Quality management for European statistics

2011/2289(INI) - 14/02/2012 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Edward SCICLUNA (S&D, MT) on quality management for European statistics.

The report notes that **reliable and accurate statistics are essential** to allow effective economic and budgetary policy making by Member States and at Union level. The success of the Europe 2020 Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the economic governance package, including the European Semester, demands high-quality independent statistics.

Accordingly, Members take the view that **a systemic approach to quality** needs to be taken, which may require a reform of the method of producing European statistics and a **gradual transition from a corrective approach to a preventive approach** to the quality management of European statistics in general and public finance statistics in particular.

The report supports the Commission's intention of **proposing amendments to Regulation 223/2009 (Statistical Regulation)** in order to establish a proactive approach to monitoring and assessing public finance data at an early upstream stage in order to allow for corrective action at the earliest possible point. It also supports the proposal to **establish a legal framework aimed at reinforcing the governance framework**, especially as regards the professional independence of national statistical authorities and Eurostat.

Members emphasise that the **independence of the statistical services** must be safeguarded at both national and European level from the threat of possible political interventions.

The Commission is asked to submit to the European Parliament and the Council **proposals for legislation aimed at introducing elements of the revised European Statistics Code of Practice** into EU law, with a view to (i) distinguishing clearly between the responsibilities and competences of national statistical agencies and those of Member State governments and (ii) ensuring more transparent and coordinated accountability for data quality. For their part, Member States should make sure that **statistics are accurate across all levels of government**.

Members also want the Commission to present proposals ensuring greater independence and greater coherence in the competences of the national courts of auditors in verifying the quality of the sources used to establish national debt and deficit figures and strengthening the coordinating role of the European Court of Auditors.

The committee calls upon **Eurostat:** (i) to pursue its efforts to modernise the European statistics production methods in order to maintain cost-effectiveness; (ii) to ensure that public accounting systems are established in all Member States in a standardised manner and that they are strengthened with both internal and external audit mechanisms; (iii) to disclose publicly whether it has doubts concerning accuracy across all types of statistics; (iv) to look at ways to make its publications, particularly those online, more user-friendly to the average citizen and non-professionals.

The report welcomes the European Commission's intention to give Eurostat greater investigative powers. It emphasises the need for Eurostat to ensure transparency with regards to its own staff and supports Eurostat’s intention of establishing a **legal framework for ‘Commitments on Confidence in Statistics’.**

Noting that it is essential to **improve the way that public accounting systems work**, Members ask the Commission, to draw up a common methodology and implement effective, suitable, proven solutions. They stress the need to develop a coherent system for research into socio-economic processes in cross-border areas, including those in the regions located on the external borders of the European Union, together with statistics for macro-regions. Lastly, they consider that the research mechanisms connected with the balance of payments should be improved.