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**Challenges and approaches to the implementation of 2008 SNA****Revision of the Dutch national accounts: experiences in and lessons from the publication of the first results****Prepared by Statistics Netherlands***Summary*

This paper describes the background and results of the revision of the national accounts in the Netherlands. It elaborates on the experience and key lessons learned in the process. Due to the potentially large impact of revisions of national accounts to the figures and the potentially negative response from the users, the publication of first results needs to be carefully planned. This paper also shares the experience gained in preparing for the release of the first revised figures and explains the choices made.

## I. Introduction

1. Like many other countries the Netherlands has in recent years invested substantial amounts of time and capacity in revising its National Accounts. This culminated in the publication of the first results of the revised National Accounts of the Netherlands in March 2014. A direct cause for this revision is of course the adoption of new international and methodological guidelines, like ESA 2010 and SNA 2008. However, Statistics Netherlands, as many other European member states, has also simultaneously conducted a statistical (source) revision. The previous revision of the Dutch National Accounts has been conducted for the reporting year 2001, which has been published in 2005.

2. On 6 March, Statistics Netherland presented the first results for the benchmark year 2010 (level estimates). At the end of June 2014, revised figures of the national accounts for the period up to and including the first quarter of 2014 will be published. Subsequently, the Dutch national accounts will be consistent with the new international guidelines from that date. No later than September this will apply to all the member states of the European Union.

3. As a result of the revision of the Dutch National Accounts, new estimates for many macro-economic key indicators will become available. E.g. the gross domestic product (GDP) for the benchmark year 2010 was adjusted upwards by 44.7 billion euros (7.6 percent); implementation of the (new) international guidelines (of which ESA 2010/SNA 2008) accounts for 3.0 percentage points and introduction and evaluation of (new) data sources accounts for 4.6 percentage points. The public deficit for 2010 was adjusted downwards from 5.1 percent to 5.0 percent of the GDP. The public debt has been adjusted downwards from 63.4 to 59.0 percent of the GDP.

4. The publication of the first results in the Netherland has been a carefully designed process. The main reason for this is of course the substantial impact of the revision on the figures. But also the knowledge that explaining such changes to the general public and the main users of the National Accounts need to be carefully elaborated and planned beforehand. In this paper we will share some of our experiences with this process and motivate the choices we made. In the end the communication worked out the way we planned it, resulting in fact in neutral coverage of the results in the Dutch newspapers and media.

5. This paper is organized in four parts. The first part gives a short background to the revision of the Dutch National Accounts and presents some of the first results for the year 2010. In the following parts of the paper we will discuss the strategy for the publication of the results. Beginning with the process up to March 6th, but also review the way the news was covered in the Dutch newspapers and media. The paper concludes with some lessons learned.

## II. The revision of the Dutch national accounts, some background and results

6. The National Accounts are the source for frequently used macro-economic variables, e.g. the gross domestic product (GDP, economic growth), the trade balance, the gross national income (GNI), the public deficit and the public debt. As a result of a revision, the level of these figures will normally change. Revisions of the National Accounts are conducted on a regular basis. The reason for the current revision is the adoption of new international methodological guidelines. These guidelines have been laid down in the European System of Accounts (ESA2010), which is entirely based upon the new System of

National Accounts of the United Nations (SNA2008). The new international guidelines facilitate comparison between national economies and provide a safeguard that structural economic developments are measured consistently. Adoption of the new ESA guidelines is obligatory for all member states of the European Union.

7 The most important adjustments in this revision affecting GDP concern research and development (R&D) expenditures plus a number of military expenses. These will henceforth be included in investments as expenditures on these items last longer than one production process and are expected to generate future benefits. Software that organisations have developed for private use will be valued against the market price instead of the cost price, thus including a return to capital. The effects of illegal activities on a country's economy must also be included.

8. Statistics Netherlands, like many other European member states, has conducted a statistical (source) revision and a methodological revision simultaneously. The level of the indicators is re-evaluated and made consistent with the new data sources, which have become available in recent years. Introduction of new source levels is not possible in a normal production cycle, because this would interfere with economic growth figures. Developments resulting from the new sources were already used prior to the revision to estimate indicator developments, for example, the Wage declaration database and the VAT database compiled by the tax authorities, new statistics compiled by the Dutch Central Bank and the revised trade register of the Chamber of Commerce.

9. The current revision has proven to be a massive project, covering a period of more than three years and about 200 revision projects, including the 44 issues of the revised SNA2008. It constituted also a heavy burden on human capacity as it involved in total about 50-60 fulltime equivalents of work. The subsequent revision of the time-series required additional resources, but compared to the previous revision the work will be done more efficiently. The latest revision of the time-series, based on the 2001 benchmark revision, encompassed a total of about 30 fulltime equivalents (including the development of new methodology and related ICT-systems). The current time-series (which in general will be 10 years longer) involves a total investment of approximately 15-20 fulltime equivalents. This efficiency is a consequence of improved and new (automated) compilation tools and less focus on details.

10. Each revision of the national accounts is based on a benchmark year. Changes in definitions and source material are implemented for this year and the effects of the changes on the level of the figures are analysed. The benchmark year for the current revision of the Dutch National Accounts is 2010. The previous revision was based on the year 2001. With the current revision we first compiled the figures for 2010 and directly afterwards compiled the new figures for 2011. This combination of compiling 2 years lead to further improvement of the results of the benchmark year 2010, e.g. in the field of the coordination between the results of the supply and use tables and the sector accounts.

11. As a result of the revision, new estimates for many macro-economic key indicators have become available. The most important are mentioned below:

(a) The gross domestic product (GDP) for the benchmark year 2010 was adjusted upwards by 44.7 billion euros (7.6 percent); implementation of the new international guidelines accounts for 3.0 percentage points. The most important effect is that R&D expenditures are now included in investments and no longer in current costs. Re-evaluation of new sources accounts for adjustment of the GDP by 4.6 percentage points;

(b) Because the level of GDP was also adjusted in all the preceding years, the effect for the economic growth figures will be limited. More accurate information will be published by Statistics Netherlands at the end of June 2014;

(c) The public deficit consistent with the EMU definition for the benchmark year 2010 has been adjusted upwards by 1.8 billion euros, mainly as a result of the use of newly available source data. Because the level of GDP was also adjusted upwards, the net effect on the public deficit, expressed as a percentage of the GDP, is modest. The public deficit for 2010 is slightly reduced from 5.1 to 5.0 percent of the GDP;

(d) The public debt for the year 2010 has been adjusted upwards by 0.6 billion euros as a result of the use of new source data. Because the GDP adjustment is larger in relative terms, the public debt for 2010 was adjusted downwards considerably from 63.4 to 59.0 percent of the GDP;

(e) The trade balance for the benchmark year 2010 has been adjusted upwards by 5.5 billion euros to 52.8 billion euros. The main reason for adjustment of the trade balance is the use of new source information about international trade;

(f) The gross national income (GNI) for the benchmark year 2010 has been adjusted upwards by 57.7 billion euros (10.0 percent); adjustment of the GDP accounts for 44.7 billion euros and adjustment of primary income flows to and from other countries (in particular interest and dividends) accounts for 13.0 billion euros. The main reason is the use of new source material provided by the Dutch Central Bank. If the GNI changes, this may affect the Dutch contribution to the European Union, but this also depends on whether the GNIs of the other member states, which also implement revisions, change.

12. For more background information and figures related to the revision, the reader is referred to the publication National accounts, revision 2010 by Statistics Netherlands<sup>1</sup>. This publication deals with the level of the figures for the benchmark year 2010. It shows the difference between the figures before and after revision and also indicates to what extent the difference is caused by the new international guidelines or new data sources. In addition to the indicators mentioned above, the publication also includes information on other indicators and more detailed information on sectors, industries and labour.

13. Later this year, other years and quarters before and after 2010 will also be revised and published. As a result of the revision, the levels of the indicators for all periods under review will be adjusted. At the end of June 2014, revised figures of the national accounts for the period up to and including the first quarter of 2014 will be published. Subsequently, the Dutch national accounts will be consistent with the new international guidelines from that date.

### **III. Towards a strategy for communicating the first results**

14. In the middle of 2013 the first work on the Communication strategy of the revised Dutch National Accounts already started. The major issue to be solved was how to communicate revision results in an early stage and inform and reassure (appease) the users. However, before addressing this issue, the first (thorough) internal discussion we needed to have was the exact point in time we wanted to publish the first results of the revision. Two scenarios representing two leading tendencies in the office were basically considered:

(a) A revision is a major statistical event which should receive a lot of media attention;

(b) A revision is an important event for the Statistical Bureau itself and communication should be well-balanced and directed.

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<sup>1</sup> At this point in time only available in Dutch, see <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/macro-economie/methoden/dataverzameling/revisie-2010/2014-revisie-nr-2010-art.htm>

15. One has to realise that the regular publication of the National Accounts in the Netherlands differs substantially from the practice in most other European member states. In the Netherlands the presentation of budgetary choices for the year ahead and political debate on these choices takes place in September. The third Tuesday in September (the day is called “Prinsjesdag” in Dutch) is an important mile stone in this process. At that day the government present its plans for the upcoming fiscal year to parliament and the King holds his annual speech to the Dutch parliament and the Dutch public at large. To prepare for this day, the government needs new economic forecast from the Dutch Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis. For this purpose this Agency prepares a report in July/August, which entails the needed forecasts and a retrospective of how the Dutch economy has performed in the latest period. Input for both the modelling exercise as well as the retrospective are the Dutch National Accounts of Statistics Netherlands. It has therefore been a long tradition that the Dutch National Accounts are published at the end of June each year. For 2014 the publication of the Dutch National Accounts is foreseen on 25 June.

16. In the discussions we in considered 3 options: (1) to publish at the end of June according to the regular publication scheme of the Dutch National accounts, so users would receive a complete set, including the full time series of revised data at one point in time, (2) to publish the results of the benchmark year in April/May as we did with the previous revision of 2005 and (3) to publish the results of the benchmark year as soon as possible, i.e. as soon as the work on the revision of the benchmark year 2010 had been finished.

17. All options had of course their own advantages and disadvantages. Option (1) had the major advantage that we would have only had one point in time for the publication and that this would be a clear and much more manageable message to the (general) public. But also had the major disadvantage that we hardly left any time for the digestion of the results by our (major) user for their own purposes. E.g. the Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Finance would in this scenario have no or very little time left to properly prepare for the budgetary discussions in September. They would not be able to include the results of the revision of the Dutch National Accounts into their analysis and reports, which, given the major impact on the macro-economic variables, should be considered a great risk. We would then have caught them by surprise, which would have probably also lead to “unpleasant” reactions and (possible) damage to our good relationships. This in the end made us decide not to choose this option.

18. Option (2) had the major advantage that we would have had enough time left between finishing the technical work on the revision and the publication of the first results. And also the advantage would be informing our users beforehand on the expected (quantitative) results of the revision of the Dutch National Accounts, so they could account for it in their own processes. The reason for including this scenario was also based on the good experience we had during the previous revision. However it also had one major disadvantage: timeliness and the need of sharing essential information, especially relating to the Excessive Deficit Procedure.

19. In Europe the Excessive Deficit Procedure is one of the well-known administrative uses of National Accounts data. Council Regulation 479/2009, as amended, requires that Member States report EDP-related data to Eurostat twice per year – at end of March and the end of September. The data are reported in harmonised tables. These tables are designed specifically to provide a consistent framework, with a link to national budgetary aggregates and between the deficit and changes in the debt. They should be fully consistent with government finance statistics. Eurostat publishes the notification tables as transmitted by

Member States. In application of Council Regulation 479/2009, these tables include data for the current year which are forecasts and not statistics<sup>2</sup>.

20. “On 2 December 2009, the Council decided, in accordance with Article 126(6) TFEU, that an excessive deficit existed in the Netherlands and issued a recommendation to correct the excessive deficit by 2013 at the latest, in accordance with Article 126(7) TFEU and Article 3 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1467/97 of 7 July 1997 on speeding up and clarifying the implementation of the excessive deficit procedure”<sup>3</sup>. Since then the Netherlands has remained in the EDP. For the year 2013 the 3 per cent threshold was therefore still a critical and very important issue, also at the political level. As the revision of the National Accounts could influence the figures, it seemed therefore advisable to publish the first results as soon as possible in 2014. However the month of April or May would probably not be the best moment in time, because the information would then become available very shortly after the EDP notification of April 1st and the subsequent assessment procedure by the commission. A publication of Statistics Netherland on revised figures, during this procedure would presumably have hampered the analyses and assessment of the notification by the commission. So in the end we did not choose for this option. But ambitiously choose to publish even sooner!

21. Option (3) appeared the best alternative, i.e. to publish the first results of the revision as soon as they became available. The work on the revision of the benchmark year 2010 and the finalisation of the new annual and revised figures for 2011 was planned to be completed in February 2014. This led to deciding to publish the first results in the first week of March. This would also provide our major user with enough time (3 weeks) to prepare their own assessment on the possible impacts on the revised figures on the EDP notification on 1 April. All insights from the revision so far would then be made publicly available in a transparent way. This is in line with a strategy of Statistics Netherland to publish results as soon as they are available. However a major disadvantage of this option was the little amount of time left for ourselves to prepare the publication.

22. With the publication date set, an important additional trigger to think about the wording of this publication was the European Commission press release on the impact of conceptual changes (e.g. ESA 2010) on GDP figures of EU member states, which was published on 16 January 2014. This press release explained the reasons and major conceptual changes of the revision and gave an overview of the estimated impact on GDP for most European countries. The table in this press release shows that the impact of all conceptual changes for the Netherlands amounts to an estimated 3 to 4 percent of GDP, similar to Austria and the United Kingdom. Generally speaking, the results seem to indicate that the impact of the revision on GDP tends to correlate with the level of GDP, presumably suggesting a link between the level GDP and the level of R&D expenditures. Nevertheless, the publication of these estimated results for the Netherlands concerned only the conceptual changes and not the impact of the source (benchmark) revision. In that sense, the results were only half of our story to be told.

23. Shortly before the European press release we put a notification on our website informing users about the reasons and consequences of a revision. In a question and answer format we discussed topics like why a revision, which data are affected, what is the expected impact on the key variables (with some qualitative indications of the direction and

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<sup>2</sup> Source Website Eurostat

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION with a view to bringing an end to the situation of an excessive government deficit in the Netherlands {SWD(2013) 392 final}

magnitude of the expected changes). What about the new data sources, when are the data published and what do other countries do, etc.<sup>4</sup>

24. We closely looked at and learned from the national (and international) press and media coverage of the press release by Eurostat. The press release did receive some attention in the Dutch newspaper. Not major headlines, but in almost all major Dutch newspapers a short article of 1 or 2 columns appeared. Media coverage was mainly negatively formulated. A heading like “A trick from Brussels saves our economy” perfectly summarises the main discussions and conclusion in the Dutch media. The main message was basically that due to “newly invented rules” from the European Commission our economy would grow overnight. And more importantly, that the economy and government finances would all of sudden be in a better shape and would solve some of our economic problems. Some papers even spoke of tweaking the figures on purpose. Also some international media attention (like in Germany) had similar tendencies. From this media-coverage and media coverage for example in de US, we learned the importance of framing the main messages we wanted to get across in the beginning of March. By carefully assessing the context of the message and prudently picking the most important messages you want to send to the public, the impact of the message would be maximised. And more importantly it also helps you to steer the media coverage in a more efficient way and would hopefully lead to media coverage that (perfectly) reflects the way you wanted to get your message across.

25. That takes us back to the issues of the basic form in which we wanted to present the first results. To answer that question we closely looked at our main perceived risks and potential issues with the communication of the first results. We tried to envisage how our users could react. An important exercise in this process was to put ourselves in the situation of our major users and ask ourselves what kind of questions might arise on their side from our publication. As mentioned above the following two scenarios were considered:

- (a) A revision is a major statistical event which should receive a lot of media attention;
- (b) A revision is an important event for the Statistical Bureau itself and communication should be well-balanced and directed

26. The first issue/risk identified is that Statistics Netherlands simultaneously performed a conceptual and statistical (sources) revision. In our message this should therefore be separated because each of the revisions has its own impact and reasons. This would have to be clearly communicated to the public. The main messages should be that conceptual revision is driven by new international guidelines (such as ESA 2010 and SNA 2008), but we agreed we should also explain why we have new international guidelines (better tools to measure the total economy and its components and to compare economies across countries).

27. The second issue/risk was that the impact of the statistical (sources) revision would be rather large, almost 5 per cent. And at that point in time it was not known to the general public if other European member states would also conduct a statistical revision and/or what the impact would possibly be. This could have easily been interpreted as if Statistics Netherlands had not done a very good job in measuring the economy in the last few years. The communication should therefore openly address the reasons for our statistical revision and highlight the most important changes in statistical sources in a positive way. It should

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<sup>4</sup> This publication is available at the CBS website, only in Dutch, see <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/macro-economie/methoden/dataverzameling/revisie-2010/2014-02-revisie-macro-economische-cijfers-cbs.htm>

also say something about the possible impact on key variables, e.g. the path of economic growth and public deficit, and, at the same time, explain that statistical revisions are a natural part of National accounts. New sources can and will always be incorporated in the National Accounts. But due to reasons of continuity and to need to properly account for real economic changes, the levels of the new sources cannot directly be incorporated. For that a major revision is needed and therefore a natural and common part of the National Accounts; in all countries not only the Netherlands.

28. A third essential issue/risk for the Netherlands was that very recently parts of the press have criticized Statistics Netherlands for their regular revisions of the quarterly economic growth data, more specifically of “accusing” Statistics Netherlands of underestimating economic growth. With an upcoming message that the economy would be much larger than we anticipated so far this would/could be an extra complication in the communication of the revision results. The message should therefore preferably say something about the effect of the revision on the path of economic growth, if possible in a quantitative way, but otherwise at the qualitative level. At Statistics Netherlands we had ambitious plans to include a time series for the revised economic growth path (2001-2010) in our press release of March 6th. But in the end, technical and methodological issues prevented this, so we had to stick to qualitative message.

29. The fourth issue concerns the question of embargo, i.e. informing all users at the same time or informing some (important) users before the official release. The publication policy of Statistics Netherlands, as in most other statistical offices, requires that all users get the information at exact the same time and all information is equally open to all users. There are only a very few specific exceptions, which are published on our website, all in accordance with the European statistical code of practice. With a major event like the publication of the revised national accounts data and knowing the substantial forthcoming changes in the macro-economic figures, we had to think about this policy. And ask ourselves whether it would be a good option to inform our major user beforehand and how we could possibly benefit ourselves from such an option.

30. All the pros and cons were weighted and it was decided to inform major users (the Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, the Dutch Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Affairs) three days before the official release of the publication. This would not only provide them with enough head time to prepare for any media attention they might get from our publication, but also with enough time to inform their internal organisation. For the latter we agreed that they informed only the most relevant persons in their organisation. In return they helped us by providing us with good feedback on the way we wanted to communicate (in practice the meeting with them was a kind of try out for us), but also supporting us by copying and using our information in their own statements and answers to the press. It even led to a letter from the Minister of Economic Affairs and the Minister of Finance to parliament, explaining the reasons for the revision and its impact in a factual and neutral way. The letter was sent on the same day as our communication (a few hours later) and worded in such a way that it almost completely reflected our intended main messages.

31. Finally, but not less important, the amount of information to present in a communication is an issue to be considered very carefully. The revision of a set of National Accounts by definition generates a lot of information, as most data and economic indicators change. It is therefore important to make a selection and concentrate on the main issues; a selection tailored to the needs of our users. Including too much information in the communication seriously hampers the message and could also impose a risk that your message is not understood, or even worse, misinterpreted. After careful deliberation we choose to limit ourselves to only five relevant macro-economic indicators: (a) GDP, (b) GNI (relevance for EU own resources), (c) public debt (EDP), (d) public deficit (EDP) and



(e) trade balance (because the Netherlands is a relative open economy). Other indicators and background information were provided in a more elaborated (technical) publication, which we published simultaneously. The communication provided a web-link to this technical note, which is only available electronically (as PDF file)<sup>5</sup>.

32. Taking these issues and risks into account we eventually decided that in the Dutch case it would be the best way to see the revision as an important event for the Statistical Bureau itself. But that the external communication should be well-balanced and directed. Not only to coordinate our messages and the coverage in the media, but mainly to prevent as much as possible the misinterpretation of the results and any subsequent negative publicity for our statistical agency.

#### **IV. The communication up to 6 May and beyond**

33. As stated before we started the communication with the general public and our major user in advance of the Eurostat press release. On 10 February we posted a Q&A document on the ESA 2010 revision project in the Netherlands on our website. Elements in this document were: (a) informing users about the reasons for a revision (b) explaining what conceptual and benchmark revisions are and elaborate on the influence of European regulations, (c) provide a first (qualitative) indication of approximate seize of benchmark revision, (d) reassuring our users on economic growth, public deficit and GNI-contribution and (e) provide more information on planned dates of publications, i.e. results for 2010 at the beginning of March and data for more recent years and time-series in June 2014. The paper was posted on our website, but also actively distributed to our major user. We also contacted them personally in the week after the publication to see whether or not they had additional questions and to enquire how and if we could help them to prepare for our announced publication in March.

34. To prepare for our March publication, we organized a range of special training sessions for our economic spokesman. An important element in this was to prepare him for difficult questions (policy issues, GNI-contribution, ‘magic tricks from Brussels’) and the way to answer them. Key messages in this were to put emphasis on the absolute need for new international guidelines (keeping up with new economic developments like internet, emphasis on methodological improvement, European and worldwide exercise, the revision is not just a Dutch exercise, etc. ). For the benchmark revision we prepared the spokesman by providing him as much background information on the revision as needed. And helped to design some tools to explain to the general public the principles of continuity of the National Accounts and why that prevents the direct full inclusion of new sources. A final element in the proposed line of reaction was that some (very important) key data were likely not to be affected (like economic growth, public deficit).

35. To manage the preparation for the communication we formed an internal technical steering group consisting of the Director of National Accounts, the Director of Media Affairs, the spokesman and a few senior statistical experts. In the last weeks we had day to day management, discussing and deciding on details of the content of the press release, the content of PowerPoint presentations (for the press release and the meeting with our major users), the general repetition of these presentations, the coordination of the invitations for the meetings, etc. This group also reported directly to the deputy director general.

36. The second milestone in the process was the presentation (under embargo) of the revision results for our stakeholders on 3 March 2014. In a session of 3 hours, (high level)

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<sup>5</sup> See footnote 1.

representatives from the major stakeholders (Central Bank, Ministry of Finance, the ministry of Economic affairs and Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis) were the first to be given detailed results of the impact of the revision on the Dutch National Accounts and the related macro-economic figures. This was done by a PowerPoint presentation by our economic spokesman, with detailed results including the more ‘problematic issues’: government deficit higher in absolute terms, household savings not negative anymore, major adjustments in international investment position, etc. This was followed by a Q&A session. In the end this session proved to be a very valuable general repetition for our official release. It helped us to gain experience, ask for suggestions for improvement, addressing questions and improve the communication on 6 March.

37. The official release of revision results for the benchmark year 2010 was on 6 March 2014. On that day we published at 10.00h a press release (2 ½ pages) with background information and the main results of the revision (GDP, GNI, public deficit and debt). We deliberately choose a different timeslot than our standard publication time (09.30h) in order to emphasis the deviant technical character of this press release. The press release was sent in advance to our major stakeholders, who were present at the meeting of March 3rd. In addition we organised on 6 March at 09:30 a technical session for the press. In this session we provide journalists with technical background information on the revision and the reasons for this revision. The press meeting also entailed a PowerPoint presentation with the main results of the revision. The presentation was held by our economic spokesman. Simultaneously with the publication of the press release we also published on our website a report with more elaborate text and explanations on the major changes and with the standard tables on the Annual National Accounts, the Annual Sector Accounts and the Labour Accounts. In this publication all the changes are decomposed into conceptual and benchmark adjustments. This more technical report was also actively distributed to our major user.

38. In the aftermath of the press release we constantly stayed in close contact with our major users. On the one hand to inquiry about the question the might have received from the press and to see if we could help them to answers these question or if it was necessary to coordinate, and on the other hand, to check whether or not they had some new questions themselves after reading the press release.

39. The communication will however still continue. The next milestone will be at the end of June 2014, when the revised figures of the National Accounts for the period up to and including the first quarter of 2014 will be published. Subsequently, the Dutch national accounts will be consistent with the new international guidelines from that date onwards.

## **V. Conclusion and evaluation**

40. Looking back we can foremost conclude that our communication on the first results of the revised Dutch National Account has been picked up in a proper way and more importantly in a way we envisaged it. The media coverage was factual, accurate en closely reflected the main messages we wanted to get across. It did not create a fuss and the related communication of our major users was aligned with our key messages. With headlines as: “Dutch economy 8% larger after revision of Statistics Netherlands”, “45 billion euros richer, after new definition GDP”, “Public debt weights less on economy”, the tendency of the coverage was much more neutral than in January 2014. But in the end we did not get very much attention in the (printed) press, and only few journalists attended our press-meeting of the results. So was this thorough preparation (and all the fuss) necessary after all?

41. The unambiguous answer to that question is yes, because in the end:

(a) Our key users appreciated our openness and explanation of the revision results. This led to a better understanding, and therefore acceptance, of the changes pursued;

(b) Broader media coverage was factual and informative, and with a positive tone like “more exhaustive estimate of economy with inclusion of illegal activities” and “in line with practises in other European countries”.

42. Finally the lessons we draw from this revision communication naturally have a wider application. As with all stories it is a good and essential start to think about the framing of your message. What are the most important messages you want to get across? How to limit the number of messages in a communication? This not only helps you to write a better communication, but will also help to better influence the media coverage you get. Of course this is not a guarantee, but failing to do so will certainly result in media coverage you did not want or even feared.

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