

News from statistical offices

Austria

Retirement of the President of ÖSTAT

Mr Erich Bader, President of the Austrian Central Statistical Office since August 1988, retired on 1 July 1999.

In 1968 he was appointed Deputy Head of the Systems and Methods Division, where, on top of his administrative and personnel duties, he was involved in the rapid expansion of the computer centre.

In 1981 he became Deputy Head of the Administrative Division, and in mid-1984 its Head. In August 1988 he succeeded Dr Schmidl as Managing Director and in November of that year was named its President.

Following Mr. Bader's retirement, ÖSTAT's Vice-President, Dr. Kurt Klein, has been entrusted with the interim management of the Austrian Central Statistical Office until 1 January 2000.

New Federal Statistics Act

This year, the Austrian Parliament passed the Federal Statistics Act 2000. This is the third basic law in Austrian federal statistics following the Acts of 1950 and 1965 respectively. When the law comes into force on January 1, 2000, the Austrian Central Statistical Office will be transformed into a fed-

eral institution under public law entitled "Statistics Austria".

A new Federal Statistics Act (FSA) was necessary due to the fact that a number of prominent problems were not covered by the existing Act, thus resulting in restraints on the adaptation of the statistical system, particularly in the areas of secondary statistics and the utilisation of administrative data, maintenance of the data register for execution of statistical surveys and protection for respondents.

A new FSA was also necessary for the reason that conditions for working with statistics in Austria had worsened over the last years. As with most areas of the public service, ÖSTAT had recently been stifled by a series of cuts, restrictions and a specifically devised reduction programme based on commercial analyses. As these conditions could be expected to continue, then at least the legal capacity for negotiations needed to be adapted in order to ease the effect of restrictions in the future.

The future public-law institution is to have two managing directors: one Statistical Director and one Commercial Managing Director, to be represented by two supervisory boards: a Statistics Council and a Commercial Council. The Central Statistical Commission and the Special Advisory Subcommittees will remain, however the Central Commission will lose its current significance and become more of a repre-

sentative “conglomerate” of the advisory boards.

Belarus

New Minister

The President of the Republic of Belarus appointed Mr. Vladimir Zinovsky as Minister of Statistics and Analysis, following the retirement of the former Minister, Mr. Vladimir Nichiporovich.

Mr. Zinovsky, who was born on 1955, was trained in Economics at the Belarus State University and then at the Management Academy of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus.

He has been working on various posts in Belarus statistical bodies and then at the Direction of Economics of the Council of Ministers. Before being appointed Minister, he has been Deputy Prime Minister of Statistics and Analyses for six years.

Population Census

The Population Census of the Republic of Belarus took place in February 1999.

Census data checking and coding have already been completed and the information is currently being keyed into personal computers for further processing.

The main results of the population census are expected to be available by the end of the year.

Czech Republic

Resignation of the President of the CSO

On 2 August 1999, the President of the Czech Republic accepted the resignation of Mr Edvard Outrata, President of the Czech Statistical Office (CSO). Mr. Outrata has been the head of the CSO since 28 May 1993 and leaves at the age of 63. (In 1969–1993, he worked for Statistics Canada, since 1975 as Director, Systems Development, from 1984 until his retirement he held the office of Director General, Informatics.)

During his term of office, basic transformation steps were implemented in the Czech State Statistical Service (CSSS), namely the adherence to fundamental principles of the CSSS (individual data protection and general availability of statistical information in particular) and the adoption and implementation of the system of international classifications, the European System of Accounts 1995, Quarterly Labour Force Surveys, short term indicators, etc., all in compliance with Eurostat methodology.

Data flows from respondents saw substantial changes for the better during his term so that advantages of centralised automated processing could be made use of. All this was accompanied by restructuring the CSSS. It is E. Outrata's indisputable merit that the CSO developed into an industrious team, who established an ethical level that can satisfy the most exacting criteria and who can communicate with the international statistical community as required.

Mr. Outrata was instrumental in ensuring the Czech Republic's member-

ship in the UN Statistical Commission, held the position of vice-president of the Conference of European Statisticians and is a member of scientific councils of the University of Economics in Prague and of its Information Technology and Statistics Faculty. He impressed himself forever on his co-workers' minds by his informal open and cordial attitude towards others as well as by his optimism, by which he managed to encourage his people even in intricate situations. He always advocated the interests of the CSSS and the Czech Republic and this he considered his mission.

Following Mr. Outrata's retirement, Mrs. Marie Bohatá has been named President of the CSO.

Estonia

Statistical Yearbook also on CD-ROM

The 1999 edition of the Statistical Yearbook of Estonia has been recently published and, for the first time, it is also available on CD-ROM. The hard copy and the CD-ROM provide official statistics on the demographic, socio-economic and environmental situation in Estonia.

The contents, structure and design of the hard copy have been innovated as compared to the previous yearbooks. New chapters, such as "Comparison of Countries" which presents comparable statistics mainly on European countries have been added.

In the hard copy the emphasis is on the year 1998 (as for economic statistics, partly on 1997), which has been discussed in comparison with previous years.

The CD-ROM presents longer time

series which, depending on the topic, begin with the years 1940–1998 and end with 1997–1999. The CD-ROM also offers regional statistics on counties and regions, while the hard copy presents regional statistics only on thematic maps.

Both the CD-ROM and the hard copy are bilingual (Estonian and English), and can be ordered from the Statistical Office of Estonia.

Germany

New branch office in Bonn

In connection with the move of the German government to the capital Berlin the Federal Statistical Office has set up a new branch office in Bonn in July 1999. More than 700 statisticians will provide statistics on health, social indicators, environment, services, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, households, labour force survey, and the micro-census (poststelle@statistik-bund.de).

Statistical co-operation within partnership programmes, Phare and Tacis programmes and special supporting programmes for third countries will also be initiated from this branch office (bicom@statistik-bund.de).

In order to be present in the German capital, the FSO has recently opened an information desk in Berlin, called i-Punkt (Berlin Info Point). The i-Punkt (i-punkt@statistik-bund.de) provides statistical information rapidly and directly to political institutions such as the German Bundestag (the parliament), ministries, embassies, representations of the 16 Länder of Germany and to businesses located in Berlin. The i-Punkt includes the Eurostat Data Shop Berlin (datashop@statistik-bund.de).

de) that offers a broad range of European statistics from the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) to all users in Germany. General information may be obtained from the information service (auskunftsdiens@statistik-bund.de).

Gerhard Fürst Award

In 1999, the FSO will grant for the first time the Gerhard Fürst Award for excellent doctoral theses/diploma/magister dissertations which discuss basic theoretical aspects that are closely related to the functions of official statistics or study empirical issues using official statistical data. The topics may range from theoretical statistics through economic or social statistics to economics or social sciences. The aim in granting the Award is to promote official statistical aspects in university training and intensify the co-operation between the academic community and the bodies of official statistics. The Award is named after the first President of the FSO who also functioned as a Chairman of the German Statistical Society. The endowment is planned to be awarded once a year.

Proposals for topics to be dealt with in future dissertations/doctoral theses are included in the research and development plan of the Federal Statistical Office which can be obtained from the FSO, Institute for Research and Development in Federal Statistics, D – 65180 Wiesbaden. Other topics will also be accepted.

New publications

Survey of German Federal Statistics

The contents are oriented towards in-

ternational customers wishing to get a general idea of the historical and legal bases of federal statistics, their institutions, tasks and programme, as well as of international co-operation in the field of official statistics. Lists of federal statistics in Germany, classifications, the Statistical Law and addresses of the statistical offices of the Federation and the Länder complement the publication.

Official Statistics

Gives an outline of the official statistical system in Germany as a part of the public administration that has been of service to the general public in a democratic society for 50 years.

Key Data on Germany

This annual edition (latest issue 1997) gives a comprehensive statistical outline of the Federal Republic of Germany and provides important benchmark data on the population, the economy, transport and communications, education, culture and many other issues. The handbook is available in the English, French, Spanish, Russian, and German languages.

Latvia

International seminar ISIS 2000

At the invitation of the Government of the Latvian Republic and in cooperation with the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, the International seminar on integrated statistical information systems and related matters (ISIS 2000) will be held in Riga at the Culture and Folk Art Centre "Maza Gilde", Amatu street 5, from 29 to 31 May 2000.

The purpose of the seminar is to study methods and techniques con-

nected with development and use of statistical information systems in a network environment, to exchange national experiences and to promote international cooperation in this field. One important role of the Seminar is also to assist the National Statistical Offices of countries in transition in solving problems raised in development of integrated statistical information systems. The Seminar is intended not only for information technology experts, but also for statisticians and subject-matter specialists concerned.

The study programme includes the following topics: Data warehousing and the development and use of statistical data bases in a network environment; Planning and management of statistical projects; Innovations in data collection and exchange; Improving data dissemination strategies

The documents will be available on the ECE Statistical Division's WWW site (www.unece.org/stats/edp/).

Lithuania

80 Years to Lithuanian statistics

Eighty years ago, on 6 September 1919, after the Independence was declared in Lithuania, the General Department of Statistics was established. It functioned till 1940, when it was incorporated into the soviet statistical system. On 18 April 1990, after the restoration of Independence, the Lithuanian Department of Statistics was set up to continue its role as a central statistical office to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

Statistics Lithuania commemorated its 80th anniversary by organising a conference "80 years to Lithuanian sta-

tistics" on 23 September 1999.

On such an occasion it is worthwhile remembering what has been achieved and what guidelines for the future have to be drafted. During the years of independence Statistics Lithuania has become an up-to-date institution, running state statistics and providing information on changes in all areas of life. Over a short period it has grown in terms of qualified staff, modern computer equipment and compliance with the international statistical requirements.

Objectives for the future are very important and meaningful. It is necessary to develop a flexible and up-to-date statistical information system to be firmly integrated into the European Statistical System and become an integral part of the information system of the state. Other pending issues are the Overall Population and Housing Census in April 2001, followed by the Overall Agricultural Census.

Activities are carried in close co-operation with Eurostat and other international organisations, bilateral contacts with NSIs of Poland, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Germany are maintained. Priority projects are coordinated with the specialists from Estonian and Latvian statistical offices.

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Netherlands

Death of Prof. Dr. W. Begeer

Completely unexpectedly, Willem Begeer (18 September 1929) passed away on 1 September 1999, just a few weeks before his 70th birthday. He had

been feeling occasionally unwell over the last couple of months before his death, but there were no clear indications that he was seriously ill.

Prof. Dr. W. Begeer was Director-General of the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, now Statistics Netherlands) from 1 October 1977–1 October 1991. Before he joined the CBS as adviser in 1975, in order to succeed the then Director-General Goudswaard, Begeer had for a long period been professor of statistics at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam and for some years also dean of the economics faculty. His thesis was about a statistical approach to efficiency of university enrolment (e.g. the percentage of student who finish a course successfully).

During his 14 years as Director-General at Statistics Netherlands, many important developments took place, in particular a revolution in information technology. Thanks to his insights, the CBS was one of the first national statistical offices –and in fact also one of the first Dutch government agencies- to switch over from mainframes to PC's and indeed laptops for data collection from households. From 1982 onwards, the CBS experienced a continuous series of budget cuts, which disappointed him deeply, but he never accepted those political decisions without a fight.

Internationally he was active as chairman of the Conference of European Statisticians (1987–1988) and the United Nations Statistical Commission (1991). The necessity of international statistical cooperation was one his strong beliefs and he made a major contribution to it by writing (jointly with Tom Griffin) – for the UN – a report about improvements in the functioning of the international statistical

system, which is still known as the 'Begeer report'.

Having been leader of the organisation committee of the 1985 – centennial – ISI Session in Amsterdam, he continued to do some work for the International Statistical Institute after his retirement. In particular, he was instrumental in setting up so-called 'briefing seminars' for newly appointed senior managers of national statistical institutes.

Begeer had the reputation of a 'tough character', but those who came to know him more intimately also experienced that he was in fact a warm person with a strong social conscience and above all, an unfaltering love for his wife and family.

He will be greatly missed. (Willem de Vries, deputy Director-General CBS)

Tribute to Willem Begeer

International statistical cooperation now has a good reputation, but it was not always so. And, in my view, the father of the new era was Willem Begeer.

Others have contributed in our various ways, and one can think of some very important figures who have taken the process forward since the foundations were laid, but if one had to identify where it all began, it would have to be with Wim Begeer.

I first knew him in his early days at Statistics Netherlands, mainly through his contributions to the meetings of Directors General of national statistical institutes of the EC, the so-called DGINS. Even then, it was he who was most able to see the work of the DGINS in the broader perspective of international cooperation. His view was later taken up also by the other mem-

bers of the committee, but it was tough going at the beginning.

He then moved on to deal with the broader international statistical 'system'. He was, as Willem de Vries records above, successively chairman of the ECE Conference of European Statisticians, and the United Nations Statistical Commission. Again, he made a very important impact in bodies which were frankly archaic and inefficient. It is difficult to imagine now just how much of an up-hill struggle it was to change the ethos of these, now reformed, bodies.

The Begeer Report, which Willem de Vries also mentions above, was also seminal and its continuing impact is perhaps underestimated even though we all know about it and it is still referred to in the continuing reform process. Its conclusion and recommendations are still working their way through the system.

For example, the UN Statistical Commission is now finally almost certain to become a short annual event instead of the long two-yearly event that lacked coherence and focus. The changes that Willem Begeer began have benefited statisticians and national statistical offices around the world.

All of these achievements were against the odds and required the tough resilience for which Willem Begeer was well known. They could not have been achieved by a lesser character. But, as Willem de Vries comments above, those of us who had the pleasure of knowing him well, also know him as a particularly warm and generous human being. It was a great privilege to know him and to have the opportunity to work with him. I learned a great deal from him, not least from his

example as a man with an exceptional sense of responsibility.

He will be greatly missed but his example to his colleagues, and his achievements in the field of international statistical cooperation, will live after him. (Tom Griffin, Director UNECE Statistical Division, 1992–1999)

Romania

New legislation

The recent Government Ordinance no. 83/1999 updated the previous legislation in order to make the statistical legal framework fully consistent with the country social and economic environment. Moreover, attention was given to the main principles and provisions through which the Romanian statistics is to be aligned, from the legal regulations standpoint, to the statistics of countries with democratic traditions (in particular with the Council Regulation 322/1997, on Community Statistics, from February 17, 1997).

The Ordinance amending the former one has been endorsed by the Government and consequently published in the Romanian Official Journal and has to be submitted to the Parliament for the final approval when becoming a Law with genuine force.

Workshop on government finance statistics

In the framework of the pilot project on general governmental finance statistics, Eurostat organised in cooperation with the Romanian National Commission for Statistics the second. The workshop took place in Brasov, Roma-

nia on 27–29 September 1999. The aim of the workshop was to bring together statisticians from those institutions directly involved in compiling general government deficit and debt statistics (National Statistical Institutes, Ministries of Finance, National Central Banks and other institutions).

United Kingdom

New senior management structure

As a result of the new government's comprehensive review of spending plans, there have been changes in the senior management structure at the Office for National Statistics (ONS). After the 1997 review, the ONS commissioned consultants to undertake a review designed to improve the efficiency of the Office. Recommendations were made about the outsourcing of various functions such as facilities management, accounts processing etc., with the aim of saving around £20m over 5 years. It was also decided to create a new, smaller and more focused executive board to help plan these changes and implement the results of the review.

The new directorates cover Economic Statistics, Social Statistics, Methodology and Quality and Finance and Corporate Services. The posts were filled through open competition. The di-

rectors are John Kidgell (Economic Statistics), John Pullinger (Social Statistics), Julian Calder (Methodology and Quality) and Alan Goldsmith (Finance and Corporate Services). The first three directors were existing ONS staff. Alan Goldsmith was previously a Vice President with Shell Europe.

The ONS is also awaiting the publication of a government White Paper on the future accountability and governance of official statistics. The paper will explain changes to the arrangements for the production of National Statistics that are designed to secure an independent National Statistical Service. The goal is to enhance the integrity of official statistics, both actual and perceived.

United Nations

Managerial change

Mr. Willem de Vries has been appointed deputy director of the United Nations Statistical Division. Before joining the UN, he spent nearly 20 years of service at Statistics Netherlands, where he was first (1980–1988) head of the Department for Development/Secretary of the Central Commission for Statistics, then (1988–1994) Director of Economic Statistics and finally Director for International Relations and deputy Director-General.