DGINS Conference 2015
Lisbon, 24 September 2015

Keynote speech

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy to be here in Lisbon today to open the annual meeting of the Director Generals of the National Statistical Institutes of the EU Member States, the candidate countries and Partners countries of the European Economic Area.

I want to use this opportunity to stress the importance of statistics for evidence-based decision making, and, therefore, the growing need for high quality and timely delivered statistical data.

Our environment is changing permanently

Our world is changing fast. Look for instance at the social impact of the unprecedented economic and financial crises, the new forms of organisation of the economic production through global value chains and multinationals, the energy or climate change issues or the global demographic trends affecting both developing and developed countries.

The data revolution has started to fundamentally change our life. This implies huge opportunities for growth and jobs.

But this also implies new challenges for statisticians, in particular as concerns new policy needs for statistics, including of course social statistics.

Importance of the EU Statistics

The European statistics are crucial for understanding the society and preparing decisions. Modern democratic societies must rely on a solid basis of high quality statistics to function properly.

Also, the public and media need statistics for an accurate picture of contemporary society and to evaluate the performance of our policies. I will come back to these developments in more detail.

Few words on the conference itself

But let me say a word about you.

Since 1953 this annual conference has developed into the most important forum for discussing developments in European statistics.

The variety of topics addressed during those years is impressive. It covers not only statistics but also the development and modernisation of the European Statistical System.

This forum plays a crucial role in supporting the modernisation of the statistical function and should continue addressing the new needs for statistics which emerge nowadays.

I am delighted to see that this year's agenda will cover an extremely important topic, namely "Indicators for Decision Making and Monitoring".

The focus will be given on the growing importance of statistical indicators for decision making and monitoring of statistical strategies. It concerns highly sensitive subjects such as Rio +20, Europa 2020, Sustainable Development Goals, and Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure.

You will also discuss and share practical experience on different initiatives in your countries or at international level. I am pleased indeed to know that this conference will conclude with the adoption of the *Lisbon memorandum* which will guide your work in response to the future policy needs.

New challenges: need for modernisation and growing demands

Let me now address some essential current developments and challenges in the production of statistics.

As I said already, expectations vis-à-vis the European Statistical System are high nowadays.

No doubts, they are not possible without new modern tools, means or change of thinking to address the new challenges and adjust to the changing environment. To name a few, this is all about development of IT, digital tools, data sources.

I'm also aware of the growing pressure on the European Statistical System to deliver more and better statistics, despite budgetary restraints and many challenges facing the statistical community (quality in the context of fitness-for-purpose, multitude of producers, big data etc.).

As European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Competences and Mobility of Workers, I am myself contributing to this growing pressure on EUROSTAT and the National Statistical Institutes.

Indeed, I do need new social indicators and additional data to get the picture of the European social development right before I make choices for the future employment social policy of the Union, as for example, the mobility of workers.

The European Statistical System and the Vision 2020

Therefore, I support very much the way the European Statistical System is reflecting on how to improve collaboration and efficiency amongst partners as well as seeking new ways to use budgets efficiently.

I am delighted to see that during the last years a lot of these things are developing very fast. This is all due to your efforts and commitment.

The European Statistical System **Vision 2020** is one of the most recent important achievements. This **partnership** between the National Statistical Institutes and other National Statistical Authorities and Eurostat improves the quality of statistics that we can deliver on.

The ultimate goal of the Vision 2020 is the production of relevant, reliable, comparable and high quality statistics to respond to new realities.

In that respect, I want to highlight the recent publication of the brochure "*European Statistics for European Policies. A wealth of data to underpin the Commission priorities*". Its aim is to show to our stakeholders and the public at large how the whole European Statistical System can contribute to the definition and monitoring of our policy goals at EU level.

The partnership and the governance within the European Statistical System have been modernised, notably with the Decision on Eurostat in 2012 and the adoption of the 'Statistical

Law' (Regulation N°223/2009 on European statistics, last amended by Regulation N° 2015/759 of 19 May 2015).

The whole European Statistical System is very much welcome in making this decisive step and strengthening the coordination role of the National Statistic Institutes within their respective systems. Certainly, this will serve for quality improvements not only for the core products and processes, but also for the System as a whole.

Timeliness and details of statistical data

Policy making requires fresh information. Economic policies often require frequent real-time data. But also for structural, long-term policies, it is difficult to base political decisions on data which are several years old.

It is therefore of the utmost importance to improve the timeliness of some key statistical indicators, in particular in the social domain.

In this respect, Eurostat's ongoing efforts to improve the timeliness of statistics on income and living conditions go in the right direction.

For several policies the detail on sub-populations is essential to provide meaningful information. This entails the need for

territorial breakdowns or for information on specific population groups (e.g. the young generations, women, small and medium enterprises, etc.).

Therefore, a close cooperation between policy-makers and statisticians is essential to ensure that policy-making is fit for purpose. The policy side assesses the relevance of indicators for a specific policy, while the statisticians inform on possibilities and limitations of indicators.

Professional expertise of statisticians

The leap from basic data to statistical information, however, can be a large one.

It requires an appropriate combination of competencies: a technical, statistical competence to collect and process the data, but also a domain specific competence to extract from those data the relevant information for a specific policy. Statistical indicators are the final product of this process.

Policy making requires statistical information that is contextualised, well-structured and concise.

It is essential that statistical indicators are based on reliable sources and appropriate methodologies. To be useful for the

EU policy making, indicators must be accurate, comparable between countries and over time and cover all Member States.

Need for flexibility and enlarging the data sources

We are confronted with the challenges of a rapidly changing world. We both policy-makers and statisticians need to be ready to flexibly adapt to new situations. Statisticians should explore all the possibilities to quickly adjust the statistical production to support the emerging needs of policy-making.

Official statistics are a guarantee of reliability. However, there are also other statistical sources. In times of big data, cooperation between statisticians, the academic world and the producers of "unofficial" statistics is crucial to meet an increasing and diversified demand for statistical information.

A real dialogue between the different communities should be established. Each community should start with guaranteeing access to their databases to other interested stakeholders. I am very pleased that this is exactly what the European Statistical System Vision 2020 covers.

New dissemination needs

Statistical information is key for democratic participation. It is a central element for accountability.

Eurostat and the national statistical institutes play a fundamental role for the communication of evidence-based information to the widest possible audience, which is nowadays facilitated by the possibility to use modern visualisation and communication tools.

Greater dissemination and wider use of official statistics passes through also a greater access to microdata for researchers. I would really urge you to look at this issue taking into account the world around you.

We are submerged by data, not all of good quality. If we want the high quality data emerging from official statistics to be used, we need to give the widest possible access to them, in the form that is requested by the users.

Final remarks

To conclude, let me repeat how I appreciate your efforts, initiatives and commitment to better serve different policies' needs.

The Lisbon memorandum that you plan to adopt during these days is one of the best examples showing that working together makes the European Statistical System even stronger.

I would like to stress once again that the European Statistical System plays an extremely important role in the EU, both on national as well as the European levels.

I wish you very interesting and fruitful discussions from which very concrete conclusions and proposals will be drawn.

Thank you for your attention.