

Roles of Eurostat and OECD in the Statistical Co-Ordination of European Countries: Implications on Asian Statistical Community

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1. Introduction

This paper is to seek to find implications of European statistical co-operation (ESC) on the Asian statistical community (ASC) via the activities of Asian Statistical Forum (ASF). Thus, it explores the statistical operations of the Statistical Office of European Union (Eurostat) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the past decades and discusses the roles of the Eurostat and the OECD in the European statistical community. Finally, it examines the impact of the ESC on the European statistics and observes the implications of the ESC on the ASF.

2. Role of Eurostat and OECD in the European statistical community

2.1 Eurostat

Eurostat is the Statistical Office of the European Union (EU) located in Luxembourg. As it is spelled out in the Statistical Law adopted by the Council of European Union in 1997, Eurostat's mission is to process and publish comparable statistical information at European level. Eurostat receives data from the Member states (15 countries at present) which were collected, verified and analysed by their statistical authorities. Eurostat then consolidates the data and ensures their comparability. At the same time, it tries to implement common statistical 'language for the Community' that embraces concepts, methods, structures and technical standards. It also defines the basic conditions, procedures and general provisions governing official statistics at EU level.

Eurostat is headed by a Director-General. Under him are six Directors and a Chief Adviser responsible for different sectors of Eurostat activities. In 1999 around 730 people worked in Eurostat. Of these, 560 were officials, 70 were experts sent from Member States and another 100 had other types of contracts. Eurostat had a total budget of around 154 million euro in 1998.

2.2 OECD

The OECD is based in Paris, France. It is a unique forum permitting governments of thirty industrialised countries to study and formulate multilateral policies in economic and social spheres. The activities of the OECD are shared among 14 Directorates and Services, assisted by over 200 specialised committees and working parties. At the Secretariat of the OECD, about 250 staff

members are currently working at the post classified for statistician (total number of staff at the Secretariat are about 1,700).

Statistical activities at the OECD

Statistics is a core activity at the OECD since it requires consensus for decisions on policies or activities. Unlike EU council, the responsibilities for collecting statistical information are shared by various Directorates of OECD. For their policy analyses, most specialised directorates require statistics, and collect and maintain databases.

The Statistics Directorate (STD) was established in 1991 and headed by a chief statistician. The main mission of STD entails: to provide internationally comparable information on a wide range of economic statistics for Member countries and a selected group of Non-Member countries; and to promote co-ordination in the field of statistical activities, technology, and in dissemination and collection of statistical information within and outside the Organisation.

The Statistical Policy Group (SPG) was established in 1992 in order to ensure that the OECD has a coherent policy for the collection and dissemination of statistics and for the development of statistical systems and standards. SPG is led by STD and consists of senior staff involved in statistical work in the different Directorates of the Organisation.

3. The impact of European statistical co-operation on the European statistics

3.1 Co-ordination of statistical work at the European level

The European Statistical System (ESS) was built up gradually with the objective of providing comparable statistics at EU level. Within the ESS, Eurostat takes a leading role in working with the national agencies responsible for collecting official statistics of the European Economic Area (EEA), i.e. EU Member States, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. The structure comprises a large set of committees, working groups, technical groups, task forces centred around the following three key committees: Statistical Programme Committee (SPC), Committee on Monetary, Financial and Balance of Payments Statistics (CMFB), and European Committee on Economic and Social Information (CEIES). The ESS works also with countries outside the EU/EEA. The ESS provides assistance to improve the statistical systems in candidate and developing countries as well as Mediterranean countries and in many African countries. At the same time, the ESS also co-ordinates its work with international organisations such as the European Central Bank, OECD, the UN, the IMF and the World Bank.

SPC: SPC discusses the most important joint actions and programmes to be carried out to meet EU information requirements. It agrees a five-year programme, which is implemented by the national authorities and monitored by Eurostat. SPC co-ordinates development of common classifications, methodology and definitions for application in Member States and collection, analysis and dissemination of statistical data for the EU, including comparisons between countries and regions;

CMFB: CMFB is the main mechanism for co-operation between Eurostat, the ECB, Member States central banks, the national statistical institutes and DG ECOFIN (Economic and financial affairs) of the European Commission. CMFB assists and gives the Commission advice on monetary, financial and balance of payments statistics.

CEIES: CEIES provides a wider forum to discuss statistical requirements for the Community. It is represented by experts in business, trade unions and academics.

OECD's involvement in European statistical integration

Through the support of the Statistical Policy Group, OECD has actively involved in working groups and parties at the European level in order to enhance the quality of European statistics. OECD also provides its portion of the Joint Presentation of Work (with Eurostat and the UNECE), which is a major instrument for co-ordination, especially in view of the substantial level of effort devoted to detailed review by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) of UNECE. OECD and Eurostat have been made permanent observers of the CES. The three organisations provide for the Conference an integrated presentation of work programs as a means for and evidence of better co-ordination. There is a joint data protocol between the OECD and Eurostat, and analysts in each organisation have direct access on their desktops to completed databases of both organisations. At the same time, OECD has been working closely with the European Central Bank (ECB) since the birth of Euro area.

3.2 The European statistical integration process

The history of European statistical integration is closely related to that of the integration of European Community. Statistics required by the Community have been broadened as the integration process and its policies have developed.

Eurostat was established in 1953 as a statistical division for the European Coal and Steel Community to produce harmonised and timely statistics. It became a Directorate-General of the European Commission when the European Community was founded in 1958. The Customs Union was created in 1962 and required a foreign trade statistics for Member states to be harmonised. The enlargements of European Community to nine (1973), ten (1981), twelve (1986) and fifteen (1995) have strengthened the statistical integration further. In 1988, European Commission adopted a document defining the first policy for statistical information. As a result, the Statistical Programme Committee (SPC) was established. Creation of SPC geared the integration process of the European statistics: the Council has adopted three five-year statistical programmes; in 1990, the Council adopts a directive on transmission of confidential data to Eurostat, previously an obstacle to Community statistical work. Eurostat's role was extended as a result of the agreement on establishment of the European Economic Area and adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991.

The establishment of the single market in 1993 changed Eurostat's activities in other fields, e.g. Intrastat established for statistics on intra-EU trade. In 1997 Statistics added for the first time to the Treaty of Amsterdam and the Statistical Law approved by the Council. At the same time, the Harmonised Indices of Consumer Prices (HICP) was published for the first time, which is designed for European Monetary Union (EMU) convergence criteria. With the introduction of euro in 1999, statistical measures to monitor the development of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) are in greater needs. Thus, ECB and Eurostat now share the responsibilities to collect statistical information for the EMU.

3.3 Statistical aspect of the EU integration process

A series of projects has been implemented over the years by the activities of numerous working groups of specialists from Member states, Eurostat and other international organisations including OECD. As results, a significant degree of integration or harmonisation in the European statistics has been achieved in the following areas:

- Regulations and harmonised collection systems;
- European System of Accounts: the accounting rules and concepts were redefined for more reliable analyses and comparisons;
- Prodcom (classification of industrial statistics: first harmonised nomenclature for products), general industrial classification of economic activities (NACE), i.e. consistent with ISIC;

- Intrastat: a new way of measuring intra-EU trade, via direct reporting by enterprises, after the introduction of the single market;
- New Community labour force survey and standardised unemployment rates;
- Harmonised Indices of Consumer Prices (HICP) used to measure EU inflation and one of the convergence criteria for countries participating in EMU;
- Money and banking statistics, financial statistics and balance of payments statistics; etc.

4. Implications of European statistical co-operation on the Asian Statistical Forum

Lessons: the following lessons can be learned from the European statistical co-operation

- the integration of European statistical system was demand-driven;
- long-term process along with the political integration;
- executed within the special committees where the participants are representatives of Member states and of international organisations;
- harmonisation of output is more important than that of input;
- cultural, historical and institutional issues should be highly considered;
- regulation on the transmission of confidential data to the supranational statistical authorities.

Implications: Greater influence of European standards on statistics produced by Asian countries

- they may or may not be suitable for Asian economic and social structures, e.g. a harmonised set of baskets of goods and services for CPI or PPP:
 - Possibility of improper policy recommendation for Asian countries;
- a strong initiative from the ASF will be necessary for efficient co-operation between ASC and European Statistical community;

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FRENCH RÉSUMÉ

Ce papier tente de dégager des implications de la coopération statistique européenne (CSE) pour la communauté statistique asiatique (CSA), par le biais des activités du Forum statistique d'Asie (FSA). Les premières sections synthétisent les activités de l'Office statistique européen (Eurostat) et de l'organisation pour la coopération et le développement économique (OCDE) au cours des dernières décennies et discutent les rôles respectifs d'Eurostat et de l'OCDE au niveau de la communauté statistique européenne. Les dernières sections examinent l'impact de la CSE sur les statistiques européennes et les implications de l'expérience de la CSE pour le FSA.