



Press release

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ESGAB: Respect for the professional independence of statistics — an obligation for all countries in the European Statistical System

ESGAB voices concern about developments in the Spanish National Statistical Institute.

The [European Statistical Governance Advisory Board](#) (ESGAB) has become aware that the president of the Spanish National Statistical Institute (INE) has suddenly vacated his position amid repeated public criticisms by Spanish Government high officials regarding the methods of compilation of certain European statistics by INE - the GDP growth rate and the inflation rate as measured by the HICP, with the policy makers insisting that the former is higher and the latter is lower than calculated by INE.

ESGAB is of the opinion that, in general, comments on and criticisms of the work of a National Statistical Institute (NSI) —including in public—can be helpful to the production of European statistics to the extent that these are grounded on scientifically and technically sound analyses. This also contributes to the accountability of NSIs for their work.

At the same time, however, when such comments and criticisms originate from politicians and policy-makers with jurisdiction over the NSI, whose policy performance the statistics of the NSI document, and when these comments go beyond the thoughtful submission of scientific viewpoints for consideration by the NSI, they can effectively amount to the government providing instructions to the NSI on how to compile statistics.

ESGAB reiterates the legal obligation of national governments to respect the professional independence of NSIs stipulated in [Regulation \(EU\) 223/2009](#) on European statistics. Policy makers exerting pressure on NSIs and other European statistics producers on the methods of calculation of certain statistics, like GDP or the inflation rate, breach this obligation. In accordance with the said Regulation, European statistics shall be developed, produced and disseminated in conformity with the statistical principles as set out in Article 338(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (including the principles of scientific independence, impartiality and objectivity) and further elaborated in the European Statistics Code of Practice.

The [Code of Practice](#) under its first principle on professional independence is clear that “professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European Statistics.” Moreover, under the same principle (Indicator 1.4) it mandates that the heads of National Statistical Institutes have „the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases“. Furthermore, Regulation (EU) 223/2009, as in force, clearly requires that “the heads of NSIs ... shall neither seek nor take instructions from any government or other institution, body, office or entity” (Article 5a 2. (c)). This is not only a legal obligation of the heads of NSIs but also of the government officials interacting with them.

Political interference with the methods of compilation of European statistics is exceedingly damaging to the public’s trust in the statistics, the more so when the statistics are criticized by



policy officials as painting a 'wrong' – i.e., too negative – picture of socio-economic developments in the country, and so of the work of the government.

ESGAB expresses its serious concern with the context of and actions surrounding the resignation by the president of the Spanish NSI. The specific event also indicates a weakness in the existing statistical legal framework in Spain. For example, ESGAB notes one unheeded recommendation from the 2015 ESS Peer Review on compliance with the Code of Practice by Spain, namely the call for legislative amendments, „laying down clear provisions for the appointment and dismissal of the President of the National Statistical Institute, in line with the European statistics Code of Practice (European statistics Code of Practice, indicator 1.8)“. Spain ought to thoroughly review the existing legal/institutional framework as well as the amendment of it currently under consideration with a view to ensuring the implementation of all European statistical principles enshrined in the European Statistics Code of Practice.

„The European Statistics Code of Practice is the cornerstone of the common quality framework of the European Statistical System and all EU Member States (and EFTA countries) have to adhere to it. Its full respect – including the professional independence of the heads of the National Statistical Institutes – is crucial for the integrity and reliability of as well as trust in official statistics. Therefore, any action that undermines the professional independence of a National Statistical Institute has to be denounced“, recalls the Chair of ESGAB, Aurel Schubert.

The European Statistical Governance Advisory Board has been established in 2008 ([Decision No 235/2008/EC](#)) with the legal mandate to provide an independent overview of the European Statistical System as regards the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice.



Further information

ESGAB Opinions, Press Releases and Annual Reports are available on [ESGAB's homepage](#).

Contact for media assistance

To arrange an interview with the ESGAB Chair, Mr Aurel Schubert, please contact the ESGAB Secretariat at estat-esgab@ec.europa.eu.

About ESGAB

ESGAB¹ provides an independent overview of the implementation of the Code of Practice. It seeks to enhance the professional independence, integrity and accountability of the European Statistical System, key elements of the Code, and the quality of European statistics. Its tasks include the preparation of an annual report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Code by Eurostat and the European Statistical System as a whole. ESGAB also advises the Commission (Eurostat) on appropriate measures to facilitate implementation.

The **European Statistical System**² (ESS) is a partnership between the European Union's statistical authority, i.e. the Commission (Eurostat), and the national statistical institutes (NSIs) and other national authorities (ONAs) responsible in each Member State for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics.

The **European Statistics Code of Practice**³ sets the standards for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. It builds on a common definition of quality in statistics used in the European Statistical System. The Code is a self-regulatory instrument containing 16 principles which address the institutional environment in which national and EU statistical authorities operate, and the production and dissemination of European statistics. Its implementation is supported by a set of indicators of good practice for each principle.

Peer reviews

Peer reviews⁴ are part of the European Statistical System strategy to implement the Code of Practice. The objective is to enhance the integrity, independence and accountability of ESS statistical authorities. The first round of peer reviews was carried out in 2006-2008, followed by a second round in 2013-2015. Both rounds covered all EU Member States and EFTA countries. ESGAB carried out the peer review of Eurostat using the methodology developed for National Statistical Institute peer reviews with some adaptations, reflecting Eurostat's specific characteristics.

¹ [Introduction - ESGAB - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

² [European Statistical System \(ESS\) - European Statistical System \(ESS\) - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

³ [European Statistics Code of Practice - Quality - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ [Peer reviews - Quality - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)