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**NEW ATTITUDE OF DISSEMINATION OF THE STATISTICAL
INFORMATION TO MEDIA**

Paper submitted by the Czech Statistical Office¹

INTRODUCTION

1. The Czech Statistical Office has gone through lots of changes, which to some extent affected both the way of providing information and relations with the press. I cannot remember all of them (the CSO is more than 100 years old), but I do remember the last.
2. Well, 15 years ago we had the Federal Statistical Office, the Czech Statistical Office, the Slovak Statistical Office, 8 regional offices and 75 local offices. And what more, there was a reign of one party and of one newspaper, more or less. Data and information were not falsified even then (though many people thought and still think they were), but they were not published very widely either. Every totalitarian party prevents citizens from obtaining information.
3. Then “the velvet revolution” (today nobody actually knows why it was called velvet) came in 1989. Suddenly a huge demand for information came into being. Everybody was interested in everything. It was a beautiful period! Almost all information was new and thus interesting – statistical information included.
4. Our present Prime Minister (he had worked in a prognostic office at that time) appeared on a crowded square with his prognosis of education and further development. How courageous we were finding it and how much we liked Mr. Zeman at that time!
5. Then there was a split (velvet as well) of Czechoslovakia. The Federal Statistical Office ceased to exist and colossal changes in administration took place. The regions lost their legal authority, decentralization set in. Most of the information to the press was provided by the headquarters and we were not successful any more in convincing people that the information is

¹ Paper prepared by Jan Tušek, Information Services and Presentation Division, Czech Statistical Office

needed that it is of a value and that it should be paid for in some cases. In 1997 we started to build our web pages (and we tried to provide even “the valuable” information for free). We began to teach the journalists and other users to use the Internet. More changes took place on the 1st January 2000. 14 regions were established (NUTS 3) and thus a great demand arose for both regional data and for topical national data provided in regions outright.

6. So we began to teach our workers in regional offices to work with the Internet and we began participate in developing the design and appearance of our web pages (which was hard in some cases, because not all of the offices are connected with the Internet!).

7. The changes that are in progress now can be divided into several areas:

- a) information for the public
- b) information for the media
- c) information for the experts

8. All of these areas can be demonstrated in the Internet presentation of the CSO.

9. General public is still more accustomed to publications, face to face or phone contact. In order to make our products transparent and accessible, we changed the publishing system, the covers of publications and also their formal quality. The individual edition series got different colours, the covers of the most important publications differs very much. Also the regional publications were included in this system. We try to make the publications and other products user-friendly so that they promote activities of the office and statistics in general. At the same time we strive to change culture within the information services. The word marketing comes up though its association with the state service was quite unusual before. We try to make a typology of users and train individual groups. We try to convince them that they need statistics, which we can provide, and ask them about their interests.

10. We can divide our clients into several groups:

- a) traditional users of the old system which continue requesting statistics (e.g. government),
- b) new institutions which know they want statistics (media, opposition parties and the private sector),
- c) general public, which had only a little contact with statistics (mainly as providers of information) and none as users, and do not know what statistics can do for them,
- d) international users, which know what they want and how to get it, and in some cases can pay for it.

11. An important aspect is to assure all users that the statistical office is impartial and independent. This concerns especially contacts with media and international institutions. This is guaranteed by equal access to information for all users without any exceptions and mainly by publishing a calendar of news releases in a year advance.

12. The CSO always publishes this calendar in September for the whole next year. Following the calendar, information about inflation, GDP, wages, external trade, etc. is released on the Internet exactly at 9,00 am on a given day and nobody gets it earlier (not even government, experts or media). At the same time it is made available by the CSO spokesman and the

information services units both in the headquarters and in the regions. We also send this information via e-mail, which is requested mainly by journalists. It is just for them that we also create a brief summary and “a title” to every news release.

13. Our experience shows that the most important matter is to provide a story for the media and stick to the well-known KISS rule (keep it short and simple). Although we do not offer any exclusive conditions and though it is hard to convince the journalists that even statistics can be interesting – we gradually seem to be doing well. The core of the problem is to create the story.

14. For this reason we try to extend the range of our services and information produced by the statistical office also by those seemingly less serious but all the more interesting, which can raise the demand for the serious in consequence. For instance, statistics on first names on the Internet and the like.