Special report 12/2012 (2011 discharge): Did the Commission and Eurostat improve the process for producing reliable and credible European statistics?

2012/2247(DEC) - 21/09/2012 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: the drawing up of a Special Report (No 12/2012) of the Court of Auditors on the capacities of the Commission and Eurostat to improve the process for producing reliable and credible European statistics.

CONTENT: reliable and credible statistics are essential for the proper functioning of the European Union.

Statistics are needed, in almost all areas for:

- the formulation of policies,
- the collection and allocation of its funds, and
- the monitoring and assessment of performance.

Statistical indicators are increasingly used as a trigger for European policy decisions or **sanctions**.

Conclusions of the Court of Auditors' audit: the Court's audit found that the Commission and Eurostat have not yet achieved the full implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice. The Code sets demanding standards but lacks strong verification and enforcement tools to ensure adherence to the standards throughout the European statistical system (ESS)

The Commission's recent initiatives to give new momentum to achieving full compliance with the Code go in the right direction, but are not sufficient to address all concerns. Ambiguity on which elements of the Code are legally binding persists, making verification and enforcement more difficult.

As to the European statistical programme (2008 to 2012), the audit found that Eurostat had not designed it as an effective planning, monitoring and accountability tool. Reprioritisation of statistical activities towards new challenges was behind schedule. Regarding the financial management of the programme, the audit found that Eurostat's grant management improved, but weaknesses in procurement persisted. The draft programme (2013-2017) provides an opportunity to reengineer the ESS in order to make it more efficient and flexible provided that it is supplemented by precise targets and milestones.

Court recommendations: the Court presents a series of recommendations with a view to improving the situation:

- **strengthening the system of European statistics to ensure professional independence**, sufficient resources, effective supervision, with sanctions and swift improvement measures for cases where quality standards are not respected;
- achieving the full implementation of the **European Statistics Code of Practice** by amending the regulatory framework and ensuring legal certainty about the nature of the obligation to adhere to the Code;
- enhancing the professional independence of the Chief Statistician of the European Union by appointing her/him for a fixed-term mandate after having received a favourable opinion from

European Statistical Governance Advisory Board and an endorsement by the European Parliament and the Council;

- ensuring a systematic review of statistical priorities and encouraging statistical innovation;
- simplifying Eurostat’s grant management and enhancing competition in procurement procedures.