

Press release

1 March 2019

Recent developments of the Greek Statistical System

The European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) welcomes the fifth report of the Greek Good Practice Advisory Committee (GPAC)¹ published on 18th December 2018. The members of the re-convened GPAC were appointed (including Mr Gerry O’Hanlon, the former Director-General of the Irish Central Statistical Office nominated as ESGAB representative in the Committee) in March 2018 for the period 2018-2019 inclusive.

Following on the analyses carried out in previous GPAC reports, the 2018 report deals with particular issues relevant to the implementation of the Code of Practice in the Hellenic Statistical System, namely: the organisation of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), in the light of the European Statistics Code of Practice (henceforth the “Code”), updated in November 2017; adequacy of resources; certification of statistics produced by the agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System (ELSS); statistical confidentiality and data protection, with special attention to the implementation of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In addition, GPAC expressed concerns about court proceedings against the former President of ELSTAT, Mr Andreas Georgiou.

ESGAB welcomes the intention of ELSTAT to further improve its organisation. In this context, as recommended by GPAC, it is important to have the existing top management board formalised and meeting regularly to ensure the involvement and responsibility of senior officials in office activities. The Board notes that, on the occasion of the implementation of the new organisation and in light of the next Census, all managerial positions will be filled by open competition and new non-management staff may also be transferred from other Greek public administrations. ESGAB recommends paying particular attention to the selection of people with appropriate technical competencies. Moreover, it would be important to launch a focused training program for new staff, with special attention given to the provisions of the Code and the functioning of the European Statistical System (ESS), including its best practices.

The Board also shares GPAC’s proposals to improve ELSTAT’s ability to continue to develop its communications so that they reach the largest possible part of the population, and to enhance its capacity to deal with legal issues. Particularly important is the improvement, underlined by the GPAC report, of ELSTAT’s capabilities to evaluate the quality of data produced by other members of the Hellenic Statistical System. ESGAB shares the Committee’s recommendations to prioritise the selection of statistics to be assessed, ensuring the efficiency of this process.

¹ <http://www.statistics.gr/en/good-practice-committee>

Finally, the Board welcomes the actions taken by ELSTAT to comply with the provisions of the GDPR, in order to fully protect the privacy of respondents, a key requirement of the Code.

The GPAC report concludes that the Greek Statistical System is committed to the aim of producing high quality statistics in an objective manner and free from external influence, and that several actions have been taken to strengthen it. However, ESGAB stresses that additional steps are needed to further improve the functioning of ELSTAT and of the System, and expresses the view that acceleration in the speed of implementation is required. Consequently, ESGAB urges the Greek political authorities to support this improvement process with adequate human and financial resources.

In its final section, the GPAC report also refers to the continuing court proceedings against the former President of ELSTAT, Mr Andreas Georgiou. GPAC “remains concerned that the proceedings have the potential to adversely affect the public perception of the credibility and objectivity of Greek official statistics”. In particular, GPAC underlines that on the 25th September 2018 the assigned prosecutor of the Appeals Court recommended to the Appeals Court Council that the case against Mr. Georgiou and his two senior colleagues (for artificially inflating the 2009 debt and deficit statistics) be referred to open trial. This occurred despite the fact that in both previous occasions when the Appeals Court Council had considered the case, the assigned prosecutor had recommended that the defendants be acquitted. In this context, it should be recalled, once more, that the National Accounts figures published by ELSTAT in 2010 and afterwards were approved and published by Eurostat following standard procedures of scrutiny and verification.

The GPAC report also notes the irrevocable conviction of Mr. Andreas Georgiou for not putting forward the 2009 EDP figures for approval by the former ELSTAT board prior to their public release, and reiterates what it had stated in previous reports, i.e., that the European Statistics Code of Practice unequivocally states that the Head of the National Statistical Institute has “sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases”.

ESGAB is very concerned by the above developments, which could be seen to challenge the EU’s statistical principles and framework. Therefore, ESGAB supports GPAC’s request to Greek authorities to bring the legal controversy on 2009 figures to an early conclusion.

Further information

ESGAB Opinions, Press Releases and Annual Reports are available on ESGAB's homepage (<http://ec.europa.eu/esgab/>).

Contact for media assistance

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

About ESGAB

ESGAB² 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**³ (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.

European Statistics Code of Practice (the Code)

The European Statistics Code of Practice⁴ 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 reviews⁵ 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 cover all EU Member States and EFTA countries. The European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB) carried out a peer review of Eurostat using the methodology developed for National Statistical Institute peer reviews with some adaptations reflecting Eurostat's specific characteristics. The European Statistical System is preparing third round of peer reviews.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/esgab/>

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/european-statistical-system/overview>

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/european-statistics-code-of-practice>

⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/peer-reviews>