European statistics: professional independence of national statistical authorities

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The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs adopted the report by Edward SCICLUNA (S&D, MT) on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European statistics.

The committee recommends that the European Parliament's position adopted at first reading, following the ordinary legislative procedure, should amend the Commission proposal as follows:

Independence: it is necessary to ensure the independence of statistical authorities from possible political pressure at national and Union level. To that end, Members stress that **national parliaments** have a particularly important role to play regarding the legitimacy of the process and in terms of parliamentary control. Thus, the 'Commitment on Confidence in Statistics' adopted by each Member State should include the participation and supervision of national parliaments. **Heads of NSIs** shall be appointed by national governments after consulting the national parliament.

In addition to guaranteeing the independence of NSIs, it is necessary for the **independence of Eurostat to be consolidated** and guaranteed by means of effective parliamentary scrutiny and control.

Coordination: Members stress that the coordinating role already attributed to the NSIs for European statistics produced through the ESS should be clarified as regards its scope, so as to achieve more efficient coordination of statistical activities within the ESS at national level, including quality management. It is necessary to **step up coordination and cooperation between NSIs and Eurostat** and remedy any shortcomings in this respect. The European Central Bank, the ESS and the European System of Central Banks (ESCB) should cooperate closely to ensure complete and coherent European statistics.

Access to statistics: national and European statistics should be **easy to compare and access and should be updated promptly and regularly** so as to ensure that Union policies and funding initiatives take full account of developments in Europe, in particular the consequences of the economic crisis.

All users should have access to the same data at the same time and embargoes should be strictly complied with. NSIs should establish binding dates for the publication of periodical data.

Director-General of Eurostat: the statistical office of the Commission shall be headed by a Director-General, **appointed by Commission, for a non-renewable term of office of seven years, after consulting the European Parliament**.

The Director-General shall have the sole responsibility for deciding on processes, statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases and publications for all statistics produced by the Commission (Eurostat). In addition, he or she shall appear annually in the framework of **Statistical Dialogue** before the relevant committee of the European Parliament.

Cooperation with courts of auditors: in order to ensure that data on the public sector are accurate and fairly reflect the situation of public accounts, the ESS shall cooperate and collaborate closely with courts of auditors, without prejudice to their independence.

Fines for manipulation of statistics: unless Council objects by qualified majority, the Commission may impose a fine on a Member State that intentionally or, by gross negligence, seriously misrepresents statistical data.

In order to establish the existence of a misrepresentation, it is proposed that the Commission may conduct **all necessary investigations**. It may also conduct **on-site inspections** and have access to all data produced by an NSI at national, regional and local level. The rights of the defence of the Member State subject to investigation shall be fully respected during the investigation.

Transmission and quality of data: where the Commission is not satisfied with the data flow from NSIs to the Commission (Eurostat) or the quality of the data, it shall send a **public warning to the Member State concerned**, publish it on the website of the Commission (Eurostat), and include a reference to it in the corresponding data set. If, within six months of such publication, the problems have not been remedied, the Commission may impose fines.

The Commission (Eurostat) shall **publicly and promptly voice any serious concern** it has regarding the quality of the data transmitted. It shall publicly disclose serious breaches of the Code of Practice.

Peer review, exchange of good practice: the Commission shall establish a template for, and encourage, peer review and exchanges of best practices among NSIs.