

## ***Global assessment of the statistical system: experience of the Republic of Belarus***

The transition to the market economy in Belarus in 1990th resulted in the necessity of reforming the existent system of state statistics .

For the last period a number of the national programs devoted to the development of state statistics were implemented. The statistical sector was reformed under the technical assistance of different international organizations and donors (such as Statistical Office of the European Union, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Monetary Fund, UNDP and others).

As a result, for today Belarus has made considerable progress in this area. The followings spheres of statistics were subjected to the substantial changes: legal framework, management efficiency, quality of statistical data, distribution practice, information and technological basis, material and human resources, system of education and further training.

### ***Goals and objectives***

Having regard to strengthening of the political and economic relations between the European Union (EU) and the Republic of Belarus, taking into account the last changes within the framework of the EU expansion and introduction of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the need to harmonize the separate branches of the Belarus statistics with the standards and requirements of the European statistical system emerged.

It should be noted that the initial program of technical assistance, financed by the TACIS project budget (1992 – 1994 and “Statistics 1”, 1993 – 1996), followed general intergovernmental priorities of the CIS and was organized as two subprograms of regional character: technical assistance and training. Basic activity was organized at intergovernmental or sub-regional level.

The second period was based on the national TACIS programs («Statistics 2», 1996 – 2000) where primary attention was given to the concrete demands of the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis of the Republic of Belarus (presently the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus).

A number of activities carried out within the framework of these components contributed to improvement of the national statistical legislation, to development of the methodological approaches etc. Belarus successfully followed the recommendations received within the framework of the rendered technical assistance, however, the need for further improvement of some statistical areas still remained.

According to the Plan of Actions of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) the Global assessment of Belarus statistics would facilitate defining the current shortcomings of the statistical system for the subsequent determination of priorities and development of plan of actions aimed at their elimination in the relevant areas of statistics.

The primary purpose of project «Global Assessment of the Statistical System of the Republic of Belarus» which was implemented in 2007 and funded by the TACIS project program was the assessment of the statistical system of the Republic of Belarus, its compliance with the European standards and determination of the priority directions in the area of statistics development.

To attain the desired aim the followings objectives were set:

- Impartial description of the institutional and technical potential of the statistical system of Belarus;
- Assessment of the general compliance of the statistical system with the European standards;
- Description of the current situation in the different statistical areas in regard to compliance with the European standards;
- Elaboration of the project plan of actions to meet the European standards and of detailed list of priority tasks;
- Provision of information on the results of the conducted assessment to the national and international parties concerned.

Their achievement defines a number of activities intended for:

- ✓ Assessment of the statistical system of the Republic of Belarus and its compliance with the European standards;
- ✓ Identification and presentation of the problem branches of statistics;
- ✓ Study of the statistical methodology, practice and standards of the EU member countries.

Since the complete compliance of the national statistics with the European standards was not considered as a primary purpose for the Republic of Belarus, though it served as a guide, the assessment in concrete thematic areas had general character, without the detailed comparison of the statistical systems of Belarus and the EU.

**Obtained results**

The assessment of the statistical system of the Republic of Belarus was carried out having the efficient interaction between the international and national expert with the representatives of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus.

In the course of the joint work the basic problems existing in the areas of national statistics were revealed that allowed to set the priority tasks and elaborate the acceptable plan of actions for harmonizing the national statistics with the European standards in the relevant areas.

In particular, the assessment of institutional infrastructure of the Belarus statistical system was made. It covered:

- ✓ Legal and constitutional system;
- ✓ Structure of the statistical system, including planning and management, personnel, finances and budget, information technologies, work with users and etc.;
- ✓ Cooperation of Belstat with the state administration bodies and other users;
- ✓ Level of compliance of the Belarus statistics with the international and European standards.

The review of the statistical branches consisted of four blocks and included the assessment of:

- ✓ Statistical infrastructure;
- ✓ Macroeconomic statistics;
- ✓ Business statistics and other branches of economic statistics;
- ✓ Demographic statistics.

The analysis of the current situation showed that Belarus had the comprehensive, logically grounded and efficient statistical information system that covered all statistical areas and allows to provide comparable information on majority issues.

Some basic problems that required solving within the framework of medium-term plan for development of statistics of the Republic of Belarus were identified in the followings areas:

- Constitutional basis (subordination to Government);
- Information technologies;
- Coordination of activity of other producers of statistical information;
- Cooperation with users;
- Classifiers and business register (introduction of classification of kinds of economic activity /CCEA/, updating and restructuring of business register);
- National accounts (calculation of regional GDP);
- Price statistics (ICP does not meet the international requirements due to the used classification of products);
- Agricultural statistics (introduction of quarterly sample survey of rural households);
- Demographic statistics (survey of labour force and labour migration);
- Tourism statistics.

Proposed recommendations on statistics improvement aimed at the removal of some discrepancies and providing of technical assistance were considered in the context of the “Program for the Development of the State Statistics of the Republic of Belarus for 2006 – 2010” and “National Strategy for the Development of the Statistics of the Republic of Belarus” elaborated jointly with the World bank. The priority tasks of the Belarus statistics development identified on the different stages of the assessment were presented as the Plan of actions and covered the followings spheres:

- ✓ Legal and institutional basis;
- ✓ Macroeconomic statistics;
- ✓ Data distribution;
- ✓ Information systems;
- ✓ Other statistical areas.

### ***Current situation***

Taking into account the recommendations received during the Global Assessment and tasks set by the “National Strategy for the Development of the Statistics of the Republic of Belarus” during last years Belstat has undertaken a number of activities intended for state statistics improvement. First of all, these changes touched the legal and institutional basis, data distribution policy.

Therefore, as provided by international recommendations, on October 4, 2008, the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis of the Republic of Belarus was re-organized into the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus. It allowed Belstat to become the autonomous public body not entering into the Government and to assure in practice the realization of one of the state statistics principles of «professional independence» and to increase the public trust to official statistics.

The National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus has realized the open free access to official statistical data elaborated in accordance with the Plan of Consolidated Statistical Data Release and placed on the Belstat web-site. Besides that, the metadata (information on surveys and methods) are available on the web-site. In particular, there are forms, instructions on their filling and methods of forming and calculating the statistical indicators.

The official statistical information is placed on the web-site of Belstat ([www.belstat.gov.by](http://www.belstat.gov.by)). Statistical data that characterize socio-economic development of the Republic and its regions are presented both over time as time series and in the format of up-to-date statistical information (these are statistical data based on processing of the current reporting that are provisional and can be revised).

The schedule for the consolidated statistical data release and conducting the state statistical observations are interrelated and balanced. They meet users' demands and assure quality of the primary and aggregated statistical information.

Taking into account the international experience and for the purpose of creating the effective system for distribution of official statistics through mass media the post of spokesman was introduced into the organizational structure of Belstat. The system of cooperation with mass-media covered the followings directions: issue of press-releases, holding of press-conferences, preparation and publication of economic reviews in the leading republican mass media.

For further improvement of the work with respondents and users of statistical information, «Questionnaire for respondents» and «Questionnaire for users» are placed on the Belstat web-site.

In 2009 Belstat started to issue the periodical subscription publication – magazine of «Statistics of Belarus».

*Information systems.* Presently, Belstat conducts work on creation of corporate network with modern complex software and databases. This project has the title «Unified Information System of State Statistics». Its realization will allow to transfer to the electronic format of submitting of the statistical reporting by respondents, organize the effective processing of statistical data and create complex information and statistical resources, provide unlimited on-line access to consolidated statistical information. The basic platform for development of software tools of final users will be become ORACLE, software used for the database maintenance.

Funds allocated from the budget for introduction of the new information system are constrained. Belstat needs additional technical assistance as regards to training of IT personnel, introduction of the data security and confidentiality within the information system and on some other issues.

*Macroeconomic statistics.* Starting from 2009 Belstat commenced the calculation of GDP at regional level. These calculations have experimental character, therefore their publication will be ensured only from January, 2010. Moreover, within the framework of transition to OKED, planned for January, 1, 2011, Belstat conducts the experimental annual estimations of GDP in current and constant prices for 2005 – 2007 according to the new classifier of types of economic activity.

While carrying out the Global assessment of the statistical system of the Republic of Belarus, the experts defined as one of the priorities, in part of providing the technical assistance by the European union to Belarus, the introduction of the computer interviewing into the statistical practice with the purpose of collection of consumer goods and services prices at places of their realization and during the household surveys.

A number of problems in other statistical areas such as agricultural statistics, tourism and demographic statistics still remain unsolved. It is necessary to reform the statistical methods, to use more extensively the sample surveys instead of the system of continuous observations. Organizational and institutional changes are essential for providing more effective and rational allocation of responsibilities between the different components of the statistical system as well as for intensifying the coordination between them in order to reduce the burden on respondents and to improve the data quality. Belstat is interested in studying the international experience on transfer to the electronic format of data collection, its methodological and technological organization.

It is obvious that at present the strategy for development of the statistical system of the Republic of Belarus should incorporate all areas of statistical activity, define priorities and directions of its improvement. Its implementation should be based on the program of statistics development that ensures the achievement of concrete results and goals; assure the high quality of data using the best international experience and standards; take into account the demands of all levels of users and serve as the concerted basis for gaining the international assistance.