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SESSION 1: RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST

AUSTRIA'S EXPERIENCE IN LONG-TERM STATISTICAL REPORTING

Report submitted by the Austrian Central Statistical Office *

Summary

1. Although our statistical systems are largely based on current economic, social and environmental theories and policy needs, there is a growing interest for the past as well as for the future. Through demographic forecasting and its long tradition, statistics are able to forecast the situation decades ahead as well as to document what has been the historical development.

2. An increasing number of publications with long-term series will appear towards the end of the century, offering more background information to the occasionally superficial descriptions received from facts and acting people. Such works depend greatly on the combined statistical and historical materials which give the possibility to reach back to different time periods.

3. The statistical service in Austria has gone through many changes throughout its existence since 1829. The establishment of an independent

*/ Prepared by Mr. Erich Bader, President.

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commission in 1863 lead to the flourishing of statistics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Historical information has never been treated as a supplementary element of Austrian statistics, but has been kept alive in historically-oriented works such as essays, volumes containing articles regarding the population and social history, together with articles

concerning the development of population and social statistics as well as family research. A collection of works containing descriptions of the development and history of official statistics as well as presenting important figures in a time-series form has also been published.

4. The presentation of time-series did pose the problem of creating a thematic limit, meaning only parts of the many facets statistics is able to portray may be reproduced, eliminating different facts over a long-term series. Basically, long-term series document the tasks that had been designated to statistics in the past. Compared to the present data, older statistical information requires more comments, explanations and footnotes. Although many concepts and nomenclatures have changed, former historical statistics should be interpreted in context of its period of origin.

5. Considering that today's data banks and publications rarely reach back to earlier times, the specialised libraries of statistical offices have the responsibility of reconstructing certain dimensions of the past through its personal research. This can be accomplished with the cooperation of experts in historical demography, of social history and the history of economy.

6. It is clearly noticed through its history, that statistics reflect conditions such as civil liberalism, democratisation and bureaucratisation as well as the most recent individualisation of our society. This integration of the past and the present keeps a connection to everyday-life and our participation in it.
