

Fiscal statistics: governance and quality of statistical data in the context of the excessive deficit procedure (amend. Regulation (EC) No 3605/93)

2005/0013(CNS) - 08/11/2005

The Council adopted the following conclusions and politically endorsed three annexes to be incorporated into a draft regulation amending regulation 3605/93 as regards the quality of statistical data used under the excessive deficit procedure.

The Council welcomes the EFC Status Report on Information Requirements in EMU. Due to the commitments of, and close-cooperation between, Eurostat and national statistical institutes (NSIs), major progress has been achieved in several fields of the Principal European Economic Indicators (PEEIs) over recent years. Furthermore, important new legislation was enacted paving the way for further progress in those areas. Overall, nine out of a total nineteen PEEIs currently fulfil or are close to the PEEI timeliness and coverage targets, thus improving considerably the information base for economic analysis and monetary policy. This progress notwithstanding, the Council acknowledges that important challenges remain. The availability of timely and high-coverage indicators for services and labour markets, in particular employment data, should be improved as a matter of priority. Generally, despite some important improvements to timeliness, most PEEIs still lag far behind the US indicators and major efforts are still required to catch up with US timeliness. In order to meet these challenges, stronger commitments are needed in the longer term from NSIs and Eurostat, with the support of the ECB.

Benchmarking exercises against other countries worldwide should be carried out from time to time so that European statistics match the best international standards. The full and prompt implementation by Member States of the legislative framework that has been adopted under the EMU Action Plan is strongly supported so as to improve the critical areas identified. To free up the necessary resources at the national and European level the Council asks the Commission to continue and reinforce the efforts on prioritisation.

The Council confirms its view that the core issue remains to ensure adequate practices, resources, capabilities to produce high quality statistics at the national and European level with a view to ensuring the independence, integrity and accountability of both national statistical offices and Eurostat. The Council is of the view that a new high-level advisory body would enhance the independence, integrity and accountability of Eurostat and, in the context of the peer review assessment of implementing the European Statistics Code of Practice, of the ESS.

The Council welcomes the letter by the Commission to the Council President providing clarification on the principles and details guiding Eurostat's methodological visits, and assurance that Eurostat will discuss any possible revision with Member States and duly take into account their comments if the need for revisions arises. In the view of the Council, legal obligations of Member States have to be specified. The Council advises that these legal obligations have a legal nature as well as Eurostat new capacity of investigation, so they should be integrated in the draft regulation as an annex. As the annex has been agreed, the Council endorses the draft Regulation amending Regulation 3605/93 and foresees a timely adoption of the Regulation with a view to its application in the next EDP notification.

There was a broad majority in favour of keeping the CMFB and not to change the current set-up of the CMFB as an advisory body. The Council invites the CMFB to review its procedures and to examine

possible areas and ways of improvements and cited the importance of reviewing statistical priorities and reducing statistical requirements for areas which are now considered to be of less importance.

Moreover, as a separate element from the above package, the Council discussed the handling of complex methodological cases with relevance for EDP statistics..