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2. STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL COOPERATION

Communication on the evolution of the European Statistical System

Report by EUROSTAT addressing statistical implications
of the Single Market of the EC

Note : This note formed a communication from the EC Commission to the Council of
Ministers

Communication on the evolution of the European statistical system

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A. Introduction

The Community is pressing ahead with European integration. To do this, it must have a high-quality statistical system which it can use to determine, monitor and assess its economic, social and environmental policies.

Community statistical activities are therefore increasing rapidly as European integration proceeds apace and the accomplishment of these tasks involves a steadily increasing interdependence between the statistical activities at European and national level.

Since the importance and usefulness of the statistics transcend national frontiers, the statistical system in the Community must be developed in a harmonious way.

The European Statistical System (ESS) is made up of all the government bodies which, at the various levels — regional, national and Community — are responsible for drawing up, processing and disseminating the statistical information needed for the economic and social life of the Community. The Community focal point for the ESS is the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) which, in view of its scientific and technical responsibilities, already occupies a specific position within the Commission.

The organization of the Community's statistical activities is characterized by the maximum possible application of the principle of subsidiarity, and a very active partnership with the national statistical services. The Member States have already come to the conclusion that the planning of statistical activities and the execution of certain tasks will have to be changed with the advent of the single market.

The statistical information produced by the European statistical system must be produced on a basis of comparability, methodological reliability, and scientific independence. It is in the interests of all the parties who are involved in the life of the Community that the quality of the data on which decisions are taken and evaluated

should be beyond reproach, and that there should be no reservations from the political point of view.

One of the characteristics of statistics is that they are not political. Statistics should reflect as accurately as possible the economic, social and environmental situation throughout the Community, without any political interference or pressure. They must be available to government authorities, private bodies and the general public. They are and must remain an essential component of the information system in a democratic society.

The Commission intends to make a proposal to the Council and the European Parliament regarding a series of projects to promote the development and operation of an efficient ESS. The aim of the projects which the Commission proposes to undertake in the future is to improve the quality of Community statistical information and to preserve and guarantee its neutrality.

B. The Community's responsibilities and aims regarding statistics

The Community statistical system must achieve the following aims:

- to use a system of standards, methods and organizational structures which is capable of producing comparable, reliable and relevant statistics throughout the Community,
- to provide the European institutions and the Governments of the Member States with the information they need to implement, monitor and evaluate Community policies,
- to disseminate statistical information to Europe in general, to businesses and to all concerned with economic and social matters, for their decisions,
- to seek to improve the statistical systems in the Member States and to support development of the statistical system of developing countries and countries which are changing over to a market economy.

To do this we must act as follows:

- (a) develop common classifications, concepts and definitions directly applicable in the Member States and backed by Community legislation;
- (b) conduct joint statistical surveys on a harmonized methodological basis;
- (c) compile, analyse and disseminate Community statistical results, including inter-country comparisons;
- (d) incorporate the 'acquis communautaire' into the statistical programmes of the Member States;
- (e) promote convergence in national statistical practices on the basis of joint training schemes;
- (f) support the development of the statistical systems of the Community countries by means of structural schemes and on the basis of the exchange of technology and experience among the Member States and with non-Community countries.

The quality of this programme is based on the following principles: scientific independence, objectivity, reliability, integrity, political neutrality, confidentiality, effectiveness and relevance.

C. Principles of subsidiarity and partnership in the ESS

The European statistical system is based to a large extent on the principle of subsidiarity. This principle applies at two levels, viz. competence and implementation.

With regard to competence, the Community will be involved only in cases where it is carrying out the tasks and objectives laid down in the Treaties which are outside the scope and the competences of the national statistical institutes.

To achieve the objectives laid down in the Community's statistical information policy, the work must be carried out at the level which ensures maximum efficiency. This means, for example, that the collection of basic data on

the basis of statistical surveys or administrative data-processing will remain the responsibility of the national bodies in most cases. This also applies in those areas which fall under the Community's competence, since this is more cost-effective, and will avoid placing an excessive burden on the units under survey, in particular businesses.

In addition, in the field of statistics, the Commission and the Member States have been very active partners in devising and implementing joint programmes. As far as the Commission is concerned, the principle of partnership will continue to be one of the pillars of its relations with the national statistical systems.

The Commission is therefore responsible for any statistical matters falling within the Community's competence. In practice this means implementing priority action programmes under a multiannual statistical programme, which will be implemented on the basis of a partnership between Eurostat and the national statistical systems.

This programme will be proposed by the Commission, and be the subject of a decision by the Council and an opinion by the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee.

D. Management and consultation structures of the Community statistical programme

The Community statistical programme of work will be managed by internal and external advisory and management structures.

As part of the reorganization of its work, the Commission has recently established the Steering Committee for Statistical Information (SCSI), which is responsible for coordinating the Commission's statistical work and determining its priorities.

As regards relations with the Member States, three committees have recently been created by Council Decisions; they have a basic and priority rôle to play in developing the ESS:

- the Statistical Programme Committee (Council Decision 89/382/EEC, Euratom),
- the Committee on monetary, financial and balance of payments statistics (Council Decision 91/115/EEC),

- the European Advisory Committee on statistical information in the economic and social spheres (Council Decision 91/116/EEC).

Other management Committees responsible for specific topics have been set up by the Council in the past:

- the Standing Committee for Agricultural Statistics (Council Decision 72/279/EEC, 31 July 1972),
- the Committee on Foreign Trade Statistics (Council Regulation (EEC) No 1736/75, 24 June 1975),
- the GNP Committee (Council Directive 89/130/EEC, Euratom, 13 February 1989),
- the Committee on Confidentiality (Council Regulation (Euratom, EEC) No 1588/90, 11 June 1990).

All these bodies constitute the framework on which the aims of the ESS will evolve. Their areas of competence have been laid down in legal texts and their work is supported by working parties composed of Commission and Member States representatives, who will be responsible for the technical preparatory work on the various components of the programme.

E. Responsibilities and resources of the ESS

Since the ESS is based on the principle of subsidiarity, the burden of implementing the statistical programmes of the European Communities at national level will fall almost entirely on the national statistical institutes. Obviously, these will continue with national programmes covering some fields which do not fall within the Community's competence, but also some which do. The ESS is thus based on a complex network of interrelated competences and responsibilities for execution between the two levels, Community and national. To promote the development of the ESS and strengthen its operating structures, the Commission will take action on the following points:

Transfer of competence between the two levels

Transfer of competence must be two-way, and lead to the establishment of lasting and mutually profitable relations between the national and Community systems. For example, certain general methodological work, in particular work on setting up and adapting statistical

standards, could be done at Community level for all the Member States. In operational terms and for reasons of efficiency, the work of developing harmonized methodology and classifications may be handed over by Eurostat to one or more national statistical institutes with specific expertise or experience in a certain area. However, in the last resort, the Commission will decide how to implement the work done by the national statistical institute(s), after the consultation of the appropriate Committees.

Conversely, certain tasks may be handed over by the Commission to Member States: for instance, the dissemination of Community results by the Commission should be focused primarily on the Community institutions and organizations at Community level. Dissemination of Community results to national users should be entrusted by the Commission to the national statistical institutes, so that the statistical information can be disseminated using linguistic and technical procedures which are directly accessible to a wider public.

Transfer of resources between the two levels

As regards *budgetary* matters, the Commission will pursue and develop its policy of funding Community statistical work performed by the national statistical institutes. In accordance with the provisions of the Financial Regulation, this multiannual action will be accompanied by a financial memorandum which will give the Commission's estimated financial requirements for it.

As for *human resources*, the Commission considers that the existence of a Community focal point, i.e. Eurostat, of a very high technical and scientific standard, is a guarantee for the harmonious development of the European statistical system. Transferring staff from national to Community level would help to maintain this high level of competence. This practice would have three advantages: it provides the necessary flexibility in a phase of rapid development, it is a source of skilled personnel, and it forges strong personal links between national and the Community officials involved in the European statistical system.

The national statistical services, including statistical departments of ministries and central banks, will be requested to make provision for mobility periods in the careers of their officials, which would be spent with Eurostat.

Secondment of national officials from the national statistical systems to Eurostat will be encouraged, in the Member States, by appropriate administrative and budgetary provisions, which will guarantee that their careers will progress in an attractive environment as regards hierarchical and budgetary considerations.

During the period of secondment to Eurostat, the Commission will try to give national officials administrative posts compatible with their areas of competence and responsibilities at home.

In a general way, the national statistical systems will be associated, on a consultancy basis, with the actions for promoting general competitions in the field of statistics.

The Commission will also encourage mobility of Eurostat officials to the national statistical systems. This measure is both a management tool aimed at improving Community officials' knowledge of the realities of the situation at national level, and also a means of transferring to the national level staff who are familiar with Community problems.

Development of human resources

Developing an efficient European statistical system also depends on providing *professional training* for European statisticians which will enable them to compare and enrich the knowledge they have acquired at national level and to strengthen their common languages, and which will also disseminate the most modern technologies relating to data-collection, processing and analysis. This professional training should ensure effective synergy between official statistics, the universities and statistics in the private sector.

The Commission will welcome any proposal and support any action aimed at reinforcing the partnership with the national statistical systems in the context of existing training centres or new Community centres which might be set up at a later date. In some cases the Commission might initiate action in this field.

F. The basic principles of Community statistics

In almost all the Community countries legislation on statistics is basic law which defines and governs the work of the public statistical system, the organization and

coordination between the central and peripheral bodies, the government authorities and the general public, its duties towards citizens in the matter of respecting fundamental rights, its relations with other public bodies which collect and process statistical data, its right to act on its own initiative in conducting surveys and lastly, in some cases, its relations with international and supranational organizations.

There is nothing like this at Community level, and yet statistics of Community origin are becoming increasingly important in the national statistical programmes. In addition, Community statistics are becoming an instrument of reference and decision-making for drawing up, monitoring and evaluating Community policies: it must therefore have common features from the scientific and technical point of view, and also as regards the principles of initiation, organization and dissemination. In a Europe in which convergence of economic, social and environmental policies is becoming the norm, statistics must be an instrument which at all points is in line with the same fundamental principles; if each government is not on the same track, the road to union could be longer and more difficult.

The Commission now intends to propose that the Council adopt a directive giving a legal basis for the construction of a cohesive, flexible and efficient statistical system, which is in line with the same basic principles in all the Member States.

The Directive on the basic principles of European statistics must therefore serve as a benchmark for the Member States in adapting their national legislation or basic administrative acts to Community principles and rules. It must also be used by the Commission for defining its rôle on statistical information policy and deciding accordingly on the organization of its statistical work.

G. Eurostat's place in the institutions

Eurostat will continue to exist as a Directorate-General and its budget will remain a part of the Commission's budget. Under the policies laid down in the Statistical Programme, the Commission will ensure that Eurostat's operating rules will be in conformity with the principles set out in the proposed Council Directive.

As regards the demand for statistical information to the Member States, the Commission, in response to the wish expressed by the Council in connection with the 1989 to 1992 Statistical Programme, has decided to set up some mechanisms to reinforce coordination of the statistical work from its departments. In future Eurostat will play a leading rôle in coordinating this statistical work.

Lastly, the Commission is conscious that one of the conditions for improving the quality of Community statistics is that the total scientific independence and political neutrality of Eurostat must be guaranteed as regards the methods used for establishing the statistics and the conditions governing publication and access to statistical data. This is the basis for the confidence which the national statistical services and the suppliers of data (industry and households) must have in Eurostat for them to submit confidential data.

H. Eurostat's place in the international statistical system

Whatever the number of Member States in the medium term, the Community will be engaged in an increasing volume of transactions dealing with movements of persons, goods, capital and services within the European

economic area and with numerous non-Community countries, necessitating the production of statistical information which can be used for monitoring the Community's policies. Eurostat is the *de facto* coordinator of the statistical standardization work of more than 20 countries and is also engaged in the process of its coordination with the United States and Canada. Moreover, Eurostat is playing a central rôle in the coordination of technical assistance for the development of statistical systems compatible with a market economy in central and eastern Europe.

Eurostat's central rôle in international statistics means that mechanisms must be set up to coordinate it with the international bodies which are involved in statistics in the same sectors as the Community. These mechanisms should produce more effective use of the resources devoted to statistical work at international level. However, the Commission will take care that such coordination does not cut across its prerogatives or slow down the decision-making process at Community level.

The Commission will act in this area in accordance with its institutional status in the various international organizations, after consulting the bodies responsible for Community statistical programmes.