

Economic statistics

Executive seeks to guarantee reliability of data

By Eric van Puyvelde | Tuesday 17 April 2012

Ensuring the independence of national statistical institutes (NSIs) and confirming at the highest political level the reliability and quality management of national data compiled at EU level. These are the two main areas in the regulation, proposed on 17 April by the European Commission, to reinforce the quality and credibility of statistics in the EU. The aim is to amend the previous 2009 regulation, as laid out in 2011 in the 'six pack' legislation on enhanced economic governance.

The Commission justifies its proposal by noting that "demands for such data have further increased in light of the enhanced economic policy coordination that has been agreed in the EU over the past year. Moreover, recent economic events have shown the importance of credible statistics to ensure the trust of the public and the financial markets in such decisions," the Commission writes, referring to the eurozone crisis.

The first focus of the proposal is on the independence of NSIs, and in particular the heads of these authorities. The heads of the NSIs must be appointed purely on professional criteria (ie without any political motivation), in full transparency, and should be entirely autonomous in their work. They must be independent in deciding how statistics are developed, produced and disseminated, as well as in managing the statistics office. In this context, the independence of Eurostat, as the central coordinator and monitor of the entire European statistical system, is also reiterated within the proposed revised legal framework. In addition, the Commission will, in the coming weeks, adopt a decision on Eurostat confirming its professional independence by clarifying its institutional setting, its role and responsibilities within the Commission. The accountability of the heads of NSIs is also underlined, and an annual report on the statistical activities and financial situation of the institutes must be presented to the relevant national authority.

A second important aspect of the proposal is that member states will be required to sign 'commitments of confidence'. In doing so, they will pledge at the highest political level to fully respect the 'European statistics code of practice', to safeguard the independence of NSIs and to establish national quality assurance frameworks for statistics. These commitments must be signed by national governments and will be counter-signed by the Commission. Adherence to these commitments will be monitored by the Commission (Eurostat).

Finally, the proposal sets out a series of provisions extending and securing access to administrative data for the production of European statistics.

The proposal is available at www.europolitics.info > Search = 312733

Background

The 'European statistics code of practice' was first agreed in 2005 and subsequently revised in 2011. The code sets out 15 principles, combined with indicators of good practice, relating to the institutional environment, the statistical production processes and the output of statistics. Professional

independence, commitment to quality, sound methodology and relevance of statistics are among these principles. The basic legal framework governing statistics was modernised in 2009 (Regulation 223/2009) to improve the efficiency of the ESS. Clear structures for cooperation and coordination, as well as priority setting and simplification mechanisms were introduced to that effect.

On 15 April 2011, the Commission put forward its communication 'Towards robust quality management for European statistics' (see *Europolitics*4186). That communication set out the ways to strengthen the governance of ESS, including the idea of 'commitments of confidence' and legal measures to safeguard NSIs' independence. The professional independence of NSIs was also explicitly recognised in the 'six pack' legislation on enhanced economic governance.