Definitions: Economic Territory and Statistical Territory

What is the difference between the statistical and the economic territory of a country?

The statistical territory of a country or area is “the territory concerning which data are being collected” [1]. That is, goods that enter or leave the statistical territory are to be recorded in the external trade statistics.

The economic territory of a country consists “of the geographic territory administered by a government within which persons, goods and capital circulate freely”[1] and includes:

(a) Airspace, territorial waters, and continental shelf lying in international waters over which the country enjoys exclusive rights or over which it has, or claims to have, jurisdiction in respect of the right to fish or to exploit fuels or minerals below the seabed;

(b) Territorial enclaves in the rest of the world (clearly demarcated areas of land which are located in other countries and which are used by the government which owns or rents them for diplomatic, military, scientific or other purposes - embassies, consulates, military bases, scientific stations, information, or immigration offices, aid agencies, etc. - with the formal political agreement of the government of the country in which they are physically located);

(c) Any free zones, or bonded warehouses or factories operated by offshore enterprises under customs control (these form part of the economic territory of the country in which they are physically located).[2]

In the case of maritime countries, their economic territory “includes any islands belonging to that country which are subject to the same fiscal and monetary authorities as to the mainland, so that goods and persons may move freely to and from such islands without any customs or immigration formalities.”[3] The economic territory of a country does not include the territorial enclaves used by foreign governments or international organizations that are physically located within the geographical boundaries of that country. [4]

The recommendation on the coverage of International Merchandise Trade Statistics is to record all goods which add to or subtract from the stock of material resources of a country by entering (imports) or leaving (exports) its economic territory. The difference between statistical territory and economic territory is that for practical or other reasons a country can decide to deviate from this principle and record its trade to a slightly smaller or larger territory than the economic territory. The recording territory is called the statistical territory.

An example to illustrate this difference can be taken from the UN publication Statistical Territories of the World for use in International Merchandise Trade Statistics. The United Kingdom gives the following explanation on question 1: Does the statistical territory of your country coincide with the economic territory?

(a) UK statistical territory includes airspace, territorial waters (12 miles), and the UK continental shelf. (b) UK statistical territory excludes territorial enclaves in the rest of the world (e.g., embassies/consulates, military bases, etc.) (c) UK statistical territory includes free zones and customs warehouses under customs control.

The Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are not included in the economic territory of the UK (SNA guidelines) but are included in UK statistical territory. Territorial enclaves used by foreign governments (e.g., USDAF bases) are not included in UK statistical territory.

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