finalise the reading of the ESA 2010, which is a revision of the European System of National and Regional accounts, and reach a compromise in the CWPS, for which the previous Presidencies of Hungary and Poland should also be credited. Subsequently and after a number of dialogues, we also reached an agreement with the European Parliament on almost all parts of the Regulation – only a few, but highly political issues remained unsolved by the end of our term, related to table 29 on pension schemes in social insurance and information on implicit pension obligations and government guarantees.



JAN PLOVSING,
Head of Statistics
Denmark

The European System of National and Regional Accounts is a very important tool for analysis and policy making. I am therefore very pleased that the new Regulation is hopefully close to being finalised.

For users – not least for policy makers - this means that the national accounts figures will give a more comprehensive picture of the economic situation in the EU Member States – one which reflects better the economic realities and the societal developments in European economies.

To give an example, the Regulation lays down some changes in the way GDP/GNI is calculated. As a consequence, Member States' GDP estimates are expected to increase by 2% on average. This increase is mainly due to the fact that spending on research and development will be included in the accounts as



“investments”, whereas this spending was previously counted as an “on-going expenditure”.

A change in GDP/GNI figures may - for example - have consequences for policy areas to which resources are allocated, nationally and at EU level, according to a certain politically defined percentage - as may be the case for areas such as Development Aid or Research and Development. These will, of course, be issues for policy makers to look at once the ESA 2010 has been implemented.

A second achievement of the Danish Presidency is that we managed to reach a compromise in the CWPS on the European Statistical Programme 2013-2017, which was also opened during our Presidency.

The programme sets out the objectives of the work to be carried out within the ESS over the next five years and therefore is a very important file, relevant to a wide range of stakeholders. With its detailed annex specifying all the objectives within the different statistical domains, the programme gives a quite clear indication of the statistics which are to be produced in the coming years.

I am pleased that we reached a compromise in the CWPS during our Presidency. I am particularly pleased that we reached a compromise on priority setting within the ESS - with a new article, which includes provisions on an annual review of priority setting and implementation of mechanisms which can facilitate prioritisation in the system.

A third main achievement of the Danish Presidency is the compromise in the CWPS on European Statistics on Demography, which was also opened during our Presidency.

This proposal has a dual purpose. One objective is to have harmonised demography statistics on population and vital events at EU level. Another objective is to have a single annual and highly comparable population figure in order to calculate the distribution of votes in the Council.

In the CWPS, there were intense discussions on how to achieve these objectives in the best way.

On the one hand, there was a wish to have a uniform method for calculating the population figures to be used in qualified majority voting in the Council and for demography statistics.

On the other hand, Member States have different ways of collecting data for demography statistics – some use survey data, others use their administrative population registers and a third group use a combination of these methods. And of course Member States would fight to continue doing this, so that the figures they publish at national level will also be the ones that are published at European level - thereby ensuring consistency.

In the end, we managed to reach a good solution in the CWPS seeking to encompass most wishes, while at the same time ensuring a high quality figure to be used in the calculation of votes.

What were the main difficulties that you encountered?

Negotiating with the representatives from the European Parliament on ESA 2010 was a challenge. We, as Presidency, were trying to ensure that the decisions taken in the CWPS would be well reflected in the final compromise while at the same time dealing with the fact that some Member States had reservations in relation to information on pension schemes. The members of the European Parliament, on the other hand, had a firm demand for more information on Member States' pension obligations and government guarantees. Finding a



common platform for a compromise was therefore challenging. Nevertheless, we managed to reach an agreement on all other parts of ESA.

And what worked well?

All in all, we had a very good and constructive collaboration with all those involved, not least with the representatives from the Member States and the Commission. We had many meetings in the CWPS - as well as meetings before and after - and it is my experience that most parties came to the negotiations with a willingness to compromise. ■



Council Working Party on Statistics, held in Brussels in Spring 2012

INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE GEORGIU, HEAD OF THE STATISTICAL SERVICE OF CYPRUS

Compared with your initial goals, how do you assess the actual achievements of the Cyprus Presidency in statistics?

Our agenda included very delicate legislative proposals, of outstanding importance to the ESS and of a high political interest. After six months of hard work we can confidently say that it all went well. We are very pleased to have accomplished our goal. We have reached a political agreement between the Council and the European Parliament on two files, the ESA 2010 and the European statistical programme 2013 – 2017 and have significantly advanced the negotiations in the Council Working Party on the amendment of Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European statistics. Moreover, following a rather sensitive and heated discussion in the Working Party, the Commission delegated decision on investigations and fines related to the manipulation of statistics was adopted. On the remaining two files in our agenda, no particular progress could be achieved: safety from crime statistics was rejected by the EP while demographic statistics is still under discussion in the relevant parliamentary committees.

Please describe each achievement and explain its impact on the ESS and its benefits for the users.

Let me start with the European Statistical Programme. The Cyprus Presidency had the task of negotiating with the EP a compromise text on this proposal. We had to defend the position of the Council which was calling for prioritisation and for limiting the demand for new statistics, in view of severe resource constraints in the Member



*GEORGE GEORGIU,
Head of the
Statistical
Service of
Cyprus*

States and the need to reduce the response burden. At the same time we had to consider the necessity to have a new multiannual programme effective as of 1 January 2013. The aim was achieved. The Regulation was adopted in December 2012 and published in the Official Journal on 9 February 2013. The programme outlines the Union's needs for statistical information, the work to be carried out within the ESS and the budget allocated to Eurostat in order to carry out its work. I don't need to stress the importance of such a Regulation. It is not only relevant to the ESS but also to a wide range of users, including policy makers.

Another challenge had been the new ESA 2010. While an agreement was reached at technical level by the Council Working Party during the previous Presidency, it proved difficult to find a compromise at political level; the EP had suspended negotiations on the file and had issued a press release accusing some Member States of wanting to hide debts. The catalyst to break a highly probable deadlock was the meeting held in Luxembourg on 26 July 2012, bringing together the four Member States that opposed the compromise text presented in June, the Cyprus Presidency and Eurostat. The meeting was successful. A new approach was proposed to deal with the highly debatable issue of contingent liabilities and data on pensions. We addressed the EP with a counter-proposal which provided for the mandatory three-yearly transmission of table 29 on pension funds as from 2015 onwards. From that point on, drafting suggestions were going back and forth between the three

institutions, leading to a political agreement being finally achieved on 7 December 2012.

The adoption of this Regulation contributes to the timely and smooth implementation of the ESA 2010, thereby also fulfilling the Union commitments towards the international community as regards the 2008 SNA. At the same time, its adoption constitutes a well anticipated element for making available important information necessary for the implementation of the so-called “six-pack” on economic governance.

The item that featured on the agenda of all six Council meetings under the Cyprus Presidency was the amendment of the Regulation on European statistics, the core legal act of the ESS. Our goal had been to achieve significant progress towards reaching a compromise at Council level. This has been largely achieved as agreement was reached on the whole text, with the exception of





The Kourion Theatre in Limassol, Cyprus

the provisions relating to the Commitments on Confidence in Statistics (CoCs).

This amendment is definitely going to have an impact on strengthening the governance of the ESS. The professional independence of NSIs and their heads is secured, while their coordinating responsibilities within their national statistical systems are made clearer. National governments are also called upon, by means of signing a CoC, to ensure the credibility of official statistics by taking all necessary measures to implement the Code of Practice. Users and stakeholders, more than ever, demand that the statistics produced are of the highest quality. The revision of this act

constitutes a decisive step in this direction, in maintaining confidence in European statistics.

The discussion on the CoCs is still ongoing as Member States are divided on the way forward. A number of them are ready to adopt the proposal as proposed by the Commission and sign a CoC, while others view this as a political commitment that cannot be governed by a legal obligation.

Let me also mention the adoption of the Commission delegated decision on investigations and fines related to the manipulation of statistics. It aims at strengthening economic governance and effectively enforcing budgetary surveillance



Council Working Party on Statistics, held in Brussels in October 2012

in the euro area by laying down the procedures for investigating misrepresentations of general government deficit and debt data.

What were the main difficulties that you encountered?

Our team was well aware that this experience had to be seen as a series of challenges we needed to take up and work through. We had to be well prepared to expect the unexpected.

Indeed, we had to drive through uncharted territory when it came to the delegated act. While Member States acknowledged the importance of this act, they strongly voiced their discontent on procedural and legal grounds, mostly related to article 5(4). There was no precedent and long consultations with the Council Legal Service and the Secretariat were needed in order to find an appropriate way to register the Member States' discontent without rejecting the act altogether. If rejected, that would have sent the wrong political message and would have been a serious blow against the political and public demand for ensuring public trust in official statistics.

Another issue that attracted a lot of attention in the Working Party was that of the consequences of signing the CoCs, for which legal advice was sought.

And what worked well?

We are particularly pleased that the negotiations with the EP on the statistical programme and the ESA 2010 were successful. We realised from the start that both issues required careful consideration and entered the negotiations adopting a constructive and pragmatic approach. As a result, reasonable and well-balanced compromises for all sides were achieved. Member States, the European Parliament and the Commission, as well as the preceding presidencies, should all be credited for their contribution and the co-operative spirit they had shown. We were all after the same goal, anyway: high-quality European statistics serving the needs of today's society. ■





PROGRESS IN THE MEASUREMENT OF WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF LIFE AT EU LEVEL

There is a growing debate at various levels - international and EU, national and sub-national - on how to best measure societal progress beyond the economic and financial indicators such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In its communication from August 2009, the European Commission concluded to complement GDP with additional indicators, such as indicators on “quality of life” and on “well-being”, on “environmental sustainability” and on “the distribution of household income, consumption and wealth”.

The publication in September 2009 of the so-called Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Report on the measurement of economic performance and social progress also put the measurement of the quality of life in the spotlight. Both initiatives responded to a growing need for a wider view on what makes a society successful and for a new benchmark that looks at development beyond pure economic progress. This need came (again) at the forefront in a time of tackling the impact of the economic and financial crisis. Where macro-economic conditions are again taking central stage in the public debate, opinion polls show that EU citizens feel that social, environmental and economic indicators should be used equally to evaluate progress.

The European Statistical System recognised at an early stage that new initiatives and also new statistics would be needed for measuring progress in the “GDP and beyond” context. It therefore established a so-called Sponsorship

Group on Measuring Progress, Well-being and Sustainable Development.

The final Sponsorship Group report sets out concrete actions and development work to be undertaken to update the statistical system to the changing needs on measuring progress.

The actions defined in the report, adopted by the ESSC in November 2011, now form an integral part of the annual Statistical Work Programme and of the 2013-2017 European Statistical Programme.

Statistics on “Quality of life”: a relatively new area

Arriving at a good quality of life is an individual aspiration as well as a collective objective for society. But what makes our lives of good quality? Using a subjective approach, quality of life is determined by what people themselves consider as important for making a good living: having sufficient economic resources such as a decent income is obviously important, but also non-economic properties are high on the list, such as having good social relations, living close to/in harmony with the natural environment and living in good health. Well-being is what people themselves perceive as a good life quality.

The measurement of quality of life is a relatively new field. The ESSC agreed that Quality of life indicators need to be understood through a multidimensional framework.



This framework encompasses nine dimensions:

- Material living conditions (income, wealth and consumption)
- Health
- Education
- Productive and valued activities (including work)
- Governance and basic rights
- Leisure and social interactions (inclusion/exclusion)
- Natural and living environment
- Economic and physical safety
- Overall experience of life.

There is also an increasing agreement for the necessity of measuring not only objective outcomes, but also of people's subjective perceptions of life.

Regular measurement of the well-being of citizens allows evaluating whether they assess their lives being improved or not, irrespective of whether this progress is linked to a change in GDP. In the past decade, a number of European

projects started comprehensive survey work. They include the European Quality of Life Survey by the European Agency for Living and Working Conditions, the OECD Better Life initiative, the UK's Measuring National Well-being Programme, the Italian project Benessere, and the Finnish Findicator portal.

Towards a common set of Quality of life indicators

The ESS (in particular the expert group on quality of life indicators) is now working on a detailed set of common quality of life indicators covering the full range of dimensions and bringing together objective and subjective data. Such a set could complement GDP in indicating whether a population is "doing well" from a view point wider than only an economic perspective.

The ESS agreed for questions on quality of life to be integrated into regular European statistical data sources and decided for the European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) to be developed as a core instrument for also measuring the quality of life and its dimensions. EU-SILC is one of the most extensive surveys in Europe, with more than 130.000 households and 270.000 persons aged 16 and above being asked an important set of questions in each country. This allows connecting the different dimensions of quality of life at individual level and reflecting their interdependencies.

An additional set of topical questions has been developed on subjective aspects of well-being and will be included – for the first time – in the EU-SILC ad hoc module of 2013.

The overall objective is to construct a robust and comprehensive quality of life indicator set with indicators for each dimension, out of which a small and forceful set (dashboard) of headline indicators could be used next to GDP. A first set of quality of life indicators at the European level will be published in mid-2013. ■

*Member States react!
Where are you
in the process of
measurement of the
well-being?*



*RODERICH EGELER
President of the
Federal Statistical
Office of Germany*

GERMANY

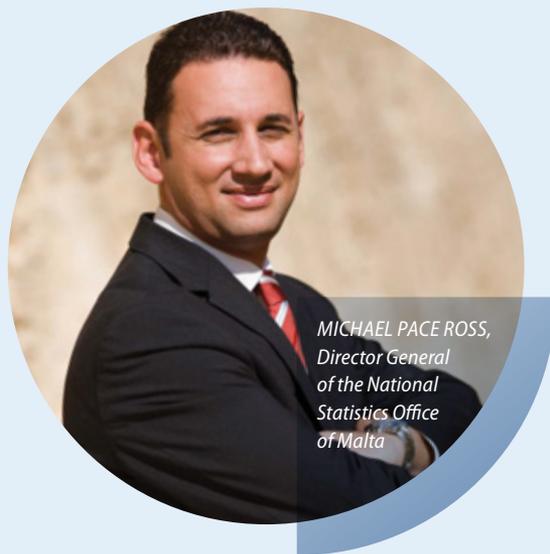
In November 2010, the German Parliament launched a study commission on the "Growth, Well-Being and Quality of Life". The commission organised its work in five project groups, one of them dealing with the "Development of a Comprehensive Welfare and Progress Indicator", in which the Federal Statistical Office is actively participating. The final reports of the project group and of the study commission are expected this summer.

Another activity concerning the measurement of well-being is the third "time use" survey currently being conducted in Germany. Its results will

be used as a basis to establish a future satellite account on household production.

Based on the German Federal Government's National Sustainable Development Strategy, we also publish a biannual indicator report on "Sustainable Development in Germany". Our indicator report includes information on the status of the individual indicators as compared to the targets established by the government.

This successful publication is highly appreciated by our users. ■



*MICHAEL PACE ROSS,
Director General
of the National
Statistics Office
of Malta*

MALTA

Malta first carried out the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) in 2005 and we have repeated it every year since then. The longitudinal character of the survey means that it is a particularly sophisticated instrument, enabling users to compare the data over longer periods of time. SILC is versatile, providing relatively straightforward indicators, such as the income of households and the number of persons living in them, and also lending itself to social cohesion structural indicators, such as the at-risk-of-poverty rate and the gender pay gap. One merit of the survey is that it is a tool to estimate income and wealth inequalities. In fact, it is worth remembering

that various social measures taken at a national level are also built on SILC indicators.

Recently, we introduced several refinements to the SILC methodology, such as combining administrative records with the income data provided to us by respondents, which significantly improved the quality of our data. We also compiled indicators on the information society and sustainable development, among which are the penetration rates of mobile telephony and the Internet, the air and bathing water quality as well as waste management. Through the latter group of

indicators, the environmental dimension has been added to the measurement of the quality of life of our citizens.

I would like to add that our NSO also published a set of sustainable development indicators. This initiative received attention locally and abroad, notably at the RIO+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development held last year. More initiatives will be launched in the forthcoming years in line with the implementation of the European Commission's "Europe 2020" growth strategy. ■

*Where are you
in the process of
measurement of
the well-being?*

UNITED KINGDOM

The Office for National Statistics (ONS), Measuring National Well-being Programme was launched on 20 November 2010. Since then the ONS has successfully held a National Debate and UK consultation to establish "what matters" to citizens. We added four subjective well-being questions to ONS Household Surveys and published an experimental first set of annual results in July 2012.

In addition, the ONS held a consultation on proposed actions and indicators for the measurement of well-being, subsequently publishing updates which took feedback from customers and stakeholders into account. We also released a series of domain-related articles, covering the economy, society, environment, children and young people's well-being, which can be found on our website.

The first "Measuring National Well-being – Life in the UK Report 2012" was published on 20 November 2012, accompanied by an interactive "Wheel of Measures", maps and charts depicting well-being at lower geography levels. The



JIL MATHESON,
UK National
Statistician

programme is now looking at further analysis and development of well-being data and applications in policy making.

We have noticed an increased interest in those data from users in academia, private research organisations and think tanks as well as from government departments, who have used our well-being data.

One of the key criteria of long-term success for the programme will be the use of subjective well-being measures in the formulation, appraisal and evaluation of policy and ONS is working closely with colleagues across Government to implement this. ■

THE EUROPEAN STATISTICAL PROGRAMME 2013-2017



In recent years, the ESS has been faced with a number of challenges. First of all, the need for European data has been constantly increasing, while enterprises and citizens have been asking for a reduction of the response and administrative burden imposed on them by the collection of statistics. Secondly, there is a growing demand for “cross-cutting” statistics that cover multiple dimensions and reflect the interconnectivity between different policy areas. These statistics include topics such as globalisation, well-being and climate change. Private data providers pose another challenge to which the ESS must respond by ensuring the quality and timeliness of its data. In addition, both Eurostat and the Member States face budget constraints that render the situation even more challenging.

The European Statistical Programme (ESP) for 2013-2017 will allow the ESS to respond in a satisfactory manner to the challenges it faces, by providing in a cost-effective way quality statistics that correspond to users’ needs and by reducing the administrative burden on respondents.

Legal basis and preparation of the European Statistical Programme

The legal basis of the ESP is the Regulation No 223 on European statistics, which was adopted in 2009. Under the Regulation, the multiannual European Statistical Programme must lay down priorities concerning the statistical information needed in order to carry out the activities of the European Union. These priorities will take into account the resources that must be employed at EU and national level, as well as the response burden on businesses. Policy-making drives the decision to produce European statistics, but these statistics will also be available to other decision-makers, researchers, businesses and European citizens.

The preparation of the ESP involved consultations with the main users of European statistics, i.e. the Directorates-General of the Commission, the European Central Bank and the European Statistical Advisory Committee, on their statistical needs for the period 2013-2017. Based on

the outcome of these consultations the first ESP draft was presented to the European Statistical System Committee. All comments received from both external and internal experts were then carefully analysed and taken into account when preparing the final version of the programme.

Finally, the European Statistical Programme 2013-2017 was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council. The EFTA states will adopt the ESP by integrating it through their respective legislative procedures.

What are the objectives of the ESP and how is it structured?

The ESP has three main objectives. The first objective is to provide statistical information that will support the development, monitoring and evaluation of the EU policies, which include the Europe 2020 strategy, economic and social performance and globalisation.

The second one aims to implement new methods of production of European statistics that will trigger efficiency gains and quality improvements. This will be achieved by defining priorities and allocating resources accordingly, by making greater use of administrative data and by identifying new data sources for European statistics.

The last objective is to strengthen the partnership within the European Statistical System, with the help of tools such as a revised Statistical Law or by adopting framework regulations that will cover all statistical areas.

In order to reach these objectives, the European Statistical Programme distinguishes three fundamental statistical pillars: social statistics, business statistics, and geospatial, environmental, agricultural and other sectoral statistics.

Social statistics are at the heart of a large number of European policies, and are of interest to both decision-makers and citizens. For this reason, the ESP aims to provide quality statistics on key areas of social policy, such as poverty, the labour market, education and training, quality of life, health and so on. This will be achieved, among

other things, by putting in place a consolidated basic infrastructure for social statistics and by reviewing the surveys on the Labour Force and Income and Living Conditions.

European enterprises are the focus of a large number of EU policies and they are responsible for the provision of basic data. There is also an increased need to have detailed and harmonised statistics in this field and, at the same time, reduce the administrative and reporting burden. As a result, the ESP will aim at providing quality statistics on domains where enterprises are the centre of interest and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of production processes.

For the last pillar, which is a combination of statistics with spatially referenced data and geospatial analysis, the ESP will aim at making better use of spatial information combined with social, economic and environmental statistical information to support the policy-making process of the EU. This will be implemented by producing datasets on key environmental statistics, agri-environmental indicators or renewable energy.

How will the ESP be implemented?

The financial burden incurred for the implementation of the ESP is shared between the EU and Member States. Member States get financial aid from the Commission, and, in addition to this, they also receive appropriate funding at national level needed to carry out the necessary statistical actions. The total amount to be borne by the budget of the EU is 300 million EUR for the duration of the programme, from 2013 to 2017. The four EFTA states contribute financially to the ESP with payments to the EU and funding at national level.

In order to ensure a smoother implementation of the ESP, annual work programmes will be adopted by the ESSC. Moreover, the European Statistical Programme will be subject to an interim progress report, as well as a final evaluation report after the expiry of the programme period. ■

*Member States react!
Which part of the
European Statistical
Programme is of
particular importance
to you?*

SPAIN

We attach particular importance to the work related to the implementation of a quality management system based on the Code of Practice, which was revised in 2011 by the European Statistical System Committee. We are committed to the implementation of the Code of Practice as part of our National Statistical Plan to reinforce the confidence and the quality of official statistics. The Plan, approved by the Spanish Government and published in the Official Journal in December 2012, is the central instrument for the statistical activity in our country for 2013-2016.

We also consider that it is important to deepen the integrated production of European Statistics within the framework of the Spanish Statistical Plan. A better use of administrative sources and the integration of data collection would be essential to achieve a more efficient statistical system. ■



*GREGORIO
IZQUIERDO LLANES,
President of the
National Statistics
Institute of
Spain*



*RENETA INDJOVA,
President of the
National Statistical
Institute of Bulgaria*

BULGARIA

We consider two priorities to be of great importance for Bulgarian official statistics.

The first one is the need to produce better statistics on cross-cutting issues and more integrated statistics, to describe complex social, environmental and economic phenomena. For us, this means updating the existing indicators and developing new indicators for the characterisation of those developments.

Our second priority is to provide conditions for a closer integration and harmonisation of the statistical production processes within the ESS. This requires the introduction of common European IT tools, further development of joint statistical products and the implementation of ESS standards for data transmission and storage. ■

Which part of the European Statistical Programme is of particular importance to you?

SWITZERLAND

Recent years have seen the re-launch of the debate on the limits of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This followed several initiatives, such as the “GDP and beyond” by the European Commission, the work of the commission on Measuring Economic Performance and Social Progress (the so-called Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi commission), and a launch of a number of OECD projects, such as “Measuring the Progress of Societies”.

It is now widely acknowledged that the GDP by itself, although an important economic indicator, cannot describe all the dimensions of a society’s development. Switzerland is no exception to this trend. As a result, the Federal Council has mandated the Federal Statistical Office to complement the GDP with indicators on social, economic and environmental development. This work has to be coordinated with the efforts of the international community and be in line with international statistical standards. Therefore, the objectives set out in the European Statistical Programme which relate to the measurement of the economic and social performance are of particular importance for Switzerland.



*JÜRIG MARTI,
Director General
of Federal
Statistical Office of
Switzerland until
beginning
of 2013*

We think that it would be important to further develop a system of economic, social and environmental indicators, built on a solid conceptual basis. For our part, we will keep focusing in particular on the concepts of the quality of life, total accounts (System of National Accounts and System of Environmental-Economic Accounting) and capital stock. We also plan to set up a “dashboard” of indicators, to provide descriptive comments and detailed analyses and at the same time to address issues of current relevance to politics and society. ■

REINFORCING THE EUROPEAN STATISTICAL SYSTEM FOR THE FUTURE

In recent years, the European Statistical System (ESS) has been faced with a number of challenges which, if not tackled, could have direct impact not only on the production of high quality European statistics, but also on the monitoring process of EU policies.

As a result, three main challenges are currently being addressed by members of the ESS. The first one is a significant increase in the demand for data, both from policymakers and EU citizens, often from new statistical domains such as societal well-being and climate change. At the same time, many European businesses are pressing for reductions in the response burden imposed on them in the process of data collection.

European statistics must also prove themselves in the face of competition from a growing number of private data providers. Today's data users often disregard the sources of statistics as long as the figures are found quickly on the Internet. Data found using a popular search engine may not be of the same quality as those released by national statistical authorities, but this does not stop users from quoting them.

In addition, all members of the ESS, including Eurostat, are confronted with severe financial constraints. This makes planning and new statistical investments extremely difficult.

Steps along the way

In the past couple of years, the European statistical community has greatly increased its efforts to respond to the above challenges. Back in 2006, a series of reform proposals, which followed the 2004 EU enlargement, was discussed by ESS members in Cracow, Poland. The so-called "Cracow Action Plan" gave a new momentum to the development of the ESS partnership

and strengthened cooperation in a number of important areas.

Three task forces, jointly-chaired at the Directors-General level, were created and covered all dimensions of the European Statistics Code of Practice – governance, statistical products and the processes. As a result, a new legal framework for the ESS was put in place and the implementation of the Code of Practice, adopted in 2005, accelerated.

Additionally, in 2009, a number of new, specialised cooperation networks was introduced, which enabled a more topical work in smaller groups of Member States for the benefit of the whole ESS. In 2010, Member States revised their approach to priority setting in their work to better identify those acts of EU legislation, which could be repealed to simplify the production of statistics.

Statistical Law from 2009

According to the Director-General of Eurostat Walter Radermacher, the most important governance issue for the ESS was the adoption, in 2009, of the Regulation No 223, also called the "Statistical Law". "This Regulation created a legal basis for the European Statistical System, which was a huge step forward in terms of creating proper statistical governance for the EU. Following the adoption of the Law, the European Statistical System became an official part of the European administration and was formally recognised as a network of partners operating on

European and national levels,” Mr Radermacher said. Before 2009, it was the EU treaties that constituted the legal basis for Community statistics, most recently the Lisbon Treaty signed by Member States in 2007 and, before that, the Maastricht Treaty from 1992.

A clear vision for the ESS

Also in 2009, the European Commission adopted a “Communication on the production method of EU statistics: a vision for the next decade”. Until 2009, Eurostat and the national statistical authorities worked individually in each statistical domain on all stages of the production and dissemination of data, accompanied by over 350 regulations. The new, “integrated” approach as outlined by the Communication focuses on the reduction of that number and on making maximum use of multiple data sources available in Member States and existing interdependencies across the ESS.

The adoption of the Commission Communication in 2009 will ensure limiting the duplication of work in the ESS and a reduction of the statistical burden on respondents, leading to cuts in the overall cost of compiling statistics. A better exchange of information within the ESS will be based on a network of “data warehouses” and conducted via a secured network exchange following common data standards and protocols for sharing information. The proposed model also includes a close cooperation with the European System of Central Banks.

ESS VIP Programme

Subsequently, current efforts of the ESS concentrate on the development of a set of statistical projects, together called the “ESS VIP Programme”, which will in future thoroughly modernise the production methods of European statistics. “The idea is to create a system geared towards developing practical solutions through a gradual pooling of resources and sharing of information and databases across the ESS. The ESS VIP Programme involves building common statistical infrastructure in selected domains through the development of new European

solutions and frameworks. While working closer together, Member States will not only be saving money by avoiding the duplication of efforts, but also be able to react quicker to any challenges around them”, explained Mr Radermacher.

In November last year, in a meeting of the ESSC, Member States gave their official support to start the ESS VIP Programme with three joint projects, “SIMSTAT” (Single Market Statistics), “Common Data Validation Policy” and the “European System of Statistical Business Registers”.

The three ESS VIP projects were singled out because joint work in certain statistical areas is today more advanced than in others. When ready, SIMSTAT will deliver a statistical infrastructure capable of exchanging micro-data on intra-EU exports between the Member States. The main idea behind the European System of Statistical Business Registers is for ESS partners to open their data registers to one another and create a network, which will play a priority role in the production of business statistics in Europe. The third ESS VIP, the Common Data Validation Policy, will allow a better allocation of tasks between the NSIs and Eurostat and provide common data validation solutions in different statistical production chains of the ESS.

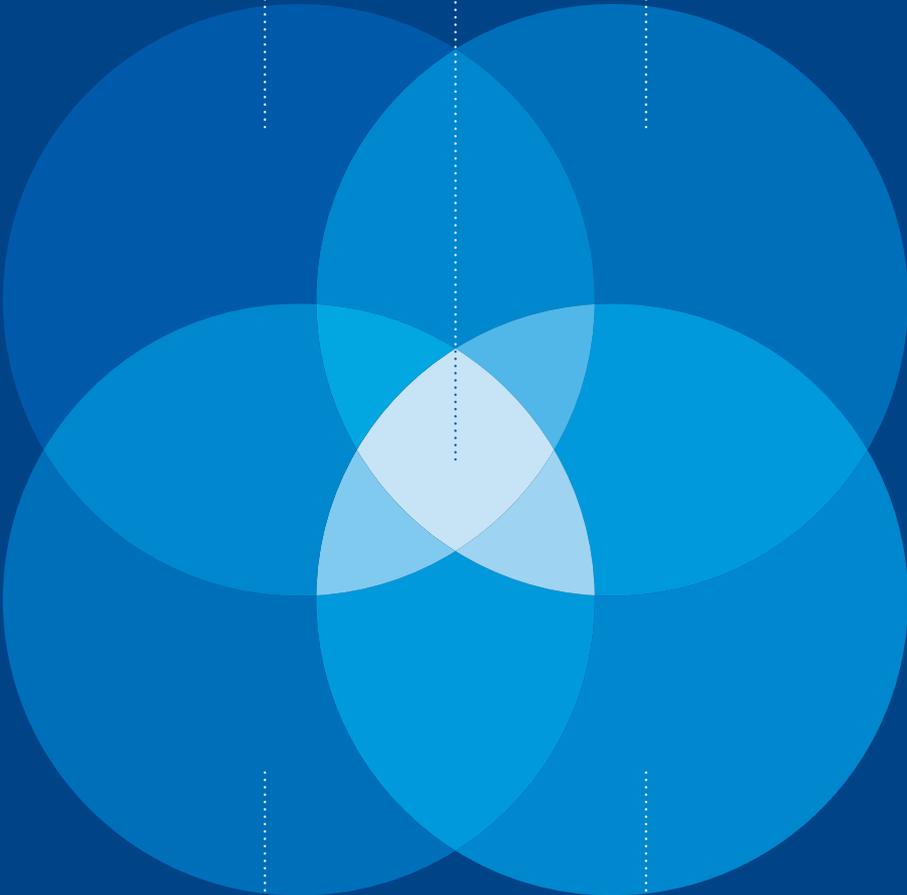
Developments in other areas

The increased cooperation on a statistical level also means an urgent need for changes in other areas at European level. An appropriate legal framework and new administrative mechanisms will need to be developed, alongside a secure IT network for the exchange of data. An issue of appropriate governance mechanisms will also need to be addressed to allocate individual responsibilities to individual ESS partners. In view of the overall dimension of the planned transformation, this process is expected to take some time. This has been acknowledged by members of the European Statistical System, who also agreed that any further development of official statistics on our continent was only possible through a much closer internal cooperation between the ESS partners. ■

EUROPEAN STATISTICS

COST
CONSTRAINTS

INCREASED
DEMAND



BURDEN
REDUCTION

GROWING
COMPETITION

*Member States react!
Why is the reinforcement
of the ESS important
for you?*

NETHERLANDS

A number of very useful initiatives were started in the past few years within the framework of the ESS. Developments such as the creation of the European Statistics Code of Practice, adopted in 2005, provide a solid basis for the System. Instruments, like the European Statistical Training Programme, encourage cooperation between the ESS partners and deepen mutual understanding. For an effective ESS those matters are necessary however not always sufficient.

Together, the ESS partners constitute a strong professional environment. To make the system function in a truly effective way, we think that it will be essential to make use of the expertise of all partnership members. A joint approach to new initiatives is crucial in such an environment.



*GOSSE VAN DER
VEEN, Director
General of Statistics
Netherlands*

Ideally, the development of new ideas should take place gradually, making use of the knowledge and experience of everyone along each and every step of the process. That way, one will be able to give true and effective meaning to the concept of partnership. For example, rapid developments in Information Technology and the availability of huge amounts of data from new sources urge us all to develop new production methods to counter the challenges that we all share across the ESS. ■



*JEAN-LUC TAVERNIER,
Director General of the
National Institute of
Statistics and
Economic
Studies of
France*

FRANCE

The current period is characterised by the need to cover new statistical areas, for instance globalisation, discrimination, well-being and green growth. Individuals often want to see their personal characteristics taken into account, which means going beyond simple averages in order to describe statistical distributions. We also have to guarantee the quality of data, compensate for the decline of governmental budgets in the foreseeable future and compete with other free information available on the internet.

Against this background, we think that only the European Statistical System is large enough to meet these challenges by enhancing public trust in all of its members, moving into new statistical areas, making joint efficiency gains and developing new production methods.

Additionally, the revision of the Statistical Law will lead to a clearer professional independence and a better coordination among the national statistical systems.

ITALY

Taking into account the importance of high quality statistics for today's societies, in particular to measure economic, social and environmental phenomena, we think that the ESS should lead the efforts to increase the integration and merging of data sources, involving the optimal use of all available resources and minimising the burden on respondents.

An effective coordination role of the NSIs within their National Statistical Systems, and of Eurostat within the European Commission, would be an important element of the reinforcement of the ESS. In this context, an increase in the usability of administrative sources for statistical purposes would be the way forward.

The Member States should see the dialogue with colleagues from other countries as an opportunity for collaboration to identify best practice in specific areas, which can also be applied in other countries. This form of cooperation between Member States will not only allow us all to

New areas and methods should be developed under a more collaborative framework within the ESS. It is our view that a cautious, gradual and cumulative approach should be followed in order to build a truly collaborative ESS network. ■



*ENRICO GIOVANNINI,
President of the
National Institute of
Statistics of Italy*

avoid “re-inventing the wheel” every time, but also to re-use common tools, methodologies and approaches, and share the knowledge and outputs of the results. From this perspective, the exchange of experiences within the European statistical system should be encouraged to enhance professional skills. ■

European Commission

The ESS report 2012

Luxembourg:

Publications Office of the European Union

2013 — 36 pp. — 18.7 × 25.0 cm

ISBN 978-92-79-25420-8

doi:10.2785/33343

EUROPEAN STATISTICAL SYSTEM

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