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## OPINION

### **of the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB), urging full implementation of the Hellenic Statistical Law (3832/2010) and Greece's commitment on confidence in statistics**

Reliable and relevant statistics are an essential condition for good governance and sound decision-making in democratic societies. Since 2009, the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) has regained the trust of its international partners by notably enhancing the quality of its statistical outputs, in particular its public finance statistics. This work has been carried out despite the difficult resource constraints in Greece and has been supported by EU technical assistance through the Joint Overall Statistical Greek Action Plan (JOSGAP). The commitment and professionalism of Greek statisticians together with the adoption of a modern and comprehensive statistical legislative framework, which reflects best practice, have contributed significantly towards this favourable outcome.

Recognising that considerable progress has been made, ESGAB welcomes the newly-elected Greek Government's pledge to fight corruption and to continue to modernise its public administration, as stated in Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis's letter of February 2015 to the Eurogroup, outlining Greece's proposed reforms. ESGAB welcomes especially the Greek Government's commitment to:

- 'Honour fully the Commitment on Confidence in Statistics, and in particular the institutional independence of ELSTAT, ensuring that ELSTAT has the necessary resources to implement its work programme.
- Guarantee the transparency and propriety of the process of appointment of the ELSTAT President in September 2015, in cooperation with EUROSTAT.'

The progress achieved by ELSTAT can be considered as providing a pioneering example of the type of reform and modernisation that is required in Greece's public administration as a whole. ELSTAT's efforts should therefore continue to be supported. The second annual report of the Good Practice Advisory Committee (GPAC),<sup>1</sup> established under the Hellenic Statistical Law<sup>2</sup>, takes stock of the progress achieved by the Hellenic statistical system since September 2013. In Greece's current context, the achievements made on the commitment to quality and statistical confidentiality are particularly commendable. However, the report also points to a number of critical issues that are also raised in the recently published peer review report<sup>3</sup> on compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice and the coordination role of ELSTAT.

<sup>1</sup> GPAC second annual report, December 2014:

[http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/General/report\\_adv\\_2014\\_EN\\_0.pdf](http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/General/report_adv_2014_EN_0.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Hellenic Statistical Law 3832/2010 (Government Gazette No 38, Issue A

[http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/General/StatLaw3832\\_EN\\_06082014.pdf](http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/General/StatLaw3832_EN_06082014.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Peer review report on compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice and the coordination role of the national statistical institute, March 2015:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/64157/4372828/2015-EL-Report/488eadf4-da69-40db-b48b-884c6ac4937c>



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In particular, the two reports found that there is still a distinct absence of a 'wider cultural acceptance and understanding amongst politicians, administrators, the media and indeed the public at large of what professional statistical independence actually entails in practice' and that the risk of a serious deterioration of the situation remains. As a result of the long-running legal battle over the methodological competence and independence of ELSTAT and its President, the institution has frequently been called into question in public. Such issues undermine the work that has gone into building capacity and trust in the Hellenic statistical system in recent years.

ESGAB, as the body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice with the aim of enhancing professional independence, integrity and accountability, would like to highlight a number of concerns that are mentioned in the two reports mentioned above:

- The principle of professional independence must be implemented in practice. The relevant legislation and rules are in place but they need to be fully implemented, with the clear and active support of the government. The forthcoming amendment of Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European statistics will further emphasise the role and position of the heads of national statistical institutes, by adding a requirement that the procedure for appointing institute heads is transparent and based on professional criteria.
- The Greek Government's commitment on confidence in statistics must be respected and put into practice, particularly in relation to ensuring institutional independence and providing adequate financial and other resources. More specifically, ELSTAT must be able to recruit and maintain a sufficiently qualified workforce.
- The wording of ELSTAT's mandate must be explicit and must be upheld in practice, especially as regards access to administrative records that could improve efficiency and quality while reducing the burden on respondents.
- The work and role of GPAC as established in law should continue and its members for the next term of office should be appointed without delay.
- Principles of quality monitoring and quality assurance, as established in Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 and the European Statistics Code of Practice, must be respected. This includes the requirement that European statistics produced in accordance with Article 338 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union comply with the statistical principles laid down in that article, regardless of national arrangements and the national distribution of tasks. ELSTAT is the national coordinator and the contact point for Eurostat on this issue.

ESGAB agrees with GPAC and the recommendation in the peer review that the Greek Government should take swift action to implement the European Statistics Code of Practice and honour in full its commitment on confidence in statistics on which a report by the Greek government to the Commission is due since March 2014. ESGAB expects Eurostat to continue reporting on the matters highlighted in this Opinion and will closely follow developments in this area.

