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**Peer review on the implementation
of the
European Statistics Code of Practice**

Country visited: Greece

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NSSG is, as many other national statistical institutes, dominated by ongoing activities with collection of data and dissemination of national official statistics. Greece has been a member of the European Statistical System since 1981 and the portfolio of statistics is dominated by European statistics.

The NSSG and its products are highly esteemed by a large variety of national users. NSSG is clearly respected by national users as a highly professional institute, with professional integrity.

In recent years, NSSG has progressed professionally in many ways. This progress is observed in content and most quality dimensions.

It was easy to observe that NSSG has an enthusiastic and competent young staff, with a clear understanding of the typical characteristics of official statistics. The human resource management seemed to be successful in both recruiting and reducing turnover among young and qualified staff.

The use of statistical methods in the production process of official statistics is given high priority by NSSG. The experts in methods co-operate closely with other colleagues to secure that each statistic will use the most relevant and the best methods. The responsibility for the content and the press releases is the production unit's.

It is observable that there is a broad understanding both by the NSSG staff and the users of official statistics that NSSG is obliged to act in an independent and objective manner. This is stated in the mission and vision and this perspective is also communicated to the public by the web pages of NSSG. The Statistics Law is old, from 1956, with some later supplements, and the basic text was written at a time when the concepts of independent official statistics were not developed internationally. The law is indirectly interpreted to support the principles of independency but this is not directly and clearly spelled out in the legal text. The law should more explicitly support this principle of independency. This legal revision should not only focus on independency and objectivity but also include revision of other aspects.

We observed that NSSG has a high reputation nationally. This high reputation, as a qualified statistical institute, was also observed by IMF when they examined NSSG (ROSC) There are however some counter-indications from the co-operation with Eurostat that should be considered. We refer to e.g. the public deficit figures and quality examination by Eurostat (2004) and to the recent situation with the revision of GDP figures. These are examples where the quality of NSSG statistics has been put under international examination. This may have caused an interpretation in the international community that the Greek national statistical system suffers from a lack of professionalism and lack of integrity. This interpretation of these incidents in the co-operation with Eurostat, is not at all shared by representatives from NSSG or other representatives from the Greece community. It is important that both NSSG and Eurostat are forward looking and should establish improved communication, especially about revision of national figures.

Quality work has a solid tradition in NSSG and statistical methods seem to have a strong position. The experts on methods seem to be active and produce a lot of documentation. The quality work should be brought more in line with EU standards.

Even though the use of internet for dissemination of official statistics has improved in recent years, it is clear that there is still a need for an improved internet presentation. Some elements

that should be improved are the access to data that may be downloaded and more metadata. NSSG could also improve the press releases with more emphasis on identification of important changes and structures.

The law says that there should be a Statistical Council. This has however not yet been established but there are now actions taken to soon convene the council. The objective seems to be primarily to improve user contacts more than establishing a body meant to support integrity. There are a lot of ad hoc user contacts. This good relationship is however not followed up by more formal user contacts - for example user advisory boards for the various subject matters.

The Greek statistical system is largely centralised with the NSSG producing most of the (European) statistics. Nevertheless, a few statistics are solely or in parallel produced by other institutions (e.g. by the Ministry for Rural Development). Therefore, co-ordination is called for and has been seen as necessary by several contacts of the Peer Review Team. The body best suited for such strategic co-ordination would be the National Council of Statistics, foreseen by law in 1988. However, it has not yet started to operate. However, the exact future role and functions of the Council need to be defined (the respective legal act dates from 1988). At the same time, technical co-operation should be encouraged (e.g. for agricultural statistics).

The uncoordinated parallel production of some data not only unnecessarily increases the reporting burden but also leads to similar but somewhat different data sets. One reason for the parallel production that was mentioned several times is the inadequate timeliness of some of the NSSG statistics. A faster delivery of the NSSG statistics would therefore help to reduce such parallel data production.

Parallel to the work of the Council, systematic channels of regular communication with different users as well as producers would strengthen the system.

2. INTRODUCTION

With the adoption of the European Statistics Code of Practice, the Statistical Programme (SPC) committed itself to adhering to its principles. At its meeting on 25 May 2005, the SPC endorsed a stepwise monitoring procedure for the implementation of the Code over three years during which countries' self-assessments should be combined with elements of peer review, benchmarking and monitoring on the basis of the explanatory indicators added to each principle of the Code.

During December 2005/January 2006, the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat have completed their self-assessments, the results have been summarised by Eurostat in a report submitted to the Economic and Financial Committee in May 2006 which has been published on the Eurostat website.

As a next step towards implementation of the Code, the European Statistical System is organising peer reviews to complement the self-assessments starting with 2006. They are considered a vital element for the implementation of the Code of Practice given their capacity to encourage the sharing of best practice and to contribute to transparency in what is, essentially, a self-regulatory approach. This approach is designed to enhance accountability and to help building trust in the integrity of the European Statistical System, its processes and outputs.

The Code of Practice peer reviews follow a common methodology focusing on the institutional environment and dissemination part of the Code comprising the following principles: (1)

Professional independence, (2) Mandate for data collection, (3) Adequacy of resources, (4) Quality commitment, (5) Statistical confidentiality, (6) Impartiality and Objectivity and (15) Accessibility and Clarity. In principle, the peer review is limited to the National Statistical Institute and its co-ordination role within a dispersed national statistical system. A short document provided by the National Statistical Institute which summarises key aspects of the functioning of the national statistical system is published together with this report.

During a three days visit on-site and on the basis of information material provided by the National Statistical Institute and Eurostat prior to the review, peer reviews yield a report assessing compliance with the Code of Practice at indicator level and by principle following a four point assessment scale. The report includes a refined set of improvement actions covering all principles of the Code which are being used to feed the monitoring process of the implementation of the Code in the European Statistical System.

While the peer reviewers will undertake to base their assessment to the extent possible on factual information, it is worth noting some of the limitations of the peer review process. For example, peer reviewers are dependent upon the resources made available to them (though experienced reviewers can be expected to identify where appropriate information is not forthcoming). In addition these reviews are conducted on a strategic, organisation-wide and system wide basis. Accordingly it is not straightforward to ascertain that certain practices or behaviours or systems operate in all statistical domains.

3. FINDINGS PER PRINCIPLE

Principle 1: Professional Independence

The 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.

Overall assessment: The NSSG is part of the Ministry of Economy and Finance (declared “an independent institution under the supervision of the minister” in the Statistical Law) and its head, the Secretary General, is a political position. Consequently, at present all its publications bear the logo of the ministry. However, despite its rather weak legal basis dating largely from 1956 the NSSG enjoys a strong degree of professional independence with respect to statistical methods as well as the timing and content of statistical releases. A National Council of Statistics, an advisory body bringing together external users of statistics, which was foreseen in a law from 1988, has not yet been established.

Indicator 1.1: The independence of the statistical authority from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in law.

Partly met

Comments: The current Statistical Law dates from 1956 at the time NSSG was first created (*Legislative Decree 3627, Official Journal No 278/16-11-56 Volume A*: on the organization of NSSG). It has been updated several times since, but mainly to reflect new developments such as access for NSSG to VAT information when VAT was introduced, or changes in the organisation chart. There is only a passing reference to (institutional) independence and no reference to impartiality or objectivity of the NSSG in the statistical law.

In Greece, usually a government change may result in the new appointment of the head of the NSSG, while the terms of the top level servants are defined by the National Code for civil servants.

Indicator 1.2: The head of the statistical authority has sufficiently high hierarchical standing to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies. He/She should be of the highest professional calibre.

Fully met

Comments: The Secretary General (SG) is – like all Secretary Generals of the different ministries - directly appointed by the Prime Minister (subject to recall). As such a top level political appointee he/she has access to policy authorities (but does not attend Cabinet meetings). The present SG has been a professor of statistics (on leave) in the US.

Indicator 1.3: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have responsibility for ensuring that European Statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner.

Fully met

Comments: The vast majority of European Statistics in Greece are produced by the NSSG. The head of the NSSG is by article 14 in the statistical law in practice given full responsibility for ensuring that these European Statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner. However, there are also some European Statistics produced by other Greek institutions (mainly ministries) and sent directly to Eurostat.

Indicator 1.4: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.

Fully met

Comments: The Secretary General of the NSSG is by law (Article 14) and national tradition given a strong position and is given the responsibility for the choice of statistical methods. It has been confirmed to the Peer Review Team by several contacts that the current day-to-day practice is fully in line with this rule.

Indicator 1.5: The statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made.

Partly met

Comments: The Annual Statistical Programme is published. It is a list (excel file) of the planned surveys/works by division, section, phase of conduct and number of persons/days. However, there are no overall priorities or guidelines and there is no overall, strategic aspect included. In addition, there are no published summary reports about progress achieved or eventual delays or changes. The summary reports are issued for internal use only.

Indicator 1.6: Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.

Largely met

Comments: The statistical releases limit themselves to a presentation of the statistics without any form of political comment. They are of good quality and clear. They always use a common format and follow a standard design. However, the logo at the top of the releases is always:

Hellenic Republic,
Ministry of Economy and Finance
General Secretariat of
The National Statistical Service of Greece

While in the Greek tradition – where the NSSG is under the supervision of the Ministry of Economy and Finance – this might add to the credibility of the data, it might send confusing signals to international data users. Outside of Greece it could be interpreted as the Ministry having direct professional influence on the NSSG.

Indicator 1.7: The statistical authority, when appropriate, comments publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.

Fully met

Comments: The NSSG confirmed to the Peer Review Team to react publicly when the media misuses official statistics. Journalists pointed out, however, that published interpretations of the same data by the media tend to vary according to the political affiliations of the respective media.

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

Statistical authorities must have a clear legal mandate to collect information for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises and households, and the public at large may be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for European statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.

Overall assessment: The NSSG has the mandate from the statistical law to directly collect data from enterprises or households or administrations. There is an obligation to respond and there is the power to issue sanctions in case of non reporting. However, it is not the policy of the NSSG to apply sanctions. Rather it tries to achieve response via moral persuasion.

Indicator 2.1: The mandate to collect information for the production and dissemination of official statistics is specified in law.

Fully met

Comments: The mandate for data collection and the obligations of individuals and companies to respond are well specified in the 1956 Statistical Law in Article 1 “The objective of the NSSG is the collection, classification and processing of all statistical data of the country”.

Indicator 2.2: The statistical authority is allowed by national legislation to use administrative records for statistical purposes.

Largely met

Comments: Law 2392/1996 gives the NSSG access to administrative records and files. The use of such information can solely and exclusively be for statistical data production. However, the law also states that public sector services may refuse such access to registers and files if it might infringe (among others) on “the secrecy of the national defence and foreign policy”. The Peer Review Team could not get information on concrete cases and the frequency of such refusals. However, contact persons reported of cases of long delays and quality problems (e.g. outdated registers) with administrative data. The problems in implementing the use of administrative records for statistical purposes may be hindered by legal acts in other parts of Government.

Indicator 2.3: On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authority may compel response to statistical surveys.

Fully met

Comments: The Statistical Law 2392 of 1996, art 3 as replaced by the article 14 par 1, law 3470/06 states that (official translation): Private individuals, their associations and private law legal persons are compelled to provide in time accurately, orally or in writing any information required by the Secretariat General of the NSSG. The violations of the above provision are punished by a fine ranging from Drs one million (1.000.000) to Drs three million (3.000.000)". However, it is the policy of the NSSG not to use fines but moral persuasion ("interventions instead of sanctions").

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.

Overall assessment: The resources are scarce but not at a dramatically low level. The total resources included the 52 regional offices of the NSSG. Most of the staff is highly qualified but there is at the same time an urgent need for improved training. The IT situation has improved largely and there seems to be relevant strategic plans for IT.

Indicator 3.1: Staff, financial, and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to meet current European Statistics needs.

Largely met

Comments: The number of staff based on info given in 2005, was 1303. The most recent figures for staff is 1018 of which approximately 300 at the 52 regional offices. More than 40% of the staff has an academic degree and a share of approximately 11 % have a post graduation including PhDs. In addition, the NSSG extensively uses external contracted staff (e.g. for surveys). The budget - which is decided by Parliament on the basis of a proposal of the Ministry of Economy and Finance - seems to be low – but not at an extremely low level. The competence level of the staff is generally good – especially among young staff. There is an expressed demand for more training. The IT staff is approximately 170 (32 with higher education).

Indicator 3.2: The scope, detail and cost of European Statistics are commensurate with needs.

For European level reply

Indicator 3.3: Procedures exist to assess and justify demands for new European Statistics against their cost.

For European level reply

Indicator 3.4: Procedures exist to assess the continuing need for all European Statistics, to see if any can be discontinued or curtailed to free up resources.

For European level reply

Principle 4: Quality commitment

All ESS members commit themselves to work and co-operate according to the principles fixed in the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System.

Overall assessment: There is a clear commitment to quality in the methodological unit in general and in its role of quality monitoring. However, other, more systematic, approaches to monitoring and improving the quality of the whole statistical process could usefully be developed.

Indicator 4.1 Product quality is regularly monitored according to the ESS quality components.

Partly met

Comments: Aspects like relevance and accessibility are monitored through a six-monthly user satisfaction survey which so far was only conducted among a very limited group of users, the visitors to the NSSG library. Other aspects such as accuracy are monitored through statistical techniques (although these are more suitable for some areas that are sample surveys than for the main macro-economic statistics).

Indicator 4.2 Processes are in place to monitor the quality of the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics.

Largely met

Comments: When a new survey or indicator is proposed, the relevant operational unit makes a proposal for methodology. This is examined by the methodology unit and only then approved by the Secretary General. The methodology unit also calculates various mathematical statistics to assess the quality. In addition, Eurostat requirements have led to the drafting of descriptions of sources and methods documents (generally in English) in some areas of statistics.

For all surveys there are quite detailed instructions for interviewers, but there does not seem to be any systematic documentation of the complete chain of processes for the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics.

Indicator 4.3 Processes are in place to deal with quality considerations, including trade-offs within quality, and to guide planning for existing and emerging surveys.

Partly met

Comments: Inevitably managers at all levels are taking day-to-day operational decisions on these questions. However, there does not appear to be any systematic or cross-cutting approach, nor is there evidence of systems to guide planning for existing and emerging surveys.

Indicator 4.4 Quality guidelines are documented and staff are well trained. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.

Partly met

Comments: There is a very recent document entitled "Quality Guidelines for official statistics" which sets out broad principles. In addition there are detailed instructions for interviewers in surveys. Staff does not seem to have received training on quality issues. There seems to be well established procedures for an exchange of views on quality aspect of a survey between method unit and production unit. Some quality information is included in metadata of some statistics.

Indicator 4.5 There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using external experts where appropriate.

Partly met

Comments: There have been no external reviews, other than the IMF ROSC in 2003 and 2004. Some ad hoc reviews have been undertaken e.g. on the consumer price index.

Principle 5: Statistical confidentiality

The privacy of data providers (households, enterprises, administrations and other respondents), the confidentiality of the information they provide and its use only for statistical purposes must be absolutely guaranteed.

Overall assessment: The importance of confidentiality is understood and respected by all partners that are involved as data providers, producers and users of official statistics. The respondents have full confidence in how confidentiality principles are practiced by NSSG. NSSG has established a Committee on Statistical Confidentiality. The committee is working both with overall policy questions and concrete cases where confidentiality principles are supervised and the committee gives advice in such cases by implementing the confidentiality provisions of the law. NSSG has assigned an external private company to apply and implement the proper software to perform checks on the confidentiality for tables disseminated on NSSG's website and for SBS tables that are sent to Eurostat. The NSSG delivers (mostly anonymous) micro data to researchers. The procedures for each case seem to be supervised by the Committee on Statistical Confidentiality. The general principles for those who consider a request for data for research could however have been clearer.

Indicator 5.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.

Fully met

Comments: The confidentiality principle is supported by the law (Chapter VII Statistical File Keeping and information of a confidential nature). Article 36 starts with a statement that makes it clear that if government data are to be used for administrative purposes, this should be clearly informed on the questionnaire. On the contrary the content of questionnaires are deemed to be confidential and in no way used by any public authority. Such questionnaires should be marked visibly "Confidential".

Indicator 5.2 Statistical authority staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.

Fully met

Comments: Staff has to sign a declaration (oath) where loyalty to the law and confidentiality principles is declared.

Indicator 5.3 Substantial penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality.

Fully met

Comments: Chapter VIII Article 40 states that those who offend the confidentiality principles are to be punished by a fine (of up to metallic DRs 10000 or an imprisonment of up to 1 year or both and is subject to the disciplinary fines of the law (1811/51) (It is also a paragraph for punishment of those who forges or counterfeits the replies from respondents).

Indicator 5.4 Instructions and guidelines are provided on the protection of statistical confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.

Fully met

Comments: The confidentiality principles are a fully integrated part of the NSSG mission statement and communicated to the public (e.g. web pages). In all meetings with staff it was clear that these principles are well known, understood and respected.

Indicator 5.5 Physical and technological provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases

Fully met

Comments: All data systems are protected by acceptable electronic protection from intruders within and outside the NSSG. The user's permissions for accessing the NSSG's Integrated Statistical Information System (statistical applications and databases) relevant to their tasks and responsibilities and every access and changes done are monitored in detail, thus ensuring any malicious/wrongful actions to be identified. The software t-Argus is under development/implementation followed by extensive training. The new and modern head office building is physically protected in a modern manner. The Peer Review Team was informed that all regional office premises are monitored/protected electronically and physically in an acceptable manner. However the Peer Review Team did not have an opportunity to verify this.

Indicator 5.6 Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical microdata for research purposes.

Largely met

Comments: Researchers have access to micro data on the basis of protocols, case by case. The research community expressed great satisfaction with the service they received from NSSG. It seemed however that the general principles were not formulated and made public for potential users from the research community. There is no ready made list of acceptable research institutes as each request for access to micro data accessing is decided by the Committee of Statistical Confidentiality on a case by case basis. A clear procedure for deciding if a data request is from an acceptable research institute will be an important and difficult element in a complete practice.

Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity.

Statistical authorities must produce and disseminate European Statistics respecting scientific independence and in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably.

Overall assessment: The mission confirmed that there is a clear expression of strong respect for the principles to use the best scientific methods and work professional in the production and dissemination of Greece official statistics. All statistics and the methods used are developed under the heavy influence of the experts in statistical method in NSSG. Documentation about methods etc are produced and in principle available for external users. The availability for external users is however not the best.

Indicator 6.1: Statistics are compiled on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.

Largely met

Comments: For areas that were examined it seems that NSSG produces official statistics based on sound methods and presented in a professional statistical manner. This is confirmed by a clear and united voice from all national user groups. When NSSG designs the surveys it is an active and close co-operation between the subject matter statisticians and the experts in statistical methods. This strong tradition for involving methodological experts may be a support for objectivity.

Indicator 6.2: Choices of sources and statistical techniques are informed by statistical considerations.

Fully met

Comments: The use of statistical methods plays an important role in the design of every survey and the unit for statistical methods is active and is given a cooperative role with other subject matter statistical units.

Indicator 6.3: Errors discovered in published statistics are corrected at the earliest possible date and publicised.

Largely met

Comments: When errors are observed it is a tradition to inform users. The procedures for this could however be made clearer and well known among staff.

Indicator 6.4: Information on the methods and procedures used by the statistical authority are publicly available.

Largely met

Comments: The quality of documentation on methods and procedures which is made available externally varies considerably between domains. The review team received several publicly available quality reports. The reports cover several statistical surveys and indicate a clear understanding of the importance of documentation of quality and methods.

Indicator 6.5: Statistical release dates and times are pre -announced.

Fully met

Comments: There is a clear and understandable statistical calendar which is publicly distributed and respected.

Indicator 6.6: All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time and any privileged pre-release access to any outside user is limited, controlled and publicised. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements should be revised so as to ensure impartiality.

Fully met

Comments: Equal access to all users is a main principle and the use of internet ensures this. We did not observe any incidents of pre release of official statistics. The law does also have paragraphs on punishment of giving away statistical information before release date.

Indicator 6.7: Statistical releases and statements made in Press Conferences are objective and non-partisan.

Largely met

Comments: Statistical releases are simple and factual presentations of the data, without comment. There is little use of press conferences for statistical releases. The yearly press conference held, has a more general content (about NSSG).

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

European Statistics should be presented in a clear and understandable form, disseminated in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.

Overall assessment: Statistics are presented in a reasonably clear, traditional, fashion on paper, CD Rom and the web site. The web site is constantly being improved. Metadata needs further development, especially for its distribution on the web site.

Indicator 15.1: Statistics are presented in a form that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.

Largely met

Comments: The main forms of dissemination are the Statistical Yearbook of Greece and the Monthly bulletin which follows a similar structure, but with more recent data. Results of detailed enquiries are available on CD Rom and there is a new web site.

All information is provided in Greek and English as foreseen by the original 1956 statistical law.

Further comments on the form, metadata, etc are made below.

Indicator 15.2: Dissemination services use modern information and communication technology and, if appropriate, traditional hard copy.

Partly met

Comments: The NSSG has created a web site which is attractive and reasonably user-friendly. Unfortunately it so far contains only the main statistical indices, which are undoubtedly the most used, but represent only a small percentage of the total output of the NSSG. The web site also contains a catalogue and price list for a long list of publications, but the data itself is not generally available. Even data that is provided on the web is in read-only (often pdf) files – there is no possibility to download data for further processing by the user.

NSSG is actively working to continue developing the web site, which was strongly requested by users in the recent satisfaction survey.

Indicator 15.3: Custom-designed analyses are provided when feasible and are made public.

Largely met

Comments: It seems quite a lot of custom-designed analyses are produced (but generally not made public) each year in response to requests addressed to the library and information service. They are invoiced per hour of staff time needed to produce them.

Indicator 15.4: Access to microdata can be allowed for research purposes. This access is subject to strict protocols.

Largely met

Comments: Anonymised micro data is made available for research purposes. Each request is assessed on its own merits by the Committee on Statistical Confidentiality. Recipients of the data sign a statement which describes and limits what they are allowed to do with the data.

Indicator 15.5: Metadata are documented according to standardised metadata systems.

Partly met

Comments: The metadata in the Yearbook is related to the chapters which are broad areas of statistics. The quantity and quality vary considerably from one area to another. Obviously the format pre-dates more standardised metadata systems, but the information can be judged as reasonably good.

The metadata on the web site is more closely related to individual indicators. Currently the style and quality varies much. Greece has signed up to the IMF SDDS and standardised metadata are available on the IMF web site for many indicators, but it does not seem possible to access that from the NSSG site. A new standard template for metadata is under development.

Indicator 15.6: Users are kept informed on the methodology of statistical processes and the quality of statistical outputs with respect to the ESS quality criteria.

Partly met

Comments: As described above, metadata is provided on the web site and elsewhere and is periodically updated. However there does not seem to be a clear orientation towards informing users about quality or the impact of changes in methods on the interpretation of results.

4. CO-ORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

The Greek statistical system is rather centralized with the NSSG producing most of the (European) statistics. Nevertheless, several – also European - statistics are solely or in parallel produced by other institutions (e.g. by the Ministries for Rural Development, for Education or for the Interior). Therefore, coordination is called for and has been seen as necessary by several contacts of the Peer Review Team. The body best suited for such strategic coordination might be the (planned) National Council of Statistics, created by law in 1988. However, it has not yet been set up. In addition, the exact role and functions of the Council need to be defined (in the light of current needs). It is encouraging, that the Central Bank announced plans for enhanced coordination and formal cooperation (including a cooperation agreement) with the NSSG. At the same time, technical statistical cooperation should be encouraged (e.g. for agricultural statistics). Specifically, the area of seasonal adjustment was mentioned as one topic where coordination by the NSSG would be urgently needed.

The uncoordinated parallel production of some data not only unnecessarily increases the reporting burden but also leads to similar but somewhat different data sets – potentially confusing users. One reason for the parallel production that was mentioned several times is the inadequate timeliness of some of the NSSG statistics. A faster delivery of the NSSG data would therefore help to reduce or even to eliminate such parallel data production.

Systematic and institutionalized channels of regular communication with different user as well as producers groups would strengthen the system (and have been asked for by several contact persons).

There are numerous (52) regional offices with around 300 staff totally. In average these offices are rather small and their main task is with data collection and quality control of data. They do not publish statistics.

5. GOOD PRACTICES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED

One very interesting practice in the NSSG relates to the close involvement and interaction between the methodology unit and the production units.

When a new survey or indicator is proposed, the relevant production unit makes a proposal for different aspects of the methodology. This is examined by the methodology unit and (after exchanges if needed) the approach, the definitions, etc are agreed between the two units. The methodology unit then selects the sample for the enquiry from the register. The production unit sends out the questionnaires and receives them back. These are forwarded to the Informatics Division for processing. The dissemination tables as well as control tables are created and checked. The methodology unit then compiles the figures, including operations like treatment of outliers, imputation for non-response, grossing up and so on. Finally the results are passed to the production unit for publication.

Such very close interaction is probably rare and worth studying. Some statisticians might be concerned that this blurs the responsibility for the final figures, but it seems to work well in Greece.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PEER REVIEW TEAM

The Greek statistical system is rather centralised. In Greece, the NSSG is generally met with high esteem and people have high confidence in official statistics. It is important that NSSG continues to cultivate and further develop the good national relations with users and data providers.

In Greece there is a tradition for use of administrative data for official statistics and the law gives the NSSG a clear mandate to collect such data. There are examples of such use. It is however also room for improved use of administrative data. There are however examples where administrative data are used for parallel statistics by other government agencies. For marked improvements the NSSG would need to strengthen its coordination role.

The business register is crucial for quality control and proper sampling design. It seems however that the current quality of the Greek business register is not optimal. Combined with improved cooperation with other agencies and efforts in the NSSG, urgent actions should be taken to improve its quality.

NSSG is as other statistical offices dependent of a highly professional staff. The staff in NSSG seems to have relevant educational backgrounds and at present the recruitment of young staff seems good. The management is supported by a human resource policy that keeps turnover low. It was however a clear demand from staff especially the young staff for more structured training,

The NSSG uses at present its web pages as the main channel for dissemination. This policy is supported by paper publications. The web pages have improved but still there is a clear need and demand for further improvement. More direct possibilities for downloading of data is one example, better access to harmonized metadata another one. According to the management of the NSSG, such improvements are in planning.

Since 1988 there is a law establishing a National Statistical Council (NSC). However, his body has not yet been set up by the respective Ministry. Such a council may have a role as an instrument to improve user contact. There is a need to set up the council and to give it a modern mandate, possibly including the mandate to supervise the integrity of the NSSG. Even after the establishment of the NSC, systematic and institutionalized user contacts (on a technical level) would help to improve both the Greek national statistics as well as the Greek contributions to the European Statistical System.

7. LIST OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS BY PRINCIPLE OF THE CODE

Principle 1: Professional Independence	Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Establishment of National Statistical Council (in process)	2008
★ Publishing of progress status of work programme	2008-2009
★ New statistical law	2009
★ Logo of NSSG	Beginning of 2008
Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection	Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Use of administrative sources is reinforced	To be completed in 2008
Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources	Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Increase the number of training courses and IT seminars	2007- 2008
★ Provisions for increasing the number and quality of IT personnel (university degree and postgraduate degrees)	2008 - 2009
★ Yearly IT maintenance costs to decrease	2008 onwards
★ Purchase of new hardware, software, middleware for the Statistical Portal	2007- 2008
★ Evaluation rating to improve (for both magnitude and quality)	END 2008 <i>Evaluation of all Principle 3 actions to be done end 2008</i>
Principle 4: Quality commitment	Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Speed up the collection of data (electronically)	2008
★ Better planning and better process documentation	2008
★ Consider reviews by external experts and expert users of the portal	2008
★ Impose templates handling procedures and actions at all levels of IT works	2008
★ Implementation of "Quality improvement of the survey processes" project	2008 <i>Evaluation of all Principle 4 actions to be done end 2008</i>

Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality	Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Apply statistical disclosure control on micro-data (m-Argus)	2008
★ Apply confidentiality rules to the published/retrieved statistical data from NSSG's official website	2008
★ Assignment to an external private company to implement secondary suppression on the SBS tables that are sent to Eurostat	2008
★ Increase Network and RDBMS by applying new techniques and methods	End 2008
 Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity	 Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ See item 4	
 Principle 7: Sound Methodology	 Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Improvement of the quality of business registers	Mid 2008
 Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures	 Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ See item 4	
 Principle 9: Non-Excessive burden on respondents	 Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Reduce the burden of enterprises responding to NSSG's surveys.	2008 (Implementation)
★ Convert questionnaires to CAWI, CASI, automatic retrieval through the enterprises' logistics systems.	Mid 2008 (Implementation)
★ Increased use of administrative data	Mid 2008 (Implementation)
	<i>Evaluation of all Principle 9 actions to be done end 2008.</i>
 Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness	 Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Improve method of electronic survey information collection to cover more than 75% of enterprise data.	Mid-2008 to end 2008
★ Alternative data collection techniques will also be developed. (CAWI, CAPI to CATI-CAPI-CASI, OCR/OMR administrative sources, revision of questionnaires (other than EU guided surveys), Automatic coding procedures)	Mid-2008
★ Development of fully operational data warehouse and dissemination database, fulfilling all the confidentiality criteria.	Mid-2008
★ Digitalisation of historical archives	End 2008
★ Upgrade of equipment	End 2008
★ Upgrade the RDBMS, application server and the data warehouse (to version 10g using the Internet developer suite 10g).	End 2008

Principle 11: Relevance	Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Enlargement of target population	2008
★ Improve and institutionalize users contacts	2008
Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability	Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Improvement is expected through the enhancement of the quality of business registers	End 2008
Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality	Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Apply new techniques in acquiring and processing statistical data (Refer to Principle 10)	2008-2009
Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability	Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Studies are in process to investigate the coherence of (cor)related data which are produced by different surveys- to be competed in cooperation with Eurostat	2008
★ More and institutionalized coordination with other producers	2008
Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity	Timetable
Improvement actions	
★ Increase availability of statistical information through the total reconstruction of the existing web site and the creation of a portal. (Increase more than 75% for both the Greek and English versions).	End 2008
.★ Use of templates for the website in order to ensure uniformity	Mid-2008
★ Extension to the dissemination formats (e.g. xls. formats, SPSS or SAS output, flat files, etc.).	Mid-2008
★ Speed up procedures (through a web form) for ad-hoc (i.e. not included in portal) statistical data.	Mid-2008
★ Application of the SDMX template for metadata and enrich metadata on the web	End 2008

8. ANNEX A: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

Timetable	Peer Review Item	Participants
29 October		
9.30 – 10.00	Welcome Programme Introduction Organizational matters	E. Kontopirakis M. Kalamara M. Dogas J. Tzougas F. Vassiliou
10.00 – 11.00	Meeting with management and Senior Staff Principle 1 – Professional Independence Principle 2 – Mandate for Data Collection	M. Kalamara M. Dogas J. Tzougas M. Kalamara M. Dogas J. Tzougas
11.30 – 12.30	Principle 3 – Adequacy of Resources Principle 5 – Statistics Confidentiality	G. Zaharaki K. Alexiou N. Psaros M. Kalamara J. Tzougas I. Nikolaidis
12.30 – 13.00	Principle 6 – Impartiality and Objectivity	J. Tzougas I. Nikolaidis A. Rousta A. Vellas
14.00 – 15.00	Principle 15 – Accessibility and Clarity	A. Rousta A. Vellas J. Tzougas I. Nikolaidis
15.00 – 16.00	Principle 4 – Quality Commitment	J. Tzougas I. Nikolaidis
16.15– 17.00	Meeting with Directors from production units	V. Benaki M. Sakkadonikolaki P. Stavrou E. Oikonomou E. Styliaras A. Pateraki Ch. Zikou
17.00 – 18.00	Meeting with Junior Staff	Junior Staff
30 October		
9.30 – 11.00	Meeting with other national data producers	- Bank of Greece (producers) - Ministry of Rural Development & Food - Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs - Social Insurance Institute- Unified Insurance Fund for employees - Ministry of Interior
11.30 – 13.00	Meeting with main users (Ministries, National Central Bank)	- Bank of Greece (users) - ICAP S.A. - Ministry of Economy and Finance - Ministry of Employment and Social Protection
14.00 – 15.00	Meeting with main users/ representatives of statistical council and representatives from Universities	- National Center for Social Research - Economic Chamber of Greece

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Hellenic Federation of Enterprises - University of Piraeus - Panteion University
15.00 – 16.00	Meeting with media	Journalists
16.30 – 17.30	Meeting with representatives of respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pan Hellenic federation of tax advisors - Hellenic Steel Makers Union - Association of Insurance Companies
31 October		
10.00 – 13.00	Meeting with management to sum-up and detailed review of list of improvement actions for all principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E. Kontopirakis M. Kalamara M. Dogas I. Tzougas A. Vellas I. Nikolaidis F. Vassiliou

9. ANNEX B: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ORGANIZATION	NAME	TITLE/POSITION
National Statistical Service of Greece	Mr Emmanuel Kontopirakis	Secretary General of NSSG
	Mrs Maria Kalamara	Director General of Administration and Organization
	Mr Minas Dogas	Director General of Statistical Surveys
	Mrs Georgia Zacharaki	Director of Administration and Organization
	Mrs Konstantina Alexiou	Director of Financial Administration
	Mr Andreas Vellas	Director of Informatics
	Mr Ioannis Tzougas	Director of Organization, Methodology and International Relations
	Mrs Katerina Rousta	Director of Statistical Information and Editions
	Mrs Vassiliki Benaki	Director of Primary Sector Statistics
	Mrs Maria Sakkadonikolaki	Director of Secondary Sector Statistics
	Mrs Panayota Stavrou-Michalea	Director of Trade and Services Statistics
	Mrs Evagelia Ekonomou	Director of Population and Labour Market Statistics
	Mr Evangelos Styliaras	Director of Economic and Short-Term Indicators
	Mr Nicolaos Psaros	Head of Personnel Section
	Mrs Fotini Vassiliou	Head of International Relations Section
	Mr Ioannis Nikolaidis	Head of Methodology, Analysis and Research Section
	Mrs Anastasia Pateraki	Head of Accounts Composition and Accounts Abroad Section
	Mrs Chara Zikou	Head of Health, Social Insurance and Protection Statistics

ORGANIZATION	NAME	TITLE/POSITION
Junior Staff		
National Statistical Service of Greece	Mr A. Malisiovas	Employee of Financial Administration Division
	Mrs M. Orfanou	Employee of Organization, Methodology and International Relations Division
	Mrs V. Spiliopoulou	Employee of Organization, Methodology and International Relations Division
	Mr H. Virras	Employee of Organization, Methodology and International Relations Division
	Mrs P. Papadopoulou	Employee of Statistical Information and Editions Division
	Mrs S. Salappa	Employee of Statistical Information and Editions Division
	Mr K. Papandreou	Employee of National Accounts Division
	Mrs I. Ovezikoglou	Employee of Trade and Services Statistics Division
	Mrs M. Giama	Employee of Trade and Services Statistics Division
	Mrs C. Karamichalakou	Employee of Trade and Services Statistics Division
	Mr S. Chrisanthopoulos	Employee of Population and Labour Market Statistics Division
	Mr N. Karvoutzis	Employee of Social Statistics Division
	Mrs G. Thimoglou	Employee of Economic and Short-Term Indicators Division
	Mr P. Loutas	Employee of Economic and Short-Term Indicators Division
External stakeholders		
Ministry of Rural Development and Food	Dr. St. Alexiadis	Agricultural Statistics Section
	Mr St. Kokkidis	Agricultural Statistics Section
	Mr. L. Spanelis	Agricultural Statistics Section
Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs	Mr K. Stoukas	Head, Department of Statistics and Operational Research
	Mr A. Karagiannis	Deputy Head, Department of Statistics and Operational Research
Social Insurance Institute- Unified Insurance Fund for employees	Mr X. Skiadas	Head, Actuarial Studies & Statistics Department
	Mrs E. Alexandropoulou	Head of Actuarial Department
University of Piraeus	Mr M. Sfakianakis	Associate Professor
Panteion University	Mr S. Bersimis	Assistant Professor
Bank of Greece	Mrs V. Rodis	Expert Economist Statistics Sector, Balance of Payments
	Mr A. Karapapas	Expert Economist Sector Balance of Payments
	Mr N. Zonzilos	Head of the domestic Economy Division - Research Department
	Mrs K. Dova	Head of Economic Activity Section - Research Department
ICAP S.A. (Business Information & Consulting Firm)	Mr K. Aivalis	Financial Consultant
Ministry of Economy and Finance	Mrs G. Dimitropoulou	Head, Real Sector Unit, Dir Macroeconomic Analysis & Forecasting

ORGANIZATION	NAME	TITLE/POSITION
Ministry of Interior	Mr I. Zanetopoulos	Head of Directorate of Electroning Processing and Statistics
	Mr A. Vitsentzatos	Rapporteur of Migration Policy Unit – Directorate of Immigration
Ministry of Employment and Social Protection	Mrs A. Tsoutsouloupoulou	Employee of the Documentation and Analysis Unit – Member of the EMCO INDICATOR GROUP
	Mrs A. Karoki	Employee in the Operational Programme “Employment of Professional Training”
	Mr E. Gazon	Employee of the Documentation and Analysis Unit – Member of the ISG/SPC
	Mrs A. Strantzalou	Employee of the General Secretary of Social Security – Member of the SPC
Greek Manpower Employment Organisation	Mrs S. Bania	Governor’s Consultant
	Mr M. Kontovas	Employment Department
Employment Observatory	Mrs O. Kaminioti	Head of Studies and Research Directorate
Vocational Training S.A.	Mrs A. Papakosta	Director, Economic Division
	Mr K. Bellas	Head, Leonardo Davinci National Authority
National Center for Social Research	Mr I. Ifantopoulos	President
Economic Chamber of Greece	Mrs Th. Theodorou	Member of Central Administration
Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Mr. L. Tsaoulas	Economic Advisor ACCI
Hellenic Federation of Enterprises	Mr Ath. Printsipas	Research and Analysis
	Mr Ang. Tsakanikas	Special Advisor HFE
Media	Mr V. Ziras	Journalist
	Mr A. Charalabidis	Journalist
	Mr M. Christodoulou	Journalist
	Mr S. Anagnostou	Journalist
	Mr K. Melissopoulos	Journalist
Representatives of respondents	Mrs M. Doukakis	President of Panhellenic Federation of Tax Advisors
	Mr Tziolis	Economist, Panhellenic Federation of Tax Advisors
	Mr G. Roussos	Economist, Tax Advisor - Panhellenic Federation of Tax Advisors
	Mr Tiktopoulos	Hellenic Steel Makers Union
	Mr. I. Fasois	Association of Insurance Companies