

Hellenic Statistical Authority
Good Practice Advisory Committee
First Annual Report

September 2013

Introduction

The Good Practice Advisory Committee (GPAC), hereinafter referred to as the Committee, was established under the provisions of Article 4 of the Hellenic Statistical Law (no. 3832 of 9 March 2010, as amended). The Law stipulated that the Committee should be comprised of five members as follows:

- a) One member nominated by the Hellenic Parliament;
- b) One member nominated by the European Statistical Office (Eurostat);
- c) One member nominated by the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB);
- d) One member nominated by the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC); and
- e) One representative of the Personal Data Protection Authority.

The President of ELSTAT is entitled to participate in the Committee on a non-voting basis.

The task of the Committee, as stipulated in the Law, is to prepare an annual report on the implementation of Principles 1 to 6 of the European Statistics Code of Practice in the Hellenic Statistical System. The report is to be submitted to the Hellenic Parliament, having informed the European Statistical Governance Board accordingly, and shall be made public following submission to Parliament.

In accordance with the Law, and having consulted with the various nominating bodies, the Minister of Finance issued a Decision (Ref. No. Δ6Α1001384ΕΞ2013, as amended) in January 2013 convening the Committee and appointing five members for the two year period 2013-2014 inclusive. Details on the appointed members are given in Appendix 1.

The Committee met in plenary session on three occasions, with all members attending. The first meeting took place on the 20th and 21st of February, the second from the 5th to the 7th of June inclusive and the third on the 16th of September 2013. The Committee formally adopted the present report in its September meeting. At the first meeting the members elected Mr Gerry O’Hanlon, former Director General of the Irish Central Statistics Office and nominee of ESGAB, as Chairman and agreed that Ms Christina Karamichalakov from ELSTAT should act as Secretary to the Committee. ELSTAT provided the members with an extensive briefing on the functioning of the Hellenic Statistical System. The full list of documents provided to the Committee for its consideration is listed in Appendix 2. At the February meeting the Committee decided that it should limit its first report to an examination of ELSTAT only and that the other statistical agencies, and the functioning of the overall statistical system, should be reviewed in its next report in 2014. At the June meeting the Committee met a range of ELSTAT’s stakeholders – details of whom are given in Appendix 3. At the conclusion of the June meeting the Committee agreed the broad outline of its report and agreed on procedures for its finalisation over the period June to August inclusive. The present report, therefore, should be viewed as representing the situation as assessed in the first half of 2013.

Executive Summary

The Committee examined ELSTAT's implementation of Principles 1 to 6 of the European Statistics Code of Practice and made the following overall assessments and recommendations.

Principle 1 - Professional Independence

The Committee notes that there has been considerable progress in establishing ELSTAT as a professionally independent agency through a range of appropriate legal and institutional measures. In this regard the Committee commends in particular the comprehensive nature of the statistical legislation and the fact that Greece is the first EU country where the Government has signed a Commitment on Confidence in support of the statistical system.

However, it is concerned that there are still a number of serious negative cultural and other factors in the wider external environment that must be addressed. The most important of these is the ongoing legal proceedings against the President and two senior officials of ELSTAT, which in the view of the Committee is seriously undermining the professional independence of ELSTAT in practice. The Committee is surprised that statistical methodological decisions, which have been formally validated in accordance with EU regulations, are the subject of legal proceedings. Furthermore, the Committee is of the opinion that there is a significant political context to the proceedings and that there is therefore an urgent need for an appropriate intervention, in line with the Commitment on Confidence, by Government and/or Parliamentary leaders to defend and support the professional independence of ELSTAT and its management.

The Committee would also point to the link between professional independence and the effective budgetary autonomy of ELSTAT and, in this regard, would urge that the remaining matters at issue between the Ministry of Finance and ELSTAT in respect of the latter be resolved in line with the clear intentions of the statistical legislation and Commitment on Confidence.

Principle 2 – Mandate for Data Collection

The Committee notes that the statistical authorities' mandate to collect information for the development, production and dissemination of European Statistics, their access to administrative data for statistical purposes, as well as their right to compel response to statistical surveys, are all comprehensively stipulated in the Hellenic Statistical Law as required by Principle 2 of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

ELSTAT is still very much reliant on direct surveys of households and enterprises to obtain its basic data. While response rates for household surveys are acceptable, the rates for enterprise surveys, as well as the time taken to obtain responses, are relatively poor compared to other countries. The Committee supports the measures taken by ELSTAT to improve the quality of its basic surveys and agrees with ELSTAT that reducing the burden on enterprises through greater use of administrative data would be the most effective solution to the response problem.

Despite the provisions of national and EU statistical legislation, the achievement in practice of access to administrative sources for statistical purposes is relatively slow. Since such access, particularly to taxation data, is a key factor in improving the overall quality and cost-effectiveness of Greek statistics, the Committee urges the Hellenic Parliament and Government to provide the necessary support to ELSTAT to overcome the remaining obstacles in a timely manner.

Principle 3 – Adequacy of Resources

The Committee is of the opinion that ELSTAT's resources are not sufficient to enable it to discharge fully in a satisfactory manner its obligations in respect of the European Statistical Programme. It notes in particular its vulnerability in respect of adequate cover for key professional personnel. The Committee therefore supports the ELSTAT strategy, as endorsed under the Joint Overall Statistical Greek Action Plan (JOSGAP), to recruit additional staff in a targeted manner over the 2012 to 2014 period.

Clarity on the availability in advance of the necessary budgetary resources to implement the agreed statistical programme, coupled with operational independence in the use of such resources, is essential for ELSTAT to deliver on its mandate in a cost-effective and professionally independent manner. Full budgetary autonomy of this nature is envisaged from 2013 onwards under the Statistical Law and in the Commitment on Confidence in Statistics but, despite some progress, obstacles remain to its full achievement in practice. The Committee recommends that the remaining obstacles to full budgetary autonomy be removed without delay.

Principle 4 – Commitment to Quality

The Committee is satisfied that there is a strong commitment to quality in ELSTAT. The Mission Statement gives a prominent position to quality concepts while the application of quality criteria is stipulated in the Statistical Law. The Methodology, Analysis and Research Section is the organizational unit responsible at central level for quality management issues, and the Group for the Coordination and Supervision of the Progress of Statistical Works, which involves top management, places a priority on quality issues. The planned establishment of a Quality, Code of Practice and Certification Section should also contribute significantly to developing and implementing quality assurance structures and procedures.

Traditionally quality procedures have been embedded in the work of the statistical divisions throughout ELSTAT. In recent years this has been complemented by a more formal approach. The Coordination Group oversees the implementation of a systematic programme of quality reviews and related action programmes. When assistance is required, ELSTAT has put an emphasis on bringing in external experts (from Eurostat and other EU countries) to ensure the quality of its outputs in a large number of areas.

In effect, many of the elements for the implementation of a more formal and structured approach towards quality management and assurance are already in place in ELSTAT. The Committee notes that a comprehensive Quality Policy Statement was finalised in June 2013 and it would recommend that this should be complemented in due course by the preparation, inter alia, of Quality Guidelines on the implementation of quality management and a

comprehensive Quality Assurance Plan to cover the systematic review of statistical outputs. Documentation of all quality aspects of the statistical production process and of statistical products is essential, as is the availability of appropriate training programmes for all staff on quality issues. The Committee would recommend that a number of internal auditors be trained in auditing techniques and quality management procedures. Finally, the existing user satisfaction surveys should be retained and developed while the shorter user oriented quality reports included in the press releases might be disseminated on a more widespread basis to complement the comprehensive quality reports, which are available on the ELSTAT website for many products and which follow the Euro SDMX metadata structure.

Principle 5 – Statistical Confidentiality

In general, the Committee is of the view that the requirement for maintaining statistical confidentiality is comprehensively covered in the Hellenic Statistical Law and the Regulations on Statistical Obligations of the agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System and on the Operation and Administration of ELSTAT. It is satisfied that the importance of statistical confidentiality is understood and respected in ELSTAT. The Authority has taken many measures to ensure the observance of statistical confidentiality, as is indicated by the responsibilities assigned to the Committee on Statistical Confidentiality and the implementation of relevant policies on statistical confidentiality, IT security and data protection. Staff training programs dealing with statistical confidentiality are also in place.

The Committee welcomes the expressed objective of ELSTAT to formalise and further develop the many measures already in place by putting into operation a data protection and security management system, in the framework of its current IT programme, so that specific organisational and technical measures are taken and permanently applied and their effectiveness periodically audited and assessed.

The Committee notes that ELSTAT uses a range of techniques and practices to minimise the risk of inadvertent disclosure in the dissemination of statistics or in facilitating access by researchers to statistical microdata. To complement these, the Committee recommends that data breach management procedures be developed and put in place to deal with any inadvertent disclosures. The procedures should deal with: the assessment of the severity of the incident, the informing of statistical units; and the taking of corrective actions.

Finally, the Committee is concerned at the recent refusal of staff to sign a specific commitment on statistical confidentiality, which was developed by management to give practical effect to the statistical legislation and the principles of the Code of Practice. The Committee would urge that this matter be resolved as a matter of urgency so that no question can be placed over ELSTAT's commitment to the principle of statistical confidentiality.

Principle 6 – Impartiality and Objectivity

The Committee is satisfied that ELSTAT demonstrates a strong respect for Principle 6 and its implementation in practice. ELSTAT produces official statistics based on sound methods and presents them in a professional statistical manner. Objectivity and impartiality are strengthened by the adoption of international statistical standards, particularly those prescribed for the harmonised production of European Statistics. ELSTAT consults and co-operates with Eurostat and other experts to ensure that the Greek sources and methods are aligned with the EU recommendations to the maximum extent.

The methodological notes published by ELSTAT are clear and explain in detail the adopted statistical methodology used. The Committee welcomes the fact that these notes are published on ELSTAT's website both in Greek and in English. All errors discovered in published statistics are announced and published on ELSTAT's website without delay. A release calendar is issued by ELSTAT and made known to users in advance through its website and information on major revisions of statistics or changes are also published on the website.

Equal access for all users is a core principle for ELSTAT and the use of the internet strengthens this practice. Statistical releases are simple and factual presentations of the data, without comments of a partisan nature. Press releases, that raise awareness of statistics and assist journalists and analysts in their interpretation, are issued regularly in respect of key statistics. The Committee commends these measures and would encourage ELSTAT to continue its efforts to publicise its statistics and to promote the use of its high quality outputs.

Principle 1 – Professional Independence

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

Indicators

- 1.1 The independence of the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat from political and other external interference in developing, producing and disseminating statistics is specified in law and assured for other statistical authorities.
- 1.2 The heads of the National Statistical Institutes and of Eurostat and, where appropriate, the heads of the other statistical authorities have sufficiently high hierarchical standing to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies. They are of the highest professional calibre.
- 1.3 The heads of the National Statistical Institutes and of Eurostat and, where appropriate, the heads of the other statistical authorities have responsibility for ensuring that statistics are developed, produced and disseminated in an independent manner.
- 1.4 The heads of the National Statistical Institutes and of Eurostat and, where appropriate, the heads of the other national authorities have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.
- 1.5 The statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made.
- 1.6 Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.
- 1.7 The National Statistical Institute and Eurostat and, where appropriate, other statistical authorities comment publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of statistics as far as considered suitable.
- 1.8 The appointment of the heads of the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat and, where appropriate, of other statistical authorities is based on professional competence only. The reasons on the basis of which the incumbency can be terminated are specified in the legal framework. These cannot include reasons compromising professional or scientific independence.

Principle 1 makes a very clear connection between professional independence and the credibility of official statistics. Professional Independence is therefore a very important consideration in Greece where the credibility of official statistics was brought into question on a number of occasions over the past decade, particularly in regard to the acceptance of the government finance data provided to Eurostat for the purposes of the biannual Excessive Deficit Procedure reporting. Professional independence of a National Statistical Institute must be underpinned by appropriate legal and organizational support measures and also by an

external environment where the independence is culturally accepted in practice by all stakeholders.

Legal and organisational support

The measures adopted by the Greek Government and Parliament to put in place a new professionally independent and, by extension, credible national statistical system appear at first glance to be both comprehensive and commendable when viewed from the legal and organisational perspectives. These measures include in particular: Law no: 3832 of 9 March 2010 on the Hellenic Statistical System (ELSS) and the Establishment of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) as an independent authority, as amended; and the Commitment on Confidence in Statistics signed on behalf of the Hellenic Government in February 2012 by the then Prime Minister, Mr Lucas Papademos.

The Commitment on Confidence contains three very explicit solemn commitments in regard to the professional independence and credibility of the Hellenic Statistical System, ELSTAT and more specifically the President of ELSTAT. Under these commitments the Hellenic Government states in particular that it commits:

“to GUARANTEE and DEFEND the professional independence of the Hellenic Statistical System , in particular of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), and to PROMOTE it through appropriate communication actions”;

“to SUPPORT the Hellenic Statistical Authority in upholding public confidence in Greek statistics and to DEFEND them against efforts to undermine their credibility”,

“...to entrust the President of ELSTAT with sole responsibility for deciding on processes, statistical methods, standards and procedures and on the content and timing of statistical releases...”

It is to the credit of the Hellenic Government that it was the first administration within the EU to issue a Commitment on Confidence in support of the national statistical system. The Commitment complements Law No. 3832, as amended, which deals very thoroughly with the principle of Professional Independence. For example, Article 10 establishes ELSTAT as “an Independent Administrative Authority ... (that) enjoys operational independence, administrative authority and financial autonomy, and it is not subject to the control of any governmental body or other administrative authority.” Article 15 states that “The President of ELSTAT shall enjoy personal independence in the performance of his duties..” and that the grounds for removal “may not place at risk his professional and scientific independence”.

The eight indicators established for determining compliance with Principle 1 (see box above) lean very much towards verifying the existence of the necessary legal and organisational support arrangements to ensure the professional independence of the statistical system. It is clear that the provisions of Law No. 3832, as amended, and the Commitment on Confidence were very much informed by the requirements of the ES Code of Practice and thus from this perspective it may be concluded that ELSTAT is in a position to comply with Principle 1.

Cultural acceptance by external stakeholders

It is without question that appropriate legal and organisational support arrangements constitute **necessary** conditions for underpinning the professional independence of a statistical system. However, on their own they do not constitute **sufficient** conditions for true professional independence to exist. Rather they must be accompanied by a wider cultural acceptance and understanding amongst politicians, administrators, the media and indeed the public at large of what professional statistical independence actually entails in practice. The Committee is of the view that Greece is some considerable distance from achieving such a favourable external environment and certainly falls far short of what would be considered best practice in other countries. To some extent this finding is not surprising given the earlier difficulties experienced with the credibility of Greek statistics and the fundamental and far reaching legal and organisational changes that have taken place over a relatively short period of time. Experience elsewhere would suggest that while public confidence in statistics can be easily lost it is very difficult to regain. All other things being equal, the Committee would expect that this aspect should improve over time in response to the new arrangements coupled with the clear and consistent demonstration by the Government and Parliament of their full support for official statistics as envisaged in the Commitment on Confidence. However, the Committee considers that there are two major issues of a negative nature that need to be addressed before real progress towards full professional independence for ELSTAT and official statistics can be achieved in Greece. The first, and by far the most important, relates to the ongoing legal proceedings against the President of ELSTAT and two senior officials within the Authority in respect of methodological decisions made in 2010. The second relates to continuing obstacles to the full realisation of budgetary autonomy for ELSTAT as envisaged under Law No. 3832, as amended, and the Commitment on Confidence.

Legal proceedings against the President and senior ELSTAT officials

In drawing attention to the judicial proceedings, the Committee is anxious not to be seen as attempting to influence the decision of the courts in respect of the details of the case as this would not be appropriate. However, the Committee would point to the seeming contradiction between, on the one hand, the methodological questions at issue being subject to mandatory harmonised EU rules and guidance and, on the other hand, the President of ELSTAT being open to legal challenge through the courts in respect of adhering to these rules. This contradiction appears even starker given that Eurostat, in accordance with EU legislation and following detailed examination, has repeatedly validated and approved the methodological decisions taken by ELSTAT and its President. Like most professions, differences of opinion on methodological issues are not uncommon within the official statistical community. However, in the case of the statistics at issue (public finance statistics) these differences are conclusively addressed through a very specific process spelled out in the relevant European regulation (479/2009 as amended) whereby Eurostat provides the needed clarification of any methodological issue and the way it should be applied across all EU member states. In all these circumstances the Committee is surprised that the methodological issues continue to be the subject of legal scrutiny.

ELSTAT management has identified the court proceedings as a major area of weakness with regard to it achieving professional independence. Furthermore, a number of key stakeholders consulted by the Committee would view the case as being “political in nature” as the statistics at issue have been audited by Eurostat and are not disputed by the vast majority of informed national and international users. This view would be supported by ELSTAT

management who would link it to a perception that certain elements within the Greek political and administrative environment do not want to recognise the independence of the NSI and do not accept that statistical production should be independent from either policy structures or political goals. From an examination of some media comments, reports of parliamentary hearings, public statements by a broad spectrum of politicians and negative statements by some staff interests within ELSTAT, the Committee would conclude that there is a significant political context to the proceedings.

The seriousness that the prosecutions pose to the professional independence of ELSTAT and its President may be gauged by the reaction of the international statistical community. Reputable statistical agencies such as the International Statistical Institute (ISI) and the Royal Statistical Society have issued public statements on the matter voicing their concerns in forceful terms. Over 300 prominent statisticians from all over the world have endorsed a public statement by the ISI expressing its profound disappointment and serious concern at the prosecutions. In the case of both agencies, actions such as this are relatively rare and point to the damage that the judicial proceedings are doing abroad to the reputation and perception of the professional independence of the Hellenic Statistical System. Of perhaps greater note is the fact that the Heads of the National Statistical Institutes of the EU Member States, EFTA and Eurostat, acting as the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC), have unanimously signed a joint letter expressing their serious concerns. It is absolutely unprecedented for the ESSC to take such an action relating to the internal affairs of an individual Member State and is a measure of the seriousness with which the Members view the issue, not only for Greek statistics but also for European statistics as a whole. Additional weight must be given to the view of the ESSC in recognition of the fact that it has oversight responsibility, in conjunction with Eurostat, for the production of all European Statistics and that it is both the initiator and custodian of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

The Committee would agree fully with the views expressed to it by a number of ELSTAT stakeholders that the Authority is extremely vulnerable to lasting damage to its professional reputation while the court proceedings continue. The prolonged nature of the proceedings is also of concern as it is a source of continuing and mounting stress on ELSTAT and its personnel while also contributing to a number of organisational difficulties. Concern must also be expressed, not only for the risk of lasting damage to the reputation of ELSTAT, but also for the capacity of its staff in future to effectively work in a professionally independent manner given the negative signals from the current proceedings. In all these circumstances, the Committee is struck by the virtual silence of the Government and Parliamentary leaders on the proceedings notwithstanding the frequent political comments on the matter. This is in contrast to the clear statements issued by Eurostat and the European Commission and would also appear to be at variance with the commitment in the Commitment on Confidence to support and defend the statistical system through “appropriate communication actions”. Indeed the absence of public comment by the Government and other political leaders could be misconstrued as signalling support for the prosecutions and, by extension, non acceptance of the data produced by ELSTAT and verified by Eurostat. The Committee is not aware of any official concerns regarding the acceptance of the data at issue and accordingly it believes that there is an onus on the Government at a minimum to unequivocally and publicly put this on the record.

Budgetary autonomy and professional independence

The question of budgetary autonomy and its realisation in respect of ELSTAT is addressed in more detail under Principle 3. However, it is important to draw the link between budgetary autonomy and professional independence. If a statistical agency does not have effective budgetary autonomy then it will always be vulnerable to potential interference from external bodies thus undermining its professional independence either directly or indirectly. Any lack of clarity, therefore, in the granting of budgetary autonomy to ELSTAT must be addressed from this perspective. The Committee considers that the link between professional independence and budgetary autonomy was clearly understood in the drafting of the Statistical Law and the Commitment on Confidence and would therefore urge that the outstanding issues between the Ministry of Finance and ELSTAT should be resolved within the framework established by these measures.

The Committee is aware of some arguments that tighter budgetary control is necessary to ensure that ELSTAT is fully accountable. However, in the Committee's view these arguments completely ignore the extent that ELSTAT is already accountable under law and through adhering to the Code of Practice. Under the law ELSTAT is required to report regularly to the Parliament and all expenditures (and revenues) are controlled and approved by the Court of Auditors. Furthermore, budgetary approval is based on the prior submission well in advance of detailed annual work programmes that include information on the related budgetary implications. These work programmes consist in the main of highly measurable activities which are also, under the requirements of the Code of Practice, subject to full transparency and the application of a comprehensive range of quality measures. In effect it may be argued that ELSTAT, in common with most statistical offices, is subjected to more enhanced level of accountability than is normally possible in respect of most other public authorities.

Overall assessment and recommendations

The Committee notes that there has been considerable progress in establishing ELSTAT as a professionally independent agency through a range of appropriate legal and institutional measures. In this regard the Committee commends in particular the comprehensive nature of the statistical legislation and the fact that Greece is the first EU country where the Government has signed a Commitment on Confidence in support of the statistical system.

However, it is concerned that there are still a number of serious negative cultural and other factors in the wider external environment that must be addressed. The most important of these is the ongoing legal proceedings against the President and two senior officials of ELSTAT, which in the view of the Committee is seriously undermining the professional independence of ELSTAT in practice. The Committee is surprised that statistical methodological decisions, which have been formally validated in accordance with EU regulations, are the subject of legal proceedings. Furthermore, the Committee is of the opinion that there is a significant political context to the proceedings and that there is therefore an urgent need for an appropriate intervention, in line with the Commitment on Confidence, by Government and/or Parliamentary leaders to defend and support the professional independence of ELSTAT and its management.

The Committee would also point to the link between professional independence and the effective budgetary autonomy of ELSTAT and, in this regard, would urge that the remaining matters at issue between the Ministry of Finance and ELSTAT in respect of the latter be resolved in line with the clear intentions of the statistical legislation and Commitment on Confidence.

Principle 2: Mandate for data collection

Statistical authorities 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.

Indicators

- 2.1 The mandate of the statistical authorities to collect information for the development, production and dissemination of European Statistics is specified in law.
- 2.2 The statistical authorities are allowed by law to use administrative data for statistical purposes.
- 2.3 On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authorities may compel response to statistical surveys.

Availability of good quality basic data is necessary for the compilation of good quality statistics. It is widely agreed that data collection is the most costly part of a statistical production process. Statistical authorities can obtain basic data via direct surveys to respondents or indirectly collecting the data by using administrative data coming from other authorities, which have collected them for administrative purposes. Increasingly, statistical authorities combine these two main data sources in an optimum way in their production process. Direct surveys and use of administrative data for statistical purposes are considered separately in the following paragraphs.

Direct surveys to respondents

Article 2, paragraph 3, of the Greek Statistics law (no 3832 of 9 March 2010 and its amendments) states the following: “the legal entities under private law, the associations of individuals and natural persons are obliged to grant the Hellenic Statistical System (ELSS) agencies access to all sources, records or files kept in printed, electronic or other form and provide, in an accurate and timely manner, any data or primary information requested by these agencies for the performance of their duties. The data and information mentioned in this paragraph are used by ELSTAT and the other ELSS agencies for the production of official statistics, as it is specifically set out in the Regulation on Statistical Obligations.”

The ELSS agencies to which the law refers include – in addition to ELSTAT – 15 Ministries and the Bank of Greece. The legal mandate of ELSTAT to collect primary statistical data directly from respondents is therefore confirmed by this provision.

Moreover, Article 9, paragraph 1, of the Law specifies the administrative sanctions that may be applied for non compliance with a mandatory survey. Specifically, ELSTAT may by its decision “... impose on the head of the competent service or the legal representative of the legal entity of public or private law or the natural person, the following administrative sanctions for violation of their obligations provided in the present Law, the Regulation on Statistical Obligations of EL.S.S. agencies and in any other provision concerning the

obligations related to the access to sources, records or files or the provision of data for the development, production and dissemination of statistics:

- a) Issue a notice to correct the violation within a limited period of time,
- b) In case of failure, to correct the violation, impose a fine, which may range from one thousand (1,000) to fifty thousand (50,000) euros.”

The legislative measures are never enough to guarantee that the ultimate aim of obtaining high quality statistics is achieved in practice. As mentioned earlier, the quality of statistics is very much dependent on the quality of the basic data that are available to the statistical authorities. Therefore it is important to evaluate whether the national statistical office has the high quality basic data at its disposal in due time either based on direct statistical surveys or on administrative data.

Among the basic statistical quality indicators of surveys are the coverage and the response rate. In Europe, there is a general, albeit slowly declining trend as regards response rates in statistical surveys to individuals. However, the response rates to business surveys in Europe have remained quite high due to the fact that such surveys are usually made obligatory by law. Information obtained from ELSTAT shows that the response rates for household surveys and surveys of individuals are relatively good. However, the response rates of most of the business surveys are disappointing at less than 50 per cent. An additional problem is that many enterprises send their responses to statistical questionnaires too late to allow ELSTAT to compile its business statistics within the time limits stipulated in the European statistics laws. Eurostat reported that the delays in some important structural business statistics are as high as 200-300 days. Among other things, the reputation and credibility of the statistical office has an impact on response rates. In this regard the ongoing court proceedings against the management of ELSTAT may be having a negative impact on the response rates of the Greek business surveys. ELSTAT is preparing measures to use its power under the law to impose administrative sanctions for those enterprises violating their obligations to provide ELSTAT with the requested data. The Committee would, however, also agree with ELSTAT that reducing the burden on enterprises through greater use of administrative data would be the most effective solution to the response problem.

The availability of a comprehensive and up to date register of business enterprises is absolutely essential in ensuring that survey results are representative of the target population. In this regard, ELSTAT’s business register can be greatly improved through ensuring ready access to the registers maintained by the taxation and other public authorities. The Committee notes that this is a key priority under the JOSGAP and that ELSTAT has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Ministry of Finance and the major public Social Security Fund (IKA). The Committee would urge that any remaining obstacles should be removed as a matter of urgency, particularly in regard to ensuring full access to relevant taxation data.

In relative terms among European countries, Greece is still very much reliant on the use of direct survey data. Eurostat has indicated that, compared to the other European countries with largely survey-based systems, the Greek statistical system is relatively under-resourced. The scarce resources available to statistics production may increase the risks of producing poor quality, even erroneous statistics. It is obvious that any problems in the direct data collection process may seriously hamper the quality of enterprise and economic statistics, especially if

the corresponding administrative data coming from administrative sources e.g. tax authorities are not made available.

Use of administrative data for statistical purposes

Article 2, paragraph 3 of the Statistics Law stipulates: “The services and agencies of the public sector, as this is defined in paragraph 6 of Article 1 of Law 1256/1982 (Government Gazette No 65 A’), are obliged to grant ELSTAT access to all the administrative sources, public registers and files they keep, in printed, electronic or other form, and provide ELSTAT with primary statistical data and information.”

The right of access of statistical agencies to administrative sources is also covered by European legislation. Article 24 of the European statistics law (Regulation No 223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council) stipulates the following: “In order to reduce the burden of respondents, the NSIs and other authorities and the Commission (Eurostat) shall have access to administrative data sources, from within their respective public administrative systems, to the extent that these data are necessary for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics.” It is important to emphasise that statistical authorities’ access to data from administrative sources must include access to data at unit level (i.e. microdata).

In many European countries the use of administrative data for statistical purposes was relatively underdeveloped up to ten years ago. But as the data have become more accessible this approach has gained more and more support as statistical agencies and governments have realised that it provides a more rational and less costly way of compiling official statistics, especially business statistics. To strengthen this approach, the statistical agencies should have an input to, or be consulted on, the design of administrative forms and systems, as envisaged in the draft amendment to EU regulation 223/2009. It is also widely agreed that the statistical authorities should be able to fully check and control the quality of the administrative data they are using, in a manner similar to their right in the case of direct data collection. According to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official statistics, the statistical authorities should have the right to choose the source data with regard to quality, timeliness, costs and the burden on respondents. This means, among others, that the statistical authorities should have the right to link both survey data and administrative data in order to choose the optimum design and quality of their data collection system. The strict confidentiality rules of statistical authorities established by both the European and national statistics laws preclude any unlawful release or misuse of these data by statistical authorities.

However, there are still a lot of difficulties in Greece as regards the practical implementation of the statistics law, including refusals on the part of certain agencies to comply with the statistical law and provide access to the administrative data sources they control. These problems are continuously repeated in the progress reports of the Joint Overall Statistical Greek Action Plan (JOSGAP). In addition, Greece’s Commitment on Confidence in Statistics (signed by the Greek Government and the EU Commission in February 2012) includes the following paragraph as an improvement action: “Full and timely access to administrative data sources and to the delivery of administrative data will be ensured in accordance with the Statistical Law.” It was reported that one of the problems relating to ELSTAT’s access to the tax files was that there was a need to amend the Greek tax law to be in line with the Statistics Law as regards ELSTAT’s right to get access to tax data.

ELSTAT is working hard to get access to administrative data as regulated by the statistics law. It has signed Memoranda of Cooperation with all the Greek Ministries (covering also their supervised bodies), with the Bank of Greece and with the General Accounting Office for the provision of data for the compilation of Government Finance Statistics required under the Excessive Deficit Procedure. It also has signed Memoranda of Cooperation for the provision of data more generally covering the private sector. Moreover, the current Regulation on the Statistical Obligations of the ELSS Agencies and the Regulation on the Operation and Administration of ELSTAT support these goals. ELSTAT has also proposed the introduction of a Single Entry Point System whereby enterprises could provide their data in response to various administrative and statistical requests simultaneously. This kind of rational system is working successfully in several other EU member states. It was however reported, that to date there has been relatively little interest in this proposal among the relevant Ministries.

In general, the Committee is of the opinion that, while access to administrative sources for statistical purposes is well covered under national and EU legislation, progress towards its achievement in practice is relatively slow. In some cases the delays in granting full access persist despite the signing of explicit Memoranda of Cooperation, which address in detail the issues involved. In some cases there is a basic reluctance on the part of some authorities to take the necessary steps to provide the required data while, in other cases, it is maintained that there is a need to amend other legislation in order to accommodate the provisions of the statistical legislation. The Committee would urge the Hellenic Parliament and the Government to provide the necessary support to ELSTAT to overcome these obstacles in a timely manner.

Overall assessment and recommendations

The Committee notes that the statistical authorities' mandate to collect information for the development, production and dissemination of European Statistics, their access to administrative data for statistical purposes as well as their right to compel response to statistical surveys are all comprehensively stipulated in the Hellenic Statistical Law as required by Principle 2 of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

ELSTAT is still very much reliant on direct surveys of households and enterprises to obtain its basic data. While response rates for household surveys are acceptable, the rates for enterprise surveys, as well as the time taken to obtain responses, are relatively poor compared to other countries. The Committee supports the measures taken by ELSTAT to improve the quality of its basic surveys and agrees with ELSTAT that reducing the burden on enterprises through greater use of administrative data would be the most effective solution to the response problem.

Despite the provisions of national and EU statistical legislation, the achievement in practice of access to administrative sources for statistical purposes is relatively slow. Since such access, particularly to taxation data, is a key factor in improving the overall quality and cost-effectiveness of Greek statistics, the Committee urges the Hellenic Parliament and Government to provide the necessary support to ELSTAT to overcome the remaining obstacles in a timely manner.

Principle 3 Adequacy of Resources

The resources available to statistical authorities are sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements

Indicators

- 3.1** Staff, financial, and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to meet current statistical demands.
- 3.2** The scope, detail and cost of statistics are commensurate with needs.
- 3.3** Procedures exist to assess and justify the demands for new statistics against their cost.
- 3.4** Procedures exist to assess the continuing need for all statistics, to see if any can be discontinued or curtailed to free up resources.

In line with the development of EU policies and strategies, the European Statistics Programme (ESP) has been expanded significantly in recent years both in terms of the range and depth of its coverage. Accordingly, it places a huge demand on the national statistical authorities to comply and this has posed a major challenge to all Member States, particularly to smaller countries and those with limited resources. Furthermore, the programme is now so comprehensive that the overlap between European and national statistical programmes is very high, typically at around 80-90 per cent in many countries.

While all indicators are relevant to the assessment of the compliance by ELSTAT with this Principle, it has been accepted that, since the ESP is determined centrally and collectively at EU level, indicators 3.2 – 3.4 should be predominantly assessed at central level within the European Statistical System. Accordingly, the Committee has confined itself in this report to examining the situation in respect of Indicator 3.1 only.

Adequacy of ELSTAT resources

Eurostat monitors compliance with the ESP by all member states on an ongoing basis. With regard to Greece, Eurostat acknowledges that while significant progress has been made by ELSTAT in recent years the Hellenic Statistical System would still be ranked among the poorer performers in regard to overall compliance with the ESP. Furthermore, Eurostat would consider that the greatest threat to the sustainability and quality of Greek statistics is the adequacy of its human resources. In particular, it would consider that the level of expert cover in many important areas is inadequate in that sufficient back-up is lacking for key personnel. ELSTAT management would not dispute this and points to a “severe lack of human resources” as the main weakness in regard to ELSTAT’s adequacy of resources.

According to the information supplied by ELSTAT the overall numbers employed have fallen by over 180 (18%) since the beginning of 2010. This decline has been mitigated to some extent by the fact that the decline in the number of university educated staff (-8.5%) has been much less severe than the decline of almost a quarter in the number of those educated to second level only. ELSTAT has received a commitment for the budgetary resources to replace, over the period 2012-2014, 115 of the departed staff. In 2013 this will involve the recruitment of 10 experts with very high qualifications and a further 87 staff through the urgent re-deployment of “properly qualified” staff from other Government agencies. To the

extent that the latter cannot be sourced through re-deployment it is intended that the staff should be recruited directly without delay. The remaining staff required (18) should be recruited in 2014. The Committee notes that this recruitment of additional staff is a high priority under the Joint Overall Statistical Greece Action Plan (JOSGAP) and it would therefore recommend that all efforts should be made to ensure that it proceeds in line with the envisaged targets. The Committee would share some of the concerns voiced in regard to delays in the recruitment due to administrative and other obstacles and would therefore recommend that the Government should take action in line with the Commitment on Confidence to ensure that they are overcome in a timely manner.

ELSTAT has a new independent financial administration since January 2013 and its annual budget proposal for 2013 was accepted by the Ministry of Finance and approved by the Hellenic Parliament. In addition, its budget proposals for the years 2014 to 2016 were also accepted by the Ministry and ultimately approved by the Hellenic Parliament. ELSTAT points out that these budgets are the minimum necessary to deliver its statistical programme and that they take full account of the difficult economic circumstances and the general cutbacks that have been imposed on the public sector. Clarity on budgets for a number of years coupled with an independent financial administration is essential in enabling ELSTAT to implement its statistical programme in a planned and optimal manner. However, as the JOSGAP report for Quarter1 of 2013 noted, a number of administrative issues between the Ministry of Finance and ELSTAT needed to be resolved as a matter of urgency to ensure that this favourable situation is achieved in practice. ELSTAT reported in June to the Committee that progress had been made on resolving some of these issues but others, with a potentially negative impact on ELSTAT's budget and independence, remained to be addressed in a satisfactory manner. The most important of these is a demand from the Ministry of Finance that ELSTAT should sign a Memorandum of Understanding whereby it would accept infra-annual ex ante control by the Ministry over its budgetary planning and execution. The Committee would agree strongly with the JOSGAP conclusion that such a measure is at variance with the agreed objective of ELSTAT being independent in regard to the execution of its agreed annual budget. The Committee has already drawn attention to the importance of recognising the connection between budgetary autonomy and the realisation of professional independence in practice. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that this matter should be resolved in line with the intentions of the Statistical Law and the Commitment on Confidence.

The adequacy of resources can, of course, be improved through training and up-skilling, the more effective use of technology and administrative data sources and through the development of more efficient organisational structures. Experience elsewhere would confirm that considerable savings and improvements in efficiency and effectiveness can be achieved through appropriate measures in these areas. Accordingly, the Committee notes with approval that these all feature in ELSTAT's plans for the coming years.

Overall assessment and recommendations

The Committee is of the opinion that ELSTAT's resources are not sufficient to enable it to discharge fully in a satisfactory manner its obligations in respect of the European Statistical Programme. It notes in particular its vulnerability in respect of adequate cover for key professional personnel. The Committee therefore supports the ELSTAT strategy, as endorsed under the JOSGAP plan, to recruit additional staff in a targeted manner over the 2012 to 2014 period.

Clarity on the availability in advance of the necessary budgetary resources to implement the agreed statistical programme, coupled with operational independence in the use of such resources, is essential for ELSTAT to deliver on its mandate in a cost-effective and professionally independent manner. Full budgetary autonomy of this nature is envisaged from 2013 onwards under the Statistical Law and in the Commitment on Confidence in Statistics but, despite some progress, obstacles remain to its full achievement in practice. The Committee recommends that the remaining obstacles to full budgetary autonomy be removed without delay.

Principle 4: Commitment to Quality

Statistical authorities are committed to quality. They systematically and regularly identify strengths and weaknesses to continuously improve process and product quality.

Indicators

- 4.1 Quality policy is defined and made available to the public. An organizational structure and tools are in place to deal with quality management.
- 4.2 Procedures are in place to plan and monitor the quality of the statistical production process.
- 4.3 Product quality is regularly monitored, assessed with regard to possible trade-offs, and reported according to the quality criteria for European Statistics.
- 4.4 There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using external experts where appropriate.

The revised version of the ES Code of Practice requires NSIs to adopt a more structured and formal approach towards assuring the quality of statistical outputs. Thus there is a greater emphasis on documentation, on the adoption of more standardised methods and on undertaking regular monitoring and systematic reviews of processes and outputs. Such approaches are viewed as constituting best practice for NSIs in delivering on a commitment to quality. To comply with the new standards many offices are in the process of upgrading their traditional and less structured approaches towards quality assurance. The review of ELSTAT in respect of its compliance with Principle 4 should be viewed in this context. It is also important to bear in mind that the absence of the more formal structures does not imply a lack of commitment to quality as existing methods can be fit for purpose in assuring quality.

The Indicators of Principle 4 have four parts, namely: quality policy and quality management, the quality of the statistical production process, product quality, and review of the statistical outputs.

Quality policy and quality management

The quality of official statistics has a prominent position at ELSTAT. The Mission Statement, published on the ELSTAT website, postulates: “The mission of the Hellenic Statistical Authority is to safeguard and continuously improve the quality of the country’s statistics.”

Quality dimensions which are relevant for the statistical production of ELSTAT are stipulated in the Statistical Law. Article 1(6) identifies the following criteria for the evaluation of quality: “relevance”, “accuracy”, “timeliness”, “punctuality”, “accessibility”, “clarity”, “comparability” and “coherence”. These criteria are in full agreement with European statistical legislation and standards.

It should be mentioned that the Greek legislation stipulates also that the ELSS must adhere to a quality system which will be agreed and monitored by ELSTAT.

Corporate issues related to quality management are within the competence of the Methodology, Analysis and Research Section of ELSTAT. For example, this section has responsibility, inter alia, for the documentation of quality in respect of statistical processes and products throughout the organisation. In addition, a high-level body, the Group for the Coordination and Supervision of the Progress of Statistical Works at ELSTAT (Coordination Group), is dealing with quality issues, often resulting in improvement actions as regards the quality and timeliness of the statistical products. The Coordination Group includes the top management of ELSTAT and may be seen as constituting a “Quality Committee for ELSTAT”. Furthermore, in the draft organisation of ELSTAT, it is envisaged that a Quality, Code of Practice and Certification Section will be established; this is welcomed by the Committee as it would further strengthen the organizational structure for managing quality. The Committee also notes with approval that ELSTAT finalised a Quality Policy Statement in June 2013 and has made it available on its website.

Quality Guidelines on how to implement quality management within the statistical production process are important tools for assuring the high and uniform quality of the statistical products. A framework for the conduct of statistical processes, viz. censuses, surveys, and other statistical works, is given in the Regulation on the Operation and Administration of ELSTAT. Related actions are elements of the Joint Overall Statistical Greek Action Plan (JOSGAP), and the Regulation on Statistical Obligations of the ELSS agencies gives a framework for the interactions between ELSTAT and other producers of official statistics. The Committee would recommend that Quality Guidelines are adopted which describe in detail the implementation of quality management within the statistical production processes of ELSTAT based on the GSBPM (Generic Statistical Business Process Model) or another equivalent model. These guidelines should also address the monitoring of the quality at each stage of the statistical production process.

An important element of quality management is the provision of specific training courses to the relevant staff which supports the quality policy. While the training programme for 2013-15 contains courses on quality issues, greater weight might be given to Quality Policy and Quality Guidelines in future programmes.

Quality of the statistical production process

Factors which affect the quality of the statistical products are the methodological support, the monitoring of the quality at different stages of the statistical production chain, and the availability of a general Quality Assurance Plan.

The Annual Report 2011 mentions the following as one of the main pillars of the activities of ELSTAT: “enhancing the quality and reliability of statistics ... by restructuring the processes and more generally the approach for the production of statistics”. The Methodology, Analysis and Research Section gives methodological support to the other sections of ELSTAT; the divisions of ELSTAT involved in statistical production have at their disposal tools for monitoring the quality of the statistical products. The Coordination Group is also engaged in quality monitoring. It is recommended that more information about the monitoring of the quality at the different stages of the statistical production is made publicly available, e.g. in the Annual Report.

It is recommended that a Quality Assurance Plan, or another similar and elaborated scheme, be developed. Such a plan should describe the working standards, the formal obligations, such as laws and internal rules, and the set of quality control actions to prevent and monitor

errors, to evaluate quality indicators and to control different points at each stage of the statistical process. The Plan should build in a comprehensive manner on the monitoring of the quality of statistical products already undertaken in ELSTAT.

Product quality

Monitoring the quality of statistical products is a major task for the quality management of an NSI. Among the plans to improve the statistical products, the Hellenic Statistical Program 2011-2013 states that “one of the main objectives ... is to enrich and upgrade its website with the metadata of all the statistical surveys and statistical works it conducts”.

The Methodology, Analysis and Research Section interacts with sections involved in statistical production, with a view to checking and assuring the quality of published statistics. The divisions of ELSTAT involved in statistical production also have at their disposal tools for monitoring the quality of the statistical products while the Coordination Group also contributes to the monitoring of the quality of published statistics. Here again, documentation of the monitoring tools is essential and the existing documentation available in ELSTAT should be elaborated further; such documentation should also give guidance on the procedures for analysing the monitoring results and for deciding on improvement actions.

User satisfaction surveys or other indirect methods of getting user feedback on statistical products are an important source for assessing quality aspects. ELSTAT conducted user satisfaction surveys in 2011 and 2012; the results are available on the ELSTAT website. ELSTAT also arranges annual users’ conferences.

Quality reports following the Euro SDMX Metadata Structure (ESMS) can be found on the ELSTAT website for quite a number of statistical products. These ESMS metadata are very comprehensive in content. In addition, ELSTAT provides shorter user oriented metadata and methodological notes in its press releases. The Committee would recommend that these shorter quality reports, which allow a quick view on the most relevant aspects, should be prepared and disseminated more widely so that the media and the general public are helped to understand the published statistical figures.

Review of the statistical outputs

Assessing the quality of the statistical output of an NSI, the central objective of the statistical production and the focus of the user interests, is a core element of quality management.

ELSTAT is currently undertaking a comprehensive restructuring of major parts of its statistical production procedures. The pillars B and C of the Joint Overall Statistical Greek Action Plan (JOSGAP) include a large number of actions, many of which have been implemented, for enhancing the statistical capacity of ELSTAT in general and the public finance statistics in particular. This restructuring is the result of a major and still ongoing revision of the statistical portfolio. Some statistical products are reviewed on a regular basis, such as annual Government Finance Statistics, in the frame of mandatory dialogue visits by Eurostat. In these and many other areas across the statistical programme, ELSTAT has put a major emphasis in recent years on bringing in subject matter experts from Eurostat and other countries to assist in its quality development work. Such visits are defined in ELSTAT’s programme of improvement actions, which in many cases overlap with the planning for the

implementation of JOSGAP. The Committee would commend ELSTAT for the extent to which it has been prepared to bring in outside expertise to critically review and develop the quality of its statistical outputs.

Quality Reviews are an appropriate tool for fine-tuning statistical processes and products and for their continuous improvement through defining and implementing appropriate action plans. The Committee notes that the Coordination Group oversees a systematic programme for conducting such reviews in ELSTAT, involving both formal auditing and self-assessment. Where problems are identified appropriate action plans are developed, implemented and reviewed. In some cases the action plans involve bringing in outside experts as mentioned above. The Committee fully supports ELSTAT's endeavours in this area, which involves a significant commitment of resources, and would encourage it to maintain and develop the programme as a key strategic objective.

In order to support the quality review programme and to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability, the Committee would recommend that internal auditors be trained in auditing techniques and quality management procedures.

Overall Assessment and recommendations

The Committee is satisfied that there is a strong commitment to quality in ELSTAT. The Mission Statement gives a prominent position to quality concepts while the application of quality criteria is stipulated in the Statistical Law. The Methodology, Analysis and Research Section is the organizational unit responsible at central level for quality management issues, and the Group for the Coordination and Supervision of the Progress of Statistical Works, which involves top management, places a priority on quality issues. The planned establishment of a Quality, Code of Practice and Certification Section should also contribute significantly to developing and implementing quality assurance structures and procedures.

Traditionally quality procedures have been embedded in the work of the statistical divisions throughout ELSTAT. In recent years this has been complemented by a more formal approach. The Coordination Group oversees the implementation of a systematic programme of quality reviews and related action programmes. When assistance is required, ELSTAT has put an emphasis on bringing in external experts (from Eurostat and other EU countries) to ensure the quality of its outputs in a large number of areas.

In effect, many of the elements for the implementation of a more formal and structured approach towards quality management and assurance are already in place in ELSTAT. The Committee notes that a comprehensive Quality Policy Statement was finalised in June 2013 and it would recommend that this should be complemented in due course by the preparation, inter alia, of Quality Guidelines on the implementation of quality management and a comprehensive Quality Assurance Plan to cover the systematic review of statistical outputs. Documentation of all quality aspects of the statistical production process and of statistical products is essential, as is the availability of appropriate training programmes for all staff on quality issues. The Committee would recommend that a number of internal auditors be trained in auditing techniques and quality management procedures. Finally, the existing user satisfaction surveys should be retained and developed while the shorter user oriented quality reports included in the press releases might be disseminated on a more widespread basis to complement the comprehensive quality reports, which are available on the ELSTAT website for many products and which follow the Euro SDMX metadata structure.

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 is absolutely guaranteed.

Indicators

- 5.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.
- 5.2 Staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.
- 5.3 Penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality.
- 5.4 Guidelines and instructions are provided to staff on the protection of statistical confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes. The confidentiality policy is made known to the public.
- 5.5 Physical, technological and organisational provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases.
- 5.6 Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical microdata for research purposes.

The guarantee of Statistical confidentiality is of fundamental importance to the proper functioning of all NSIs. Statistical offices need to obtain access to individual data for the sole purpose of compiling aggregated statistical results and facilitating analyses that do not disclose, either directly or indirectly, individual details. Extensive arrangements, both legal and organisational, must be put in place to ensure that the guarantee is upheld in practice and respondents must be assured that the data they provide is respected and protected against unlawful disclosure to the maximum extent.

The six indicators used to assess adherence to Principle 5 of the Code cover four main areas. These are: the existence of appropriate legal provisions underpinning the guarantee of statistical confidentiality; the specification of penalties for wilful breaches of the guarantee; the putting in place of organisational and technical measures to protect the security of statistical databases; and the existence and implementation of publicly communicated policies and protocols to minimise the risk of inadvertent disclosure in the production and dissemination processes or in facilitating access to statistical microdata for research purposes.

Legal provisions

Article 8 of the Statistical Law is entirely devoted to issues relating to statistical confidentiality. This article places an obligation on ELSTAT and other ELSS agencies to ensure that data are protected and used for statistical purposes only. The article includes provisions relating to penalties and sanctions for breaches of confidentiality and specifies the obligation on ELSS agencies to transmit confidential data to ELSTAT where necessary for the development, production and dissemination of statistics or the improvement of the quality of the statistics. Moreover, this article contains a provision limiting the persons authorised to have access to confidential data within ELSTAT to those engaging in the relevant tasks and

appointed by an act of the President of ELSTAT. In exceptional cases, the President may grant access to persons, other than ELSTAT personnel, to whom it has contracted out statistical works and after having taken all the necessary steps in order to ensure the confidentiality of the data. Finally, the general conditions under which researchers engaging in statistical analysis for scientific purposes may be granted access to data that allow indirect identification of statistical units are specified. In summary, statistical confidentiality is fully guaranteed, in line with best international practice, under Greek law.

Staff, when entering the service, sign an oath, as civil servants, where loyalty in general to the law is declared. A recent attempt by ELSTAT management to introduce a specific declaration, relating to statistical confidentiality, in line with indicator 5.2 of the Code, was misinterpreted and resisted by many staff for reasons not linked to the principle of statistical confidentiality. The Committee would urge that this matter be clarified and resolved as a matter of urgency so that no question marks can be attached to ELSTAT's absolute commitment to statistical confidentiality.

Penalties for wilful breach

Sanctions for violations of statistical confidentiality are fully prescribed by law. In particular, Article 8, paragraph 1, of the Statistical Law states the following: 'In case of violation of data confidentiality and/or statistical confidentiality, apart from the penal sanctions stipulated in Articles 252, 253, 370B, 370C of the Penal Code and Article 4 of the Law 2392/1996 (Government Gazette 60 A'), the administrative sanctions set out in paragraph 2 of the following Article are imposed.' As to the foreseen penalties, according to paragraph 2 of Article 9: 'ELSTAT, by its decision, may impose a penalty ranging from ten thousand (10,000) up to two hundred thousand (200,000) Euros to anyone who violates the confidentiality of data and/or statistical confidentiality. The penalty is always imposed after the hearing of the defence of the person liable for the breach, depending on the gravity and the repercussions of the violation. Any relapse constitutes an aggravating factor for the assessment of the administrative sanction.'

Protecting the security of statistical databases

ELSTAT has a range of physical, technological and organisational measures in place to ensure the security of its statistical databases. These include: confining access to statistical databases to internal users only; controlling the access to individual databases of internal users on the basis of need/function; and daily monitoring of the firewall. In order to put these measures on a more formal and comprehensive basis, ELSTAT has recently issued and published an IT security and data protection policy, including guidelines which must be followed by everyone accessing the statistical databases so as to ensure data integrity, availability and confidentiality. This policy covers the whole information system consisting of the central system, the remote systems and the local networks and wide area network connections. It foresees a central authority for information security and certification responsible for: following the international standards on security and information technology; suggesting IT and information security standards; producing the relevant security rules to be approved; checking for the proper implementation of information security instructions (provided for by the relevant rules); and determining policy and coordinating actions to detect, protect from and respond to potential electronic attacks. The Committee would fully support and commend these policies and would emphasise the need to ensure that they are accompanied by specific organisational procedures and technical measures that are

elaborated in detail, documented, implemented and monitored as to their permanent application.

Minimising the risk of inadvertent disclosure

ELSTAT has issued and published on its website a statistical confidentiality policy, which collects all provisions and rules relating to statistical confidentiality contained in the statistical Law 3832/2010, as amended, the Regulation on Statistical Obligations of the agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System and the Regulation on the Operation and Administration of ELSTAT. Also, ELSTAT has developed a staff training program for the period 2013-15 that includes statistical confidentiality as a topic.

According to the statistical confidentiality policy of ELSTAT (p. 3), ‘Issues referring to the observance of statistical confidentiality are examined, when requested by the President of ELSTAT, by the Statistical Confidentiality Committee (SCC) operating in ELSTAT. The responsibilities of this Committee are to make recommendations to the President of ELSTAT on:

- granting researchers access to confidential data for scientific purposes;
- the analysis level at which statistical data can be released, in order to avoid the direct or indirect identification of the surveyed unit;
- the anonymisation criteria for the microdata which are provided to the users;
- other issues on statistical confidentiality submitted to the Committee by the President of ELSTAT for opinion.’

The SCC and the Methodology Division provide ongoing advice to all divisions on the use of procedures to minimise the risk of inadvertent disclosure during the processing and dissemination of statistics.

According to the Regulation on Statistical Obligations of the ELSS agencies (*Article 8(6)*), ‘ELSTAT may grant researchers conducting statistical analyses for scientific purposes access to data that enable the indirect identification of the statistical units concerned. The access is granted provided the following conditions are satisfied:

- a) an appropriate request together with a detailed research proposal in conformity with current scientific standards have been submitted;
- b) the research proposal indicates in sufficient detail the set of data to be accessed, the methods of analysing them, and the time needed for the research;
- c) a contract specifying the conditions for access, the obligations of the researchers, the measures for respecting the confidentiality of statistical data and the sanctions in case of breach of these obligations has been signed by the individual researcher, by his/her institution, or by the organization commissioning the research, as the case may be, and by ELSTAT (see attached template of the contract).’

In summary, the Committee notes that ELSTAT uses a range of techniques and practices to minimise the risk of inadvertent disclosure. To complement these, the Committee recommends that data breach management procedures be developed and put in place to deal with any inadvertent disclosures. The procedures should deal with: the assessment of the severity of the incident, the informing of statistical units; and the taking of corrective actions.

Overall Assessment and recommendations

In general, the Committee is of the view that the requirement for maintaining statistical confidentiality is comprehensively covered in the Hellenic Statistical Law and the Regulations on Statistical Obligations of the agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System and on the Operation and Administration of ELSTAT. It is satisfied that the importance of statistical confidentiality is understood and respected in ELSTAT. The Authority has taken many measures to ensure the observance of statistical confidentiality, as is indicated by the responsibilities assigned to the Committee on Statistical Confidentiality and the implementation of relevant policies on statistical confidentiality, IT security and data protection. Staff training programs dealing with statistical confidentiality are also in place.

The Committee welcomes the expressed objective of ELSTAT to formalise and further develop the many measures already in place by putting into operation a data protection and security management system, in the framework of its current IT programme, so that specific organisational and technical measures are taken and permanently applied and their effectiveness periodically audited and assessed.

The Committee notes that ELSTAT uses a range of techniques and practices to minimise the risk of inadvertent disclosure in the dissemination of statistics or in facilitating access by researchers to statistical microdata. To complement these, the Committee recommends that data breach management procedures be developed and put in place to deal with any inadvertent disclosures. The procedures should deal with: the assessment of the severity of the incident, the informing of statistical units; and the taking of corrective actions.

Finally, the Committee is concerned at the recent refusal of staff to sign a specific commitment on statistical confidentiality, which was developed by management to give practical effect to the statistical legislation and the principles of the Code of Practice. The Committee would urge that this matter be resolved as a matter of urgency so that no question can be placed over ELSTAT's commitment to the principle of statistical confidentiality.

Principle 6: Impartiality and Objectivity

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

Indicators

- 6.1 Statistics are compiled on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.
- 6.2 Choices of sources and statistical methods as well as decisions about the dissemination of statistics are informed by statistical considerations.
- 6.3 Errors discovered in published statistics are corrected at the earliest possible date and publicized.
- 6.4 Information on the methods and procedures used is publicly available.
- 6.5 Statistical release dates and times are pre-announced.
- 6.6 Advance notice is given on major revisions or changes in methodologies.
- 6.7 All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time. Any privileged access to any outside users is limited, controlled and publicised. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements are revised so as to ensure impartiality.
- 6.8 Statistical releases and statements made in press conferences are objective and non-partisan.

Principle 6 calls for the production and dissemination of statistics, respecting scientific independence, in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably. ELSTAT's adherence to the dimensions of objective and impartial methods, transparent processes and equality of access are considered in the following paragraphs.

Use of objective and impartial methods

Based on its interaction with stakeholders and on an examination of statistical outputs and documentation provided by ELSTAT, the Committee is satisfied that ELSTAT produces official statistics that are based on sound methods and presents them in a professional statistical manner. While resource and other practical considerations may sometimes constrain the optimum choice of sources and methods, it is clear that objectivity and impartiality are at all times adhered to as core working principles within the organisation. Objectivity and impartiality are strengthened by the adoption of international statistical standards, particularly those prescribed for the harmonised production of European Statistics. ELSTAT actively consults and co-operates with Eurostat and experts from other Member States to ensure that Greek sources and methods are aligned with such standards to the maximum extent.

Transparent processes

The methodological notes published by ELSTAT are clear and explain in detail the statistical methods used. The quality of published documentation on methods and sources is very good. They are published on ELSTAT's website both in Greek and in English. The Committee notes with approval that ELSTAT is pursuing a work plan to ensure that up to date methodological notes and metadata are available for all outstanding areas in a standardised format by the end of 2013.

ELSTAT has a clear revision policy and all errors discovered in published statistics are announced and published on ELSTAT's website. All stakeholders consulted by the Committee believe that ELSTAT provides revised data as soon as possible after it becomes aware of the need for a correction.

A release calendar is issued by ELSTAT and is made known to users in advance through its website. The stakeholders generally acknowledge the usefulness of the calendar and the fact that it is respected in practice.

Information on planned major revisions of statistical series or changes in methodologies etc. is included in advance in a separate chapter in the annual statistical work programmes of ELSTAT and is published on the website.

Equality of access

Equal access to all users is a fundamental principle and the use of internet strengthens the achievement of this indicator in practice. The law prohibits the communication of statistical information before the due release date. In particular, Article 7(2) of the Statistical Law states that "The ELSS agencies are obliged to provide all users with equal access to statistics according to the principle of impartiality, as it is specifically set out in the Regulation on Statistical Obligations". Article 4(2) of the Regulation on the Statistical Obligations of ELSS agencies: "ELSS agencies are obliged to produce and disseminate their statistics in an impartial, objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably, according to the principle of impartiality. Statistical release dates shall be pre-announced in a release calendar and all users shall have equal and simultaneous access to the statistical releases". All stakeholders, and especially financial journalists who have a particular interest in ensuring that this principle is respected, agree that ELSTAT adheres to the principle without exception and that there is no discrimination between users.

Statistical releases, which consist of simple and factual presentations of the data, are issued without comments of a partial nature. Up to now there has been little use of press conferences in releasing statistics. However, press releases are issued regularly to the media relating to recent prominent statistics (growth, consumer price index, unemployment, industrial production, etc). The purpose of these impartial releases is to raise awareness of the statistics and to assist journalists and analysts in their interpretation. The Committee would encourage ELSTAT to develop further its efforts to publicise and promote the use of its statistics as there is evidence that some users are unaware of the existence of high quality ELSTAT statistical outputs and are using other sources to meet their needs.

Overall assessment and recommendations

The Committee is satisfied that ELSTAT demonstrates a strong respect for Principle 6 and its implementation in practice. ELSTAT produces official statistics based on sound methods and presents them in a professional statistical manner. Objectivity and impartiality are strengthened by the adoption of international statistical standards, particularly those prescribed for the harmonised production of European Statistics. ELSTAT consults and cooperates with Eurostat and other experts to ensure that the Greek sources and methods are aligned with the EU recommendations to the maximum extent.

The methodological notes published by ELSTAT are clear and explain in detail the adopted statistical methodology used. The Committee welcomes the fact that these notes are published on ELSTAT's website both in Greek and in English. All errors discovered in published statistics are announced and published on ELSTAT's website without delay. A release calendar is issued by ELSTAT and made known to users in advance through its website and information on major revisions of statistics or changes are also published on the website.

Equal access for all users is a core principle for ELSTAT and the use of the internet strengthens this practice. Statistical releases are simple and factual presentations of the data, without comments of a partisan nature. Press releases, that raise awareness of statistics and assist journalists and analysts in their interpretation, are issued regularly in respect of key statistics. The Committee commends these measures and would encourage ELSTAT to continue its efforts to publicise its statistics and to promote the use of its high quality outputs.

Appendix 1

Information on the members of the Good Practice Advisory Committee

- Gerry O' Hanlon, former Director General of the Irish Central Statistics Office, nominee of the European Statistical Governance Advisory Body (ESGAB), Chairman of GPAC
- Ioannis Chalikias, Professor at Athens University of Economics and Business, nominee of the Hellenic Parliament, Member of GPAC
- Dr. Peter Hackl, former Director General of the Austrian Statistics Office, nominee of Eurostat, Member of GPAC
- Heli Jeskanen-Sundstrom, former Director General of the Finnish Statistics Office, nominee of the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC), Member of GPAC
- Dr. Vasileios Zorkadis, Director of the Secretariat of the Hellenic Data Protection Authority, nominee of the Hellenic Data Protection Authority, Member of GPAC

Appendix 2

List of documents provided to the Good Practice Advisory Committee by ELSTAT

- Completed self assessment questionnaire
- Organisation chart of ELSTAT (including information on regional offices)
- Dissemination and communication legal framework
- Adequacy of human resources
- Information on IT Data Center
- Information on Software
- Information on IT human resources
- Data on financial resources 2009-2013 (tables)
- Financial resources
- Eurostat press releases for Greece
- Peer Review 2007
- IMF Report on Standards and Codes (ROSC) 2005
- User Satisfaction Survey Results 2011-2012
- Quarterly technical report 2012-2013 (summary of addressed users' requests by ELSTAT)
- User satisfaction questionnaire
- IT System for statistical surveys planning and monitoring
- Group for the Coordination and Supervision of Statistical Works
- Programming of projects - actions
- Staff training
- Participation by ELSTAT personnel in seminars 2012-2013 (tables)
- Training programme 2013-2015 (tables)
- Data Protection Policy
- Statistical Confidentiality
- Pricing Policy
- Administrative data used in the production of statistics
- List of awarded grants 2013

- Last advertisement for the post of the head of ELSTAT (official Greek announcement)
- English translation of the last advertisement for the post of the head of ELSTAT
- Information on agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System
- Response rates in ELSTAT's sampling surveys
- Joint Overall Statistical Greek Action Plan (updated version of March 2013)
- Report on the court case against ELSTAT officials
- Memorandum of Cooperation with the General Accounting Office and the Bank of Greece
- Memorandum of Cooperation with the Ministry of Environment
- Memorandum of Cooperation with the Ministry of Health
- Memorandum of Cooperation with the Ministry of Interior
- Memorandum of Cooperation between ELSTAT, GSIS, IKA
- EU-SILC 2010 Final Quality Report
- Labour Force Survey 2011 Quality Report
- Quality Policy
- Revision Policy
- Statistical Confidentiality Declaration

Appendix 3

Participation of stakeholders in the Good Practice Advisory Committee meetings

- Representatives of ELSTAT management
- Representatives of agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System
- Representatives of institutional users of ELSTAT's statistical products
- Representatives of the economic adjustment programme partners (EU, IMF)
- Representatives of Eurostat
- Representatives of international users of ELSTAT's statistical products resident in Greece
- Representatives of the Greek financial press
- Representatives of specialised users of ELSTAT's statistical products (academics and researchers)
- Representatives of the Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Finance