

International Conference
“Russian State Statistics and the Challenges of the XXI Century”

Opening Statement

Paul Cheung
Director
United Nations Statistics Division

Your Excellency Minister Ms. Elvira Nabiullina, Minister of the Economic Development of the Russian Federation

Mr. Alexander Surinov, Head of the Federal State Statistics Service (ROSSTAT)

Representatives of National, Regional and International Organizations

Distinguished Guests and Colleagues,

It is a great honor for me to have the opportunity to say a few words at this International Conference organized by the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation - ROSSTAT. The occasion of the Conference – to commemorate the 200 years of the establishment of the state statistics service in Russia, makes my participation particularly memorable.

On behalf of the United Nations, I would like to congratulate the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation and its staff on this special occasion. I am happy to place on record the significant transformation and accomplishments of Statistics Service during this period. The Imperial Manifest of the 8th of September 1802 which ordered the ministries to collect written statistical reports was an act of historical importance, which laid the foundation of official statistics in Russia.

Since the establishment of the first statistical section under the Ministry of Police in 1811, the Russia's State Statistics Service has made significant progress. The statistics produced at the beginning were limited. The first balance of national economy, which in nowadays could be compared with the compilation of national GDP, was prepared for 1923/1924, in the initial period of the Soviet statistics. In the subsequent years the role of official statistics in Russia has increased notably and the range of produced data has expanded significantly as the "Goskomstat" to become today the leading government agency entrusted with the responsibilities for collecting, compiling and disseminating official statistics related to the Russian Federation's economy and society.

The adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, international statistical standards and norms and the constant efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of official statistics have made the Russian system of official statistics a vital national institution. This achievement is recognized and fully acknowledged by the global statistical community.

I would like also to use this opportunity and to express my gratitude for the fruitful cooperation between ROSSTAT and the United Nations Statistics Division. In the past few years the level of engagement of Russia on the stage of global statistics has significantly risen. Russia regularly attends the United Nations Statistical Commission, which is the apex entity of the global statistical system and presently is a member of its Bureau. Russian experts had taken part in numerous expert group meetings and workshops on economic, social and demographic statistics organized by UNSD. ROSSTAT has also helped organize international meetings periodically, the most recent one being the International Seminar on Early Warning and Business Cycle Indicators, held in Moscow in November 2010.

Drawing from the diverse topics on the agenda of this Conference, I would like to reflect on some of the guiding principles for the organization of a modern and efficient official statistics and their implications for the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Three areas are of particular interest.

Development of professionalism in official statistics

I believe that the Federal State Statistics Service of Russian Federation with its more than 23,000 employees, working in the headquarters and in the 83 regional offices have developed a specialized cadre of well-trained, professional statisticians who stay at the core of your system, which embodies the professional values of objectivity and neutrality. I have had the opportunity of visiting two regional statistical offices. I understand the staff has received a rigorous academic training at Moscow and other regional universities. ROSSTAT must strive to retain its professional cadre by offering opportunities for career development within the statistical system.

The recruitment and retention of professional staff is now being regarded as a key success factor for a national statistical system. As official statistics deal increasingly with complex subject matters which require specialized knowledge, the retention of knowledgeable staff becomes imperative for effective compilation and analysis. Consider, for example, the compilation and analysis of national accounts or business statistics, which will be subjects of discussion in the panel sessions. All these require a certain period of training to gain proficiency and to be able to improve the methodology. Professional official statisticians should be given the proper recognition for the knowledge and skills that they possess.

Development of a data management system of Russian Federation

To respond to the post 1991 challenges and to provide reliable data for ongoing changes in the society and economy, ROSSTAT had to introduce numerous changes in its work. Private sector companies had emerged rapidly and data had to be collected for them. Comprehensive statistical reporting has been replaced by sample surveys. New data sources and new accounting rules had to be developed to replace those serving the old Material Product System.

While surveys are still a popular method for collecting statistical data, countries, including Russia, are experiencing greater difficulties in getting respondent cooperation. Over the same period, we have also witnessed the rapid development of government data systems arising from various administrative functions. In recent years, a clear trend of increased use of administrative data sources in the compilation of statistical information can be observed in national statistical offices world-wide.

Associated with this is an important shift in the philosophy of how we manage our statistical offices: we are now more focused on the output, and less concerned about the sources of the data. In addition, managing data flows and data aggregation have become equally important as skill sets among official statisticians, as the expertise of collecting

data from the field through surveys. In some countries, administrative sources have become just as important as traditional surveys.

However, effective use of administrative data sources requires as a prerequisite a conducive environment with enlightened policies and a legal framework that permit data aggregation or sharing of databases. In addition, it further requires the existence of a data management system in the country that enables the coordinated flow of administrative data. Such a system has the following elements: a set of rules that enable the flow the data under the necessary confidentiality guarantees, an adequate IT infrastructure, and appropriate personnel who manage the data flows. In a modern government with the full exploitation of IT in every aspect of its work, creating a data management system to take full advantage of available information is a logical outcome. In fact, many countries have already moved ahead in this aspect.

I understand that in the “Report on the results and future directions of the Federal State Statistics Service for the period 2011-2013”, ROSSTAT had set two priority areas of work in this direction, namely, to improve the collection, processing and dissemination of statistical information; and to place the Federal State Statistics Service on a new information platform which combines statistics from benchmark (census) and short-term (sample-type) surveys with administrative data. These efforts will give ROSSTAT a good basis to improve its data collection and management processes.

Governance of the Federal State Statistics System

Many statistical systems have been redesigned and restructured in the last years. Russian Federation is not an exception from this general tendency. The chronology of administrative changes in the Russia’s State Statistics since its foundation clearly shows the evolution of the national statistical system. The democratic arrangements in the early 1990s have helped ROSSTAT transform into an autonomous state entity.

A widely recognized position of autonomy is necessary for a statistical office to have credibility and to carry out its functions for the provision of an unhindered flow of

high quality information to public and policy makers. Some countries have written this autonomy into their constitutions or legislations. Autonomy is increasingly being seen as part of good governance.

The autonomy of national statistical offices is often expressed in two forms. One is ‘organizational autonomy’, where the statistical office is established separately from other government agencies or organs of the state. Organizational autonomy is often associated with the second type of autonomy which is ‘professional independence’. The general perception in the statistical community is that professional independence is of critical importance, but it also carries important accountabilities and responsibilities. Independence from political dynamics allows national statistical office to play its role as a national information provider, free from bias and influence. In a democratic governance framework, this information role is particularly critical. As you know, professional independence and the guarantee of impartiality are two key elements in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

The Federal State Statistics Service of Russian Federation is a part of the government structure, as the Chief Statistician reports to the Deputy-Prime Minister. I understand that ROSSTAT is granted total professional independence. Professional independence means that ROSSTAT has the authority to decide professionally on statistical methods to be implemented, data to be published, when to be published and that the content of publications did not require approval of the Deputy-Prime Minister. ROSSTAT should continue to safeguard the autonomy that has been granted and convey to the Russian Government of the potential benefits and the merits of giving the agency a greater degree of autonomy.

Concluding remarks

At this significant moment, when the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation is evaluating what has been achieved during the past 200 years and is getting ready for the challenges of the 21st century, I hope these three points as well as the deliberation of this conference will give you new ideas and inspiration. In line with the

new development of official statistics, I have no doubt that ROSSTAT will stay true to its mission of providing high quality statistics, consistent with international principles and standards.

The celebration of this historical anniversary, I am sure, is being met with great satisfaction by the present and former statisticians, as well as by all those who had contacts with the official statistics in Russia. You should indeed be proud of your achievements.

Again, please accept my warmest congratulations on this special occasion. The United Nations will count on ROSSTAT as a key partner in advancing the global statistical system.