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**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE  
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

Fiftieth plenary session  
(Paris, 10-12 June 2002)

**REVIEWING THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

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**I. Organising the programme**

1. The Conference has developed the important role as the 'co-ordinator of the co-ordinators', based around the Integrated Presentation. With a number of international organisations developing, collecting and disseminating comparable statistics it is important they all have unique and complementing roles. As a community of statisticians avoiding duplication of effort helps maintain our credibility and legitimate call on resources.
2. The Integrated Presentation is a first-class product of considerable value in ensuring international organisations and NSIs are fully aware of each other's activities and move forward together. Need to ensure we build on our strengths and use it to its full potential.
3. The Integrated Presentation places the Conference in a unique position within the UN family of regional statistical organisations. Our sphere of coverage extends well beyond our regional boundary. This has its benefits in helping to ensure our region is at the forefront of global developments. However, we should not neglect the important role of bringing together statistics within our region.
4. Ivan Fellegi proposes a module approach to organising the Conference programme. I will outline my reasons for supporting this way forward. The proposed structure contains a balanced mix of activities that are relevant to all countries within the region, primarily transition countries and leading edge emerging topics. Splitting the second module into two parallel

sessions is an appropriate way forward. Within our membership there is sufficient homogeneity within these groups to allow discussion to focus on areas of more specific interest.

5. A possible third module is suggested dealing with the interaction with and between international organisation. I would support this additional module. We need to exploit the bringing together of statisticians from a range of international organisations and countries.

6. The political and economic landscape of Europe has changed considerably since the launch of the Conference 50 years ago, with the main influences during this period summarised by Ivan Fellegi. It is appropriate we take time to consider our role in the twenty-first century, building on successes to date.

7. The proposals prepared by Ivan Fellegi and Yves Franchet provide an insightful and relevant body of thinking to make the Conference of European Statisticians a successful, challenging and productive regular event in the calendar of the Chief Statisticians within Europe. In endorsing enthusiastically the general thrust of the paper, I would like to extend some comments on the way in which one particular aspect of the paper is presented and add some comments on the ideas already embodied in the paper.

## **II. Conference of European Statisticians in the Future**

### Strengthening the Conference on major priority issues

8. Paragraph 25, bullet 4 of the paper recommends providing substantive sessions for transition issues and fast-track leading edge emerging issues. It is important that the CES in the future develops into a forum that facilitates thinking on what makes a strong statistical system for all, and I would express the purpose of the substantive sessions differently. The first block should look at developing activity and concepts that enhance knowledge about the nature of statistical systems. This would include thinking about statistical practices, the position of statistical offices within government, statistical capacity and integrity. This could develop new thinking about any body of statistics and the statistical frameworks that we are familiar with. The second stream should be focused on existing received wisdom about statistical systems and identifying those issues that challenge our capacity to operate within these views, and solutions to remove such obstacles.

### Leadership

39. An important role for the conference - perhaps one of its most fundamental - is to enhance the capacity of the leadership of European statistical offices to not only do their job but to leave behind a legacy of increased capacity and capability within their institutions. There are leadership dilemma fundamental to the application of the UN principles of official statistics. One major issue faced by all statistical offices is that of data protection, which has become even more prominent since 11 September. It is the primary role of any statistical office to protect the

confidentiality of data on individuals. Without this assurance, suppliers of statistical information would be less willing to participate in surveys on individuals and businesses. There is much legislation at international and domestic level which protect such data from being misused. Long before there were increasing international concerns about the impact of terrorism, many powers of the state are being sharpened in ways which undermine privacy and the confidentiality of information on individuals. The state in seeking to enhance its capacity to manage and focus public sector activities through its knowledge of citizens, may well be reducing trust in the ability of the statistical office to guarantee confidentiality of information. This in turn diminishes trust in official statistics and makes it more difficult for statistical offices to collect the information required to produce data.

10. An increasingly significant key aspect of leadership is in the forms of international statistics that cannot exist without collaboration between statistical offices or international organisations with a stake in statistics. The most obvious areas are the environment, migration, foreign trade, international financial flow, the activities of multi-national companies and, of course, understanding the way in which international infrastructures and network organisations function within countries. The Conference of European Statisticians may provide more effective leadership in determining the way we build up measures of these phenomena that are applicable across countries and function effectively for all. One example is the intrastat foreign trade system of the European Union.

11. It is also important to recognise the distinct role of the Chief Statistician. The independence of statisticians is not always expressed with considerable clarity, and as a result this independence cannot always be protected from local pressures and the preferences of politicians. The building up of collegiality among Chief Statisticians gives statisticians in each country an understanding of the common types of pressures faced, and the ways in which they are withstood across countries. This is an immensely important resource in developing local case law. In many countries the growth and use of administrative data, the increased extent to which data is seen as important in the whole of government issues, not to mention the development of performance measures, is creating challenges that previously may not have been significant. The CES can play an important part in supporting the development of methods to address these new factors.

12. Another aspect of leadership is the significant contribution of the Chief Statistician identifying and implementing change in statistical offices. This leadership of change can be supported by professional international groups, such as the CES, that have more insight into statistical practices than other institutions in our own countries. The CES as a forum and meeting place provides a platform to exchange good practice, not only in the statistical field, but also in management. Advances in technology, not only across organisations but within single organisations, can result in new management challenges and require systems and processes that are consistent with the type of technological infrastructure that is now an essential part of any national statistical office attempting to function within the limited budgets that most have.

All these comments reinforce the fundamental elements of the paper by Franchet and Fellegi, which is to change the Conference of European Statisticians so that it can best reinforce the leadership capacity of those involved in official statistics in Europe. Some of this is about supporting development of individuals as leaders, and by recognising that some issues need to be dealt with collegially, if they are to be handled at all.