Statistics on the trading of goods between Member States: computer networks between administrations, EDICOM 1996-1999

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This document consists of the report from the Commission on the implementation of the EDICOM programme (1997-1999). The purpose of this report is to provide information on the results of the actions undertaken in 1997-1999 in connection with the 1996 Edicom Decision, in accordance with Article 9 of the Decision. The main results at the completion of the programme were as follows: - the programme helped considerably in introducing the Intrastat system under suitable conditions; - in particular, it allowed the design, development and promotion of electronic Intrastat declaration forms distributed to more than 50 000 firms required to provide statistical information; - it allowed the infrastructure for collecting, processing, transmitting and disseminating statistical information to be modernised in the Member States and at Eurostat, with a notable positive impact on information quality, dissemination times and arrangements for access to statistics, especially the development of the Comext data base, which is now a reference tool at Eurostat; - it was involved in the work of standardising messages and promoting electronic data exchange resulting in a considerable improvements to data bases, their speedy availability and reduced costs of statistical production; - it allowed the computerisation of the management and dissemination of information related to the nomenclature, as well as the availability of such information to internal and external users; - it was involved in improving and harmonising statistical methods, thus contributing to better data quality; - it was involved, as part of the SLIM initiative, in adapting Intrastat rules to the needs of the internal market by ensuring a better balance between user requirements and the burden placed on information providers. On the basis of these results, the Commission (Eurostat) in 1999 proposed guidelines on the future of statistics on trade in goods in a strategic document which was the outcome of broad consultation with national administrations and professional circles. These guidelines recommended that statistical methods be adapted and that modernisation efforts be continued with a view to easing further the burden on firms, while boosting the effectiveness of the statistical system. In this context, a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council outlining a five-year work programme was adopted in 2001. The two main objectives of the programme were: - to encourage the organisation of the statistical network in the most modern, rational and effective manner possible and to adopt measures necessary for improving and harmonising the methods used, in order to produce statistics which are more reliable and less expensive for the information providers and administrations, become available more quickly and better satisfy the expectations of users; - to develop existing computer tools for the collection, production, transmission and dissemination of statistical data, taking into account the latest technological advances and seeking to optimise cost-effectiveness. The work has begun. In cooperation with the Member States the Commission will regularly review the actions financed under the Decision, in order to ascertain whether the stated objectives have been attained and to provide guidelines for improving the effectiveness of future actions.