Excessive deficit procedure: quality of statistical data

2010/0035(NLE) - 28/06/2010

The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs adopted the report drafted by Othmar KARAS (EPP, AT) amending, under the consultation procedure, the proposal for a Council regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 479/2009 as regards the quality of statistical data in the context of the excessive deficit procedure.

The main amendments are as follows:

- the Commission should assess and draw conclusions about how the collection and evaluation of financial statistics from Member States was conducted in the past. Those conclusions should be reported to the European Parliament;

- Members consider it essential that ensuring institutional independence of all national statutory statistical bodies is crucial to avoid any undue pressure on them from their respective governments;

- it is essential that the data received from the Member States is shared in due time with the European Central Bank's Directorate General for Statistics;

- the comparability of economic data requires a uniform methodology. The Commission should therefore promote the harmonisation of statistical data collection;

- the Commission should consider elaborating sanctions within the framework of the Stability and Growth Pact in relation to the submission of misrepresented macro-economic statistics by Member States. It should also consider enforcing such sanctions against Member States that falsify the macroeconomic statistics relating to their budget deficit and government debt;

- the Member States should provide the Commission (Eurostat) with all statistical and budgetary information on the basis of a standardised and internationally accepted method of accounting. Planned government deficit and government debt level figures shall be the most recent official forecasts, taking into account the most recent budgetary decisions and economic developments and prospects and monthly and quarterly outturns;

- in carrying out monitoring visits to a Member State whose statistical information is under scrutiny the Commission (Eurostat) should be entitled to have access to the accounts of government entities at central, state, local and social security levels, including the provision of underlying detailed accounting information, relevant statistical surveys and questionnaires and further related information, including off-balance sheet transactions, respecting the legislation on data protection as well as statistical confidentiality;

- the methodological visits may be unannounced and are designed to monitor the processes including the independence of the national statistical authority from the government. These visits, announced or unannounced, shall only be undertaken in cases where serious risks or problems with the quality of the data are suspected. The Commission shall establish a list of cases to be considered as a significant risk or problem relating to the quality of the data;

- Member States shall, at the request of the Commission (Eurostat), provide the assistance of experts in national accounting, including for the preparation and undertaking of the methodological visits, which

may also be unannounced. In the exercise of their duties, these experts shall provide an independent expertise and shall undergo special training so as to ensure a high level of expertise and impartiality;

- Representatives of the European Central Bank may take part and assist the officials of the Commission (Eurostat) during the methodological visits;

- the Commission (Eurostat) may make on-site inspections and be permitted to hold interviews with any organisation it deems relevant to its work.