

Opinion on the Draft Council Regulation (Euratom, EC) concerning structural business statistics

(95/C 236/22)

On 31 May 1995, the Economic and Social Committee, acting under the third paragraph of Rule 23 of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an Opinion on the Draft Council Regulation (Euratom, EC) concerning structural business statistics.

The Section for Economic, Financial and Monetary Affairs which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on this subject adopted its Opinion on 16 May 1995. The Rapporteur, working without a Study Group, was Mr Cal.

At its 326th Plenary Session on 31 May and 1 June (meeting of 31 May 1995), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion unanimously.

1. General comments

1.1. The need for harmonized statistics on businesses has gradually increased as the single market has developed. New requirements flowing from competition, social, environmental and business policies have rendered these requirements even more pressing. Finally, harmonization of the way the gross national product at market prices is determined means that results have to be compiled which are comparable between the countries of the European Union.

1.2. The proposed Regulation does not intend to harmonize the systems for compiling data, but rather to establish a legal framework common to all business activities and business statistics areas so that they can be compared, on the basis of data collected under the respective national systems.

1.3. The basic thinking behind the proposed Regulation, which the Committee endorses, is to take full advantage of existing systems and to reduce the number of variables which require direct collection in businesses, thus reducing their administrative costs. Therefore, the use of sampling methods, direct calculation of some variables by inference and the use of other administrative sources (VAT departments, social security contributions, etc.) should be endorsed and encouraged, as should the spread of new electronic data transmission methods.

1.4. For businesses, employers' and workers' representatives and in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises, there is a growing need for statistical data (on wage structures, labour costs and training) now that national markets are being unified, world markets are being globalized and given the increased competitiveness resulting from these developments.

1.4.1. Moreover, only reliable statistics which are comparable between Member States on businesses, and

particularly on income and employment, can provide a suitable basis for assessing the progress of genuine convergence between Member States' economies.

1.5. This Draft Regulation aims:

- a) to provide a common framework for collecting, transmitting and developing structural business statistics in order to produce data which is comparable between the different Member States, so as to meet the Commission's, Member States', enterprises' and other users' need for statistical information;
- b) to strengthen the statistical system incorporating the recently developed Community statistical tools;
- c) to adapt the list of data to be collected;
- d) to create a legal framework for collating statistics.

1.6. The Draft Regulation contains a common module with the variables which should be included in structural business statistics in all sectors, together with two other modules which deal with structural statistics in industry (mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, gas and water supply and construction) and structural statistics on the distributive trade.

1.6.1. The Committee hopes that the module dealing with financial services (banking, insurance and other financial activities) will be proposed as quickly as possible, given the increasing importance of this sector, even if initially it is not possible to include pension funds.

1.7. The Committee feels that using the sums of money provided for in the financial statement appended

to the Opinion could provide a major incentive for Member States' statistics services to speed up adjustments to their respective collection systems, particularly with regard to the distributive trade.

2. Specific comments

2.1. The Committee endorses the move to set the maximum period for transmitting rapid results for business statistics at ten months and hopes that these results will be published for users immediately thereafter.

2.1.1. However, the number of enterprises, wages and salaries and gross investment should be included in the list of characteristics set out in the part on the distributive sector (Section 7, No 2) as is the case in the module on industry.

2.1.2. In the part on specific demographic data in the distributive sector, the number of births and deaths of

enterprises should be added to the annual statistics to be compiled, in line with the module on industry.

2.2. In Article 11 (Review), the Economic and Social Committee should be one of the addressees of the report referred to.

3. Final comments

The European Parliament has advocated that Eurostat become an autonomous body retaining special technical links with the Commission, with a legal personality, financial autonomy and its own budget along the lines of the recently established Institutions Translation Centre. The Committee feels that this could make a positive contribution to better clarification of both Eurostat's and the European Commission's role and that this possibility should be discussed as part of the Intergovernmental Conference.

Done at Brussels, 31 May 1995.

The President
of the Economic and Social Committee
Carlos FERRER
