



32nd Meeting
Monday, 2 December 2013 at 10:45

European Commission
54, rue Joseph II, Brussels
Meeting Room J-54 2/186

Minutes

Doc ESGAB/2013/187
The Secretariat

Minutes from the 32nd ESGAB meeting

held on 2 December 2013

Participants:

Mr Wieser (Chair)

Ms Epler, Mr Kopsch, Ms Martín-Guzmán, Ms O'Hara, Mr Outrata (members)

Mr Radermacher, Ms Bohatá, (observers)

Ms Pereira de Sá, Ms Lehtimäki, Ms Göbel (Secretariat)

Excused: Mr Charpin

1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

2. Exchange of views with ESGAB like bodies

Greece, Good Practice Advisory Committee (GPAC), represented by Mr O'Hanlon

In November 2012 the independent advisory committee was established under Greek statistical legislation comprising five members. Each of the following parties has nominated one expert - the Hellenic Parliament, Eurostat, ESGAB, the ESSC and the Personal Data Protection Authority. Having foreigners as members of GPAC has not caused difficulties in its operations. The task of this committee is solely to prepare an annual report on the implementation of principles 1 to 6 (institutional framework) of the European Statistics Code of Practice in the Hellenic Statistical System. The GPAC has no powers in relation to the management and organisation of EL.STAT or in relation to the collection, production and dissemination of EL.STAT statistics.

The Committee met in plenary session three times; in February, June and in September 2013. At the February meeting the Committee decided that it should limit its first report to an examination of EL.STAT only. The other statistical agencies, and the functioning of the overall statistical system, should be reviewed in its next report in 2014. The Committee formally adopted the present report in its September meeting.

The report acknowledges that EL.STAT has progressed in adopting highest international standards and that in general the Hellenic statistical law is good. However, the implementation of the law in practice faces severe challenges in the environment where EL.STAT operates. The report draws attention to the adverse impact of the continuing court proceedings against the EL.STAT President (over two years with no sign of a resolution) and the absence of effective and consistent support to EL.STAT by the Greek government and authorities. Also, statistical methodological decisions stipulated in EU regulations are being challenged in the Hellenic courts.

Malta Statistics Authority (MSA), represented by Mr Leone-Ganado

Mr Leone-Ganado presented his professional background and how the MSA is operating. The MSA is divided in three areas: high level controls, better governance of the NSO, improve training of staff and IT. The new board (since July 2013) retained only two members of the previous board. The MSA board is composed of experts with a background in statistics, to strengthen certain aspects of data collection.

In summer this year the Minister of Finance spotted some unclear figures in the GDP numbers and launched an investigation. It turned out to be an error caused by a human mistake in a spread sheet to calculate national accounts

As Malta is such a small country the National Statistical Office faces difficulties and disadvantages with obvious limitations as regards to expertise, capacity, and other operational issues.

While access to micro data is strictly regulated, the MSA wishes to improve collaboration between the national central bank and the NSO. The MSA also seeks to improve transparency e.g. by enhancing ex-ante and ex-post assessments of statistical releases and making better and public use of breach registries.

France, Official Statistics Authority (OSA), represented by Mr Champsaur

The production of the statistics on the number of jobseekers by Pôle Emploi is being brought in line with the European Statistics Code of Practice.

The extension of the calendar of pre-announced indicators of the official statistical service (Insee) marked an important step in 2012. The professional independence of the producers will thus be enhanced.

The Directorate General for Public Finances (DGFIP) wishes to facilitate researchers' access to individual fiscal data. This requires a legislative amendment. The individual fiscal data will be provided under conditions that guarantee strict protection of statistical confidentiality.

Progress has been made to improve the quality of delinquency statistics. Some data have been collected by the Ministry of Interior and by the Ministry of Justice. The OSA is satisfied that the Ministry of Interior will have the sole responsibility for these statistics and will create a statistical service for establishing them

UK Statistics Authority, represented by Mr Laux

The Statistics Authority was created in 2008. Compliance with the Code, introduced in 2009, became a binding duty on the bodies that produce the statistics. The Authority has published more than 260 reports covering over 1,000 sets of statistics, setting out requirements for greater Code compliance and suggestions for further development. Pursuit of the Authority's aims requires separation of functions - in particular, that those involved in the production of statistics are not involved in the statutory assessment of those statistics against the Authority's Code of Practice. The Authority has different powers to pursue its strategic aims in the different parts of the statistical system.

Five noteworthy developments relevant to ESGAB and other similar bodies are:

- The establishment of a 'Good Practice Team' reporting to the National Statistician, to embed across the Government Statistical Service some of the systemic issues that have arisen during the first five years of the assessment regime
- The recent publication of a report by the Authority which is intended to inform the appropriate use of statistics during the forthcoming public debate about Scottish independence (ahead of the Referendum in September 2014).
- An increasing focus on the quality of data originating from administrative sources linked to crime, health and education and subsequently used in the production of official statistics. The immediate focus is on the reliability of police recorded crime data..
- The close interest of the UK Parliamentary committee to which the Authority reports – it is midway through a series of about a dozen inquiries into official statistics, e.g. crime, open data, communication of statistics, regional statistics etc.

□A new role for the Statistics Authority, providing strategic governance and Parliamentary accountability for the work of new Administrative Data Research Network (a partnership between national statistical authorities and the Economic and Social Research Council)

Switzerland, Ethics Board for Public Statistics represented by Mr Brüngger

Switzerland has a nationally customised form of Code of Practice, the Swiss Public Statistics Charter. The Ethics Council for Public Statistics has no legal basis, therefore power to intervene if misuse of data has been detected is limited. The Board focuses on promotion of and advice on the Code compliance. Recommendations from ESGAB regarding the legal form of ESGAB-like bodies would be appreciated. The future work of the Ethics Council focuses on creating a policy for pre-release access and improving training and awareness of Swiss statisticians about the Charter.

3. Outline for a peer review of Eurostat

The programme is kept for 28-30 April in a format that allows all members to be involved. The programme will be complemented in the January meeting. ESGAB accepted in principle the idea of having one observer from the NSI. However, some basic rules about the observer's involvement are yet to be agreed.

Recent developments

The meeting of the European Statistical Forum on 15 November 2013 took place. On the agenda were issues such as cooperation in the field of balance of payments, Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) and peer reviews. The ESCB will be subject to a peer review exercise based on their own quality assurance system and the audit mechanisms will be monitored by external people.

The Task Force Vision 2.0 has its next meeting on 10 December in Prague. Four alternatives ranging from no cooperation to all national statistical services becoming a department of Eurostat will be discussed. A final report will be submitted to the May ESSC meeting.

Discussion on the revision of the Regulation 223/09 continues to be challenging. The Commission agreed to work on a compromise text with the Council and the Member States to start a new discussion with the EP.

4. Time and place of the next meetings

The next meeting takes place on Monday 13 January 2014 in Brussels, including an exchange of views with France, Slovenia and Croatia.