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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE COUNCIL ON THE EX-POST EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY
STATISTICAL PROGRAMME 2003-2007**

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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL ON THE EX-POST EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY STATISTICAL PROGRAMME 2003-2007

This Commission staff working document contains the executive summary of the evaluation report on the Community statistical programme (CSP) 2003-2007.

1. INTRODUCTION

The requirement to carry out an evaluation and present a report on the Community statistical programme (CSP) 2003-2007 is enshrined in Article 4 of Decision No 2367/2002/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2002 on the *Community statistical programme 2003-2007*. Article 4 of that Decision states:

"At the end of the period covered by the programme, the Commission, after consulting the Statistical Programme Committee, shall present an appropriate *evaluation report on the implementation of the programme, taking into account the views of independent experts*. The report is to be *completed by the end of 2008* and subsequently submitted to the European Parliament and the Council."

The task of carrying out this ex-post evaluation was awarded to IDEA Consult - a company specialized in research-based consulting. Starting in October 2007, the evaluation was conducted over a period of 13 months; it included desk research, review and analysis of quantitative data, a number of interviews with various stakeholders, and a survey addressed to the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs). In March 2008, an interim evaluation report was submitted which presented facts and factual trends, but no evaluative conclusions. In the ensuing period, more qualitative information was gathered and processed. This whole process resulted in an evaluation report, of which this document is the executive summary. The summary provides an overview of the main findings and conclusions from the report and is accompanied by the evaluator's recommendations.

2. MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION BUILDING BLOCKS

In order to maintain a structured approach in the evaluation, we identified a number of aspects, which together characterise the Community Statistical Programme (CSP) 2003-2007 and the European Statistical System (ESS). These aspects have served as building blocks throughout the whole evaluation process. In the paragraphs below we present the most important facts and findings for each of the building blocks of the evaluation framework. These are:

- Relevance of the programme
- Progress of activities
- User satisfaction and user needs
- Development of the ESS and subsidiarity
- Staff and internal productivity
- Dialogue and Interaction between users and partners
- Quality of products and services
- Monitoring of implementation

2.1. Relevance of the CSP 2003-2007

THE LINK BETWEEN THE 5-YEAR PROGRAMME AND THE ANNUAL PROGRAMMES

The 5-year programme serves as the framework document for the five individual annual programmes over the period in question. However, no explicit reference to the 5-year programme is to be found in either the structure or the content of the annual programmes. Every title in the CSP 2003-2007 contains a list of its relevant themes in the annual programmes, but there is no trace in the annual programmes of either the objectives described in the titles or of the six strategic principal objectives formulated separately from the titles of the 5-year programme. The annual programmes seem to lead the work without any reference to the 5-year programme.

The evaluator has conducted an exercise ex post to try to link the key operational priorities in the horizontal themes of the annual programmes with the six principal objectives of the 5-year programme. This exercise has provided a very useful insight into the extent to which the annual programmes do actually cover the content of the 5-year programme. It has demonstrated that there is a match between the 5-year programme and the annual programmes as far as content is concerned. By working on the priorities of the annual programme the Eurostat units are - whether consciously or not - making progress on the strategic objectives of the 5-year programme. The results of the survey show that this perception is shared by the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs), with 92% of them believing that the priorities included in the annual programmes were derived directly from the 5-year CSP.

Despite the apparent match between the 5-year programme and the annual programmes in terms of content, the conducting of the abovementioned exercise ex ante for the whole programme by explicitly linking the key operational priorities from the annual programmes to each of the principal strategic objectives in the 5-year programme would provide the necessary reference framework for the different units to draw up the annual programmes. Furthermore, a clear link between operational priorities and strategic objectives would allow progress towards the objectives of the 5-year programme to be monitored more efficiently and transparently.

The indicators show that, each year, a number of new priorities are adopted and/or old ones are discarded. This confirms that the practice of working with annual statistical programmes in a multi-annual framework gives Eurostat the flexibility to achieve its objectives as set out in the 5-year programme. Each year, new emphases and adjustments to changing needs can be introduced into the annual programmes. As a result, this combination has within itself the potential to provide a flexible and permanently relevant approach to meeting the statistical challenges as they change over time.

The broad and flexible formulation of the objectives of the 5-year programme also has another aspect to it. In the interviews and the survey, concerns were raised that the objectives are too general, and that clear-cut priorities or strategic direction are lacking. This is a concern for the NSIs because their own statistical programmes are based on the Eurostat programmes. Furthermore, by far the majority of the NSIs' activities derive from EU regulations, and are therefore obligatory. Moreover, the fact that the formulated objectives are not linked to quantifiable targets makes it difficult to evaluate them.

INVOLVEMENT OF USERS AND PRODUCERS IN THE FORMULATION PROCESS

In general, both the Directorates-General (DGs) and the NSIs feel that they have been involved sufficiently in the formulation of the CSP 2003-2007 and that their input has been taken into account. On the other hand, they find that the process of influencing the programmes is difficult and often time-consuming. Both groups seem to place a great deal of

emphasis on influencing the annual statistical programmes, as these are more specific and aimed at the short term.

The two groups obviously have certain opposing interests. The DGs want to see new requests implemented, whereas the NSIs focus mostly on keeping the number of requests in the programmes under control and on introducing more prioritisation. The growing demand, coupled with the absence of priority setting, seems to be a serious problem for the NSIs, because their resources often do not match the large and growing number of requests. The NSIs are constantly trying to strike a balance between the demands they have to meet and the resources at their disposal, and they are finding it increasingly difficult to achieve that balance. This has led to the introduction of so-called "negative priorities" - i.e. looking for ways to reduce the statistical burden by abandoning outmoded statistics or by simplifying existing obligations.

Furthermore, the NSIs feel that new demands are not always dictated by necessity. Incidentally, according to the survey, the aspects 'keeping the demand under control' and 'burden reduction by prioritising statistics' are the only ones where Eurostat has achieved less than the NSIs expected.

2.2. Progress of activities

All Eurostat units have reported on their activity and progress towards the objectives by individual title in the CSP 2003-2007 by completing 'fact sheets' prepared by the evaluator. Reporting by production units and by horizontal units has been processed differently. Reporting by the horizontal units was added to the hierarchy of objectives which had previously been used to make explicit the link between the 5-year programme and the annual programmes. For the production units the matrix shown below was devised (Table 1). The matrix consists of three core areas of action (rows) – data, regulation/legislation, methodology & tools - and four major relevant Eurostat issues (columns) – Quality, Development ESS, Simplification/modernisation and Enlargement – plus a residual category entitled 'Regular activity'. The activities reported by the units have been added up and classified in the various categories of this matrix. This provides a valuable overview of the number of activities carried out in each area of action and on each major issue for Eurostat. The specific content and individual actions included in this table are discussed in the relevant sections of the evaluation.

Table 1: Categorisation and sums of reporting on vertical fact sheets

Main area of action	Subareas	Regular activity	Enlargement	Simplification/modernisation	Quality	Development ESS	Total
Data	Coordinating surveys	8	1	1	2	3	15
	Production of existing statistics	40	15	4	24	4	87
	Production of new statistics	56	2	2	9	5	74
	Total	104	18	7	35	12	176
Regulation/legislation	Preparing new legislation	9	0	6	5	3	23
	Adopting new legislation	14	0	4	5	0	23
	Revising old legislation	3	0	9	6	1	19
	Total	26	0	19	16	4	65
Methodology & tools	Preparing new methodology or tool	24	0	3	6	9	42
	Implementing new methodology or tool	13	1	4	16	17	51
	Revising methodology	7	0	10	18	5	40
	Monitoring methodology	2	1	3	15	5	26
	Total	46	2	20	55	36	159
	Overall total	176	20	46	106	52	400

Source: Idea Consult, 2008

Significant action has been taken on all of the principal objectives, areas of activity and major issues identified. Unsurprisingly, most actions reported by the production units have been related to the production of statistics. The number of actions involving production of new statistics is quite high compared to the other activities. A large proportion of the actions of both groups of units also falls under the heading of quality. Furthermore, many activities were dedicated to the development of the ESS.

Although a fair share of the activities related to simplification or modernisation, only a few of these actions focused on data production. Simplifications and modernisations are more a feature of the legislation and the methodology than of the actual production of statistics.

There is little activity to report in relation to the enlargement project, which all sources describe as ‘running smoothly’. The interviewed NSIs from new Member States stated that their accession had been well prepared on both the input and output sides, and that their integration into the ESS had gone very well. Also, as the enlargement to include 10 new countries had taken place in 2004, most of the preparations for enlargement had already been completed before the CSP 2003-2007 began.

The NSIs generally agree that considerable progress has been made towards the objectives of the 5-year programme. Furthermore, the results of the survey largely support the findings from Table 1, as the NSIs indicated that the aspects ‘production of new statistics’, ‘development of methodology’ and ‘data accessibility’ were among those receiving the most attention during the CSP 2003-2007. However, the NSIs felt that the CSP had paid less attention to all aspects related to “reduction of burden” and aspects related to the monitoring and management of processes and performances. Encouragingly, the NSIs point out that greater attention is being paid to these aspects in the CSP 2008-2012.

2.3. User satisfaction and user needs

All indicators relating to the ‘use’ of Eurostat statistics and publications point to a significant upward trend. Examples of this include the monthly number of users of online dissemination and the number of downloads from the Eurostat website, both of which have risen significantly (Annual Activity Report 2007, Annual Management Plan 2007, website

monitoring reports 2005, 2006, 2007). The trend can be seen most clearly in the number of hits on the website per month (performance scoreboard, 2006/2007), which increased from 34.7 million in 2004 to 73.1 million in 2007 indicating every item displayed on the website. One of the contributory factors was the remarkable rise in the number of requests when the free dissemination policy was introduced. The accession of the 10 new Member States to the European Union also probably contributed to this growth.

The distribution of downloads across the various statistical areas has remained stable, with a strong interest being shown in general socio-economic statistics. For the period 2004-2007, the areas of Population & Social Conditions and Economy & Finance accounted for more than 20% of the total number of downloads. Areas such as Environment & Energy, Science & Technology and Transport barely reached 5%.

User monitoring reports reveal no significant increase in the number of requests for support by users over the period 2004-2007 (up from 23993 to 24928). This can be regarded as a positive trend, since it suggests that the increase in the number of users was not followed by a big increase in the number of clients who felt that the presentation or the content of the website was insufficient to meet their needs.

The main source for rating user satisfaction was the user satisfaction survey, which was carried out in 2007 on two groups: internet respondents and key users. Although it should be borne in mind that surveys of this kind add a negative bias (as they usually attract more complaining, negative respondents than satisfied users), they do offer interesting insights. From an aggregate perspective, approximately half of all users rate the overall quality of statistics as 'good' to 'very good'. The timeliness aspect of the statistics is the quality dimension which, in general, had a relatively higher proportion of user satisfaction. Completeness and accessibility received somewhat lower ratings.

This aggregate approach conceals major differences between statistical areas. Price and employment statistics are generally rated highly, whereas the regional and environmental statistics receive lower ratings. Also, key users tend to be slightly more positive than internet respondents.

The aggregate perspective gained from the user satisfaction survey is rather negatively biased compared to quality surveys on separate statistical areas. Other surveys conducted for separate statistical areas show higher user satisfaction ratings. A survey of international trade statistics shows that 85% of users are 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with these statistics. However, this survey also reveals less satisfaction with certain aspects, such as comparability of the data (39% satisfied) and coherence between different trade data sets (35% satisfied).

Most of the DGs interviewed feel that Eurostat performs quite well on its core task, i.e. supplying other Commission Services with high quality statistics. All DGs regard Eurostat as the main authority when it comes to statistics and the first port of call when they need statistics of any kind. It is only in cases where Eurostat does not have the information that the DGs try other options – usually the OECD, the World Bank, the IMF or the ILO. Some DGs note that other sources are sometimes more policy-oriented than Eurostat – and thus easier for them to use – but then those sources can cause other problems.

2.4. Development of the ESS and subsidiarity

In order to gain an initial insight into the development of the ESS and the application of the subsidiarity principle, we examined the new legal acts in each statistical domain. We recorded a total of 33 new legal acts over the period 2003-2006. The subsidiarity principle is referred to in 11 of these acts.

The statistical requirements compendia for the years 2003 to 2007, which include overviews of legislative acts and data requirements, have also been studied. Both seem to have peaked in 2006. Eleven extra legal acts have been added to the compendium, i.e. the number of new acts minus the acts that have been abolished. The increase in data requirements is very noticeable (up by 138). This indicates that the ESS is expanding and becoming increasingly regulated. During the 2003-2007 programme period, a start was made on the ex ante evaluations of new statistical acts adopted during the programme period, with 12 such evaluations being conducted in 2007.

By far the majority of NSIs claim that they have to contend with an imbalance between users' demands and the resources at their disposal. The interviews and the survey show clearly that NSIs are suffering from the constant increase in users' needs for more and greater sophistication of data, together with the fact that they barely have the resources to cope with this increased workload. They feel that (more) effort should be put into reducing the workload, either by limiting the demands or by increasing the resources.

The DGs acknowledge this problem, but argue that lowering the existing statistical requirements is complicated, as it would negate much of the previous investment in developing the statistics and their particular features. Another consideration is that reducing the burden for survey respondents has been identified as a major concern in the ESS too. Some argue that this burden is inversely proportional to the burden for the NSIs. Less work for respondents often means a heavier burden for the data producers (NSIs) in terms of processing the surveys.

All of this goes to show how delicate this issue is, and how difficult the position of Eurostat is in this respect. The ESS can be likened to a constant delicate balancing act between the supply side (producers) and the demand side (users). Those interviewed on both sides acknowledge that Eurostat is in a difficult position in the middle of the system, and has the complex task of managing not only the system but also the expectations of both users and producers.

Both the DGs and NSIs fully recognise the working groups, task forces and committees as the decision-taking and executive bodies of the ESS, are closely involved in them and perfectly satisfied with the way they function. Nevertheless, the NSIs feel that the ESS provides too few opportunities for discussion at a more strategic level. The sector groups are named as the bodies that should be given broader mandates and greater prominence, since the role of working groups is primarily a technical one.

Furthermore, both NSIs and DGs are aware of the importance of the SPC, and find its functioning to be increasingly efficient and effective. In order to improve the efficiency of the SPC, efforts have been made to reduce the number of agenda items discussed in this body. Some NSIs have argued that this aspect should not be exaggerated, and that the SPC should maintain its strong position within the system.

The DGs underline the importance of a continuous dialogue between producers, users and Eurostat. Direct communication between DGs and Eurostat normally takes place through personal, informal contacts, and thus is not highly institutionalised. This means that a lot of information does not trickle down to the whole DG. This has to do with the lack of statistical coordination within the DGs, although the DGs point out that Eurostat, too, could be more proactive when it comes to the dissemination/communication aspects. Many of the main client DGs have separate direct agreements and contracts with Eurostat. Certainly, in the development phase of new statistics this can provide clarity as to what each one can expect from the other, and avoids miscommunication.

The derogations that were granted during the period 2003-2007 shed light on another aspect of the development of the ESS. Derogations are basically exceptions granted to Member States from certain (parts of the) requirements, allowing them to not to deliver that part of the demand. The highest total number of derogations for one country over the full programme period is 12; two countries have been granted 10 derogations. These figures can be supplemented by so-called "compliance monitoring", which shows the extent to which the Member States are complying with a (wide) range of ESS statistical regulations. Overall compliance can be regarded as very high.

The number of derogations for new Member States is strikingly low. At the same time, non-compliance by the new Member States is 1.8%, as against 4.5% for the old Member States. One possible explanation for this is that the new Member States are not yet very familiar with the system of derogations. The NSIs from new Member States that were interviewed also acknowledge that they have a slight advantage, because in the case of NSIs from existing Member States the implementation of the ESS often involves replacing or modifying existing national regulations on which all actors had reached a consensus and to which they had become accustomed. For the new NSIs, it simply means implementing a new Regulation, which may possibly require a shorter adaptation period.

Eurostat's units have devoted much of their activity to developing the ESS. One of the most relevant facets of this effort is the elaboration and implementation of ESSnet - a system in which certain Member States become experts in specific statistical fields, perform specific tasks and share their knowledge throughout the ESS. This initiative is strongly supported and highly appreciated by the NSIs; it appears to work well, and is an example of a measure that has a significant and evident impact on the burden. Another potentially important body within the ESS - the European Advisory Committee on Statistical Information in the Economic and Social Spheres (CEIES) - has been reformed to make it a more strategic body, whose aim is to facilitate reflection on the whole strategic programming and interaction within the ESS.

Another interesting stage in the development of the ESS is the agreement reached at the end of 2006 on the Krakow action plan. This resulted from the meeting of the Directors General of the ESS in Krakow in 2006 at which three task forces (TF) were set up: (1) a TF for a basic legislative framework for Community Statistics (2) a TF for statistical challenges and (3) a TF for ESS resources management and programming. These TFs have not yet reached the end of their mandate, but have each formulated a number of recommendations on their respective themes.

2.5. Staff and internal productivity

The smallest number of key priorities in the annual programmes related to principal objective 4 'Boosting staff motivation'. However, the reporting in the fact sheets demonstrates that the horizontal units have largely compensated for this through extensive action on these priorities.

Over the period there has been a clear increase in the number of staff, reaching a peak in 2007. This has meant fewer vacancies. The extra staff were distributed relatively equally over the units. The percentage of staff involved in statistical production has increased from around 80% to 83%.

The gender division of the staff has remained fairly stable across all levels (Equal Opportunities in Eurostat report 2007). In both higher and middle management, around 20% of staff is female; at non-managerial level, the figure is closer to 30%. The fact sheets report that a mentoring programme for female administrators is in place.

During the period under review, various actions were taken to increase the internal productivity of the work at Eurostat. An important factor in this context has been the

implementation of the Single Entry Point (SEP). Other examples taken from the fact sheets include:

- the development and improvement of an internal communication strategy and tools;
- the development of a new intranet portal;
- the maintenance and improvement of CIRCA.

According to various sources (Annual Management Plan 2007, Performance scoreboard 2006/2007), about one third of the data transmission from the Member States takes place through the SEP. This means that around 65% of all transmissions are still taking place via other, mainly electronic, channels such as mail, CD and FTP, which entails risks as regards confidentiality and complicates administration within Eurostat. The introduction of the SEP is highly appreciated by the NSIs, as was clear from the interviews and the survey. The NSIs view the SEP as a useful simplification for both the NSIs and Eurostat. They also maintain that this tool is not used sufficiently and that it should be expanded further.

2.6. Dialogue and interaction between users and partners

The indicator sheets show that since 2005 the number of working group meetings has gradually increased from 117 to 130. Satisfaction with these meetings has remained very high (around 87% in 2006).

The number of grant agreements rose from 319 (€35.148.909) in 2003 to 536 (€60.660.156) in 2005. In 2006, the number fell back to 428 (€3.280.474).

An important issue in the report is the reduction of the burden on the producers of statistics (NSIs). The assessment of what has been achieved in this field is to a large extent based on interviews and on the results of the survey sent to the Member States. The working group on 'Coordination and Programming' and the task force on 'Priority Setting' address the possibilities of reducing the burden and recommend practical measures. These documents and initiatives make it clear that this is a live issue among stakeholders within the ESS and one which is certainly receiving a great deal of attention in the current CSP 2008-2012.

For the time being, however, the NSI are only moderately satisfied with the achievements in this area. A number of NSIs have had to make serious cutbacks in their organisation, whereas demand just keeps increasing. Their view is that many more initiatives can be taken to simplify, modernise and just reduce the production of statistics.

A structural concern arising from the interviews is that there is little direct contact between the NSIs and DGs. The NSIs do not complain about Eurostat performing the difficult task of intermediary between the two, but they still feel that there is a lack insight into each others' wishes and problems, and of mutual fine-tuning. The NSIs would like to have more contact with the DGs at a strategic level. They would also welcome greater involvement of the DGs in the development of statistics, so that DGs would gain a better idea of the costs involved in developing and producing statistics. On the other hand, the DGs are reluctant to do this, as they rely on the coordinating work done by Eurostat.

The mutual lack of understanding of their respective positions and activities takes concrete shape in the opposing views expressed by NSIs and DGs when interviewed on the issue of accepting and meeting new demands. In the survey, 56% of the NSIs state that they are insufficiently informed about the discussions that are taking place between Eurostat and the Commission services on new statistical demands. This creates a feeling within the NSIs that their point of view is not being taken into account in this process. The NSIs have the impression that Eurostat accepts new demands too readily, without considering all the implications for the statistical institutes. On the other hand, the DGs believe Eurostat is too

"soft" on the NSIs in terms of enforcing the requirements. The NSIs therefore advocate a more transparent and clearer process for accepting new requests and turning them into a regulation, and for paying more attention to the implications of this for their work.

2.7. Quality of products and services

Many of the actions listed on the fact sheets for both the production units and the horizontal units within Eurostat fall into the "quality" category. The demand for a more in-depth and detailed examination of the statistics and other quality improvements is constant, and unlikely to decrease. Throughout the evaluation it can be seen that Eurostat and the ESS as a whole have put a lot of emphasis and investment into this, in order to accommodate these requests and raise the overall quality level.

Between 2003 and 2007, some 43 quality reports were produced, and five statistical areas were fully reviewed in terms of quality. Also, one third (12 out of 33) of the new legal acts explicitly include a quality monitoring requirement. Furthermore, the quality aspect has increasingly become a topic of discussion in working group meetings and on the agendas of the Statistical Programme Committee (SPC).

Various initiatives have led to the so-called "Quality assurance framework", which brings together a range of tools and methods to assess, monitor and improve statistical quality. The Code of Practice encompasses institutional and quality principles in the ESS, while the peer reviews performed within the ESS on the implementation of the Code reveal that overall quality has improved significantly. Furthermore, the Eurostat peer review report expresses the widespread appreciation on the part of the review panel and all stakeholders for the commitment and leadership shown by Eurostat on the quality issue.

The Eurostat-wide effort to work on and improve the quality of statistics is undeniable. Therefore, it would be very interesting to assess and disclose the effects of this effort on the various aspects of statistical quality. Uniform, transparent and correct monitoring of the quality of statistics is obviously essential. However, it is this uniformity – in particular – which appears to be creating a major obstacle to the conducting of such an assessment.

The two main general sources on statistical quality - the performance scoreboard (2006/2007) and the quality barometer (2007) - are summaries of quality reports for the different statistical areas. These reports are compiled by different units, who each perform their own monitoring and use differing methods and definitions. These data are thus highly dispersed across different databases, aspects and years, and cannot be compared with any degree of accuracy.

In order to gain an insight into the results of all these efforts to improve quality, an appropriate next step would be to develop a clear and coherent quality monitoring framework, alongside the quality assurance framework. The approach and methods to measure quality should be the same for all parts of Eurostat, and should be used throughout the whole Eurostat organisation.

The evaluator has nevertheless tried to summarize some of the available data on quality. For the Euro indicators, a number of figures on completeness of the data are available. Around 22% of the data series in the Euro indicators do not contain values, and therefore are not available. Of the 78% of the data series that are available, only 1.5% includes missing data. Furthermore, 96% of the Euro indicator data covers a period greater than 5 years. The non-response rate for the different surveys (Labour Force Survey, Structural Business Survey, Structure of Earning Survey) is approximately 20%.

Concerning timeliness, we have found figures on the freshness of the Euro indicators which show that 55% are between 60 and 90 days old. The LFS data are published with an average delay of 116 days after the reference period.

Thanks to the continued attention to quality, none of the DGs question Eurostat's position as the main authority and source when it comes to statistics. However, the DGs do have a lot to say about the quality of the statistics, and have expressed a desire to see improvements. Ongoing work is therefore required in order to cope with a demand which is becoming increasingly sophisticated and complex.

The interviews highlight two structural concerns: both the frequency and the degree of detail of the data are often not high enough. More and more, the Commission services need monthly or weekly data rather than annual figures, in order to be able to react more quickly to all kinds of developments. Furthermore, they need data at lower, more detailed levels, and increasingly even at micro level. Eurostat has difficulties delivering these data because of confidentiality issues - as it is often not permitted to publish individual data - and because of representativeness issues, because statistical samples (and thus the number of respondents) are not constructed to provide robust information at detailed levels. Moreover, the balance between timeliness (frequency) and accuracy/level of detail is a very delicate one. The more quickly statistics have to be produced, the less accurate they are likely to be. While the DGs obviously understand this, it nevertheless remains a problem for them.

Other concerns that are voiced include the user friendliness of the website and NewCronos. It appears that the website and the NewCronos database are difficult for new users to understand and use. Second, the consistency within and between databases could be improved. For instance, each Member State produces price statistics, but these are not available in a consistent form at Eurostat level. Price data are used to produce both the HICP (harmonised index of consumer prices) and purchasing power parities. This work is done in different Eurostat units, with price statistics being spread over two different directorates. Therefore, compiling a comparable overview is a very complicated exercise.

2.8. Monitoring of implementation

There is no framework for monitoring and reporting Eurostat's progress towards attaining the objectives of the 5-year programme. There is some reporting on content in the annual activity reports (AAR), but the link between these annual activity reports and the 5-year programme is weak. This is why, at each evaluation round (mid-term, ex post), information on the progress of this programme has to be collected from the various units. The transparency of Eurostat's activities would be greatly increased if a strategic exercise were to be carried out which involved:

- (i) linking the (operational) objectives of the annual programmes to the (strategic) objectives of the 5-year programme, and then
- (ii) defining key actions and key monitoring indicators.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Main recommendations

LINK

The 5-year programme is designed as a framework programme that sets out a strategic vision for the next five years. It ensures, in conjunction with the annual (working) programmes, that the ESS will continue to adopt a flexible and relevant approach to meet the statistical challenges that are changing over time.

However, in order to improve the transparency of Eurostat's activities, and to ensure that the 5-year programme does indeed provide the necessary reference framework within which the

various Eurostat units have to draw up the annual programmes, these annual programmes should refer explicitly to the 5-year programme.

This explicit reference can be achieved by devising a hierarchy of objectives, i.e. by linking the key operational priorities (in the themes) from the annual programmes to the strategic objectives and titles in the 5-year programme. The evaluator has provided an example of such a hierarchy for the horizontal objectives.

It is also clear that, during a programme period, new developments in society might occur which the 5-year programmes cannot anticipate, and that this may give rise to unexpected new statistical demands. In that case, the annual programmes should be used as a way to adapt to these developments and to cope with the new demands. Therefore, the annual programme may indeed contain issues and/or priorities that cannot be linked to the 5-year programme. We believe it would be appropriate to clarify the reasons for deviating from the 5-year programme in explicit terms, and to provide a clear explanation as to why additional issues and/or priorities should be included in the annual programme.

An explicit reference of this kind will ensure that the combination of the 5-year programme and the annual programmes is used to its full potential as the main strategic driver behind the work. Moreover, a clear link between the operational priorities and the strategic objectives would allow the efficient and transparent monitoring of progress towards the objectives of the 5-year programme.

MONITORING

Within Eurostat there are a number of monitoring activities designed to closely follow up the various plans, including monitoring of data quality, user satisfaction surveys, staff opinion surveys, compliance monitoring, and (website) user monitoring. These initiatives are definitely a sign of good governance.

Two points merit greater attention. First of all, there is no overall monitoring of the 5-year programme or of the achievements towards its objectives. Eurostat's progress towards achieving the objectives of the 5-year programme is only reported on during the (mandatory) evaluation stage. Secondly, the various monitoring activities and initiatives are conducted relatively independently of each other: for example, the quality aspects surveyed differ considerably from statistic to statistic; the various categories of statistics defined in the user satisfaction survey differ from those defined on the website and also from those defined in the performance scoreboard.

Overall monitoring of the 5-year programme can be achieved, as already mentioned above, by establishing a closer link between the 5-year programme and the annual programmes, and subsequently by choosing/defining (from among the many potential candidates) a few key indicators that provide information leading to the achievement of both the operational and - thanks to the link to be established - the strategic objectives. A better streamlining of lower-level monitoring initiatives can be achieved by defining clearer links and greater uniformity between the different operational parts of the organisation.

A more streamlined monitoring of the various independent initiatives, together with an overall “tableau de bord” to follow up Eurostat's activities, will not only simplify reporting requirements, but at the same time improve the complementarity, transparency, comparability and - hence - the visibility of several of the initiatives.

ESS: BALANCING DEMAND AND RESOURCES

The ESS can be characterised as a constant delicate balancing act between its producer and its user sides. Eurostat is at the heart of the ESS and has to fulfil the difficult task of being an

intermediary between the “main requesters” (DGs) and the “main providers” (NSIs) of the statistics. Many instruments (such as ESSnet, derogations, single entry point) have been developed and new structures (e.g. the European Statistical Advisory Committee (ESAC)) put in place to support and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of (the providing side of) the ESS. The parties involved are generally satisfied with the functioning of the various bodies, such as the SPC, working groups and task forces. However, there is still a lot of room for improvement.

On the demand side, the main trend - which is confirmed by the various DGs - is an increase in the demand for statistics (in terms of quantity, level of detail or quality). Increasingly, the Commission's services need frequent and detailed data in order to be able to react to developments of all kinds. Despite all the efforts made to ensure efficiency and effectiveness on the providers' side, there is a limit to the possibilities on the supply side, where the situation is one of growing or increasingly sophisticated and complicated demand. This is confirmed by the NSIs, who are concerned about the balance between the resources at their disposal and the statistical demands and requirements. Moreover, they are not very satisfied with how they are kept informed about the discussions between Eurostat and the Commission Services on the subject of new demands for statistics

This situation calls for either an increase in resources for the producers or a strategic rethink of demand - and probably aspects of both. There are a number of channels to guide a strategic rethinking of demand, and these must be used to provide a context not only for existing demand, but also for new demand: they include priority setting, simplification and burden reduction for existing demands and ex ante impact assessments for new demands. To sound a cautionary note, there are certain forms of burden reduction for the providers of statistics (e.g. enterprises) that may lead to even greater burden creation for the producers (the NSIs), unless the various legislations are adapted accordingly.

These subjects are delicate and difficult, and they will need time; but they are regarded as being of the utmost importance. The ground was prepared during the period 2003-2007 and this aspect is receiving a great deal of attention in the current CSP 2008-2012. Given that tangible results from the working groups and task forces dedicated to these issues are essential to the sustainability of the ESS, we would recommend that sufficient resources should be devoted to them. The concrete proposals for action from these WGs and TFs should be given consideration at the highest levels.

TRUST

Trust between the various stakeholders is fundamental to the proper functioning of the ESS. Eurostat is in the delicate position of being an intermediary between the DGs and the NSIs. Fundamentally the system is made up of interactions between the players involved, who – to some extent – may have opposing interests. The ESS consists of several bodies whose purpose is to stimulate dialogue, and thereby create trust. In recent years, the further development of the ESS and the increase of this trust seem to have gone hand in hand. The survey results provide an excellent illustration of this, as the growth of trust within ESS is as one of the aspects most highly rated by the NSIs.

The DGs' confidence in Eurostat's ability to defend their needs vis-à-vis the NSIs, and - equally - the trust that the NSIs place in Eurostat to defend their aspirations vis-à-vis the DGs, must be intensively nurtured in the light of their common interest in quality statistics.

3.2. Other recommendations

ENLARGEMENT

The main preparations for the enlargement process took place before 2004 and, thus, enlargement during the period 2003-2007 did not pose any problems. The Eurostat units describe the enlargement process as 'smooth', and the new NSIs have likewise expressed their satisfaction with this process.

However, it appears that the process has not yet reached its culminating point, and that the newest Member States - Romania and Bulgaria - deserve the same investment in order to be integrated into the system. Moreover, our own observations reveal that data for these new Member States are not complete on Eurostat's website.

This successful integration into the ESS should also be reflected, during the current programme period, in the availability of data from the new Member States. Investment in the integration of the new NSIs should be continued so as to ensure that the statistics from new Member States are complete and available to users in the (website) databases.

The further integration of new Member States and extension of the availability of data from these countries are essential for two reasons. First of all, a more complete database can only improve the service to users, i.e. both Commission Services and non-institutional users. Secondly, this will be beneficial for the development of the ESS, as increasingly all members are becoming equal partners both in theory and in practice. This enhances the credibility and legitimacy of Eurostat and the ESS as a whole.

QUALITY

The ESS-wide effort to work on and improve the quality of statistics is undeniable. Eurostat has placed a great deal of emphasis on, and efforts and investment into, improving quality; this includes the quality assurance framework, the Code of Practice and surveys to monitor the quality of different statistics. Nevertheless, continued efforts are still required in order to cope with a demand which is becoming increasingly sophisticated and complicated. Thanks to this continuing attention to quality, all DGs regard Eurostat as the main authority when it comes to statistics. Eurostat is the first source they look to when they need data.

Monitoring the quality aspects of the different statistics is essential to the "visibility" of quality. However, the various monitoring activities are carried out by different statistical areas using differing methods and definitions. For example, there are several sources to which one can refer in order to get an idea of data completeness: (1) completeness of data expressed as a percentage of data frequency for NewCronos as a whole, (2) number and percentage of data series available; number and percentage of data series with missing values and length of series in years for Euro-indicators; and (3) average percentage availability of data for dissemination for the Structural Business Statistics in EU25. The approach and methods used to measure quality should be more similar for all parts of Eurostat, and should be used throughout the entire Eurostat organisation.

The development of a clear and coherent quality monitoring framework would be an appropriate next step. Such streamlined monitoring can be defined both alongside, and building on, the quality assurance framework. Uniform (though flexible) quality indicators could considerably advance such harmonisation of quality reporting.

Harmonisation of quality reporting would improve Eurostat's quality image even further, and at the same time contribute to greater credibility and transparency in its relations with users.