

# Evolution of the Slovenian Statistical System

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## 0. Introduction

The Republic of Slovenia proclaimed its independence and sovereignty on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1991. It became a member of the United Nations on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1992, a member of the European Union on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004 and from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007 Slovenia is a member of the Euro Area. All these very fast developments towards modern state and market economy have had an important implication on the development of the Slovene official statistics and particularly on the development of the Slovene Statistical Office (SORS). The article provides some insides on the past process and future challenges.

## 1. Short historical background of the Slovenian national statistics

The history of Slovenian statistics goes back to 1754, when the first population census was carried out. In 1863 the first independent statistical service was created in Vienna. As the milestone of the starting point of national statistics, the year 1944 is taken, when the Slovene Statistical Office was established by independent Slovenian authorities during World War II. From 1945 to 1990 the work was organized within the former Yugoslavia. But Slovenia all the time kept the Slovenian Statistical Office and also in that period made use of the opportunity to co-operate with Germany and the Nordic countries. The co-operation resulted in bringing the concept of registers in the seventies and eighties to Slovenia, as well as the knowledge on statistical methods and modern statistical concepts as is the System of National Accounts (SNA). The Slovene government already in the late nineties decided that the Slovenian Statistical Office started to calculate the economic aggregates not only in the Material Product System (MPS), but also in SNA terms.

## 2. First steps of the national statistics in independent Slovenia

In 1992 the Statistical Office of Slovenia (SORS) became a member of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) which in the same year adopted the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. This largely contributed to the process of preparing new statistical legislation in Slovenia. In 1994 the Common Declaration of Statistical Co-operation between SORS and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) was signed, enabling official participation of the Slovenes in the European Statistical System. In 1995, the Slovene Parliament adopted the National Statistics Act, with which SORS became a professionally independent statistical service. It introduced vital provisions on the functioning of a modern statistical office.

## 3. Slovenian National Statistics as part of the European Statistical System

In 1998 with the Accession Partnership Agreement and Screening of the statistical Acquis Communautaire, the Slovene National Statistics committed itself to achieve full compliance with the EU statistical legislation by 2002 at the latest. As a part of the process, Amendments and Supplements to the National Statistics Act were adopted in 2001 in order to allow the preparation and adoption of programming to become more flexible, to improve statistical confidentiality, to deepen the independence of the institution and to clearly define the role of authorised producers of statistics. In June 2003 the Government of the Republic of Slovenia established that its national statistics was fully prepared for the accession of Slovenia to the EU. On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004 Slovene national statistics became part of the European Statistical

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<sup>2</sup> More information on the Slovene statistical system and more on SORS can be found on: [www.stat.si](http://www.stat.si)

System. This resulted in successfully taking on board all the responsibilities and challenges of the member of the ESS in working together in partnership and through institutional arrangements such as Working Groups, Sectoral Groups and the Statistical Programme Committee at the European Commission and Working Groups at the Council - when preparing the *acquis communautaire*. Active participation in ESS work has brought quality improvement through involvement in R&D projects and a new way of thinking on the part of the SORS staff.

#### **4. Some key issues for successful capacity building of the Slovenian statistics:**

- The Slovenian decision to start the negotiation process for full membership in EU resulted in speeding up the process of harmonization of statistics with international standards, EU demand for high quality, EU comparable statistics needed in order to assess the Slovene position in the accession process; and its readiness to enter EU and the Euro Area was also pushed from the EU side. In the negotiation process, it was stated by EU - the Commission that good quality statistics is a precondition for negotiation and that statistics cannot be a subject of the negotiations. That was a clear message to the Slovenian government to support the statistical capacity building process to be a guaranty to non-political objectivity, professionalism and to provide the indispensable means (legal framework, organizational position of the SORS within the government, human and financial resources, programming of work). The development plan was followed by strict compliance monitoring and evaluation studies, organized by Eurostat in order to ensure that the statistical legislation and other statistical standards be properly taken into account. One of the key issues was the awareness of the Slovenian state authorities that they need objective, impartial and comparable statistics in order to be able to assess and defend the Slovenian position in the EU framework as well as to prepare, conduct and assess the evidence based policy at the national level.
- Forward looking management of SORS, who started international co-operation on registers, modern statistical and IT standards, foreign languages very early in the seventies and eighties. It has resulted in a good knowledge base of the SORS staff and register oriented statistics. It was crucially important when the transition to a modern statistical system in Slovenia officially started. The management and the staff have been prepared to take on board very challenging tasks. Even though SORS is a small office, due to professional qualities, good legal framework, trust of users, and a good management, SORS has become a case of the “good statistical practice” in EU.
- Support of academia and research institutes in providing professional assistance in projects and training of statistical methods and helping to build professionalism and consequently increase trust in official statistics in Slovenia was important as well. The Statistical Society of Slovenia, SORS and University of Ljubljana introduced the postgraduate study of statistics with a special module on official statistics in 2000. There is also ongoing co-operation with several research institutes.
- The legal framework of the Slovenian national statistics is one of the most modern ones. It has been prepared in line with the basic principles of official statistics and also the best practices in world statistics, especially those in the Nordic countries where similar register-based statistics have been developed.

- At national level, SORS as co-coordinator of official statistics has developed a good co-operation with data providers, especially public sector institutions as holders of registers and administrative records as a vital source for statistics. SORS is responsible for standard classifications. Use of standard classifications in administrative records is obligatory and influences the quality and coherence of data in administrative records. Such data represent an excellent source for statistics.
- SORS established the Statistical Advisory Committees in the eighties, i.e. long before they were officially introduced by national Statistics Act in 1995. Their work together with the Statistical Council has a significant impact on the development of national statistics in Slovenia. Currently more than 400 participants from the public sector, academia, research institutes and enterprises work in 25 different groups.
- SORS has a long tradition in intensive relations with the media. Support and mutual understanding with media in general was very helpful. Planning media relations is a top management responsibility. Our products must be accessible, understandable, useful and of high quality. Media play an important role in disseminating data to users. Media trust is a precondition for public trust building and the reputation of NSI. Currently SORS organises around 15 press conferences per year. The press conference is chaired by the Director-General. The journalists attended press conferences also after all information has been published in special folders on our website: [www.stat.si](http://www.stat.si). The user-friendly website, incl. a special section for press conferences, the advance release calendar for publications, automated information, sent via e-mail about new publications and updates in the database, the new method of preparing the First Release (content – short message, lay-out), the help desk (public relations officer and the Information Centre); rapid replies to press requirements have been developed. The awareness of SORS that it must respect the principles of the media and train the statisticians (on journalism, on writing messages, on the art of speaking, on appearing in front of the camera) is one of the key challenges also for the future. Developing the awareness that statistics can be useful for citizens and the societies. Fair and transparent communication, incl. of top management, shows respectance of the role of media. The on-going process with the media has to be two-way communication. Taking into account the way in which the journalists operate (time, medium) was also proven to be a factor for success. Training of statisticians in order to work with the media is crucial. Statisticians have to be prepared for end-users, they have to offer them outputs with low additional efforts by journalists.
- International co-operation started in the end of the sixties when Slovenia took part in international projects sponsored by OECD. Participation in the projects offered to SORS the opportunity to start co-operation with the Nordic countries and Germany. In 1992 SORS was – for the first time after having gained independence - even officially included in the international statistical community in the Conference of the European Statisticians. In the most demanding period of the harmonization process SORS benefited from good technical assistance organized by the European Commission and especially by Eurostat, the technical assistance provided by Member States of EU, the technical assistance provided by the Conference of European Statisticians and UN Statistical Division Geneva, the Statistical Commission, OECD<sup>3</sup>, ILO, UNDP and

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<sup>3</sup> Much methodological knowledge has been gained thanks to the co-operation with OECD in the accession period. In 2005 SORS became a permanent observer in the OECD Statistical Committee.

other international organizations as well as the knowledge gained by the International Statistical Institute. It also has to be mentioned that Slovenia carried out statistical capacity building for joining the European Union in a group with other 9 countries. It was a scale of economy which enabled good organization from the Eurostat point of view, as well as a synergy effects between accession countries. Today Slovene statistics is actively involved in shaping the international statistical work with a Chief Statistician being a member of the Bureau of Conference of the European Statisticians and the member of the Partnership Group, which represents the preparatory group for the Statistical Programme Committee in the European Union.

- Register-based statistics become vital during the accession to EU, and is also currently. We have to cope with the increasing demand for timely, high quality and relevant statistical information on the one hand and reduction of administrative burden on the other hand.
- The issue of the stability of resources needed for the preparation and execution of the statistical work programmes is crucial for future developments of official statistics. Also in Slovenia, especially after full membership in EU, which also means higher national costs for statistics. SORS has been facing the increasing demands from the Slovene government as well as data providers to take into account as much as possible the reduction of the administrative burden and the cost-benefit approach. At the same time the user requirements are growing. SORS is at present in the phase of preparation of the next five-year programme which has to take into account all these challenges.

#### **5. Strategic objectives for the period 2008 - 2012**

Slovene National Statistics - and especially SORS as co-ordinator of all official statistical activities - is in the process of the preparation of the new Mid-term Programme of Statistical Surveys 2008-2012. The following major strategic objectives were defined:

- Further work on quality assurance and user friendliness.
- Improvement of flexibility in response to user needs and requirements with the innovative approach to the data sources and competence development in the field of the methodologies used.
- Building trust in official statistics and promotion of statistics within the country and abroad.
- Building willingness and trust of data providers, and reduce of administrative burden with the use of administrative data sources, simplification of current EU statistical legislation and better process of assessment of the users' needs at the national and EU levels.
- Building the competence and new innovative approaches for efficient process-oriented organization.
- Improvement of the organizational culture and staff motivation and satisfaction.
- Further active participation in the international statistical co-operation.
- Further development of the Slovene national statistics (interinstitutional cooperation, co-ordination of statistical work, development and dissemination policy of ministerial sectoral statistics in connection to official statistics with the aim to increase the users' satisfaction.

SWOT analyses were carried out in order to find out the strengths and weaknesses inside the Slovenian statistical system - and opportunities and potential treats in the external

environment. SWOT analyses were performed on: infrastructural issues such as general methodology and standards, data dissemination, data collection, editing and database management, further development of official statistics, IT support, promotion of official statistics and increasing the statistical literacy, Human Resource Management and financial issues.

In the next step the SWOT analyses will be an input for revision of the strategic objectives and to revise the strategies such as:

- Dissemination strategy
- IT strategy
- Quality strategy
- HRM strategy
- Strategy for reducing the response burden.

## **6. Conclusions**

The key issue for the rapid development of the Slovenian statistics was the transition of Slovenia to democratic, market-oriented and social welfare state. High quality statistical data were the key element in accession to EU, as well as for the good functioning as a Member State in the Euro Area. Lessons learned in adapting EU requirements show that EU harmonisation requires long-term, organisationally and financially sustainable efforts. Organisation of statistics at international and particularly at EU level has made it possible. But to sustain the level of harmonisation and development also in the future, the national circumstances in which the National Statistics operate are equally important. National needs for EU harmonisation raised the awareness on importance of official statistics and SORS within the Slovenia. But it has to be underlined that statistical capacity building and harmonisation are ongoing processes. In the next five years we can expect more data producers also outside the official statistics. This will increase the importance of quality labeling of statistical products and it will certainly bring new challenges for official statistics. The international co-operation and exchange of good practices have been some of the advantages which made us able to explore the worldwide synergy between different players in the international statistical community.