

ECE/CES/62

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
and
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Report of the fiftieth plenary session

(Paris, 10-12 June 2002)



**UNITED NATIONS
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Information Guide for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)**IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMISSION DECISION I(48)**

To be considered during the sessions of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies (PSBs) and included in their report to the Commission

Information Guide for the Commission

		<u>Paragraphs</u>
(i)	Draft decisions and/or recommendations for possible adoption by the Commission at its next session.	Not applicable
(ii)	Implementation of decisions previously adopted by the Commission, including application of resolutions adopted by ECOSOC and the General Assembly (inputs made to global programmes and interregional cooperation)	8-13
(iii)	Possible amendments to the mandate of the PSB, for discussion and, possibly, adoption by the Commission	Not applicable
(iv)	Programme of work	18, 28, 32, 40, 45, 53, 55
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I. INTRODUCTION

Attendance

1. The Conference of European Statisticians held its fiftieth plenary session in Paris at the invitation of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It was attended by representatives of Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Republic of San Marino, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America and Yugoslavia.
2. The session was attended by representatives of the European Commission (Eurostat). Australia, Japan and Republic of Korea participated under Article 11 of the terms of reference of the ECE.
3. Representatives of the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis (UN Statistics Division); United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the following specialised agencies and intergovernmental organisations attended: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Trade Organization (WTO), International Labour Office (ILO); International Monetary Fund (IMF); World Bank; United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (UN-SIAP); Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT); the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Free Trade Organisation (EFTA).
4. The following non-governmental organisation in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was represented: International Statistical Institute (ISI).
5. Mr. Svein Longva (Norway) chaired the session. Messrs. Len Cook (United Kingdom), Hallgrimur Snorrason (Iceland), Tadeusz Toczynski (Poland), Vladimir Sokolin (Russian Federation) and Mrs. Katherine Wallman (United States of America) served as Vice-Chairpersons.

Agenda and procedure

6. The provisional agenda (ECE/CES/61) was adopted. The Conference recalled the procedure for improving the efficiency of plenary sessions (CES/821) that the Conference adopted at its 1994 plenary session.

Opening statements

7. Opening statements were delivered by Mr. Longva, Chairman of the Conference, and Mr. Kelly, UNECE.

II. IMPLICATIONS OF MEETINGS OF THE CONFERENCE'S PARENT BODIES

A. May 2002 session of the Economic Commission for Europe

Documentation: CES/2002/1

8. The Conference thanked Eurostat for facilitating the participation of representatives of Central and East European countries and of CIS countries in the annual plenary sessions of the Conference of European Statisticians and in selected other high priority meetings in the Conference's work programme. Representatives of the statistical offices of these countries have used the European Commission's funds to finance their participation in these meetings;
9. The Conference agreed that the ECE Statistical Division is closely involved in operational activities addressing the issue of economies in transition through the Regional Adviser Programme and in the UNDP financed project aiming at statistical capacity building for social reporting, and agreed that the Statistical Division should seek ways of increasing its technical assistance in statistics to economies in transition in the ECE region through its Regional Adviser in Statistics, the Conference's regular meeting programme and its current regular budget and extra-budgetary resources. The Conference also agreed that the technical assistance in statistics be demand driven and closely coordinated with activities undertaken by other organisations and UN agencies so as to achieve tangible results in the recipient countries.
10. The Conference agreed that the Bureau of the Conference, the Conference itself and the secretariat of the Statistical Division should continue to work actively towards contributing positively to strengthening the ECE as an Organization.
11. The Conference asked the Bureau of the Conference, on the basis of proposals by the Secretariat and the Bureau, to examine in which new areas the Conference could further contribute to statistically-related cross-sectoral activities in the ECE, and in identifying what the most efficient, flexible and cost effective modalities would be for addressing those intersectoral issues.
12. The Conference asked the Bureau to continue to review annually statistically-related intersectoral cooperation that is underway in the ECE, and to report on the outcome of the review to the annual plenary sessions of the Conference.
13. The Conference asked the Bureau to continue to consider what contributions the CES can make to the implementation process of the Millennium Declaration and to statistically-related policy-related work that the ECE may undertake in the future, and how aspects of it could be integrated into the CES programme of work.

B. March 2002 session of the UN Statistical Commission

Documentation: CES/2002/2

14. The Conference noted the conclusions reached by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session and considered whether those conclusions should have any implications for the programme of work of the Conference of European Statisticians.

15. The Conference was informed that the ACC Subcommittee on Statistics ceased to exist. However, the activity as such has not disappeared, as the need for coordination is larger than ever. The UNSD will continue the activity and will find the modalities to report back to the countries.

16. The Conference was also informed on the progress made by the UNDP on improving the Human Development Report, particularly on improving the data quality.

17. The Conference noted the progress made by the World Bank on further advancing the work on the implementation of the global International Comparison Programme.

**III. INTEGRATED PRESENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK
IN THE ECE REGION**

Documentation: CES/2002/3 and addenda 1-7; CES/2002/4, CES/2002/5; CES/2002/6, CES/2002/7 and CES/2002/8

a) Introduction

18. The Conference agreed to review the Integrated Presentation in the manner suggested by the Bureau, namely to review one topic in greater depth, and to review the remaining programme elements more quickly on the basis of the detailed recommendations made by the Bureau. The topic that it reviewed in greater depth was Statistical data collection and processing (Programme Element 2.2).

b) Statistical data collection and processing

Documentation: CES/2002/7, CES/2002/8, CES/2002/WP.4 and CES/2002/3/Add.2

19. The discussion on this topic revealed that it is of great interest to the National Statistical Offices (NSOs). The NSOs called for better coordination of statistical data collection among various International Organisations (IOs), improved efficiency of data collection and decreased reporting burden. The present situation was documented by examples from various subject-matter areas such as annual international trade statistics, national accounts, purchasing power parities, financial statistics, structural statistics for industry and services and short-term indicators for industry and services.

20. Specific issues were raised in the discussion, cutting across various Programme Elements (PEs) of the Conference, in addition to PE 2.2, and covering a wide variety of managerial, technological and methodological issues: (i) Use of coordinated classifications/standards by IOs (PE

2.4); (ii) Common and clear metadata descriptions following some minimum standards (PE 2.3); (iii) Use of well specified transmission agreements between NSOs and IOs (PE 1.2); (iv) Breaking the requests down to manageable and logical units (PE 1.2 and all subject-matter related PEs); (v) Use of standardised data interchange formats like GESMES, GESME/CB and SDMX (PE 2.3); (vi) Focusing the requests and transmission only on new data and revisions in order to decrease the reporting burden (PE 2.1); (vii) Coordination and maintenance of common datasets by various IOs in order to avoid multiple reporting (PE 1.1); (viii) Implementing optimal national and internal organisation including the management of statistical production (PE 1.2), dissemination databases (PE 2.3) and standardised metadata (PE 2.3); (ix) Providing national statistical offices with access to statistics stored at IOs in order to improve their motivation for providing data (P.E. 6.1); and (x) Ensuring high level quality of data collected by the IOs.

21. The representatives of both the national statistical offices and international organisations perceived automation as a possible way for the improvement. Standardisation is a necessary pre-condition for broad use of automated data extraction on the NSOs' part and automated data entry on the part of the IOs. Apart from economising resources, the automated data extraction and entry would increase the reliability and accuracy of the data stored by the IOs. Particular attention was paid to the standardisation of data interchange formats, metadata and classifications.

22. In concluding the discussion on this topic, the Conference identified issues requiring a follow-up by the international organisations. In particular, the Conference asked the international organisations:

- To investigate the possibility of developing a common system (portal) for monitoring data collection activities by International Organisations;
- To ensure the development of data sharing models;
- To give both NSOs and other data providers easy access to statistics available at the international organisations in a form allowing comparisons and usage in national dissemination programmes;
- To put in place secure and operational methods and tools for the transmission of sensitive information. The experiences from the STADIUM/STATEL solution supporting GESMES CB should be considered in this context;
- To investigate the possibility of defining a standard codification scheme for economic time-series (for national accounts and balance of payments) with an initial focus on short-term indicators;
- To work with national statistical offices to facilitate the reuse of their standard products.

23. The Conference asked the international organisations active in the area to present a progress report on the issue at the next year's plenary session of the Conference.

c) Presentation of Web site for Best IT Practices in NSOs (OECD)

24. The Conference was informed that the Seminar on Integrated Statistical Information Systems, held in Geneva on 17-19 April 2002, agreed to bring to the attention of the Conference the proposal for the creation of a Website on Best IT Practices in National Statistical Offices. The website is located on the OECD's server. The responsibility for the content and its ownership remain with the author organisation. It is coordinated by a steering group presently composed of representatives of Canada, Finland, Latvia, Netherlands, United States, OECD and UNECE. The

Conference encouraged the national statistical offices and international organisations to contribute to the development of the website.

25. In conclusion, it was stressed that the design and implementation of reference databases appear to be a requirement for more efficient data transmission at the national level. Such reference databases would hold the data that are to be transferred to international organisations, including well structured and approved metadata, and allowing for transmission of data in a standard form supported by metadata.

d) Other aspects of the integrated presentation

26. Following the recommendation made by the Bureau, the Conference agreed to the new format of the Integrated Presentation described in document CES/2002/4, and used for the preparation of documents CES/2002/3 and Add.1-7 and CES/2002/6.

27. The Conference reviewed the forty-six programme elements of the Integrated presentation.

(i) Programme Activity 1: Organisation and operation of statistical services

Documentation: CES/2002/3/Add.1

28. The Conference approved the work done in 2001/2002 and the ongoing activities in this programme activity.

29. Subject to the qualifications specified below, the Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/2002/3/Add.1)

P.E. 1.2: Management and policy issues of direct concern to presidents of national statistical offices

30. The Conference agreed that the UNECE Statistical Division produce in 2002/2003 a special publication to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Plenary Session of the Conference.

31. The Conference asked the Bureau to select the topics for substantive discussion at the 2003 plenary session. The Bureau will circulate its proposal to the members of the Conference.

(ii) Programme Activity 2: Technical infrastructure and other cross-cutting issues

Documentation: CES/2002/3/Add.2 and Add.7

32. The Conference approved the work done in 2001/2002 and the ongoing activities in this programme activity.

33. Subject to the qualifications specified below, the Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/2002/3/Add.2)

P.E. 2.1: Management of information technology

34. The Conference agreed to merge the two series of meetings – Meetings on Management of Statistical Information Technology (biannual - odd years) and Seminars on Integrated Statistical Information Systems (biannual - even years) – into one, and agreed that a steering group would work using means of electronic communications to define a framework for the new series of ECE/Eurostat Meetings on Statistical Information Technology.

35. The Conference agreed that a website on the Best IT Practices in Statistical Offices be created and hosted by OECD, and encouraged the national statistical offices and international organisations to contribute to the development of the website.

P.E.2.2: Statistical data collection and processing

36. The Conference decided to include the Work Session on Statistical Data Editing in the Conference's work programme (timing to be decided by the CES Bureau on the basis of a proposal put forward by the ECE).

37. The Conference also decided to include in its 2003/2004 publication programme the methodological material "Statistical Data Editing, Vol. 3" based on the outcomes of meetings on Statistical Data Editing with special regard to evaluation methods and quality indicators for statistical data editing.

38. The Conference encouraged further extension of the existing Web knowledge base (K-base) for data editing (<http://amrads.jrc.cec.eu.int/k-base>) to include evaluations and experiences of various data editing processes.

P.E. 2.3: Dissemination and interchange of statistical information

39. The Conference agreed to include the Work Session on Statistical Metadata in the Conference's work programme for 2003/2004.

(iii) Programme Activity 3: Economic Statistics

Documentation: CES/2002/3/Add.3 and Add.7

40. The Conference approved the work done in 2001/2002 and the ongoing activities in this programme activity.

41. Subject to the qualifications specified below, the Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/2002/3/Add.3).

P.E.3.1: Implementation of the System of National Accounts

42. The Conference included the joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Meeting on National Accounts in the Conference's work programme 2003/2004.

43. The Conference agreed that the ECE secretariat in consultation with other international organizations would undertake the following surveys: (a) Best practices in estimating service lives of fixed assets; (b) Countries' practices in estimating prices of exports and imports (including unit values).

P.E. 3.4: Transport

44. The Conference endorsed the activities to be undertaken by other Divisions and PSB's in the ECE, notably the work on the NST/2000 classification on transport of goods, adopted by the ECE Transport Committee.

(iv) Programme Activity 4: Social and demographic statistics

Documentation: CES/2002/3/Add.4 and Add.7

45. The Conference approved the work done in 2001/2002 and the ongoing activities in this programme activity.

46. Subject to the qualifications specified below, the Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/2002/3/Add.4)

P.E. 4.1: Demographic statistics (including projections, migration, fertility and families and households)

47. The Conference approved the activities to be undertaken by the ECE's Population Activities Unit in this programme element.

P.E. 4.2a: Population and housing censuses

48. The Conference approved the activities to be undertaken by the ECE's Population Activities Unit in this programme element.

P.E. 4.2b: Statistics on population groups of special interest

49. The Conference approved the activities to be undertaken by the ECE's Population Activities Unit in this programme element.

P.E. 4.4: Labour statistics

50. The Conference included the joint ECE-Eurostat-ILO Seminar on Measurement of the Quality of Employment in the Conference's work programme (timing of the meeting to be decided by the CES Bureau on the basis of a proposal put forward by the ECE, Eurostat and ILO).

P.E. 4.7a: Statistics of household income and expenditures, of the welfare of the population, and of poverty and income statistics

51. The Conference welcomed the good work carried out by the Canberra Group on Household Income Statistics. However, it was noted that there are still problems in ensuring international comparability of income statistics, in particular as concerns monetary and non-monetary components of income. The so-called "fringe benefits", in fact, represent an increasingly important component of income, and therefore they need to be taken into account.

P.E. 4.10: Gender statistics

52. The Conference approved the activities to be undertaken by the ECE's Population Activities Unit in this programme element.

(v) Programme Activity 5: Environment statistics

Documentation: CES/2002/3/Add.5

53. The Conference approved the work done in 2001/2002 and the ongoing activities in this programme activity.

54. The Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/2002/3/Add.5)

(vi) Programme Activity 6: Dissemination and support for secretariat activities

Documentation: CES/2002/3/Add.6

55. The Conference approved the work done in 2001/2002 and the ongoing activities in this programme activity.

56. The Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/2002/3/Add.6).

e) The Integrated Presentation database

Documentation: CES/2002/4

57. The Conference noted the information presented by the ECE Secretariat on the development of a database version of the Integrated Presentation. The database version is intended to facilitate users' access in a structured manner over the Internet and the production of documents for the

Conference and the Bureau. It is also intended to facilitate the management, preparation and updating of the Integrated Presentation.

f) **Prioritisation of the Statistical Division and the Conference's work programme**

Documentation: CES/2002/5

58. The Conference reviewed and endorsed the prioritisation of the Statistical Division's and Conference's work programme proposed by the Bureau, that was presented in Annex II of CES/2002/5, and asked the Statistical Division to transmit it to the ECE's Office of the Executive Secretary so that it could be forwarded to the Commission's Group of Experts on the Programme of Work.

IV. SEMINAR ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY PLENARY SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE

a) **The CES in the past 50 years – Book on the history of the CES**

Documentation: CES/2002/10 and working papers CES/2002/WP.1, WP.2, WP.3, WP.6 and WP.7

59. The first part of the seminar session at the 2002 plenary session was organised in a panel discussion and chaired by Carlo Malaguerra (Switzerland), a former Chairman of the Conference. The panel was composed of Messrs. Tom Griffin (UNDP), Willem de Vries (UNSD), Mikhail Korolev (CIS-STAT), Edmond Malinvaud (France), Jozef Olenski (Poland), Vladimir Sokolin (Russian Federation), Jean-Louis Bodin (ISI), Paolo Garonna (UNECE) and John Kelly (UNECE). The discussion focused on two issues: (a) past and future and (b) the recent period and the role of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

60. To help mark the occasion of its 50th anniversary the Conference decided that a publication should be produced that would provide an overview of the history of this subsidiary body of the Economic Commission for Europe during the past 50 years. The publication is intended to highlight some of the major accomplishments which marked its development during the first five decades of its existence. It will consist of a collection of about 10-12 articles written by different authors who are familiar with the Conference because they have been closely associated with it in different ways in the past. The publication will be produced as an ECE publication that will appear under the auspices of the Conference. The Bureau of the Conference will review the entire publication, but the authors of the chapters will remain responsible for the content of their chapters. Mr. Malaguerra will serve as the editor of the publication. It is planned that the book be published in the three official working languages of the ECE. The Conference noted that INSEE offered to ensure the translation into French. The members of the panel, listed above, will author individual chapters of the publication.

61. Mr. Malaguerra noted, in his introduction, that ideas are the main driving force in human progress. He also pointed out that developing ideas has been among the main contributions of the United Nations from the very beginning. At its best, the United Nations has always been rooted in powerful ideas reflecting human concerns and aspirations. He emphasised the need to learn lessons from the past in order to be able to direct the future.

Past and future

62. Tom Griffin recalled the origins of the Conference and, in particular, the creation of the League of Nations' Conference on Statistics that took place in Geneva in 1928. After that conference, a Committee of Statistical Experts was set up, composed of about ten members, which met regularly between 1928 and 1939 and undertook pioneering work in many areas of statistics. The work of this Committee set the foundation for work to come later in the UN Statistical Commission and in the Conference of European Statisticians.

63. Willem De Vries commented on the phase of renewal after the Second World War and the dissolution of the League of Nations. The most important events connected to the history of the Conference were the creation of the UNECE in 1945 and of the UN Statistical Commission in 1947. The first of the Regional Meetings of European Statisticians took place in Geneva in 1949, which led to the birth of the Conference of European Statisticians. Mr. De Vries also discussed the interaction and cooperation of the Conference with other international organisations in its early years and later.

64. Mikhail Korolev and Edmond Malinvaud addressed the development and the achievements of the Conference during the Cold War, providing two perspectives - of Eastern Europe and of Western Europe. These two groups of nations were governed at that time by two very different political philosophies, and the official statistics were defined according to the purpose they had to serve. Both discussants emphasized the significant contribution of the Conference to the East-West dialogue, the mutual exchange of knowledge and experiences and the improvements in international comparability of data.

65. The coordinating role of the Conference was highlighted in the discussion. It was noted that many other actors in the field of statistics have appeared since the Conference was created. The Conference works closely with them, aiming at coordinating the statistical activities and, at a more recent stage, organising numerous joint activities. In this connection, the introduction of the Integrated Presentation of International Statistical Work Programmes in the ECE Region was quoted.

Recent period and the role of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

66. The impact of the fall of the Berlin wall on the activities of the Conference was discussed. The Conference has played an important role during the period of transition of the statistical systems of former centrally planned economies towards the standards applicable to market economies. In this respect, the importance of TACIS and other technical assistance programmes was mentioned. However, some delegates stressed that the time has come for a change from the classical provision of technical assistance to a cooperation between the countries.

67. Jozef Olenski focused his presentation on the recent period and the role of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. He stressed the importance of the Conference in developing the fundamental principles. The participation of Central and Eastern Europe in general debates was very useful for further development and harmonisation of the statistical systems in the ECE region. On the other hand, observed Mr. Olenski, the statistical systems of all countries need continuous improvement and adaptation to the changes in the socio-economic environment.

68. Vladimir Sokolin discussed the importance of the TACIS programme during the transition period. TACIS and other technical assistance programmes, particularly in the field of harmonisation of statistics, statistical registers and the statistical infrastructure, played a central role in the adaptation of the statistical systems of former centrally planned economies to the standards used in the market economies. The importance of the coordinating role of the Conference was highlighted. It was also stressed that the Conference should, in future, remain the leading body for coordination of international statistical activities.

69. Jean-Louis Bodin recalled the important events that took place in the beginning of the 1990s that led to the creation and adoption of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. It was noted that, unfortunately, during the period of political divide between East and West, the Conference did not contribute much to the discussion of ethical questions and of the fundamental function of official statistics in the countries. However, immediately after the changes, the Conference adopted the Fundamental Principles in 1991 and they were endorsed by the Economic Commission for Europe in 1992. In 1994, after the United Nations Statistical Commission adopted the Fundamental Principles, they became a universally recognised standard. Since then, they have served as a basis for the adoption of several other standards such as the Special Data Dissemination Standard by the IMF and the recent ILO standards.

70. Paolo Garonna discussed the future of official statistics. Looking ahead and judging on the basis of the long-term development that society has seen in the course of the last century, one can expect dramatic changes in the environment in which public statistics plays its role. Two basic profiles characterising the essence of official statistics were emphasised: (i) the role of science in government; and (ii) the “public good” function of statistics. It was also stressed that bridging the statistical divide and guaranteeing basic information freedoms and rights has become the main objective of official statistics.

71. John Kelly made an overview of some of the many different people who have contributed significantly to the Conference of European Statisticians over the course of the last 50 years and who have played an important role in its life covering that period. He paid tribute to the “Founding Fathers” of the CES. The creation and establishment of the Conference came about as the result of a process that lasted several years, and also as a result of the vision that a relatively small number of individuals had and the major investment in time and effort that those individuals were prepared to make. He also recalled that it was at the 1953 ad hoc Regional Meeting of European Statisticians, where the Conference of European Statisticians was elevated and converted into a full-fledged “Principal Subsidiary Body of the ECE”, that the Conference was born. The role of the Bureau of the Conference throughout the past 50 years was stressed. The Bureau has acted as a kind of “Steering Committee” for the Conference, which has discussed and planned how best to advance the shared concerns of the entire CES.

72. In the discussion that followed it was stressed that the official statisticians are faced with increasing challenges. It was noted that the spirit of cohesion and responsibility among statisticians, in full respect of the Fundamental Principles, has to be strongly developed. In this context, it was also noted that the dramatic changes that took place in the ECE region during the past decade led some countries to reconsider the organisation and the content of their national statistical systems.

Conclusions

73. In summarising the conclusions of the round table discussion, Mr. Malaguerra noted that humanity has never experienced so many important changes as those which have taken place over the past fifty years, and in particular in the last fifteen years, and which were characterised by the increasing complexity in society. The role of statisticians is to observe society and to try to interpret it, without being influenced by emotions or ideologies. This was a challenge in a world that was divided by ideology, but the United Nations, through the Conference of European Statisticians, played a fundamental role in this field.

74. The Conference paid tribute to all those who contributed to the work of the Conference during the last fifty years. In concluding the discussion, delegates emphasised that the future of the Conference has to be taken from its past. The Conference has accumulated an important knowledge and human capital, which should be used as an important message to be carried forward into the future.

b) Possible scenarios for future CES plenary sessions

Documentation: CES/2002/11 and CES/2002/12-18

75. The Session was organised as a round table discussion and was chaired by Ivan Fellegi, Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada. The panel was composed of Messrs. Paolo Garonna (UNECE), Mikhail Korolev (CIS-STAT), Zarylbek Kudabae v (Kyrgyz Republic), Len Cook (United Kingdom), Dennis Trewin (Australia), Yves Franchet (Eurostat), Hermann Habermann (UNSD) and Enrico Giovannini (OECD).

76. The introduction to the round table was provided by a paper prepared by Ivan Fellegi and Yves Franchet. The paper takes stock of what works well with the Conference and what areas need improvement. The usefulness of the Conference of European Statisticians is generally recognised and praised. This makes its adaptation to a changing world particularly important. The main strength of the current system relies on the Integrated Presentation of statistical work programmes, the working groups created by the Conference, the opportunity provided by plenary sessions for informal interactions of chief statisticians, and the transfer of technology between national as well as international agencies.

77. However, some pressures have emerged in the recent past that require the Conference of European Statisticians to change its working methods. Some of these factors include the break-up of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia, the enlargement and the increased influence of the European Union, the strengthening of OECD, the risk of Europe and North America drifting apart, and the loss of focus of discussions conducted in the "Seminar" part of the Conference's plenary sessions.

78. In order to overcome these pressures and to maintain the attractiveness and usefulness of the Conference of European Statisticians to Heads of National Statistical Offices, the Fellegi-Franchet paper suggested adopting a structure for the plenary sessions built around three main modules, which would be run consecutively. If necessary, an additional module could be added dealing with the international organizations. The following three modules were proposed:

- Formal business, interactions of different bodies (UN Statistical Commission, UNECE), discussion based on the Integrated Presentation, including a short overview of issues to be brought to the attention of the Conference;
- Seminar module on topics related to transition system issues;
- Seminar module on emerging “leading edge” issues.

79. It was also suggested that organising committees for the second and third modules be set up and coordinated by the Bureau of the Conference. The secretariat should obtain, with the help of the Bureau, a clear indication from member countries and observers of the list of issues to be addressed. A main paper should be prepared for each module, and discussants should be appointed. An evaluation procedure would be conducted at the end of each plenary session, seeking suggested improvements and proposals for new topics.

80. The seven participants in the round table had prepared written contributions to the discussion. There was general support for the proposals made in the Fellegi-Franchet paper. Additional suggestions on how to improve the Conference were also made.

81. Paolo Garonna discussed the future of the Conference of European Statisticians against the background of the UN Reform, with particular emphasis on the regional dimension. He stressed that a good test of the success of the Conference in the future would be its playing a leading role in promoting statistical integration in the sub-regions of UNECE, including the European Union, and its consistently being placed in the wider context of pan-European and global integration. The CES should work with other UN regional commissions and the UN Statistical Commission to make the regional statistical integration a stepping stone in the construction of a more integrated and better performing global statistical architecture.

82. Mikhail Korolev put forward some basic principles that are critical to the success of the Conference of European Statisticians in the future. These principles relate to equal rights for all countries, democracy, mutual respect, cooperation and openness. Moreover, he pointed out the need for flexibility in the evolution of the Conference. He supported the idea that the Conference should draw up a list of important topics for immediate discussion, setting up an order and format in which they would be discussed. The preparatory work should be organised by the Bureau, assisted by an elected Programme Committee.

83. Zarylbek Kudabaev pointed out that the transition countries are at different stages of economic and social development and therefore claim extra attention and a qualified approach. The Conference of European Statisticians could become a coordinator and generator of ideas and priorities that are specific to transition countries. The strengthening of the role of the Bureau, the increased use of modern communication technologies, and the closer involvement of the CIS would facilitate the emergence of this new role of the Conference. It was proposed that some topics of interest to transition countries receive special attention, such as: (i) the monitoring of poverty reduction; (ii) international comparisons; and (iii) quality and reliability of human development indicators, as a regional follow-up to discussions held at the 32nd Session of the UN Statistical Commission.

84. Len Cook emphasised the Conference’s role as the “coordinator of coordinators”, and the importance of the Integrated Presentation as a tool to avoid duplication in international statistical

work. He supported the idea of a possible additional module dealing with the interaction between international organizations. He also suggested that the first seminar module should look at developing activities and foundational issues dealing with the nature of statistical systems (e.g. statistical practices, the position of statistical offices within government, statistical capacity and integrity). The second seminar module could be focused on issues that challenge statisticians within the existing systems, and on solutions to remove such obstacles.

85. Dennis Trewin looked at the CES from the perspective of a country that is not a member of the UNECE. He emphasised that the CES meeting should be both influential and inspirational in order to provide motivation for the Heads of Statistical Offices both within and outside the ECE region to participate. It is of particular importance that the Conference discuss issues of interest to Heads of Statistical Offices. Such issues could include: increased interest in international comparisons; sharing international good practice; and discussions that lead to the development of international standards. As the international standards are strongly influenced by the European standards, there is a need for a forum where non-EU countries can interact with European countries in the early contemplative stages of the standards development. In conclusion, Dennis Trewin highlighted that it is important to relate the CES work to policy concerns, to market the importance of international statistical work and explain it to the larger audience.

86. Hermann Habermann looked at the role of the CES in its relation to the UN system and the global statistical community. He noted that the UN has five Regional Commissions but only three of them have managed to preserve their statistical divisions. It was also pointed out that the trend towards abolishing Statistical Divisions in the Regional Commissions endangers the regional Committees of Statistics and their programmes of work. Therefore, the CES should be renewed to remain relevant in guiding the statistical work program of the region, developing a sense of community among statisticians, and providing a forum for knowledge transfer. The intrinsically valuable elements in the CES work should be preserved. However, the CES needs to renew its dedication to the common goals of the statistical community.

87. Enrico Giovannini endorsed the proposals made in the Fellegi-Franchet paper as a necessary condition for the CES reform. In addition, he recommended changing the procedure followed to prepare papers for the Conference. He also suggested that the papers for module two, dealing with the foundational issues of statistical systems, be prepared jointly by different NSOs, also with the involvement of one international organization. The module dealing with the leading edge emerging issues should be a brainstorming session based on papers from countries that have paid special attention to the issue under discussion. Periodically, discussion should be devoted to the progress of work of international organisations and their strategies. Another area which needs improvement is the way in which the Conference interacts with the rest of the world. Finally, Enrico Giovannini suggested that the visibility and “profile” of the CES vis-à-vis the policy makers should be improved. This can be achieved by inviting the CES leaders or policy makers at an international level, and by issuing a press release on the CES decisions.

88. In the general discussion that followed, the participants agreed that the Conference needs to change the way it works.

89. There was some discussion concerning the seminar module covering topics related to transition issues. Some unease was expressed about the use of the word “transition”. It was noted

that the terminology used with reference to “transition” should be clarified in order to avoid any confusion when implementing the proposed new organisation of the plenary session, in particular the module focusing on transition issues. The term “foundational issues of statistical systems“ should be used instead.

90. The need for more harmonisation within the ECE region was emphasised. It was stressed that neither Eurostat nor OECD could play their role focusing only on their respective constituencies. Therefore, they should also act within a broader system, and the relevant one is the UNECE system.

91. During the discussion a suggestion was made that the Conference should reconsider its global role to strengthen official statistics outside the European region. An exchange of information and knowledge between Regional Commissions and Committees of Statistics could enhance support for official statistics in the less advantaged regions. The Conference, consisting of heads of NSOs from the most developed regions, is in an advantageous position for contributing to the development of statistics outside the ECE region. To improve the information flow, it was suggested that a summary report of the planned future work of other regional Committees of Statistics be prepared as background information for future plenary sessions of the Conference, possibly by presenting it as an annex to the Conference’s Integrated Presentation of International Statistical work.

92. A suggestion was also made that the development of a sense of community among official statisticians within the ECE region and between them and official statisticians in other regions could be major goals of the Conference.

93. The Conference agreed that preparation procedures for the Conference’s plenary and seminar sessions should be improved. Member countries and observers should be consulted on topics to be addressed in each session. An organising committee, set up under the auspices of the Bureau, should be responsible for the preparation of each session. Invited papers should be designed to stimulate discussion and to introduce issues in a problematic way rather than trying to settle them. Written comments on invited papers from the Heads of Statistical Offices should be encouraged. There should be a formal feedback from these comments at the plenary session.

94. The importance of leaving more time for general discussion by the participants was also stressed. The risk of not all member countries participating in the discussion was pointed out. Therefore, in order to eliminate this risk, appropriate organisational arrangements have to be set up.

95. The Conference asked the Bureau to evaluate the implementation of the proposed organisation of the Conference’s plenary sessions within five years time.

V. CEREMONIAL PART OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY PLENARY SESSION

96. The Executive Secretary of the UNECE, Mrs. Brigita Schmögnerová and the Secretary-General of OECD, Mr. Donald Johnston addressed the Conference. Lord Moser, former Chairman of the Conference, delivered a key-note address.

97. Mrs. Schmögnerová addressed the Conference and noted that for almost 40 years, throughout the Cold War period, the CES served as a bridge between statistical offices from market and non-

market economies. Today, the Conference is discussing how to adjust its work to better respond to the new challenges that need to be faced, such as the EU enlargement process.

98. The UNECE has started a debate aimed at strengthening the UNECE as a part of an initiative promoted by the United Nations's Secretary General to reform the United Nations. Within this debate, several issues are discussed, such as: raising the policy profile of UNECE; including social policy issues in the UNECE mandate; subregional grouping of countries; etc. The reform, if adopted, would need the support of the Conference in many fields. Therefore, the Conference and its Bureau were encouraged to continue to work actively towards the strengthening of the UNECE as an organisation. Mrs. Schmögnerová noted that the Integrated Presentation could serve as an example for other PSBs of the UNECE.

99. The Conference should continue to play a key role in contributing to close the statistical divide which still exists among member countries. Furthermore, the mandate of the Conference could be extended to respond to regional and global processes, such as the Millennium Declaration, the expected Johannesburg Declaration, the economic and social implications of population ageing, and the impact of information technology on societies. The Conference can also contribute significantly to the democratic debate through better dissemination of knowledge in the civil society and its increasing use in policy decisions.

100. In his opening address Mr. Donald Johnston, Secretary General of OECD, congratulated the Conference on its successes over the years, a result explained, among other things, by the close cooperation among international organizations, in particular in developing norms, standards and best practices. He underlined the importance of ensuring necessary resources for producing good statistics over time and in the form required by policy makers. The quality of key statistics is often questioned in the media which calls for a greater focus on producing good quality statistics and educating the public on their use.

101. Mr. Johnston stressed five areas where improvements are called for:

- Comparability and reliability;
- Accuracy in the production of statistics;
- Coverage of social issues;
- Long term indicators for sustainable development;
- Better understanding of statistics by the public in the policy debates.

102. Lord Moser in his keynote address reviewed the past of the Conference and what has been achieved. He recalled that the CES had created a bridge between SNA and MPS and only gradually moved towards social statistics. The cooperation among international organizations in the early days of the CES was far from what it is today.

103. Lord Moser paid tribute to the remarkable progress in the coverage of statistical fields and how this is reflected in the Integrated Presentation. On the issue of pay-off between timeliness and reliability, Lord Moser put the former at the top of the list. He also recalled the work carried out by R. Stone and others in developing the Systems of Social and Demographic Statistics.

104. As for the future, Lord Moser identified three challenges:

- Public trust and interest in what statisticians do;

- User links;
- Links to the academic world.

105. In his conclusion, Lord Moser stressed that statisticians have to come closer to the decision making but in doing so they should be aware that they might undermine their neutrality.

a) **Panel discussion on the past and the future of the CES – Issues raised under items IV and V**

106. The Session was organized as a panel discussion and was chaired by Hermann Habermann (UNSD). The panel was composed of Ms. Milva Ekonomi (Albania) and Messrs. Carlo Malaguerra (Switzerland), Ivan Fellegi (Canada), Dennis Trewin (Australia), Yves Franchet (Eurostat), Enrico Giovannini (OECD), Mikhail Korolev (CIS-STAT) and Teimuraz Beridze (Georgia).

107. There was general agreement that the Conference should continue to benefit from the good experience it has had in the past. The discussion focussed on identifying the priority topics of interest to the members of the Conference for discussion at future plenary sessions. It was agreed that the future topics should reflect the experiences of all ECE member countries.

108. The members of the Panels suggested the following topics they considered could be discussed at future plenary sessions:

- a) Issues related to the statistical environment: (i) public trust in statistics, protecting the privacy of respondents while respecting the right for information – principles of good practice; (ii) supporting analysis and research by providing access to anonymous microdata, changes in institutional framework, etc.; (iii) challenges for traditional approaches to confidentiality protection over the next ten years;
- b) Privacy issues: (i) how to keep legitimate concerns about privacy from preventing progress on building longitudinal files – which are the prerequisites of evidence-based social policy decisions; (ii) how to maintain a productive relationship with Privacy Commissioners;
- c) National Statistical Systems: (i) the role of the NSO in statistical activities undertaken by other agencies (use of administrative registers and records for statistical purposes); (ii) how to maintain integrity, good quality, use of appropriate statistical standards and public access to statistics produced by other government agencies;
- d) Improved data reporting: (i) electronic reporting; (ii) decreasing burden on respondents; (iii) coordinating requests by international organisations;
- e) The role of statistical offices in the development of e-government;
- f) Social statistics: (i) linking outcomes to the determinants of those outcomes; (ii) reviving the system of social and demographic statistics;
- g) Environmental statistics: issues in implementing the new handbook of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting;
- h) Statistical information relevant to sustainable development: (i) advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches and methods used; (ii) experiences in providing statistical information;
- i) The relationship between statisticians and policy makers;
- j) How to encourage increased statistical numeracy of children in the education system (i.e. a better understanding and knowledge of statistics);
- k) Performance measures: political and statistical issues in their selection and publication;

- l) Globalisation: record keeping of multinational enterprises, FDI vs. Exports.

109. The Conference asked the Bureau to review the list of suggested topics and to select the topics for substantive discussion at the 2003 plenary session. The Bureau will circulate its proposal to the members of the Conference.

VI. DISCUSSION OF SEMINAR FOLLOW-UP

a) Bureau's suggestions for future Conferences' seminars and possible future topics

110. There is a need for change in the work of the Conference, as described in detail in the Fellegi/Franchet paper. The Conference, in its future work, should be guided by the objectives it agreed upon at its 1991 Plenary Session concerning its structure and relations, namely:

- To improve national statistics and their international comparability;
- To promote close coordination of the statistical activities in Europe of international organizations;
- To respond to any emerging need for international statistical cooperation arising out of transition, integration and other processes of cooperation both within the ECE region and between the ECE region and other regions.

111. The organization of future Conference sessions should draw on the proposals made in the Fellegi/Franchet paper including the suggestions made in the other papers concerning the future of the Conference. The Conference should contribute to the development of the global statistical system by:

- Strengthening the coordination process: review and fill the gaps;
- Increasing the focus on major foundational issues and new emerging issues.

112. The Conference delegates to the Bureau further work on developing the implementation of this proposal, including the selection of topics for the seminars to take place during the next plenary session.

113. Members of the Conference are asked to comment on the suggested list of possible topics and to indicate their priorities to the secretariat.

b) Demonstration of the Integrated Presentation as a database

114. The ECE Secretariat reported to the Conference on the progress and future development plans of the project aimed at converting the Integrated Presentation into a database. The Conference noted that this would be a common undertaking by the ECE Secretariat in cooperation with Eurostat and OECD.

VII. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

115. The report of the plenary session was adopted by the Conference at its closing session on 12 June 2002.

ANNEX I

INTEGRATED PRESENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK IN THE UNECE REGION, 2002/2003 AND 2003/2004

Note

The Integrated Presentation of the statistical work programmes of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the European Communities (EC), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other international organizations working in the ECE region is presented in documents CES/2002/32 and Addenda 1-6, as indicated below. The Integrated Presentation shown in these documents, which collectively constitute Annex I of the report of the plenary session, is too large to issue as part of this report or as a single document, and will be issued as separate documents as follows:

CES/2002/32: Programmes of international statistical work in the ECE region, 2002/2003 and 2003/2004: An Integrated Presentation – Introduction and overview

CES/2002/32/Add.1: Programme Activity 1: Organisation and operation of statistical services

CES/2002/32/Add.2: Programme Activity 2: Technical infrastructure and other cross-cutting issues

CES/2002/32/Add.3: Programme Activity 3: Economic statistics

CES/2002/32/Add.4: Programme Activity 4: Social and demographic statistics

CES/2002/32/Add.5: Programme Activity 5: Environment statistics

CES/2002/32/Add.6: Programme Activity 6: Dissemination and support for Secretariat activities.

ANNEX II

CES CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2002/2003

<i>Programme element</i>	<i>Title and lieu of meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
1.2	50th Plenary Session of the Conference of European Statisticians (Paris)	10-12 June 2002
4.10	ECE Work Session on Gender Statistics (Geneva)	23-25 September 2002
4.10	ECE/UNDP Task Force Meeting on the Regional Website (Geneva)	25-26 September 2002
3.1	Special Session on National Accounts for Transition Economies (OECD, Paris)	11 October 2002
2.3	Work Session on Statistical Output for Dissemination to the Information Media (Geneva)	28-30 October 2002
3.10	ECE-Eurostat-FAO-OECD Seminar on Agricultural Statistics - Perspective for Agricultural and Rural Indicators and Sustainability (Paris)	21-22 November 2002
3.9	ECE/Eurostat/OECD Consultation on the ECP (Geneva)	4-6 December 2002
4.11	ECE/Eurostat Work Session on Registers and Administrative Records for Social and Demographic Statistics (Geneva)	9-11 December 2002
4.11a	ECE/UNDP Seminar on Social Trends Reporting and Monitoring (Geneva)	(end-of-2002)
2.1	ECE-Eurostat Meeting on Statistical Information Systems (Geneva)	17-19 February 2003
4.9	ECE-WHO Meeting on Health Statistics (Geneva)	5-7 March 2003
2.1	ECE-Eurostat Work Session on Statistical Data Confidentiality (Geneva)	9-11 April 2003
4.1	ECE-Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics (Geneva)	28-30 April 2003
2.6	ECE-Eurostat Work Session on Methodological Issues Involving the Integration of Statistics and Geography (Geneva)	7-9 May 2003

<i>Programme element</i>	<i>Title and lieu of meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
4.2	ECE-Eurostat Work Session on Population and Housing Censuses (Ohrid, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)	May 2003
3.1	ECE-OECD-CIS/STAT Meeting on National Accounts for CIS Countries (Moscow)	26-28 May 2003
3.14	ECE-Eurostat Meeting on Business Registers (Luxembourg)	June 2003
1.2	51st Plenary Session of the Conference of European Statisticians	10-12 June 2003
