



European Statistical
Advisory Committee

41st Meeting

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13.30 – 17.30

In Person Meeting

Brussels

ALBERT BORSCHETTE Conference Centre

Room AB 304

Minutes

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1. Welcome to the new Members and adoption of the agenda

The ESAC Chair, **Ms. Roxane Silberman**, welcomed three new members, including **Ms. Angelika Becker** from BUSINESSEUROPE, **Ms. Rachel Lancry Beaumont** from the Committee of the Regions, and **Mr. Wojciech Rafal Wiewiorowski** from the European Data Protection Supervisor. **Mr. Wojciech Rafal Wiewiorowski (Absent)** from the European Data Protection Supervisor was replaced by **Ms. Georgia Bakatsia**. The Chair also welcomed **Ms. Vitaliana Rondonotti** from the European Central Bank (DG Statistics), who participated in her first in-person meeting.

The agenda was adopted without changes.

2. Feedback from Eurostat on recent developments in the ESS

The Director General of Eurostat, Ms. Mariana Kotzeva, explained that in the context of approaching the end of the current EU political cycle due to the European elections. Eurostat is engaged heavily in negotiations of the EP and the Council on three important statistical regulations. The first one refers to the Commission proposal to amend the Regulation (EC) 223/2009 on European statistics. The proposed revision focuses on ensuring sustainable access to privately held data for the development and production of European official statistics, faster reaction by the European statistical system in times of crises, fostering data sharing among ESS partners and promoting innovation and statistics under development. The aim is to adopt the change in the Regulation (EC) 223/2009 at the end of the term of current EP in spring 2024. The second legal dossier concerns the Commission proposal for Regulation ESOP regulation, on European statistics on population and housing including the future population censuses. The third regulation concerns European environmental-economic accounts. It proposes adding three new accounting models - on forestry, environmental subsidies and ecosystem services.

The DGs of Eurostat also informed that the European Statistical System is working to provide better metrics and measurement on emerging topics like greening of economy and finance, environmental impact, and digitalisation. Eurostat could report more systematically on selected topics and make more detailed presentations. The proposal on Regulation 223, which includes a dialogue for defining requirements and efficient data acquisition, is a good balance for the private sector. The ECB also provided an opinion on the proposal.

3. Topical presentation on Experimental statistics

By way of introduction, the Chair indicated that as a follow-up to the discussions at the last ESAC meeting, the Executive Board of ESAC had discussed with Eurostat the proposal of having regular presentations on important developments at ESAC meetings. This approach will enable ESAC to best prepare its opinion on Annual work programs. It will complement the activities of ESAC members attending the ESS Directors groups meetings. The topic to be presented today reflects the last ESAC opinion which highlighted the significance of experimental statistics.

Mr. Albrecht Wirthmann (Head of Unit A5 at Eurostat) outlined the concept of the experimental statistics and the developments so far. Experimental statistics are produced within the quality framework set by EU statistical legislation and European Code of practice. However, these statistics do not meet all the quality criteria necessary for official statistics. The term experimental statistics is used to emphasize experimentation and the need to received feedback during the development process, as they represent innovations in the statistical context. In other words, experimental statistics are those that are in the research and development phase and have not yet fully reached maturity in terms of meeting quality criteria. The goal of publishing experimental statistics is to seek users' feedback and gain information about the needs for these statistics, the quality of these statistics, and users' priorities. The ultimate goal is to improve the statistics and integrate them in the regular statistical production.

Experimental statistics are often produced using new methodologies and data sources, balancing important criteria like timeliness and accuracy. During times of crises, timeliness becomes an important criterion. These statistics address new phenomena by producing new indicators and integrating data from different sources. Some experimental statistics also use new classifications based on these data sources, ensuring the accuracy of the results.

Experimental statistics are a valuable tool for meeting user needs and communicating innovation activities. However, these statistics may not be as comprehensive or accurate as official statistics, and they may cover few Member States. Despite their potential to coexist with official statistics, experimental statistics are not a necessary preliminary stage for their development, production, and dissemination. Their wide definition and different life cycles make them valuable for various users.

Some of the experimental statistics are based on new legislation, while others are one-off exercises to test user opinions. Some are a response to user requests or urgent innovation, such as during the COVID crisis. In principle, some experimental statistics are expected to be promoted to official statistics once they meet quality criteria. However, the transition to official statistics is often a matter of domain experts' statistical judgment, and it is expected that limitations that classify the statistics as experimental are resolved before moving to official statistics.

In 2017, Eurostat officially began producing experimental statistics as part of the DiGiCom project (Digital Communication project). Discussions arose about whether statistical offices should publish experimental statistics to differentiate between official and experimental statistics, which was seen as a potential threat to user trust. However, an agreement was reached, and experimental statistics were introduced to communicate with users and meet user demand for specific types of statistics. Since then, most statistical offices have started publishing experimental statistics, with over half of national statistical institutes and two EFTA countries participating in the Eurostat hub on experimental statistics. This hub leads to national pages where national experimental statistics are published.

Experimental statistics have been a crucial aspect of the statistical field during times of crisis, as they have allowed for the rapid development of official statistics and the creation of new experimental statistics in urgent demand. This has led to a rebalancing of quality criteria, with timeliness becoming the most important quality criteria. Users are also encouraged to be aware that some statistics provide recent data, but their detail may not be large enough for careful treatment. Collaboration on experimental statistics has resulted in the publication of

these statistics on their own website on experimental statistics and their inclusion at the Eurostat experimental statistics website (Hub). Surveys and intensified use of new data sources have enabled the production of quick experimental statistics that support policy making during recent crises.

The ESS Statistical Recovery Dashboard includes existing statistics and new ones, including four new indicators: monthly excess mortality, monthly flight number, air quality, and quarterly greenhouse gas emissions. The dashboard also accelerated the release of new indicators stipulated by European business statistics regulation, such as monthly production and services, quarterly business registrations, and bankruptcy authorization. These indicators were already foreseen in legislation but were prioritized for their publication and production on the dashboard. The new experimental statistics were crucial in managing the crisis effectively.

The transition from experimental statistics to regular production is a challenging process. To bridge this gap, Eurostat is developing criteria and mechanisms to help production units to make transition from the experimental phase to the production phase. Eurostat aims to select use cases for new statistics, labelling them as statistics under developments, and develop them into official statistics.

The Chair thanked Mr Wirthmann for this very clear presentation and opened the discussion with a question on the status of these experimental statistics and the balance between normal statistics and experimental statistics which are linked to an approach to innovation in Regulation 223, in which not all countries participate.

Mr. Albrecht Wirthmann expected that not all new statistics will go through the experimental phase, but experimental statistics are being developed. The development of new statistics is linked to innovation, and strengthening these mechanisms would strengthen the European statistical system's innovation capacity. More statistics are under development through working groups, task forces. Strengthening recognition through statistical law and convincing Member States to participate could help increase the number of statistics under development.

The Director-General of Eurostat of Eurostat highlighted the importance of voluntary participation in experimental statistics. The decision to embark on the journey of experimentation is typically made in the ESS Director's groups. Eurostat makes proposals based on a solid justification reflecting user needs and EU priorities. The goal is to provide statistics that are of interest to as many countries as possible and that are of EU value.

The Director-General of Eurostat underlined that experimental statistics are published on Eurostat's website with the agreement of Member States concerned. Eurostat has always tried to involve as many countries as possible in the process, and the number of participating countries has significantly increased since 2017.

The Director-General of Eurostat explained that to make innovation and experimental statistics as an indispensable part of Eurostat and the ESS work, a structured policy must be developed and agreed upon by the European Statistical System Committee. This policy should involve a separate chapter, in the annual work program. It should describe the process of selecting areas for experimental statistics (e.g. the ESS Director's groups can propose certain topics for experimentation and the European Statistical System Committee can decide on final list). Documentation of the process is crucial, and it should be a procedure that is followed by the Committee. This discussion at ESAC is relevant as it helps to formalise the process of experimental statistics.

Mr. Claudiu Herteliu praised Eurostat for the nice presentation. He stated that in Romania, the Academy of Science defines what experimental statistics for academia means and it is something different than statistics under development.

Mr. Albrecht Wirthmann stated that the new legislation addresses statistics under development, and there has been ongoing discussion about the wording used.

Ms. Angelika Becker highlighted the importance of experimental statistics in Germany. The federal statistics office is actively involved in this area, but the implementation is challenging due to the complex legal framework. She is seeking inspiration from Europe and the group's work. She also questions whether experimental statistics can prevent the growing gap between regulatory and economic statistics. The Commission requests more data from companies about energy-related products, but most companies are unable to provide this information. She suggested that experimental statistics could be used to show what is possible and what is not possible, allowing stakeholders to determine which data can be provided by enterprises and which data not.

Mr. Maurizio Vichi thanked Mr Albrecht Wirthmann for the interesting presentation but mentioned that smart statistics which used to be an important topic was not included. The name "experimental statistics" indeed appears in the statistical literature. Why not to use statistics in progress? Or maybe progressive statistics in evolution?

Mr. Maurizio Vichi underlined that the organization of the process is crucial for producing accurate statistics, as it prevents the creation of statistics with varying quality levels. Experimental statistics are typically produced by national statistical institutes, but they can also be produced by other actors like ONAs or private institutions in conjunction.

Ms. Marie Bohata recalled the concept of quality labelling, which was coined at the 2010 Helsinki quality conference. She was inspired by the ECB, who published experimental statistics. The goal was to demonstrate the best quality for policy making, such as the Maastricht criteria. Ms. Bohata was pleased with the production of experimental statistics but was surprised by Eurostat's distinction between European statistics and experimental statistics. She believed that European statistics, including experimental ones, were different from those produced by other agencies that did not adhere to fundamental principles, such as confidentiality. The revised regulation still includes the idea of putting experimental statistics under the umbrella of European statistics, making them also European statistics.

Mr. Albrecht Wirthmann discussed the naming of experimental statistics, a topic that has been debated for years. After numerous proposals, the decision was made to use statistics under development as a future term for these types of statistics.

Mr. Albrecht Wirthmann's understanding of the question regarding the gap between industry official statistics and testing was unclear. There will be two levels of official statistics: official statistics and experimental official statistics, which will be regularly disseminated. Quality criteria will be improved to meet sufficient standards for the statistics under development. Future experimentation, especially with Eurostat's use of new data sources, will be encouraged. Collaboration with private partners and universities and academia will also be involved. A mechanism for development and testing will be in place to ensure certain data sources can be used for official statistics production.

Mr. Albrecht Wirthmann also stated that Eurostat is developing smart statistics based on data sources that are byproducts of digitalisation and the digital economy. The term "European

official statistics" is limited to European statistics, as there is no notion of official statistics in the European statistics law. This means that Eurostat is bound to European statistics, which also includes the concept of official statistics.

Mr. Athanasios Thanopoulos representing producers, expressed pride in the fact that 16 Member States and two from EFTA countries are part of the experimental statistics HuB. This success is attributed to its smooth evolution and the need for topicality and timeliness. Experimental statistics allow meeting urgent user needs without undergoing lengthy legislative trials or dialogues. The fundamental principles of confidentiality and timeliness are followed, making it a best seller in Greece. The experimental statistics, primarily focusing on start-to-business statistics, are used by journalists to predict GDP components due to their granular nature. The system has proven successful due to its instinctive nature and the need for timely data.

Mr. Athanasios Thanopoulos appreciated the lack of different quality levels in European Statistics, as it could have been a grading system. There is no real notion of quality levels, pertaining to statistics under development. This is like statistics that have not yet reached maturity to be a full-fledged statistical product. The construct allowed the chief statistician to provide users with information that would not have been possible otherwise, as they would have to meet all requirements through the standard way. However, this information would remain in their drawers, preventing users from accessing the information they desire. Ultimately, the goal is to provide users with the information they need at right the right moment.

Ms. Rachel Lancry Beaumont, from a different perspective, believed the use of data in policymaking is exciting and useful. She sees the attraction of speed, access to private data, and innovation as key factors. However, she raises concerns about the potential for citizens to be concerned about the use of data for rapid policy decisions. Eurostat's Director General mentioned the COVID crisis as a good example, and she noted that during the crisis, concerns about the use of data in certain Member States and regions were evident.

Mrs. Rachel Lancry Beaumont wanted to ask about governance. She assumed that there have been consultations and that local and regional levels and citizens have been involved. But how do you see the future? From a local and regional perspective, but also as a citizen, it is important to know what the checks and balances are. So that was her first question: what's the governance and how are we going to reassure citizens in the ongoing use? She thinks we need governance. We need it not only at the national level, but also at the other levels, but she can see that there might be kickbacks and concerns.

Mrs. Rachel Lancry Beaumont inquired about the involvement of countries outside the EU, such as the US and Australia, in the process. She also expressed interest in the name of the initiative and the logo, particularly the one with a test tube in the middle. She suggested that the abbreviation "SUD" should not be used, as sustainable urban development is already taken.

The Chair inquired about the median coverage for each experiment in 16 countries, suggesting it might be four or five.

Mr. Albrecht Wirthmann clarified that experimental statistics conducted in 16 countries do not necessarily mean that only these countries are covered. National needs dictate the coverage of these statistics, and there is no requirement to cover all European countries. However, when published on the Eurostat website, Eurostat aims to cover all countries of the

European Union. The participation in experimental statistics differs from the coverage of countries in statistical publications, as most Eurostat statistics cover all European countries.

The Director-General of Eurostat expressed gratitude to all participants for their diverse perspectives on the subject matter.

The Director-General of Eurostat explained that the construction of European statistics, as laid down in the Regulation on European Statistics, involves three stages: development, production, and dissemination. The existing regulation does not mention development, which was a hidden process involving understanding technologies, creating questionnaires, and making samples. However, during the development phase, Eurostat used to publish the results of feasibility studies or flash estimates for different purposes. For instance, Eurostat began by testing flash poverty estimates or modelling poverty estimates, as hard data was not yet available. The testing was needed to ensure that the output was plausible and could be used with all the quality limitations and caveats. With the full support of the countries, Eurostat included a chapter on the development of statistics in the amended law, explaining that development is one of the three stages of statistical production. Eurostat works on statistics under development because this corresponds to the development phase and is not yet in regular production, but Eurostat wants to publish the results of its work because even if they are not yet mature, the statistics could be quite useful. Immature could be understood in a methodological sense, but immature could also be understood as the lack of full coverage of countries. To produce some information, one needs access to data. For example, to produce a flash estimate of GDP based on financial transactions from credit cards access to the aggregate data on financial transactions are needed.

The Director-General of Eurostat has emphasised the importance of including “Statistics under development” chapter in the Regulation (EC) 223/2009 on European statistics, as it provides framework for the participation of the Member States and basis for secure funding for innovative projects.

The Director-General of Eurostat explained that in terms of ESS governance, nothing will change. The participation in experimental and innovative projects will continue to be on voluntary basis. The difference will be that statistics under development as an important European statistics products, will be visually delineated in the annual working program. Similarly, to producing statistics of GDP, Eurostat must mention the focus of the innovation program and the statistics under development in the work programme to make them visible. But in terms of decision-making, nothing will change. The question is how users could now provide an opinion not only about the production side, but also about the innovation side and statistics under development? For example, where do users think that statistics under development should focus in the years to come?

The Director-General of Eurostat added that nothing will change in terms of governance as far as other national statistical authorities are concerned. All statistics under development could be produced by those who produce European statistics, i.e. NSIs and other national authorities. The next stage is to reflect on whether these statistics under development could closely involve researchers or scientific communities and even cooperate with the private sector. It was too revolutionary to be a legal change so soon. There is nothing to prevent Eurostat from now describing the statistics under development in more detail each year in the work programme, and to search for more active cooperation with researchers and forge partnerships with some private data source providers.

The Director-General of Eurostat clarified that experimental statistics involve a voluntary participation and joint projects under EU-level programs. The challenge is to identify common factors and useful data for users across as many countries as possible, while countries have their own experimental statistics. The goal is to provide comprehensive data for users and in as many countries as possible.

The Chair thanked the Eurostat Director General and the participants for the discussion and the many questions on the future development and status of these experimental statistics. The Chair suggested that the ESAC should become more involved in the development of this topic, follow discussions with users and receive regular updates on developments, such as the transition from experimentation to implementation.

The Director-General of Eurostat proposed three options for involving ESAC in the process of developing statistics under development and innovation agenda. The first is to contribute to the development of a policy document outlining the entire process, which will be discussed with the European Statistical System Committee. The second is to make the innovation part of the annual work programme more visible, as ESAC provides an annual opinion on the program. Eurostat could show ESAC the innovation part and consider its relevance in the opinion. The third option is for ESAC members to provide feedback on the product during Directors' Group meetings, or by contacting researchers. This would provide valuable feedback on the specific product and contribute to Eurostat's overall strategy.

The Chair thanks the Director-General for her excellent proposals and conclusions.

4. ESAC work planning - Identification of key development topics for the next work program to be presented to ESAC at the 2024 meetings.

The Chair explained that the idea is to have regular topical presentations, such as the one at this meeting, to improve the way ESAC delivers opinions and to discuss with Eurostat the important issues that ESAC would need to address for its annual opinion. We are approaching a turning point, as there will be a mid-term review of the multiannual programme and very soon the starting point for discussing the next programme. The Chair asked Members for suggestions regarding topical presentations.

Mr. Peter Van Der Heijden would be interested in statistics dealing with the Green Deal.

Ms. Maria João Valente Rosa was interested in migration statistics, including refugees.

Ms. Angelika Becker suggested a topic on evaluation for structural business statistics, energy statistics or environmental statistics.

Ms. Pervenche Berès mentioned the homeless. She raised the question of having the same definition of someone who died from COVID, as there was no harmonised picture of how to count people who died from COVID or from other causes.

The Chair suggested to define rather large topics and asked the Director General of Eurostat on which topics Eurostat would particularly like to have an ESAC opinion.

Mrs. Florence Thome spoke on behalf of Mrs Rachel Lancry Beaumont, who had to leave the meeting earlier. The Committee of the Regions did not have much time to make proposals but was considering doing so later in the year. Some ideas related to cohesion policy or considerations beyond GDP were raised.

Ms. Marie Bohata thought it would be very interesting to know more about the impact of artificial intelligence on statistical production.

The Chair suggested to take into account the timetable, i.e. the progress of discussions with Eurostat and when it would be important to have a discussion with the ESAC.

The Director-General of Eurostat thought that all these issues are relevant. The ESAC Executive Board would need to discuss what kind of areas need to be addressed. One topic could be the Green Deal. One could add the measurement of digitalisation and the impact of digitalisation on life, on business, etc. It would make sense to have overall presentations, although the topics might be too broad. ESAC Members mentioned hard-to-reach groups or homeless people, and artificial intelligence. These are relevant issues, and they have different aspects.

The Chair raised the question of possible improvements in the presentation of the annual work program, an Excel spreadsheet that ESAC received for the preparation of ESAC opinion. There are some places in the table where one can see that there is, for example, a project in development that is practically at the end while some other projects are starting. One possible action would be to complement this table with links to additional documents describing what has been achieved, where the project stands, etc.

The Director-General of Eurostat suggested that Eurostat should approach its presentation differently, focusing on specific priorities and providing an overview. One major issue for the coming years is the impact on business statistics, as sustainability requirements are becoming increasingly more important. It is strategic to have an exchange with business stakeholders, as official statistics and short-term statistics often do not consider sustainability. The dialogue with businesses is crucial, as it provides valuable feedback for the business community, the ECB, and other stakeholders related to greening and financing. This topic aligns with the Green Deal topic and should be a starting point for Eurostat's efforts. The goal is not regulatory but to provide valuable feedback for the business community.

The Chair said that ESAC will have to establish priorities. Some topics could also be included in the annual workshops and in the conference with statistical stakeholders. Members were invited to send contributions by email. In terms of timing, the Chair thought that ESAC needs to have this discussion very quickly with the Executive Board and see what it can do and come back to ESAC with a proposal.

Ms. Marie Bohata suggested that, under the sustainability umbrella, the issue of ESG reporting and potential data sources from it might also be a topic for the ECB and how the statisticians could benefit from this huge amount of information.

The Chair thanked the participants and stressed the importance of regular follow-up of important issues such as experimental statistics discussed during the meeting or the health issues discussed at the ESAC workshop. She suggested short presentations as an option for updates.

5. ESAC and the National Council workshop.

The Chair asked members for their feedback on the seminar and invited them to make some decisions for the future. Some proposals were discussed during the workshop. The Chair

suggested that when ESAC has online meetings, ESAC would find it useful and feasible to invite interested National User Councils to attend this part of the meeting. From the presentations made during the seminar, it was felt that National User Councils don't have a clear understanding of what is going on at European level. ESAC can invite other people to its meetings, so it seemed possible to invite the NUCs.

Mr. Peter Van Der Heijden was very happy about the introduction and was a bit afraid that these meetings would not attract all these experts. It seemed also that since the NUCs do not know what is happening in other countries, these seminars are interesting for them too. He was even more inclined to organise these meetings in combination with ESAC meetings.

The Chair thought that it is one thing to have a workshop once a year, but it would be better to involve people on an ongoing basis. She will try to implement this, particularly when the meetings are online as it is easier.

Ms. Maria João Valente Rosa thought that the last sessions were very interesting and very useful. But there was not enough time to discuss all topics in depth. As for the presentations, it would be useful to publish them on the ESAC website, just to share the experience. The last suggestion is to have these events on a more regular basis, perhaps once a year.

The Chair said that ESAC would need the agreement of the authors of the presentations, but the idea was really to put them on the website.

Ms. Biruta Sloka said that she had spoken informally with a head of unit at Eurostat, and it was confirmed that such meetings are extremely important because it gets feedback and sees that it is on the right track. Eurostat also gets an indication if there is something that needs to be adjusted.

Ms. Marie Bohata agreed with everything that had been said and wondered whether we could not think of inviting the representatives of the National User Councils to the Conference of Statistical Stakeholders. This was done in Rome, so perhaps it could become a normal practice to organise a meeting with the NUCS every time. It would somehow encourage people to be more active if they could see how important it is for them to share experiences and be inspired by others.

The Chair would not be in favour of linking the National User Council workshop to this conference due to a timing issue. Usually, people can't stay for very long. It could be an additional meeting or initiative and then ESAC might have to think about what the specificity of meeting with the NUCs during the CESS could be.

Ms. Vitaliana Rondonotti explained that one aspect that would help is if the meeting documentation on new or topics not necessarily familiar to all participants is available sufficiently in advance of these meetings, e.g. a week before, so to have a more fruitful discussion of the group. Also, if there are topics that need more time to discuss, then this may be better addressed in a physical or face-to-face meeting, to be chosen once a year. For other issues like more debriefing or updates from both sides, virtual online meeting would be perfectly fine.

The Chair underlined that the preparation of the NUCs seminar required a lot of work over several months. It raises the problem of the resources of the ESAC Secretariat and of more involvement of ESAC members and more collective work, especially in deciding on topics and making suggestions for the work programme. There is a lack of resources to organise these

workshops and events such as the CESS. In the end, the workshop was a success, which was not obvious at the beginning.

Mr Maurizio Vichi mentioned that the link within the National User Councils, could be made more visible in the sense that half a page presentation for each NUC would be published on the ESAC website. This will make the NUCs more visible and persuade them to give information on a voluntary basis.

The Chair agreed.

6. CESS conference.

The Chair introduced the item. The last CESS conference was held in Rome. The timeframe is rather short as the conference is to be held in the autumn. The last conference was linked to the European Statistical Day. In 2024, there will be an ESSC Committee meeting and a DGINS conference from 23 to 25 October in Estonia, which might be a problem for organising the CESS conference back-to-back with the ESD just before it.

The Director-General of Eurostat stated that Eurostat is ready to discuss resources with its partners, i.e. the ECB and the host country.

The Chair said that time was very short for the preparation of this type of conference. She had made a first contact and asked the French National Statistical Institute if it would be happy to be a partner and host the conference with the French National Central Bank and then some local partners.

Mr. Maurizio Vichi, a key figure in the organisation of past CESS conferences, explained that since 2014, ESAC, the European Central Bank, Eurostat, the national central bank, the national statistical institute, the national statistical society, and FenStats have all participated. The CESS conferences are held every two years, except in 2020 due to the COVID. The last year conference saw 300 participants. Attendance is free, and there are two main financial supporters, ESAC and the ECB. Additional funding may be available for the National Statistical Institute.

The Chair still expected to receive suggestions for possible partners and the theme of the CESS. Once it is decided who will be the partners of the conference, the process involves the setup of a Steering Committee and a Scientific Committee.

Mr. Maurizio Vichi added that, in general, each time we have a scientific committee made up of representatives of the partners, the participating university, and the national statistical institutes. Then there is a local organisation committee, which includes Eurostat and the European Central Bank. In general, there is no theme for the conference because it is a general conference that covers many areas. The conference also has the peculiarity that it is a stakeholders' conference. So, the stakeholders are divided into three groups, which are the users, the producers and also the academia. This should be maintained, not to overlap with other conferences that Europe has dedicated to methodology or the NTTS conference. General sessions should be organised with one person coming from the users, one person coming from the producers and one person coming from the academia, to have these three different viewpoints. That approach should be maintained.

The Chair explained that the contact point for the European Central Bank still had to be confirmed. There was a possibility that the French statistical office INSEE could be the local partner. Based on a first discussion, the Director General of INSEE had shown interest. He would like to involve the Banque de France, but this was not yet confirmed. The conference could be hosted by Banque de France, a beautiful building in Paris, but the size of their amphitheatres needs to be checked. Other options include hosting the conference outside Paris on the campus of SACLAY, where the school of statistics and its research department are located. The Paris School of Economics, particularly the IPP Institute for Public Policy Evaluation, could also be a potential partner or host, as they are users of the conference. Other suggestions, perhaps even for the next conference, would be useful.

The Director-General of Eurostat has suggested next weeks to identify contacts with France, clarify their participation, and proceed with preparatory work, including developing a website, organizing committees, and discussing practicalities, to ensure a successful project.

Ms. Maria João Valente Rosa supported the view that the European Statistics Day should coincide with the Conference, even though ESD 2024 falls on a Sunday (20/10).

The Director- General of Eurostat explained that there is an ESSC committee meeting in Estonia and people need to travel to Tallinn on Tuesday 22/10. The CESS should take place the week before, so possibly on Thursday 17/10, and Friday 18/10.

The Chair explained that the Banque de France recognised the problem of linking the CESS with the ESD. The best option would be to hold the event during the week of 14-18 October. There is one question from the INSEE about the program and the topic. Having many of topics is not a problem, but INSEE is interested in having a specific theme which could be something like “statistics for a better development”. The central banks are also very much interested in this topic. If you want to have the involvement of academia, not only the methodologists but also the researchers, it is important having a good theme because it is much easier to get the researchers involved. Most people come from the statistical offices and not so many people from the user side. Looking at the topics of other statistical conferences, the CESS conferences are quite similar.

Mr. Maurizio Vichi explained that it was possible to open several topics and that it was probably not necessary to have only one heading. It is not a problem to list several topics that can be considered also to involve the users. The national statistical offices can also propose topics. If only one heading is proposed, some of the audience will be lost. So, if you propose several topics, you can involve a lot more people.

Ms. Maria João Valente Rosa explained that in previous years, the CESS had about seven or eight themes. And within each theme, several sessions were held. Themes could be, for example, communication and dissemination of statistics. There was also a broader session with methodologies, academia, producers and so on. The model was very flexible.

Mr. Peter Van Der Heijden explained that there would also be a choice of keynote speakers in these areas.

The Chair suggested to have keynotes and plenary sessions on a specific theme, and then the usual other more general sessions. This will of course be discussed with the conference partners steering and scientific committees.

Ms. Marie Bohata said that “statistics for a better development” is a very good topic that can cover various areas. This would be very appealing for the OECD, and we could get many

users because of the topics of better work, better development that OECD addressing from various perspectives.

Ms. Angelika Becker said that the CESS is a bit like the statistics week that takes place in Germany every year together with Austria, involving universities, the statistical society, the statistical office, and the users. An important topic in Germany is data literacy. It could also be a theme for another agenda.

Mr. Maurizio Vichi clarified that in all past conferences, the programme had generally three parallel sessions with about 32 or 33 sessions. Some keynote speakers would intervene at the beginning of the first day together with the celebration of the European Statistics Day.

The Chair thought that it would depend on the logistical possibilities with the hosting partner.

Mr. Peter Van Der Heijden offered his help with the organisation of the CESS.

The Chair would report to the next meeting on the progress made in organising the CESS.

Members were invited to make suggestions for topics.

Help was also offered by Members who had organised the 2022 Quality Conference in Lithuania.

7. 2024 Meetings

The ESAC Secretary had circulated a draft schedule for ESAC meetings in 2024. He explained that the draft schedule had been discussed by the Executive Committee. It is proposed to increase the number of meetings, considering the demand for more topical presentations by Eurostat. It is also proposed to maintain two physical meetings per year, one in the first half of the year and one in the second half of the year. One of the constraints is to better synchronise the timing of the discussions with the preparation of the opinion for the annual work programme. A longer face-to-face meeting in the first half of the year would be appropriate in that regard. The proposal also considers, as far as possible, other important Eurostat meetings such as PGs, DGINs and ESSC meetings. The date of the last (face-to-face) meeting in November will depend on the final decision on the dates of the 2024 CESS. The current dates proposed for the CESS (17 or 18 October) need to be confirmed with the other partners.

The Chair explained that one constraint is the date by which ESAC will get the draft annual work programme, so that it will have time for ESAC to read it and then have a meeting on the spot to discuss and draft the opinion.

The Director-General of Eurostat recalled that the ESAC is expected to adopt its opinion on the proposed annual work Programme by the end of June. Eurostat is legally obliged to send the draft programme to the ESSC by the end of April. There is no problem to send it in parallel to ESAC.

The Chair suggested that if ESAC had the draft programme by the end of April, then ESAC could have a first discussion on the work programme in May, with the final discussion and adoption of its opinion in June.

The Secretary suggested to ESAC to alternate the places for the in-person meetings between Luxembourg, and Brussels.

The Chair also suggested that a NUCS meeting be combined with the ESAC meeting in November, but for 2 or 3 days to allow more time for discussion.

On the question on possible preferences for the meeting locations and possible suggestions, **Ms. Vitaliana Rondonotti** expressed her preference for Brussels as a regular physical meeting place since better connected for travelling. She was also in favour of combining meetings and seminars considering this as an efficient alternative to meet only once, even if this requires that participants stay longer. The September date in 2024 might be a problem for ECB DG-S due to another event taking place at the same time.

Ms. Marie Bohata said that if there is a conference and another face-to-face meeting a month later, they might be too close to each other. It might be more attractive to have a NUCs meeting in June and then the conference in October. But this is more complicated to do given the heavy agenda.

The Chair will consider the possibility of organizing another NUCs Seminar before the Conference.

Mr. Athanasios C. Thanopoulos also offered to organise the NUCS meeting in Greece and the Chair suggested that one possibility would be to hold it there on 25-26 September.

The Director-General of Eurostat explained that Greece is currently leading the partnership group. A meeting of Directors General will take place the week before 25 September.

The Chair announced that she will circulate a revised schedule of meetings in 2024.

8. AOB and closing

The Members thanked the Director General of Eurostat for taking the whole day for the ESAC and also congratulated the Chair of ESGAB and the Secretariat for organising the meeting and the seminar with the NUCs.

The Chair closed the meeting at 17:30.
