

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy to be here today and be able to celebrate the European Statistics Day 2017 together with you. Thank you for this opportunity!

This conference on the value of official statistics comes at such an important moment in time, important for everyone in Europe and beyond, and not just to members of the European statistical community.

As we all know, official statistics are key instruments, which enhance the transparency and accountability of EU policies. However, they also enable civic engagement and democratic participation in the political life of Europe's citizens. And this particular role of official statistics is very close to my heart and the work I do at Eurostat.

Official European statistics are indispensable for EU decision-making and for the measurement of the performance and impact of EU initiatives. High quality European aggregates, together with comparable statistics on individual Member States, underpin the Investment Plan for Europe, Stability and Growth pact, the European Semester exercise, the social agenda and top priorities in numerous other policy domains.

At the same time, we are confronted with a new reality, which demands from us swift and efficient responses. Due to rapid internet advancements and the arrival of new media technologies, European citizens are universally connected and digitally aware. This means that they also have a multitude of new data sources at their disposal, access to which could not be easier or more tempting.

And providers of non-official data compete with official statisticians by producing more timely, but often less reliable information. So in this 'post-truth' era of social media, 'fake news' and 'alternative facts', trustworthy official statistics are needed more than ever. And I am convinced that their value will only increase with time.

It follows that official statistics must evolve and offer real fact-checking possibilities to European citizens, who might want to verify unsubstantiated claims they encountered on social media and the Internet.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope you will agree with me, when I say that this new reality we are all confronted with is far from what you might call 'business as usual'. Which means that we statisticians must look for new and innovative solutions to the challenges we are facing.

Among others, they might include making sure that our statistics reach the European audiences and are understood by them. And not just by policymakers, researchers and academics, but also by European citizens.

Allow me to very briefly tell you what Eurostat is doing in this area. At the beginning of this year, we started publishing European data in a new format, which complements our well-established news releases. We created a new section on Eurostat's website called "What's new?". This section brings the work of Eurostat and the European Statistical System closer to European citizens by providing them with the data that are easily understood by them and relate to their daily lives.

This year, Eurostat has also boosted its presence on social media. In addition to the quickly growing popularity of our Twitter account, we also opened a Facebook account, enlarging our user base and multiplying our statistical messages even further.

Let me add that, in parallel, we have also made significant changes to the look of the Eurostat homepage, which has been re-designed and simplified, in line with our policy of making access to our data easier for users.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You will understand that this is not the best place and time for me to outline all the initiatives Eurostat and other fellow producers of European statistics have started in recent years to modernise their statistical production and make it relevant for the next decade.

At this point, let me only mention the entirely new level of increased cooperation between the national statistical offices of the European Statistical System and Eurostat, our joint approach to integrating Big Data in our statistical production, and also embracing new technologies for the benefit of our future work.

Before I finish, I would like to mention another aspect of how we can raise the value of official statistics as a public good even further. We need to expand the discussion about the orientation and purpose of our future work to wider audiences. Eurostat has been going in this direction for some time now.

Earlier this week, a conference co-organised by Eurostat in Brussels and called "The Power from Statistics", gathered statisticians as well as industry leaders, policymakers, academics, journalists and international experts. Together, they discussed important topics, such as migration, globalisation, and new economic and business models, trying to determine how the European statistical community should prepare itself to best meet the information needs of the future.

The conference was preceded by five round table discussions with experts, held in various European locations. This, ladies and gentlemen, has provided us with a large amount of interesting information that will help us in the future.

Let me finish by saying that, obviously, we all realise that the status quo is not an option for European official statistics. Luckily, we have a range of actions at our disposal, which we can and should use to stay relevant in the future.

In the search for our redefined role in today's society, we should go beyond the traditional solutions and attempt to predict new statistical trends, before they occur and surprise us.