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Theme 3

Changing use of statistics in transition countries

Supporting paper submitted by the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria¹

1. The accelerated integration of international statistics as part of the globalization process makes it necessary for transition countries, too, to become increasingly comparable with the market economies, statistically and otherwise.
2. The organised statistical activity in Bulgaria began immediately after the proclaiming of the Principality Bulgaria. On January 21st, 1880 the “Statistical Department” was established at the Ministry of Justice. On June 25th, 1881 a Statistical Organisational Section, was formed to the Ministry of Finance, which on August 19th, 1881 became an independent Statistical Office. This is considered to be the beginning of statistics in the country.
3. In recent decades Bulgarian statistical activity has undergone a considerable change. During a large part of the post war period Statistics of Bulgaria expanded. The need for statistics grew and increased resources were allotted to this area. A centralisation of the responsibility for statistics also took place.
4. The necessity for adopting of a new Statistical Law arose from the fact that the existing Statistical

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Law adopted in 1991, actually regulated only the statute and activity of the NSI. There was no normative basis regarding the relations between statistics and the physical and legal entities, and it lacked detailed rules about the statistical activity. The statistical Law of 1991 did not respond to the national needs and was not in accordance with the requirements of the modern statistical system that are issued in the Council regulation (EC) No 322/97 on February 17th, 1997 on Community Statistics.

5. The adoption of the new statistical Law was also necessary for the legal regulation of the scope and content of the Unified Register of Identification of the Economic and Other Subjects, which includes the subjects conducting economic and other types of activity on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria (BULSTAT), other statistical registers in the country, as well as the relations between BULSTAT and the other registers and information systems.

6. The new moments in the Statistical Law are indicated in several directions:

1. Introducing of legal definitions of the terms and concepts of the principles of carrying out statistical activity

2. Detailed description of the structure and interoperability of the Bodies of Statistics: the National Statistical Institute and the respective structural units in the Ministries and Institutions accountable for the carrying out of statistical activity. The specific scope of the statistical surveys is determined by their necessity, usefulness and expedience for society. The normative requirements for conducting of the surveys foster transparency of the activity of the Statistical Bodies and regulate the rights and obligations of the users, respondents and statisticians.

3. Detailed description of the principle of confidentiality and protection of the statistical data, which is an obligation of the statistical offices. The Statistical Law ensures the conducting of statistical activity according to the 10 main principles of the official statistics among which are - lawfulness, independence, impartiality, reliability, efficiency, adequacy, confidentiality and transparency.

7. The relationship between BULSTAT and the rest of the registers and information systems is developed with a view to ensuring the reliability of the data, kept in the register, as well as to decrease the burden of the respondents in Bulgaria. Only the strict abiding by the main principles of statistical activity shall lead to improvement of the quality of the produced statistical information, and the acquisition of updating of statistical data.

8. The implementation of the new Statistical Law will contribute considerably to development of the statistical system on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria and will lead to improvement of the quality and scope of the statistical surveys.

9. Development of the national statistics is directed mainly towards the harmonisation of the normative basis of the statistical activity in the country with the European legislation. In connection with this, NSI has determined as its main priority the activity of adopting "Acquis Communautaire" for statistics. This is reflected in the adopted by NSI Programme for realisation of national strategy for incorporation of Bulgaria in the European Union. The working out of a National Programme for

Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) in the field of Statistics aims at determining the reached level of compliance with the EUROSTAT requirements, given in the “Statistical requirements Compendium” issued, July 1998.

10. Main priority areas about the development of Bulgarian statistics, defined by EUROSTAT in the multinational programme PHARE are:

- Macroeconomics statistics
- Agriculture statistics
- Foreign trade statistics
- Statistics of migration

11. In the following years as a priority of PHARE are also included: population census in 2001, statistical infrastructure and finance accounts.

12. In the national aspect, priority areas in the development of the statistics are:

- Statistics of living standards
- Regional statistics
- Statistical infrastructure
- Statistics of crime

13. A priority task of statistics in the following year is the improvement of the quality of statistical information. The statistical infrastructure, methods of the statistical surveys and organisation of the activity on national and territorial level shall be improved. The implementation of European and world statistical standards will be continued, as a basis for ensuring international comparison of the statistical data and integrating of the republic of Bulgaria within international structures.

14. The Bulgarian Government made the decision that our country is to be included in the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) established by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

15. The Republic of Bulgaria accepted the IMF suggestion to be a pilot country in the elaboration of meta-data for GDDS, which after their approval will be used as a model for the elaboration of meta-data in other countries of the region as well.

16. The NSI builds up and maintains, as a priority, the system of national nomenclature, classification and registers(NCR), based and compatible with the European standards. The establishment and maintenance of such a system of NCR gives the possibility for free statistical information exchange not only between NSI and all other statistical bodies, but with the European partners as well.

17. The establishment of the BULSTAT register provides our country with a powerful information means for precise identification of the economic units. It is also a basis for maintenance of the other administrative registers and information systems. Established in accordance with the international standards, BULSTAT will have a leading role for the harmonisation of the national information systems with those of the member-states of the European Union.

18. It has been a step forward for facilitating the activity of the economic subjects in the conditions of the market economy.

19. At the beginning of the 20th century the censuses were the sole means of collecting of mass information about the economical and social life in this country. Due to this, the censuses after the Liberation up to the 30ies of this century were conducted in a period of less than ten years. For the 120-year-period 15 censuses were carried out.

20. The first census in the Principality of Bulgaria was conducted as of 31st December, 1880 nearly 120 years ago. This census was followed by two censuses in eastern Roumelia (the Southern part of Bulgaria), an independent province up to 1885, when it was united with the Principality. The programme of these censuses provided information about the number and main characteristics of the population: sex, age, marital status, residence, religion, mother tongue, literacy, nationality, administrative regions and others.

21. Currently NSI is elaborating the programme of the census according to the practice in a number of European countries. In the area of international co-operation the NSI participates in different meetings and events connected with the problems of the forthcoming censuses. Elaborated is a Draft Law, which will regulate the legal basis of the population census.

22. According to the Draft Law, the population census is provisioned to be conducted in March 2001.

23. The NSI plays a considerable role in the development of the information society, by fostering the necessary conditions for the statistical data about the demographic and social phenomena and processes, and for the development of economy, to become accessible to users in the country and abroad. In the dissemination of information the institute focuses on the standards of the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) of the IMF: quality of the public in them; equal access by the public.

24. The integration of the national statistical information system with the European and international information system is a priority goal.

25. The main tasks in the field of information support of the users in the country and abroad are:

- Providing full transparency of the statistical activity and forming of a new mediapolicy for wide dissemination of the results of statistical activity
- Broadening of the circle of users and optimisation of information services
- Study and analyses of the consumers' demand with a view to a fuller satisfying to their needs
- Creating a new type of products and services
- Development of updated forms and means of dissemination

26. The dissemination is carried out by means of: dissemination of statistical data via INTERNET; press-conferences and briefings; providing of standard and non-standard products; publications on a

conventional and electronic carrier.

27. Just like other types of information, statistical information is now available much more quickly and much more easily than in the past, and consequently not only tends to circulate in larger quantities but are also of interest to a much wider public. On the other hand, the connection between the producers and the consumers of statistical information has become more intense, from the geographical, institutional and cultural points of view. The dissemination of more and more statistical information to more and more users implies a desire, on their part, for access to information on the characteristics of the data, in order to be in a position to choose the statistical information that best meets their needs.

28. The NSI provides statistical information for all state institutions from the sphere of Legislative Executive and Judicial Power, both on a national as well as on a regional level.

29. The international organisations are among the major users of data on the social and economical development of the country. Our main partners in this activity are: the UN, ECE, PROON, IMF, EU, EUROSTAT, OECD, UNICTAD, UNESCO, FAO, ILO, WTO, WHO, BSEC, World Bank, etc.

30. Over 120 standard questionnaires, as well as a great number of extra and Ad hoc questionnaires are filled out by the NSI and sent by monthly, quarterly and annual periodicity, to the respective international organisation.

31. The embassies and trade representatives of foreign countries in Sofia, as well as many foreign firms, are traditional users of statistical information. Special interest is shown towards different economical branches, relating to future investment intentions.

32. There is a constant interest on the part of the users in the area of science and higher education, state and private firms, banks, consulting agencies, investment mediators, political parties, syndicates and private persons.

33. The opportunities which have been opened up by technological progress are bringing about changes in the conditions of dissemination of information which are reshaping the contours of the supply of statistical data.

34. The new forms of information dissemination are realised in the following directions:

- Improving and maintenance of a Web page of the NSI on the INTERNET
- Creating and disseminating of exchange of electronic publications (on diskettes, CD-ROM etc.)
- Optimising of the information exchange and limiting the time for providing of statistical data by e-mail
- Broadening the circle of statistical publications, published in English
- Preparing of consumer programmes for information services of the users from the statistical database

35. The internationalisation and transformation of the conditions of dissemination and utilisation of information are changing the patterns of supply and demand in the domain of statistical information. The development of internationalisation in response to the globalization of markets implies that various

actors, and not only the traditional users of information, are keen to acquire a more detailed knowledge of economic and social conditions in different countries, in order to improve their decision making capacity.