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SEMINAR ON BALANCING PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY AND
ACCOUNTABILITY WITH THE MANDATE TO PRODUCE POLICY RELEVANT DATA

SESSION I: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STATISTICIANS AND POLICY MAKERS:
MAINTAINING INDEPENDENCE WHILE ADDRESSING DEMANDS

**UKRAINE'S EXPERIENCE IN ASSURING BOTH THE PROFESSIONAL
INDEPENDENCE OF STATE STATISTICS BODIES
AND THE OBJECTIVITY OF STATISTICAL INFORMATION**

Note by the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine

Summary

The Conference of European Statisticians selected in June 2008 (ECE/CES/74) the topic "Balancing principles of professional autonomy and accountability with the mandate to produce policy relevant data" for a seminar to be held at its 2009 plenary session. The Bureau, acting on behalf of the Conference, approved the outline for the seminar at its February 2009 meeting (ECE/CES/2009/2) and requested Ukraine to prepare a note to provide basis for the discussion.

Ensuring professional independence and the objectivity of statistical information is a prerequisite for producing objective and reliable statistics and a guarantee of the data quality and reliability for the government and the public. The note covers the legislative and organizational basis that provides for the professional independence of Ukrainian statistics, permitting the production of reliable and accurate data.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. According to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, one of the main requirements of a National Statistical Office (NSO) is to ensure its professional independence. Observation of this requirement is a prerequisite for producing objective and reliable statistics and a guarantee of the data quality and reliability for the government and the public.
2. The presentation covers the main legislative and organizational basis that provide for the professional independence of Ukrainian statistics allowing the production of the reliable and accurate data.

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND POLICY OF UKRAINE'S STATE STATISTICAL BODIES RELATING TO PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND ASSURING IMPARTIALITY OF STATISTICS

3. Numerous factors influence the degree of actual independence of state statistics. They are as follows:
 - a) Legal status of the statistical office;
 - b) Its visible influence;
 - c) National legal framework;
 - d) Level of culture in the society;
 - (e) Historical traditions, etc.

An NSO and its head have to be protected from external pressure in the professional issues related to methodological approaches of the organization of statistical surveys, identifying the information sources and system of indicators, data collection terms, development and dissemination, etc.

4. Considering the purpose of the statistical activity and the approaches using statistics, the NSO's activities support the achievement of political goals to a certain extent. In practice, the NSO's day-to-day work often intercepts this or that political priority, wish, expectation, etc. It is thus in some cases extremely difficult to avoid external influence and maintain the professional independence of the statistical body. However, in any case the statistical office has to stay away from politics in order to remain objective.
5. Ukraine's Constitution states that the organization of state statistics and information is governed solely by the law. Following these requirements, in 2000 the Parliament of Ukraine adopted a new revision of the Ukraine's Law 'On State Statistics'. It sets out the main provisions of the state statistical operations, the system of state statistical offices, their key tasks, functions and responsibilities. Among other major tasks of state statistical bodies, this law specifies the integrity, reliability, objectivity, accessibility, publicity and transparency of statistics.

6. Ukraine's current Law 'On State Statistics' is tailored to take into account the international legislation standards and is fully compliant with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. A separate article of the law stipulates that the state statistical activities are carried out by the state statistical bodies according to the objectives within their competence based on professional autonomy and independence. The interference of any central and local government authorities, other legal units, public unions, officials and other persons in the statistical activities, in particular concerning the content of the statistical information, the choice of its sources, statistical methodology, forms and terms of survey data collection and dissemination, etc., is prohibited. In other words, in order to provide for the trust and confidence in the official statistics, the bodies that are authorised to compile statistics are given legal guarantees that exclude interference from any government authorities, officials, etc., into their statistical activities.

7. The system of Ukraine's state statistics bodies comprises:

- (a) The State Statistics Committee of Ukraine (central office);
- (b) Regional statistical offices;
- (c) Functional bodies of state statistics including:
 - (i) Scientific and Technical Complex for Statistical Research (a research institution);
 - (ii) State Academy for Statistics, Accounting and Audit (an educational establishment);
 - (iii) Information and Analytical Agency (responsible for dissemination of statistical information).

8. According to the Regulation on the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine (SSCU) approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the SSCU is an independent state government body: its activities are coordinated directly by the government. The SSCU's chairman and deputies are appointed by the government.

9. Following the SSCU Procedures, the advisory bodies are established with the participation of representatives of research institutions, experts of government authorities and non-government organizations, etc., in order to define the priority directions of the state statistics development and coordinate the activities in the implementation of the chosen strategy.

10. The professional autonomy and independence of the statistical body under the centralised system of state statistics can only be assured if the 'vertical' subordination of regional bodies to the central office is in place. Until 2004 in Ukraine, heads of regional bodies were appointed by the SSCU Chairman; the candidates were agreed upon with heads of local governments. Being to a certain degree under the control of local authorities, very often the regional offices felt pressured concerning the organization of statistical observations, deadlines of data collection and dissemination, etc. In order to provide for the professional independence of heads of regional

statistical offices, the Regulation on the SSCU established a procedure for appointing the heads of regional offices by the SSCU Chairman with further agreement of the Ukraine's government. The latter increased the status of the heads of regional statistical offices and significantly restricted the influence of local administrations.

11. The Ukraine's Law 'On the State Statistics' gives the mandate to the SSCU and its regional offices to collect data and choose the sources of statistics independently, the choice being based on considerations of data quality and decreased burden on the respondents.

12. One of the elements of the independence of the statistical service is a well-established system of planning of statistical operations and access to programs, plans and progress reports for the public. In Ukraine, this system comprises the following:

- a) The long-term program of development of the state statistics (five years);
- b) The plan of state statistical observations (one year, based on the long-term program);
- c) A number of current plans on organisational and technical issues. Programs and plans are opened for discussion by the public, after which they are adopted by the central government. Following the results of the plans execution, annual reports are prepared and placed on the SSCU web-site.

13. Scientifically grounded methodology for conducting statistical surveys is significantly important for ensuring the objectivity of statistical information. The quality of the statistical information depends on the concepts, information sources, methods, etc. that are used. The development of the methodology requires the involvement of the research institutions. Therefore, the SSCU established the Scientific & Technical Complex for Statistical Research, which has been the main institution developing methodology for many statistical surveys conducted by the state statistical bodies. The Complex comprises the Scientific & Research Institute of Statistics and the Institute for Design of Statistical Technologies.

14. Respondents' confidence in the proper collection, processing, protection, and use of the information they provide to the statistical offices in the course of statistical surveys guarantees the reliable and objective results of statistical surveys. This is why the state statistical bodies have systematically disseminated the information on the statistical surveys' methodology. The website, specific methodological publications, comments in the statistical yearbooks and other statistical publications, press-releases, etc. are used for this purpose. In turn, such complete and transparent information on methodology is a safeguard against possible political interference in the state statistical bodies' activities.

15. In March 2009, the Parliament of Ukraine amended the Law of Ukraine "On State Statistics" to provide for clearer interaction between the state statistical offices and respondents and users on the basis of mutual respect and partnership. Since then it has been legally established that interaction is based on the following principles:

- a) Reliability;

- b) Objectivity;
- c) Confidentiality of statistics;
- d) Cost-efficiency; and
- e) Transparency of the statistical methodology.

16. Implementation of these principals in practice means the following:

- a) Monitoring and reducing the burden on respondents;
- b) Examining how user needs are satisfied while avoiding the violation of data confidentiality requirements;
- c) Carrying out the activities aimed at building respondents' trust to provide for obtaining reliable and objective statistical information;
- d) Providing for users' equal access to statistics; and
- e) Dissemination of basic principles of statistical methodology, etc.

17. In order to reduce the burden on respondents, avoid the duplication of information flows as well as minimise the costs of production of the official statistics, the SSCU uses many administrative sources of information. This information is based on national classifications, scientific methodologies and general requirements of data collection methods, processing and use. To assure the quality and reliability of the data according to the Statistical Law, the statistical authorities have to agree on the methodology and documentation related to collection and use of the administrative data. The State Statistics Committee has developed and implemented the specific Procedures for this work.

18. According to the Statistical Law of Ukraine, the primary data obtained by the state statistical bodies from respondents during statistical surveys are considered to be confidential information protected by the law and used in the aggregated and impersonalized form solely for statistical purposes. This provision complies with the international legislation concerning individual data protection as well as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Guarantees for protection of confidentiality of the information provided by individuals are also stipulated in the Laws of Ukraine "On the All-Ukrainian Population Census" and "On Agricultural Census" adopted by the Parliament of Ukraine in 2000 and 2008 respectively. Only unconditional observation of these provisions gives the opportunity to provide for the respondents' trust and confidence, which in turn is the prerequisite to obtaining reliable and trustworthy information. Respondents need to be sure that the confidentiality of the information they submit is maintained. Therefore, the State Statistics Committee informs respondents about the confidentiality protection stipulated in the legislation.

19. The Statistical Law of Ukraine also sets out the procedures and terms of access to the statistical information presented in paper publications and disseminated electronically, through

mass media, and directly according to users' requests. Along with providing the government and public with reliable, objective and comprehensive statistical information, state statistical authorities regularly provide for the transparency and availability of the information as well as instruct users so that they can use this information correctly. This is achieved by accompanying the statistical information with comments and explanations.

20. During the past years, the state statistical authorities of Ukraine have made numerous efforts to harmonise national statistics with international standards and requirements. The fact that Ukraine joined the IMF Special Data Dissemination Standard in 2003 was one of the results of this work and it confirmed the level of reliability and quality of Ukrainian statistics, thanks to the mutual efforts of the SSCU, the Ministry of Finance and the National Bank of Ukraine. The complex preparatory work on improvement of the methodology and the organization of the national statistical system supported by the IMF experts also contributed to this event.

21. In order to assure the compulsory observation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics related to confidentiality protection and the use of statistical information, a special legal act - Code of Ukraine on Administrative Offences - was adopted. It prescribes administrative responsibility of citizens and officials, including those working in statistics, for infringing the requirements of data confidentiality protection and the use of statistical survey data in mass media, its dissemination via the information networks, on paper, magnetic and other carriers, in scientific works, etc. without reference to the source.

III. THE GOALS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE STATISTICS OF UKRAINE TOWARDS ASSURING ITS PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY AND STATISTICAL INFORMATION OBJECTIVITY, IMPROVEMENT OF ITS QUALITY AND RELIABILITY

22. In 2008, the Government of Ukraine approved the Strategy for the State Statistics Development for the period until 2012. The purpose of the Strategy is to lay conditions for further development of the state statistical system, to satisfy the needs of society in high quality statistics, and to harmonize the system of indicators with the international standards at the level recommended for the statistical institutions of candidate countries. The activities of the Strategy are aimed at improvements in the following:

- a) Statistical legislation;
- b) Statistical methodology;
- c) Organizational structure;
- (d) Management system for the state statistical bodies;
- (e) Interaction of the state statistical bodies with the respondents and users of data, etc.

The outcomes will allow the enhanced quality of statistical information and the methodology of its compilation, the objectivity and reliability of the data and their improved accessibility and clarity.

23. The priority tasks of the Strategy include:

- (a) Assurance of accessibility, visibility and transparency of statistical information;
- b) Establishment of the system for regular users survey on how the information services provided by the state statistical authorities satisfy their needs; and
- (c) Development of the standard system of metadata and introduction of the reporting on statistical data quality.

24. The adherence to the principle of impartiality of statistics places the responsibility for the formulation and implementation of special data dissemination policy on the state statistics authorities. This policy should cover such components as development of the standard procedures for the release of the statistical information and comments on it, regular revision of data, treatment of incorrect data, misuse of the information, etc.

25. The Strategy activities include:

- a) Wider exchange of information resources between the state statistical authorities and other interested government agencies;
- b) Coordination of activities of the bodies and authorities to implement the state statistical works;
- c) Wider use of administrative data for state statistical observations;
- d) Establishment of the system for monitoring the burden on respondents and receiving feedback; and
- (e) Large-scale introduction of sample-based surveys into the national statistical practice.

26. The improved system of management of the state statistical authorities is an important step on the way to strengthening the professional autonomy and assuring the impartiality of the statistical information. The SSCU pays special attention to this issue. It was and still remains the priority in the preceding and current long-term programs of the development of the Ukrainian state statistics.

27. In 2006, the Government of Ukraine endorsed the Regulation "On the Approval of the Program for Introduction of the Quality Management System in the Government Bodies". In pursuance of this Regulation, in 2007-2008 the SSCU carried out the activities on the development of the quality management system, which would be in line with ISO 9001-2000 standard. These activities allowed the enhanced processes of planning and resource allocation, improved statistical works, and thus increased quality of the information services provided to users. In the framework of the implementation of the Strategy for the State Statistics Development for the period until 2012, the SSCU plans to introduce and obtain a certificate for the special quality management system.

28. In the course of the introduction of the quality management system in 2008, the SSCU conducted the self-assessment of its compliance with the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice. This work was aimed at establishing the information base for positioning the Ukraine's state statistics as a part of the European statistical system, and also to identify the areas that need further improvement. The work also involved creating the tools for building the SSCU institutional capacity concerning the following aspects:

- (a) Use of programme approach to the financial management and planning that will combine the objectives of the development and the available resources;
- (b) Improvement in staff selection and professional training as well as the establishment of the information system for the staff management;
- (c) Quality management with the process approach that monitors the satisfaction of users' demands at different stages of statistical production.

29. The results of the SSCU self-assessment were used in the Survey on Observance of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in the countries of South-Eastern Europe and CIS countries conducted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in March 2009.

30. In 2009-2010, the SSCU plans to prepare "National Principles of the Activities of the State Statistical Bodies" and "Procedure for Conducting the Self-assessment of the Activities of the State Statistics Bodies" that will include relevant rules and procedures and establish the means and methods for analysis of the work outcomes with the aim of grading the national statistics compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice and identifying the problems to be solved.

31. The development of a stable and well-established statistical system providing the government and society with reliable and impartial statistical information is only possible with the adequate organizational structure and availability of qualified staff. In order to achieve the objective of the Strategy for the State Statistics Development for the period until 2012, the SSCU intends to carry out the gradual reorganization of the system of state statistical authorities in order to bring it in line with the European statistical system standards.

32. International cooperation and familiarisation with the experience of those countries with a developed statistical system play an important role in strengthening the autonomy of the Ukrainian statistics and its development. Productive and comprehensive cooperation with such international organizations as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, UNECE, the United Nations, Eurostat and the International Labour Office is aimed at the improvement of the Ukrainian statistics, increasing the efficiency of its activities and, finally, the quality of statistical information.

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