

# **27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the European Statistical System Committee**

Luxembourg

**19<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

Final minutes

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Chairperson of the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC) welcomed all the participants to the 27<sup>th</sup> ESSC meeting and the 85<sup>th</sup> EEA Conference.

Making reference to the Paris terrorist attacks of the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2015, the Chairperson expressed his own sincere condolences and solidarity, as well as those of all the delegates present, to the INSEE delegation for the loss of life caused by these tragic events. In reply, the President of INSEE thanked the Chairperson and all the members of the ESSC for their support in such difficult circumstances. While highlighting the fact that no member of the staff of his office was harmed, he stressed the unity and determination shown by all Parisians in order not to allow fear to triumph.

The Chairperson of the ESSC stressed the importance that the statistical world prepares itself to face the phenomena emerging in the aftermath of the different crises, for instance the financial and the migration crises. He urged the statistical community to be more forward-looking in order to face any future crisis. He advocated the importance that the European statistical community walk in lockstep with an ever-changing world in order to remain relevant.

Subsequently, the new President of DESTATIS, Mr Dieter Sarreither, was welcomed by the Committee.

The Chairperson also informed delegates that the expected visit to the Committee of Mr Christian Danielsson, Director General of DG NEAR (item 11 of the draft ESSC agenda), was to be postponed to 2016. He closed the introductory part of the meeting by informing the delegates that, as an item under "Any other business", he would be briefing the ESSC about the third brainstorming session concerning the value of statistics and communication that was held in Grotta Ferrata (IT) on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2015.

The members of the ESSC approved the changes in the draft agenda of the 27<sup>th</sup> ESSC meeting.

## Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/1

### **Commission implementing regulation (EU) No .../.. of XXX adopting the specifications of the 2017 ad hoc module on self-employment provided for by Council Regulation (EC) No 577/98**

#### **A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat cited Commission Regulation (EU) No 318/2013, which provides a programme of Labour Force Survey (LFS) ad hoc modules for the years between 2016 and 2018. In this context, the ESSC was reminded that an ad hoc module on self-employment had been foreseen for 2017. Further to this, reference was made to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1397/2014, which specifies the areas of specialised information to be included in the said ad-hoc module.
2. Eurostat highlighted that this will be the first time that the topic of self-employment is to be covered by an ad hoc module, and that co-financing by European Commission grants will be available.
3. Eurostat also went through the very origins of this module, detailing the policy need expressed by Commission Directorate General for Employment (DG EMPL), in relation to the EU2020 goal of increasing the employment rate by encouraging and supporting self-employment. The draft Commission Implementing Regulation was in turn prepared by a Eurostat Task Force, which was composed of a number of Member States, together with a representation from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and from DG EMPL.
4. Eurostat highlighted the importance of monitoring the progress toward the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy through a comprehensive set of data on self-employment which would allow comparisons to be made between the different Member States. It was also argued that the module answers the data needs linked to the "Small Business Act", as well as the 2012 Commission communication *Towards a Job Rich Recovery*. It was also emphasised that the main target population of the module are persons in employment, including both employees and self-employed.
5. Ending its intervention, Eurostat indicated that it took note of the remarks made by the NSIs in the exchange of views forms, and that an evaluation of the application of this Regulation will be made so as to draw lessons.

#### **B. Discussion**

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#### **C. Opinion**

1. None of the Member States voted against.
2. None of the Member States abstained.
3. All of the represented Member States voted in favour. In favour: 27 Member States representing a population of 99,89%. One Member State was not represented (0,11%).
4. EEA/EFTA was in favour. Switzerland was in favour.

## **Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/2**

### **ESS Vision 2020**

#### **A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat introduced the item by stating that it would be constituted of two distinct parts, the first being the progress report of the Vision Implementation Group (VIG) and the second being the business case of the DIGICOM project.
2. As regards the first, Eurostat thanked the Committee for all the support and appreciation expressed in relation to the work of the VIG so far. It was pointed out that Eurostat, the VIG and the Vision Implementation Network (VIN) are aware of the ambitious agenda of the ESS Vision 2020 and assured that a critical eye would be kept on proceedings to make all the necessary changes in a swift and timely manner. Eurostat also made reference to the publication of the second issue of the ESS Vision 2020 newsletter.
3. Concerning the second sub-item (DIGICOM project), Eurostat defined this project as the last one that completes the portfolio projects under the ESS Vision 2020. It was explained that DIGICOM addresses the response to user needs, as well as innovation in communication and dissemination of statistical products and services.
4. Eurostat informed the ESSC that the project business case was put together by a Task Force including 11 Member States, led by Statistics Belgium. Eurostat also commended the commitments from a large number of Member States and NSIs to participate in different aspects of the project. It was reiterated that from its inception the project was designed with an agile methodology to be able to swiftly change direction to keep in touch with technological developments.

#### **B. Discussion**

1. The ESSC showed its appreciation for the VIG progress report as well as the business case for the DIGICOM project. A number of Member States also showed their willingness to participate in the DIGICOM project.
2. A number of delegations stressed the importance of the agility of the DIGICOM project. One delegation iterated the difficult task that the DIGICOM steering group would have in this regard, and exhorted all the Member States to endow the steering group with their best personnel. The development of digital service standards was also cited as an important factor for the success of the project.
3. Referring to the VIG progress report, one delegate asked whether the questionnaire on deployment costs would clash with the task given to the Resource Directors' Group's (RDG) work regarding the development of a methodology on cost accounting. In reply to this, another delegate stated that the deployment cost method trialled within the VIG was different from the RDG's inasmuch as the latter's focussed on developing a system to determine the costs for statistical outputs across the European Statistical System (ESS), while the former's was about the costs and efforts for the implementation of the necessary changes within a Member State when a Vision Implementation Project (VIP) produces new products, systems, standards or guidance.

## Items for opinion

4. One delegate exhorted all the ESS Members to encourage their VIG and VIN members to be proactive and demanding on the implementation of the ESS Vision 2020 to ensure that this is in line with national initiatives.

### **C. Opinion**

1. The ESSC welcomed the regular report from the Vision Implementation Group (VIG) and recognised the good progress achieved on the implementation of the ESS Vision 2020.
2. The ESSC took note of the need to emphasise the quality of VIP projects ahead of the proposed timelines.
3. The ESSC welcomed and approved the DIGICOM business case. Several delegations accounted their readiness to actively contribute to the project implementation and governance.
4. A number of Member States noted that the objectives and nature of the project require an agile and flexible approach. In particular, the future project Steering Group should closely follow user needs and the developments in the technological environment and, if necessary, introduce adequate changes to the project in the course of its implementation.

### **Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/3**

#### **Single Integrated Metadata Structure (SIMS - ESMS, ESQRS) version 2.0 - and progress in production and dissemination**

##### **A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat iterated that the SIMS was developed as a follow-up of the recommendations of the high-level ESS Task Force and the Sponsorship on Quality (SoQ), concerning quality reporting across the ESS and different statistical domains. Further to the development of the first version of the SIMS and its technical manual, some light updates were then considered necessary also taking into account the first steps in implementation.
2. Eurostat also reminded the ESSC that the revised version of the SIMS and its underlying structures, the ESS quality and reference metadata reporting standards (ESMS 2.0 and ESQRS 2.0), had been previously presented to the joint meeting of the DIME/ITDG (Directors of Methodology and Information Technology) held in February 2015.
3. It was reported that during this meeting the members had acknowledged the revised version of the ESMS 2.0 and ESQRS 2.0 as part of SIMS, as well as agreeing on a timetable for their implementation. Furthermore, the DIME/ITDG members expressed their support for the full standardisation of the ESS reference metadata by 2018, besides taking note of the work to improve the technical interoperability between national and ESS reference metadata systems.

## Items for opinion

4. The ESSC was informed that a specific training course on quality reporting and the use of SIMS/ESMS, ESQRS is to be set up by Eurostat. It is planned that this training will be delivered in the context of the 2016 European Statistical Training Programme (ESTP), as previously requested by a number of ESSC members.

### **B. Discussion**

1. A large number of Member State NSIs welcomed the revised version of the SIMS.
2. One delegation encouraged Eurostat to involve the Member States in the test phases of this process, putting itself forward as possible participant.

### **C. Opinion**

1. The ESSC endorsed the revised version of the Single Integrated Metadata Structure (SIMS 2.0) and its underlying reporting structures, the Euro SDMX Metadata Structure (ESMS 2.0) and the ESS Standard for Quality Reports Structure (ESQRS 2.0). SIMS will be the standard for quality reporting according to Article 12 of Regulation 223/2009 on European statistics.
2. The ESSC also endorsed the strategy and timeframe - as approved by the joint DIME/ITDG meeting of February 2015 - for the implementation by 2018 of the streamlined quality and metadata report structures, SIMS 2.0 / ESMS 2.0 and ESQRS 2.0 in the different European statistical domains.
3. The ESSC requested that the technical implementation of the reporting structures in European statistics be regularly monitored by the DIME/ITDG and the ESSC until completion.

## **Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/4**

### **Strategic priorities for the Annual Work Programme 2017**

#### **A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat reminded the ESSC that the requirement for the Annual Work Programme (AWP) is defined in Article 17 of the amended Regulation 223/2009 and that the first step in the preparation of the AWP is the definition of its strategic points.
2. Eurostat then proceed to delineate the three strategic frameworks in this regard, namely, the objectives of the European Statistical Programme (ESP) 2013-2017, the needs stemming from the ten political priorities of the Juncker Commission, and the strategic goals set in the ESS Vision 2020. It was noted that 2017 is the last year of implementation of the 2013-2017 ESP, while highlighting the need to ensure that all objectives therein are met.

## Items for opinion

3. Concerning the first ESP objective, “provision of quality statistical information to support EU policies”, Eurostat briefed the ESSC that its main element was continuity: the main proposed changes take into account the ten priorities of the EU in order to maintain the relevance of European statistics.
4. Regarding the second objective, "new methods of production", Eurostat declared the priorities to be in line with the ESS Vision 2020, focusing mainly on the VIPs portfolio. In connection with this, references were made to the BIG DATA and ADMIN projects, which will continue to contribute to the objective to use new sources of data; DIGICOM, contributing to the interaction with users and communication; QUAL, with its impact on the quality strand; and ESDEN and SERV's role in modern production processes. Eurostat also highlighted the activities to put in place a secure exchange of EU data through the implementation of the framework for IT security within the ESS and accrediting access facilities in the Member States.
5. About the objective to strengthen the partnership within the ESS, Eurostat informed the ESSC about the planned initiatives aimed at enhancing the role of the NSIs as coordinators of their respective national statistical systems. Concerning partnerships beyond the ESS, Eurostat expressed its willingness to support both the enlargement and the European Neighbourhood countries in their efforts to provide data of the best quality in accordance to European standards.
6. Eurostat argued that the multiannual programme requires such priority-setting in the ESS that ensures the most efficient use of limited resources on priority areas. Therefore, Eurostat committed itself to improving the priority-setting process on the basis of the catalogue of products within the forum of the RDG. Eurostat also undertook to consider the proposal made from one Member State NSI to strengthen the contributions of the respective Directors' Group to prioritisation.
7. The ESSC was informed that, after garnering the support of the ESSC, the European Statistical Advisory Committee (ESAC) will be invited to express its views on the draft strategic priorities for 2017. Furthermore, Eurostat confirmed that the 2017 AWP would be elaborated on the basis of the strategic priorities and consultation in the respective Working and Directors' Groups, after which it would be submitted to the ESSC in May.
8. Some Member States expressed their concerns about the high level of ambition of the programme and the tendency to make new surveys, requesting to balance new needs with prioritisation and securing funding. In reply Eurostat reiterated its intention of using administrative sources whenever possible. In the area of social surveys, Eurostat argued that its ambition is to respond to emerging user requirements, and to maximise the usefulness of SILC and LFS while at the same time limiting the burden as much as possible.
9. Concerning the balance between new needs and funding, Eurostat reiterated its strategy of working along three strands: (i) continuous examination of the relevance of statistics and proposals for simplification actions, based on the catalogue of products and cost assessment; (ii) reengineering of the production and exploration of alternative sources implementing the ESS Vision 2020; and (iii) ensuring adequate funding for the production of statistics at national and European level.

## **B. Discussion**

1. While supporting the strategic priorities for the 2017 AWP, the ESSC expressed its concerns that these priorities would be unrealistic in terms of the available resources. Some of the NSIs suggested that further efforts be made into finding the highest priorities amongst all the proposed initiatives, which would notably include the most urgent needs of the policy makers. Other NSIs urged further work on negative prioritisation and expressed support for a "bottom-up" approach to prioritisation. This was countered by another Member State which proposed a mixed approach, where both the "top-down" and the "bottom-up" approaches would co-exist: the expert groups would be asked to list the products with the lowest priority but the strategic decision on what to cut would fall to the ESSC. One delegation urged for more interaction between policy makers, Commission services and producers in order to engage in a reprioritisation exercise.
2. In reply Eurostat committed itself to do whatever possible to find lower or negative priorities. Experiences of the last years have however shown that such efforts of negative prioritisation would bring about smaller changes than expected by the Committee due to the fact that the current strategic priorities include years of accumulated user needs.
3. Eurostat expressed its opinion that the "bottom-up" approach, whereby the different ESS expert groups are asked to rethink their statistical output, would not work as expected. Alternatively, Eurostat showed itself in favour of the opinion of one of the NSIs, which advocated a "top-down" approach where decisions are taken at the highest level and subsequently implemented at the expert group level.
4. One Member State advised to put more emphasis on timely social statistics on inequality, poverty and social exclusion. It also argued that the areas of social protection, health and education should be integrated in the system of national accounts. As regards dissemination, this delegation welcomed the renewed attention to the dialogue between statistical producers and users, and appreciated the emphasis placed on the real user needs as guidance in choosing new dissemination channels. It also highlighted the importance of HORIZON 2020 as a great opportunity to be fully exploited within the ESS.
5. The Chairperson of the ESAC drew the attention to ESAC's opinion on migration statistics stressing the high priority that should be given to this topic, including labour market mobility, integration in the labour market, social integration and the issue of asylum seekers.
6. Another delegation flagged the importance of (i) the proposal to create competitiveness councils in Member States, which could generate further demands on the coverage and quality of the data used; (ii) creating a consistent system covering all the different aspects of migration statistics; and (iii) EPSAS as a tool to alleviate the work of NSIs and lead to a more efficient use of resources
7. One Member State delegation came back to its proposal and urged for the reduction in frequency of the ICT and other surveys as a way of decreasing the costs on ESS NSIs.
8. A number of Member States stated that the ESS should engage more proactively with the political establishment in order to avert as many cuts in the statistical offices' resources as possible. This stance was contradicted by one delegate who made the point that the ESS should be able to work out which statistical products to negatively prioritise without asking for more resources from central governments. Indeed such an act was considered by this delegate as one that would undermine the collective credibility of the ESS. In response, yet another Member State argued that these two apparently opposing positions are not mutually exclusive.

## Items for opinion

9. In this context, Eurostat put forward a strategy that would include: (i) an efficiency dimension (encapsulated in the ESS Vision 2020); (ii) prioritisation (a permanent yearly screening of the statistical programme in order to cut the least important aspects, using the statistical catalogue as input); (iii) improving the environment for statistics (such as administrative data, big data and EPSAS) that would improve input quality; (iv) a proactive approach starting with the improvement of the relevance of the statistical offices in order to attract more resources); and (v) work on the partnerships with, for instance, private partners and universities.

## C. Opinion

1. The ESSC supported the strategic priorities for the Annual Work Programme 2017 and acknowledged the relevance of new initiatives. Many delegations considered however that the overall plan was ambitious in not taking sufficiently into account the resource constraints.
2. Specific comments were raised on social surveys, migration, waste statistics, competitiveness, ICT and EPSAS.
3. The Committee confirmed the need to strengthen prioritisation. It should support strategic actions on efficiency gains (ESS Vision 2020), efforts to improve the quality of administrative data (e.g. public sector accounting), communication with key political users to ensure adequate funding of official statistics, and partnership with researchers and the private sector.
4. The ESSC invited Directors Groups to use the catalogue of products in order to prioritise the work in their respective areas. This will be valuable input for discussions at strategic level. The ESS Resource Directors Group (RDG) will continue its work to improve cost assessment of statistical products in the ESS.
5. Specific comments will be taken into account in the detailed Work Programme that will be proposed to the ESSC in April 2016.
6. The draft strategic priorities will be sent to the ESAC for opinion.

### **Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/5**

#### **Strategy for agricultural statistics for 2020 and beyond**

##### **A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat reminded the delegates about the visit of Mr Jerzy Plewa (Director General of DG AGRICULTURE) to the ESSC Meeting in May 2014, during which Mr Plewa had outlined the European Commission's need for high quality agricultural statistics. It was also at that meeting that the ESSC had discussed the plan for a Strategy for Agricultural Statistics for 2020 and Beyond. The ESSC was informed that, since Mr Plewa's visit, work on this Strategy had been undertaken by Eurostat at the Group of Directors for Agricultural Statistics (DGAS) and the related Working Parties.

2. Eurostat reiterated the importance of agricultural statistics for evidence-based agricultural policy making, stressing the importance of ensuring enough knowledge about food production, security and safety. The importance of such statistics was highlighted in relation to the budget of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which accounts for around forty percent of the EU budget. It was also argued that agriculture covers half of the EU territory and that agricultural statistics are becoming increasingly important for other policy areas as well (for instance, environmental, climate and regional policies).
3. It was claimed that the current legislation is not adequate to serve new and emerging data needs and that the legal acts in place are not flexible and integrated enough to answer to new policy needs in a timely fashion. Furthermore, as the legal basis for the farm structure surveys (Regulation (EC) No 1166/2008) expires after 2016, if no legal framework is agreed in time for the 2020 agricultural census, the ESS would risk losing the European foundation for comparable farm-level data, which would have implications for a broad range of analytical tools.
4. The ESSC was informed that the strategy for agricultural statistics presented to the Committee has the aim to increase the coherence of the various data collections, reduce burden on administrations and respondents whilst improving the flexibility of including new data needs. The strategy is based on a two-step approach including two framework regulations: one covering a system of farm-level surveys (the "Integrated Farm Statistics" regulation) and another one comprising statistics on agricultural inputs and outputs.
5. Eurostat ensured the Member States that their concerns regarding burden, data confidentiality, the use of legal instruments as well as costs and financing would be dealt with during the preparation of the act in close cooperation with them.

## **B. Discussion**

1. A number of ESSC members agreed with the key points of the strategy. Nonetheless, a group of delegations maintained that the main elements of the strategy presented at the ESSC needed to be developed further with more discussions at the technical level. In regard to the underlying time constraints, considering that the framework regulation should be in force by 2018, one delegation argued that the implementation of the fourth scenario of the strategy (two-step integration of agricultural statistics) would not be possible within the foreseen timeframe. It highlighted the second scenario (prolongation of the FSS Regulation (EC) No 1166/2008) as a more realistic option.
2. Another delegation expressed itself against any increasing burden on data providers and costs through this initiative. It also argued that the confidentiality aspects should be considered when planning unique farm identifiers and exact geo-coordinates.
3. One Member State indicated that the use of unique identifiers would allow the module and satellite data to be merged within the core survey, amounting to sharing of confidential identifiable micro data, and therefore proclaimed itself opposed to any such course of action. It also asked Eurostat to give assurances to the Member States regarding the quality guidelines for the use of administrative data and expressed its concern about the timing of the changes, which it maintained would coincide with the 2020 Agricultural Census. A number of delegations shared this Member State's concern with the use of unique farm identifiers.

## Items for opinion

4. Another Member State NSI claimed that much more resources had been spent on agricultural statistics than on services, arguing that a significant reason for agricultural data was related to a monitoring function to disburse resources under the CAP.
5. One delegation agreed to the proposed two-step approach for future legislation in agricultural statistics provided that the participation of Member States in the decision-making process is guaranteed. As regards the "Strategy of Agricultural Statistics for 2020 and Beyond", the same NSI expressed its opinion that the proposal gave scope to the Commission to make use of delegated acts, urging Eurostat to show restraint in the use of such acts.
6. Another concern brought forward by a different NSI related to the use of sensitive data (for instance the gender of the spouse), which it would not be able to deliver in line with national legislation. It also expressed its reservations concerning the idea of dividing large farms into several statistical units as this might increase the statistical burden on larger holdings. The same delegation also made a reference to the many data sources that, while not being structured on farm basis, could still be used in the agricultural sector.
7. One delegation highlighted the importance of better aligning the requests for data between Eurostat and DG AGRI. Eurostat maintained that, together with DG AGRI, it is doing its utmost to intensify the dialogue about certain issues (such as the decrease in resources, the access to confidential data and administrative burden) with the national ministries of agriculture and other relevant entities in order to deliver successfully on all these elements.

## C. Opinion

1. The ESSC expressed its support for the proposed strategy going to a modular approach to agricultural statistics and ensuring good quality.
2. The ESSC emphasised the need to have in time a legal basis in place for the agricultural census in 2020.
3. The implementation of the strategy should not lead to the sharing of identifiable micro-data, should ensure a balanced use of legal instruments and should ensure that burden is not increased.
4. The ESSC agreed that the Directors' Group on Agricultural Statistics (DGAS) and the related Working Groups should continue the work on the implementation of the strategy.

## **Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/6**

### **ESS Agreement - EU-SILC supplementary variables on health, labour, over-indebtedness, consumption and wealth to be collected as part of the 2017 SILC ad-hoc module**

#### **A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat explained to the ESSC that this draft ESS Agreement aims to test important rolling-module variables for the future revised EU-SILC, covering variables on health, labour, over-indebtedness, consumption and wealth.
2. The ESSC was informed that the proposal was elaborated by an ad hoc Task Force, the delegates of the Working Group on Income and Living Conditions Statistics, the main users of EU-SILC as well as the Group of Directors of Social Statistics (DSS).
3. Eurostat argued that, in order to limit the burden on both NSIs and respondents, it has been decided to use two different instruments in parallel for the 2017 SILC ad hoc module, namely a Regulation (endorsed by the ESSC in its September 2015 meeting) and an ESS Agreement. Such a strategy offers the possibility to test politically important domains covered by the Regulation in all countries while also testing a number of politically important topics for other modules of the revised EU-SILC but with more flexibility for implementation via an ESS Agreement.
4. Eurostat specified that the results of the concerned variables will be assessed through the test exercise and will not be disseminated. It was also stated that the variables on consumption and wealth may be collected and submitted either on personal level, or at household level only. Furthermore, each Member State was asked to test one subject of their choice, which would then be reflected in the ESS Agreement. As regards labour market data, Eurostat clarified that no data on employment or unemployment from EU-SILC would be published.
5. Eurostat expressed its intention to provide funding for the test exercise.

#### **B. Discussion**

1. One Member State informed Eurostat that, because its previous concerns had been dealt with, it would be in favour of the proposed agreement.
2. Another delegation informed the ESSC about its adherence to the ESS agreement but stated that the supplementary variables it will compile in the EU-SILC would be those related to "labour" (and not those to "over-indebtedness", as previously notified).
3. The OECD welcomed the proposal but observed that the supplementary variables could have been more inclusive, and in particular expressed concerns related to the health variables requested, where two proposed items (related to difficulties in dressing and communicating) from the Washington Group had not been included. Eurostat replied that the efforts have been made to ensure consistency as much as possible with other existing health frameworks.

### **C. Opinion**

1. The ESSC supported the proposed ESS Agreement. One Member State stated that for legal reasons it cannot sign up to the ESS Agreement at present; one Member State can implement it only if the required financing is provided.
2. Topics will be implemented by Member States according to their own choices. Eurostat will provide detailed guidelines taking into account the experience from other surveys. It was agreed that variables on consumption and wealth can be collected and submitted either at person or household level even though for wealth, collection and submission at both levels is the preferred option. Due to the experimental characteristics of the data, the results will be mainly used for assessing variables and no dissemination will take place. An in depth evaluation of the results and their quality will be made so as to draw lessons for the future.
3. The ESS Agreement will be finalised taking into account the points mentioned in paragraph 2 and circulated to ESSC members for review. Eurostat will ensure the financial support for the implementation of the ESS agreement via grants according to Commission procedures.

#### **Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/7**

#### **Draft regulation on statistics relating to persons and households – IESSS: Integrated European Social Statistics**

##### **A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat informed the ESSC that the draft regulation on statistics relating to persons and households – IESS, is part of the modernisation programme that was requested by the DGINS in the Wiesbaden Memorandum of September 2011.
2. Eurostat added that the modernisation programme regarding social statistics had been presented to the ESSC at its November 2014 meeting, garnering the Committee's support.
3. Eurostat summarised the objectives of the draft IESS Regulation as follows: (i) to increase the efficiency and responsiveness of social statistics; (ii) to facilitate the integration of data collections; (iii) to promote the use of administrative data and other sources as well as innovative approaches; and (iv) to implement the new legislative architecture of the ESS in the domain of social statistics.
4. The ESSC was informed that the draft regulation was discussed six times within the Group of Directors of Social Statistics (DSS). Indeed, at its last meeting in mid-September 2015 the DSS generally supported the revised draft of IESS Regulation and the many changes that had been included in the earlier draft.
5. Eurostat thanked the large number of Member States which supported this legislation in the exchange of views, and tackled the concerns expressed by the Member States as follows:

## Items for opinion

- a. Eurostat considered that this draft act would benefit from a flexible approach so that statisticians are able to adjust and respond to changing user needs. At the same time, Eurostat expressed its understanding of the Member State's wish for certainty to retain control and to limit costs and burden. Eurostat argued that, to address these concerns, the draft IESS has fixed the domains, the topics under the various domains and the statistical population and observation units in the basic act so that they can only be changed by another regulation taken by co-decision. The same applies for the precision requirements, sample characteristics, periodicity of data collection and transmission deadlines, which have all been worked on taking into account the need to limit cost.
- b. Eurostat contended that the use of delegated acts is foreseen in the case of detailed topics to be able to respond to user needs in a timely fashion and to remain relevant as a statistical system. Nonetheless, Eurostat maintained that it would limit its use of delegated acts as regards the number of detailed topics that can be changed, as well as the frequency of the change (every four years). Eurostat also reminded the ESSC that as regards social statistics, after using a delegated act on a detailed topic, the surveys can only be implemented via an implementing act, which provides further control to the Member States. Eurostat stated that although the use of delegated acts was also foreseen in the planning, it only concerned the period of data collection and ad hoc subjects.
- c. The ESSC was informed that the DSS supported the timeliness objectives of EU-SILC data, including the deadlines mentioned in Annex 5 of the draft Regulation. Eurostat explained that this was done so that the objectives based on EU-SILC have a timeliness that matches the timetable of the European Semester, so that social statistics are brought in line with macroeconomic indicators. Eurostat added that the topic of timeliness had also been discussed on a bilateral level with the Member States who had signalled difficulties in order to clarify under which condition the timeliness can be met.
- d. Eurostat maintained that there is a need to include the Household Budget Survey and Time use Survey in the IESS act, but stressed the need of modernising these aspects and stated that the IESS act would only apply to Household Budget Survey and time use in ten years' time.
- e. Eurostat mentioned the request from both users and researchers regarding the extension of the longitudinal dimension of SILC from four to six years. The rationale behind this was explained as being the ability to follow the persons in and out of poverty and social exclusion during a sufficient period of time.
- f. As regards the obligatory nature of feasibility studies, Eurostat will work out the list of feasibility studies in specific areas in close cooperation with the DSS. Once the limited pragmatic list is drafted, Eurostat assured the Member States that they would be invited to express their area of preference in which they would work so that a practical programme of representative feasibility studies can be agreed within the ESSC.
- g. In connection with the concern in relation to limited elements of input harmonisation, Eurostat stated that this is strictly limited to employment and unemployment.
- h. On the issue of funding, Eurostat confirmed its intention of providing funding for feasibility studies, capacity building as well as work on ad hoc subjects that still have to be identified.

## **B. Discussion**

1. Most Member States generally supported the draft legislation, and expressed their appreciation to Eurostat for allaying a number of their concerns.
2. One delegation, supported subsequently by a number of other delegations, highlighted the three areas that it considered problematic, namely, (i) the use of delegated acts, in the case of which the use of sunset clauses was urged; (ii) the opposition to the inclusion of Time Use and Household Budget Surveys; (iii) the opposition to the use of implementing acts to specify some of the technical specifications of the data sets, especially the inclusion of elements of input harmonisation. As regards the last point, another delegation stated that according to the principle of subsidiarity such elements should be left to the individual Member States to decide. These concerns were shared by a few other delegations.
3. Another delegation considered the decision to implement Time Use Surveys in 2025 as premature. Some other NSIs made a reference to the quality and cost implications of having a six-year longitudinal extension of the EU-SILC.
4. Additional questions were asked about the introduction of certain variables in the different surveys that would increase burden on respondents, and it was suggested that any new variables that are increased in the future would be balanced out through a decrease in existent ones.
5. One Member State argued for the inclusion of wealth as a fully-fledged domain in its own right in order to adequately meet user requirements in wealth statistics. It was argued that "overloading" the SILC survey might pose quality risks for the main income and living conditions measures.
6. Another delegation, while welcoming the introduction of IESS, took the view that it was premature for ESSC discussion due to lack of unanimous DSS approval of IESS. This delegation was also of the opinion that the implementing measures of IESS should be discussed in parallel and accepted as a package. One Member State indicated that it did not see to which extent IESS contributes to the objectives of simplification and burden reduction of European statistical legislation.
7. Eurostat thanked the ESSC for the comments proffered by the Member States and highlighted the importance of balancing the flexibility and transparency of the draft act. On income, consumption and wealth, Eurostat reassured the ESSC that it is very active on this front. Eurostat promised that it would deal with concerns revolving around several specific issues like the collective households on a bilateral basis with the Member States in order to find a technical solution. Concerning the extension of the rotational panel for EU-SILC from four to six years, Eurostat stated that this is an issue on which reflection was still ongoing and invited all the NSIs with pending concerns to discuss them bilaterally with Eurostat. On the inclusion of Time Use and Household Budget Surveys, Eurostat reminded the ESSC that user request for these surveys is very high and that this demand should be heeded. Eurostat expressed its intention in continuing bilateral contacts in the coming weeks and months. It reminded the ESSC that the objective is to have the draft proposal entering the final legislative decision procedure after adoption by the Commission by the end of the second quarter of 2016. The draft act would then be forwarded to the Council Working Party on Statistics, where the remaining differences would be resolved.

### **C. Opinion**

1. The ESSC generally supported the draft regulation on statistics related to persons and households. In particular, several elements were appreciated, such as the overall objective of increasing flexibility and responsiveness to users' needs, as well as the efforts made towards ensuring more efficiency and control over the costs and burden entailed by the data collections. The multi-annual rolling planning, the promotion of the use of administrative data and the promotion of innovative ways of producing statistics were also positively received.
2. The ESSC noted as well that compared to the last version presented to the DSS, much progress has been registered, from the Member States perspective. This concerns in particular the removal of the possibility to amend some annexes by delegated acts and the postponement of the implementation of the domains dealing with time use and consumption so as to allow for the investigation of the use of new sources of data and new technologies.
3. Some issues have also been successfully dealt with for a majority of countries, like the overall objective of increased timeliness, in particular for SILC, the regionalisation of the SILC and LFS data, and precision requirements, for which several methods adapted to the situation of the Member States have been discussed and will continue to be discussed bilaterally.
4. A number of Member States reiterated the issues with the principle of the use of delegated acts. Others expressed concerns about the inclusion of the time use and consumption domains and the extension of the SILC longitudinal component to 6 years. Some Member States underlined the importance of wealth and suggested that it should be better covered, e.g. as a domain or topic. Eurostat will further reflect on these issues in the coming weeks when finalising the proposal, which is planned for adoption at the end of the second quarter of 2016.

## Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/8

### ESGAB 2015 Report

#### A. Presentation

1. After thanking the ESSC for inviting him to discuss the 2015 ESGAB Report, the Chairperson of the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board listed three main reasons why ESGAB is important to monitor the implementation of the Code of Practice: i) statistics play a vital role as a basis for economic policy in the EU, ii) ESGAB enhanced the trust in European statistics, and iii) all Member States have work to do in terms of the quality of their statistics.
2. Referring to the report, The Chairperson of ESGAB highlighted five important points:
  - a) the improvement of cost-accounting systems by the NSIs in order to enhance the accountability of the ESS;
  - b) the ESS has to be in the lead when addressing the issue of responding to the challenge of the data revolution;
  - c) the importance that NSIs have a strong mandate to coordinate national statistics to enhance the quality of European statistics;
  - d) the appointment and dismissal procedures of the Director General of Eurostat should be enshrined in law;
  - e) the problem of the Greek statistical crisis which was seen to be more of a national political issue. The Chairperson of ESGAB advocated a better way of communicating with this Member State in order to achieve better results.
3. The Chairperson of ESGAB informed the ESSC that he would be presenting the 2015 ESGAB Report to the Economic and Finance Committee (EFC) in the coming week. Subsequently, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December the Report would be presented to the ECOFIN Council and then on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December to the ECON Committee of the European Parliament.

#### B. Discussion

1. The ESSC showed its appreciation for the 2015 ESGAB Report.
2. One Member State asked the ESGAB Chairperson whether a regulatory regime would lead to an increase in trust in official statistics.
3. Another delegation emphasised the issue of legal architecture, and expressed his satisfaction that the 2015 ESGAB report recognises the need for balance between flexibility and certainty.
4. A number of Member States also appreciated various parts of the ESGAB report, *inter alia* regarding transparency and adequacy of resources.
5. One Member State asked the Chairperson of ESGAB whether in his opinion a reform of ESGAB's mandate was needed. Another delegation enquired whether pre-release access to statistics should be held back from the political level and the media, adding that some

countries which traditionally do not implement such pre-releases are currently under pressure to do so in the future.

6. Regarding the regulatory regime, the Chairperson of ESGAB replied that the Board should confine its role to its mandate, and that questions on regulatory regimes would be best answered at the level of the NSIs. Concerning ESGAB's mandate, the Chairperson focused on the fact that ESGAB itself holds no authority to change its mandate. He also emphasised that one of ESGAB's tools is to flag and give publicity to concerns that face European statistics, which includes asking the European Parliament to summon a particular national minister in charge of statistics to appear in front of the ECON Committee. On the question regarding the pre-release of statistics, the Chairperson iterated the principle that pre-release should be limited as far as possible.

### **Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/9**

#### **Report on the Economic and Financial Committee (EFC) statistical package**

##### **A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat reminded the ESSC that the EFC statistical package comprises major reports on structural statistics and macroeconomic imbalance procedure-relevant statistics (a report from the Economic Policy Committee - EPC) as well as the EFC report itself, which included a substantial section on modernisation issues. Included as well is a report on the excessive deficit procedure work done since the most recent notification.
2. The ESSC was informed that the various reports were discussed within the EFC – Subcommittee on Statistics and in the EFC itself. Eurostat stated that the draft Council Conclusions that have been prepared in this regard will be brought forward to the December ECOFIN Council meeting.

##### **B. Discussion**

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**Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/10**

**Project on establishing a Framework Regulation Integrating Business Statistics  
(FRIBS): 3rd progress report**

**A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat started by showing its appreciation for the encouraging and positive feedback provided by the Member States in the exchange of views questionnaire.
2. Eurostat stated that, thanks to the commitment of Member States, significant progress had been achieved in all the four main elements of FRIBS, namely the infrastructural elements, the technical provisions, the impact assessment and the drafting of legal acts.
3. Concerning the infrastructural elements, the ESSC was informed that it has been decided (decision endorsed by the BSDG in December 2014) not to include the definitions of the statistical units in the FRIBS Regulation. The ESSC was reminded that the joint notice of intention of the BSDG and DMES, the operational rules and the guiding principles for helping to correctly implement the existing definitions of statistical units of Regulation No 696/93 had been presented to the ESSC in September 2015. As regards business registers, the package to be included in FRIBS had been agreed in the April 2015 meeting of the Working Group on Business Registers and Statistical Units.
4. The provisions regarding the micro-data exchange for the European network of statistical business registers were agreed in the Business Register and Statistical Units Working Party in April 2015. While mentioning that the SIMSTAT pilot exercise is still ongoing, Eurostat confirmed that the outcome of the ESS.VIP.SIMSTAT will be presented at the May 2016 ESSC meeting.
5. Eurostat also reported good progress in connection to the technical provisions in FRIBS, mentioning the agreement reached by the BSDG in June 2015 on the definitions of twenty-two cross-cutting variables. Regarding the data requirements, there were only a few issues still pending (mainly in SBS and in ITGS-Intrastat).
6. Eurostat informed the ESSC that the collection of information needed for drafting the impact assessment report for FRIBS took place in three phases: a first collection of information needed for making a cost/benefit analysis of the FRIBS infrastructural provisions. had taken place during 2014. It would be complemented, upon request of the BSDG, by an additional analysis focusing on the cost/benefits of new data requirements that will be covered by FRIBS.. Eurostat took this opportunity to thank all the ESS NSIs for their contributions to the questionnaires related to this analysis. Finally, the analysis will also be complemented by a cost-benefit assessment of the different options for redesigning Intrastat.
7. Eurostat informed the ESSC that the first discussion on the FRIBS legal architecture and draft basic act took place in the June 2015 BSDG meeting. The BSDG mandated the BSDG-SDG to further work on the legal architecture. On that basis a second draft of the basic act and a first draft of the main implementing act were prepared, reflecting the updated proposal for the legal architecture. These will be further discussed at the December 2015 BSDG meeting.
8. Eurostat held the view that it would expect the ESSC's orientation on micro-data exchange in May 2016 and envisaged that the final draft of the basic act would be submitted to the ESSC in November 2016. The adoption of the proposal for the basic act by the

Commission was foreseen for the fourth quarter of 2016. This would mean that the adoption by the Council and the European Parliament would take place around 2017 or 2018.

## **B. Discussion**

1. Two ESS NSIs raised again the issue of the deletion of the environmental variables (from the SBS package) in the FRIBS data requirements and asked for still further reflection on that issue.
2. Another delegation expressed its concerns about the very ambitious schedule for FRIBS, especially in the context of allowing enough time for follow-up consultations before the final draft of the legal act is presented to the ESSC, and the assessment of the results of the impact assessment. According to this NSI's national impact assessment, FRIBS would result in an increase of burden at national level; therefore, this delegation expressed an interest in sharing the results of the national impact assessments.
3. One delegation asked Eurostat to ensure more consistency between different framework regulations.
4. Eurostat replied that it would be investigating the issues raised by two Member States regarding the deletion of the environmental variables at the technical level, but also reminded that there had already been a clear decision on that.
5. Eurostat would also aim at a more consistent approach between different framework regulations and would explore the possibilities and practices for providing information on the impact assessment results, as requested by another Member State.

### **Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/11**

**Visit by Mr Danielsson, Director General of NEAR to the ESSC**

**Visit postponed**

## Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/12

### Report on statistical cooperation with the enlargement and European neighbourhood countries

#### A. Presentation

1. Eurostat referred to the recently published progress reports of the candidate and pre-candidate countries in complying with the EU *acquis*, specifically their chapter 18 which refers to statistics. In this context Eurostat informed the ESSC about the change in methodology used by DG NEAR for the statistical chapter of the progress reports.
2. The ESSC was informed that association agreements have been signed with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, while other agreements are under negotiation with Morocco and Tunisia, setting up ambitious programmes of reform and good governance. It added that in this context, statistics is increasingly understood to be an important tool to support the design of policies, to monitor the results of these policies as well as to monitor the impact of technical cooperation and assistance programmes.
3. Mentioning the statistical cooperation strategies with the enlargement and European neighbourhood countries, Eurostat argued that their implementation is dependent on the provision of expertise, mainly from the ESS NSIs, in the form of twinning projects or other ad hoc actions. In this regard Eurostat acknowledged that some of the cooperation instruments that are available require administrative, legal and operational arrangements to be in place, which some of the NSIs have found difficult to work with.
4. In relation with this, Eurostat stated it should be envisaged to use the meetings of the Management Group for Statistical Cooperation to exchange good practice in setting up the necessary structures in NSIs for them to be able to provide their expertise to the enlargement and European neighbourhood countries.
5. In replying to some concerns put forward by two NSIs regarding their inability to compete with private companies offering expertise, Eurostat clarified that in external aid programmes, the ratio between the technical and financial elements is 80:20. Eurostat argued that it drafts the technical specifications of such tenders carefully to ensure that the main emphasis rests on technical aspects and expertise.

#### B. Discussion

1. One ESS NSI, having been the beneficiary of statistical cooperation in the recent past, testified to the great benefits that enlargement countries enjoy from this cooperation. The delegate urged all the NSIs to participate in such cooperation in view of improving the statistical reality in candidate countries. He also confirmed his office's willingness to share its experience and assist other NSIs on their path to potential ESS membership and would thus be interested in sharing best practices with other Member States in dealing with the adaptation of national administrative systems to allow more extensive involvement in statistical cooperation. The preparation of an inventory of good practices or guidelines for dealing with constraints at the national level was also put forward for consideration.

2. Referring to the financial elements of external aid programmes, another Member State claimed that even initiatives such as twinning were not totally cost neutral, since the reimbursements rarely cover the whole expense.
3. Another Member State informed the ESSC about the current review of its technical cooperation policy with the sharing of best practices with two other Member States as regards the longer term contributions to twinning projects
4. An ESSC observer stated that a dedicated unit within its office engages in technical assistance in the field of statistics directly to third countries, while also cooperating with other NSIs and international organisations. It highlighted the recurrent challenge of donor coordination between European countries and international organisations. It advocated for appropriate tools that would ensure a better coordination in order to make the cooperation programmes more efficient and to avoid duplication of efforts.
5. Another delegation proposed the creation of a pool of experts from the Member States' NSIs to contribute to the more effective use of resources and to mitigate the risk of potential non-engagement of NSIs. In its opinion this would also increase the visibility of potential experts to the beneficiaries.
6. While agreeing with the idea to improve the system of supply and demand of experts in the context of international cooperation Eurostat also urged that this model be well-planned, in order to take account of the different rules of the specific NSIs in this regard.

### **Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/13**

#### **State of affairs report on UN-GGIM matters**

##### **A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat reported on the developments of the UN-GGIM (UN Global Geospatial Information Management) and UN-GGIM: Europe initiatives, namely the decision of the meeting of the UN-GGIM Committee of Experts to propose the continuation of the initiative to ECOSOC in 2016, and the application to the UN General Assembly for the establishment of the UN-GGIM as a permanent Committee of the UN.
2. The progress of the UN-GGIM: Europe was mentioned to include the mandate obtained from the UN-GGIM Committee of Experts to lead the work on determining fundamental geospatial data themes globally. In this context Eurostat also made a reference to the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which was reported as providing an opportunity for making progress in this area.
3. The ESSC was informed that, although it is not represented directly in the UN-GGIM: Europe, Eurostat does enjoy observer status and pays attention to the statistical requirements.

##### **B. Discussion**

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**Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/14**

**Reports from Directors' Groups**

**Report of the meeting of the Directors of Macroeconomic Statistics (DMES)**

**A. Presentation**

1. The ESSC was informed that the agenda of the forthcoming DMES meeting will include: (i) a decision on the possible introduction of a quarterly GDP flash estimate for European aggregates at t+30 days; (ii) the establishment of a quality reporting system for the ESA 2010 transmission programme; (iii) strategic priority setting for the DMES' activities in the short and medium term; (iv) the elements of the proposed work programme for "GDP and Beyond" and (v) the results of the Task Force which has looked at European needs for a future SNA.
2. The ESS Committee was also informed about an upcoming DMES seminar on benchmark revision policy in the national accounts, which will discuss progress towards the implementation of a harmonised benchmark revision policy across the EU and the launch of a DMES Task Force on this topic.

**B. Discussion**

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**Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/15**

**Partnership Group (PG)**

- Report on the last meeting, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015
- Draft agenda of the next meeting, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2015

**A. Presentation**

1. The Chairman of the PG referred to the PG report for the different items that were discussed at the PG's last meeting, held on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2015. This meeting started with the report from the Luxembourgish Presidency, before focusing on strategic issues which included the follow-up on the 2015 DGINS. Indeed the PG expressed its satisfaction with the papers presented and discussions held during the last DGINS Conference. The PG also urged that in future conferences the balance between the presentation of papers and discussion is considered more judiciously in order to have more time to debate the issues. Furthermore, it was also advised that the contribution and engagement of participants be promoted as much as possible through the organisation of breakout sessions.
2. The ESSC was also briefed about the discussion on the next steps of the implementation of the ESS Vision 2020. In this context the PG urged the Vision Implementing Group

(VIG) to proceed with its work on the action roadmaps and the allocation of risk action owners, for submission to the ESSC in its February 2016 meeting. It was also mentioned that the PG requested a paper, to be presented at its December 2015 meeting, regarding the exchange of micro-data and the core principles and enabling actions agreed in this context.

3. On the "Catalogue of Statistical Products", the ESSC was informed that the PG welcomed the provisional version of the catalogue as a useful tool, while proposing that the catalogue be presented according to statistical domains. It also requested that more work be done regarding the consistency of the objectives of the European Statistical Programme (ESP), the Annual Work Programmes (AWPs), and the structure of the catalogue.
4. During its September meeting the PG was also informed about the outcomes of the first meeting of the Task Force on the implementation of amended Regulation 223/2009. Additionally, the state of play concerning the 2015 ESS Report was presented by Eurostat. In this context, the PG appointed Tjark Tjin-A-Tsoi as the new member of the editorial committee.
5. In addition, the PG Chairperson notified the ESSC about the draft agenda of the next PG meeting, to be held on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December. The items therein include, inter alia, (i) the state of play of the implementation of ESS Vision 2020; (ii) the topics for the 2016 DGINS Conference; (iii) the implementation of amended Regulation 223/2009; (iv) statistics on income, consumption and wealth; (v) a report on the Task Force on Cooperation models within the ESS; and (vi) the indicators to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
6. Finally, the PG Chairperson announced that the recent ESS vote resulted in the choice of Genovefa Ružic as new PG Chairperson from January 2016. The upcoming PG Chairperson thanked the preceding chairmanship for their excellent work during the previous two years and committed herself to work as hard, in cooperation with Eurostat and the ESS. The ESSC welcomed the new Chairperson of the PG and also thanked the preceding Chairperson for the work done.

## **B. Discussion**

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### **Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/16**

#### **Report from the outgoing Presidency (Luxembourg)**

##### **A. Presentation**

1. The Luxembourgish Presidency elucidated its work on a number of proposals as follows:
  - a) The proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 184/2005 on Community statistics concerning balance of payments, international trade in services and foreign direct investment (BoP). In

this context the Presidency launched a hearing on the 6<sup>th</sup> July, as well as a non-binding paper highlighting the main concerns of the Member States on this file. The following compromise proposal was then presented to the CWPS on the 30<sup>th</sup> October;

- b) The proposal for a Regulation on harmonised indices of consumer prices and repealing Regulation (EC) No 2494/95. In this case, the ESSC was informed that the ECON Committee of the European Parliament (EP) had voted on the amendments of the HICP on the 13<sup>th</sup> October. It was also enlightened about the Presidency's drafting of a discussion paper on the major issues with regard to the EP's amendments for the CWPS. This led to new compromise text, drafted by the Presidency, and which has been made available to the Member States for their comments on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November;
- c) The proposal for a Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1365/2006 on statistics of goods transport by inland waterways as regards conferring of delegated and implementing powers upon the Commission for the adoption of certain measures. A meeting was organised with the rapporteur on Inland Waterways file for the TRAN Committee. Furthermore, on the 26<sup>th</sup> October the Presidency launched a written hearing with the aim of reaching an agreement with the Member States, which would allow the start of a final trilogue.
- d) The proposal for Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 91/2003 on rail road statistics, as regards the collection of data on goods, passengers and accidents. The Presidency mentioned its meeting with the rapporteur of the TRAN Committee, together with Eurostat. It also expressed its intention of launching written consultation upon receipt of the approved document by Eurostat. It also informed the delegates that, upon agreement by the Member States, it intends to launch the final trilogue on this dossier.

## **B. Discussion**

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### **Report from the incoming Presidency (The Netherlands)**

#### **A. Presentation**

1. The ESSC was informed about the priorities of the forthcoming Dutch Presidency of the Council, in the context of the Trio Presidency Programme which also includes Slovakia and Malta. It was explained that the Trio of Presidencies will support activities aimed at the provision of relevant and high quality European official statistics, while respecting growing user demands in terms of scope and quality of information against a background of considerably reduced resources. Furthermore, it was reported that special attention will be paid to strengthening the confidence in European statistics and to harmonisation, as well as the reduction of production costs and response burden.
2. The next Presidency also argued that it would be building its agenda on the progress achieved by the preceding Presidency. As such, the dossiers earmarked for further work or finalisation were: (i) statistics of goods transport by inland waterways; (ii) rail transport statistics; (iii) balance of payments, international trade in services and foreign direct investment; (iv) harmonised indices of consumer prices (HICP); and (v) external trade with non-member countries (Extrastat).

3. The ESS delegates were updated about three legislative proposals that are expected to be adopted by the Commission during the Dutch Presidency, namely: (i) the harmonisation of gross national income (GNI); (ii) social statistics (IESS); and (iii) the extension of the 2014-2017 work programme for the period 2018-2020.
4. Finally, the ESSC were also enlightened about the Presidency team of Statistics Netherlands, the launching of a website dedicated to the Dutch Presidency of the Council Working Party on Statistics (CWPS), and about the dates of the scheduled meetings of the CWPS for the duration of the Presidency.

## **B. Discussion**

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**Agenda item ESSC 2015/27/17**  
**Catalogue of statistical products**

**A. Presentation**

1. Eurostat reminded the ESSC delegates that at its May meeting the Committee had asked for further discussion on the catalogue of products in the context of the implementation of the amended Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European statistics. This discussion was held in the context of the Resource Directors' Group (RDG) and the PG, allowing for the drafting of a revised version of the catalogue of products.
2. The ESSC was informed that the current version of the catalogue has been substantially improved and enriched since its presentation to the ESSC in May 2015. In particular, the names of some products have been revised to be more "user oriented". Furthermore, the current catalogue, excluding information on micro-data, was defined as being part of the 2016 Annual Work Programme (AWP) that is now in the process of inter-service consultation with the Commission DGs.
3. Eurostat expressed its intention of furthering the discussions with a small group of volunteering countries and the RDG during 2016. Subsequently, Eurostat committed itself to present a revised version of the catalogue as a basis for the priority setting exercise at the May 2016 ESSC meeting, together with the draft AWP for 2017.

**B. Discussion**

1. A number of Member States thanked Eurostat for its work on the catalogue of statistical products. One delegation underlined that this catalogue is a useful tool, both for communicating the relevance of statistics, as well as for the NSIs in regard of assessing cost and quality.
2. One delegation stressed the importance of a clear definition for European statistics in order to improve the NSIs cooperation with the other national authorities (ONAs). A number of delegations contended that the catalogue would benefit from having a new column specifying which statistical products could be listed as European Statistics as defined by Regulation 223/2009, and another one showing the actual producer. In this context, Eurostat committed itself to further work concerning the column description.
3. Two NSIs expressed their opinion that the current version of the statistical catalogue was not mature enough to be included as an annex of the 2016 AWP.
4. Eurostat clarified that the catalogue presents the statistical products disseminated by Eurostat based on inputs produced by national statistical authorities. Eurostat further explained that although during 2016 it plans to identify which flows of data from each country are associated with each entry in the catalogue, given the high number of flows this information will not expressly feature in the catalogue.
5. Eurostat proposed to include the catalogue of statistical products as an Annex to the AWP, including only the products that will be available during the year.
6. The Chairperson of the ESSC made a reference to ICT Survey in the context of deciding whether it should be held on an annual or biannual basis. The Chairperson also argued that the relative priority of the ICT survey would have to be seen in the light of the overall priorities assigned to all products on this catalogue. In this sense, the catalogue will, as

## Item for discussion

was the plan from its origin a few years ago, facilitate priority setting and decision making based on more precise and complete evidence.

**Briefing from the 3<sup>rd</sup> brainstorming meeting on the value of statistics and communication - Grotta Ferrata (IT) – 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2015**

1. The Chairperson of the ESSC briefed the Committee about the 3<sup>rd</sup> brainstorming meeting. The aim of the meetings (held in Vienna, Amsterdam and Grotta Ferrata) was described as being the attempt to establish innovative ideas which would benefit the ESS.
2. The ESSC was informed that the group discussed the issue of certification, recommending: (i) short term action focussing on the entire production system of the ESS and the quality safeguards that are already in place; and (ii) long term action expanding to the product level and possibly installing a proper certification procedure.
3. The brainstorming group agreed with the further elaboration of a decision document regarding the short term action for subsequent presentation at the ESSC meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2016. It was also suggested that a seminar on quality be organised back-to-back with the February ESSC meeting, allowing for a plenary discussion during the ESSC meeting itself. This seminar would address open issues related to quality, including the longer term action on certification, as well as possible actions under the ESS Vision 2020 and for which strategic guidance is needed. A possible future revision of the Code of Practice as well as the creation of a high level Task Force could also be considered.
4. The Chairperson of the ESSC further reported that the group had tackled the subject of "branding" and proposed a motto - "Better Statistics – Better Europe" – defining the mission of European statistics. It was also suggested that this motto be followed by a statement inspired by the dimensions identified on the ESAC's "Data manifesto for Europe". The ESSC was informed that a corresponding vision statement, explaining the destination and goals of the ESS Vision 2020, would be proposed by the VIG.
5. The ESSC was briefed about the discussions on budget and resources as well as concerning innovation.
6. The Chairperson of the ESSC relayed the opinion of the brainstorming group that this meeting format has proven to be a meaningful model of informal cooperation complementing the more formal settings of the other existing ESS-related entities. In view of the success of these meetings, the group suggested to make further use of this type of cooperation whenever a concrete subject asks for such a creative approach. The membership of the group would follow a general principle of openness for any interested ESSC member, working in a transparent way for a limited duration and scope.
7. The ESSC agreed with the continuation of the model of informal cooperation as delineated by the brainstorming group.