

Statement of the Members of the European Statistical System on their commitment to professional independence of statistical authorities and the credibility of European statistics and on statistics in Greece

The importance of European statistics in supporting evidence-based decision-making at both national and Union levels is without question. The professional independence and integrity of statistical authorities is one of the absolute pre-conditions for ensuring high-quality and credible statistics. This was confirmed by the European Parliament and the Council on 29 April 2015, by the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2015/759 amending Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European statistics.

We, the undersigned, who collectively, as members of the European Statistical System Committee, are responsible for overseeing the production of European Statistics in compliance with the highest professional standards throughout the European Union, wish to express our commitment to the statistical principles set out in Regulation (EC) No 223/2009, as well as in the European Statistics Code of Practice.

Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 provides a framework for the development, production and dissemination of independent European statistics. The amendments now introduced in the Regulation arise from the need to strengthen the European Statistical System following serious interference with the professional independence of the statistical institute in one specific country, namely Greece, revealed by the end of 2009.

The objectives of the amendments are to strengthen the European Statistical System and improve the credibility of the statistics produced by it. We are convinced that the System now stands stronger and better protected. The amended Regulation strengthens the role and position of National Statistical Institutes and of their heads. By doing so it protects the independence of all statistical authorities and of the statistics they produce.

The integrity of official statistics and the functioning of the European Statistical System must be continuously ensured. We are committed to defending these aspects under the amended Regulation (EC) No 223/2009. This means defending the System as a whole, also by defending its various components.

Therefore, we confirm our concern with regard to the situation in Greece, where the statistical institute, ELSTAT, as well as some of its staff members, including the current President of ELSTAT, continue to be questioned in their professional capacity. There are ongoing political debates and investigatory and judicial proceedings related to actions taken by ELSTAT and to statistics which have repeatedly passed the quality checks applied by Eurostat to ensure full compliance with Union legislation.

We acknowledge the clear improvements within the Greek statistical system that have been achieved during the past five years, illustrated notably by Eurostat's consistent publication of Greek deficit and debt data without reservations nor amendments since November 2010. However, we are aware that ELSTAT still has many challenges to face to maintain the institution's independence given the above-mentioned political debates and judicial proceedings and the forthcoming recruitment of a new President of ELSTAT. We welcome, therefore, the reinforced provisions on professional independence in Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 whereby the recruitment of the new President must follow a transparent procedure and be based on professional criteria only.

The European Statistical System will very closely observe the further developments in the Greek statistical system.