

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Second meeting of the 2001/2002 Bureau  
(Oslo, 22-23 October 2001)

**Report of the meeting**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The second meeting of the 2001/2002 Bureau was held in Oslo from 22-23 October 2001. The following members of the Bureau attended: Svein Longva (Chair), Len Cook, Hallgrimur Snorrason, Vladimir Sokolin, Tadeusz Toczyłski and Katherine Wallman. The following permanent participants also attended: Enrico Giovannini and John Kelly. (Yves Franchet was unable to attend, but Eurostat was represented by Pedro Diaz and Maria Helena Figueira, Herman Habermann also was unable to attend but was represented by Willem De Vries). Mikhail Korolev of CIS/STAT, Carlo Malaguerra of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office and Ivan Fellegi and Bela Prigly from Statistics Canada also attended at the invitation of the Bureau. Ms. Carol Carson of the IMF was unable to attend. The following persons assisted members of the Bureau: Olav Ljones and Bjorg Moen of Statistics Norway and Janice Owens from the OECD Statistics Directorate. Lene Mikkelsen of UNECE served as Secretary of the meeting.

**II. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ECE STATISTICAL DIVISION**

2. The Bureau was informed by Mr. Kelly about the staff developments in the Division which had occurred recently and resulted in both the posts as Director and Secretary of the Conference being for the time being filled on an acting basis. He also informed the Bureau of the large number of vacancies in the Division. The Bureau noted the intention of the Division to fill the vacancies as soon as possible. The chairman also pointed out that having this number of vacant posts in the Division could also be seen as an opportunity for internal re-organisation.

3. The Bureau agreed that the Chairman should follow the process of filling the Director's post in order to determine whether the process could be speeded up by writing to the UNECE Executive Secretary and remind her of the need to fill the post without delays. **(Action by the Chairman on behalf of the Bureau).**

**II PROPOSALS FOR RENEWING THE CES**

4. The basis for the discussion under this agenda item was a paper by Mr. Fellegi and one by Mr. Habermann. Mr. Fellegi in introducing his paper stressed that it was a draft intended only for the eyes of the Bureau. He outlined the driving forces which he considered to be at play and which could lead to the demise of the Conference if nothing was done. He therefore stressed the need of seizing the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as an opportunity for renewal of the CES plenary sessions. His proposal outlined in the paper contained two alternative visions of the Plenary: one with concurrent sessions and one with sessions "*ad seriatim*". Upon reflection he now preferred the option which argues for having the two groups meet "*ad seriatim*" rather than in concurrent sessions.

5. According to Mr. Fellegi, this proposal would mean that the core of the Conference as it exists currently would be preserved, but that two sessions attached in the beginning and the end would constitute fora for, respectively, CIS and other transition economies and for statistically advanced

countries. This would enable the Conference to strengthen its support for statistically developing countries and offer OECD a forum for its future statistical group. The Plenary Session according to this format would remain the meeting place for all heads of statistical offices in the region without necessarily increasing the length of time heads of office would need to dedicate to the CES plenary.

6. Mr. Fellegi's proposal produced mixed reactions from members of the Bureau. Although the necessity to improve CES functioning was recognised by all, a number of members of the Bureau was against the proposal of splitting countries into two groups because it would endanger future co-operation and therefore they recommended that another solution should be sought. However, other members of the Bureau were in favour of Mr. Fellegi's proposal. Eurostat also conveyed a strong message of support to the overall proposal because Eurostat's opinion is that the interest of the CES is declining and there is an urgent need to renew its role or the Conference will die. This opinion was clearly shared by the OECD.

7. Notwithstanding this, there was general agreement that any forced division between the member countries should be avoided and that the sense of community as well as the technological and knowledge transfers which take place through the Conference were well worth preserving. These important functions could be preserved if the option of splitting the agenda and having sessions *ad seriatim* was chosen. The Bureau recognised that not all members considered the proposed changes of the current structure as appropriate to the need for developing the efficiency of CES. The chair suggested that a revised proposal should be worked out for discussion at the next Bureau meeting. Assuming that this could be agreed upon it would be submitted to the Conference's plenary in 2002. **(Action by Ivan Fellegi for input to the February 2002 meeting).**

8. Both the chair and Mr. Fellegi summarized the main messages they had heard in the discussion as being: renewal is desirable and urgent to ensure the survival of the Conference; all meetings and sub-meetings or associated meetings etc., should be open to all member-countries of the CES so that they could participate according to their interest; the Seminar part of the Conference should be maintained but shortened and improved with a careful selection of topics and presentations; alternatively, it could be merged with the in-depth discussion of selected items of the Integrated Presentation; and the plenary sessions should continue to be annual for continuity.

9. In the revised proposal for discussion at the next Bureau meeting, Mr. Fellegi was asked to highlight what transition countries could gain from the proposed change and to be more precise about how the change could be operationalised. The inclusion of a non-European viewpoint, through OECD's membership, could also be mentioned as positive for the Conference. It was also suggested that a wider consultation of the revised paper after the next Bureau meeting but before the plenary session may be advisable in an attempt to minimise possibilities for discussion at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary session being too polarised.

### **III FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTEGRATED PRESENTATION**

10. This topic was discussed based on a paper prepared by the secretariat, a paper by Tom Griffin and one by Louis Kincannon. The secretariat paper summarised the responses received to an inquiry on the uses of the Integrated Presentation (IP) and based on these proposed some possible improvements to the IP while the two other papers focused respectively on rapporteurs' reports and on the preparation and uses IP.

11. Eurostat's position on the IP was that they already find the reporting burden very heavy and would be against any substantial change involving additional work. Ms. Figueira justified this position by the fact that Eurostat had now established an information collection procedure that all subject matter departments had agreed to at a meeting and they would like to keep that unchanged for the next five years. The secretariat explained that the idea behind the proposed improvements was to reduce the reporting burden on the organisations and at the same time to prepare a shorter, more readable product that could still be used as a management tool. On the output side, the purpose of establishing a database with all the essential information was to make it possible for users to tailor their information search according to needs.

12. The main conclusions from the inquiry were that a shorter document was desired as was a product that would be more flexible and meet the needs of different users. The proposal put forward by Secretariat therefore was to prepare a kind of abstract of the IP in printed form for the annual Plenary of the Conference which would contain the essential information for management, but in a more streamlined and focused format that was illustrated in the annex of the paper (CES/BUR.2002/5). This information would be derived from a proposed database that in addition would contain all the detailed information regarding Activities and Means.

13. The Bureau noted that the proposed new format and the shorter abstract of the Integrated Presentation would still be available in printed form, and that those who wanted more detailed information could obtain this from the planned database. OECD thought that the new format was much improved in clarity and did not consider that it would cause them problems to use that instead. Regarding Eurostat's wish not to introduce any changes into the way they collected the information from their subject-matter Divisions, the Secretariat offered to prepare a draft abstract with the new headings and format based on the usual information received from Eurostat. This should be presented to the next Bureau meeting for approval. The secretariat and Eurostat were asked to work out details of format and timing for the abstract. **(Action by the ECE Secretariat and Eurostat).**

14. Regarding the resources needed for turning the IP into a database, it would demand a considerable work effort from the secretariat's side. Due to the loan for the next couple of months of a very able staff member from the UK Defence Analytical Services Agency and the availability of consultancy funds that could be invested in the planned database, the secretariat was optimistic that good headway could be made over the course of the next six months. As the database would not be available straight away the short abstract of the IP would have to be prepared manually this year, but the idea would be to produce it from the database when it is operational. Similarly, when the database would be completed users would be able to tailor their searches based on keywords.

15. The Bureau also discussed whether the Rapporteurs' reports should be made publicly available as had been done this year. The majority thought that due to their usefulness and special insight they ought to have a wide circulation among statisticians. OECD expressed some hesitation about making them public as they felt it could impair the way they were written. The risk was that Rapporteurs would censor themselves and produce more bland reports. To avoid this, it was suggested that this year's request to Rapporteurs should contain a question as to whether they wanted any part of the report to be restricted and not for public circulation **(Action by ECE Secretariat, OECD and Eurostat in requesting the new set of rapporteur reports).**

16. OECD pointed out that due to the timeframe necessary for the preparation of the final post-plenary session version of the IP, work and meetings that take place between the February and June often were excluded from the integrated programme. After consideration, the Bureau agreed that this practice should be changed and references to the recent past should no longer be taken out but the whole period from the Bureau's February meeting onward should henceforth be included.

**IV 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY AND THE SEMINAR SESSION OF THE 2002 CES PLENARY**

17. The discussion of this item was based on three papers by respectively Carlo Malaguerra, Ivan Fellegi and the Secretariat. Mr. Malaguerra's paper outlined the part of the Seminar which would be concerned with the history of the Conference and which he proposed to be dealt with in three main historical periods spanning the last 50 years. As not too much detail could be presented at the Seminar, the Bureau agreed that the only suitable way would be to have a publication containing all the commissioned chapters.

18. Mr. Malaguerra's outline for the chapters/themes in the book was discussed. One member proposed to divide theme 2 into two parts, one would reflect the position of a western participant and another the position of an eastern participant. Another suggestion was that current theme 3 of the publication should be made identical to theme 4, but represent the view of the wider range of CIT's. It was also proposed that a second author from a CIS country should be added to Theme 5 to ensure that the TACIS process was adequately reflected. Finally some concern was expressed about including period descriptions of relationships between statisticians and the political power at the time. Several Bureau members also felt uneasy about including references to the influence the communist system had had on statistics, and thought it preferable to have national contributions as each country would have had a different development.

19. Mr. Malaguerra replied that what he thought was needed was an objective, scientific view and a critical synthesis from the above, not a detailed description of each political context. The idea was to show the evolution of the statistical systems and their links to the political world in the overall context of our society. The approach should be critical and the view from above. He agreed, however, that Theme 5 could be broken into two groups reflecting those which were already countries with statistical systems and those which were not and where such systems had to be developed from scratch.

20. One Bureau member thought that the publication should not only be an account of where we have been and where we might go, but should also have a chapter on the accomplishments of the last 50 years. Another was of the opinion that some common questions/themes should be raised in the introduction and introduced and reflected in each chapter. Regarding the Fundamental Principles to be described in Theme 6, the chairman suggested that examples of how they have been applied should also be included.

21. Other suggestions for the publication outline were that: the current proposed Annex should rather become a chapter and/or expanded to include reference to former officers of the CES and to the various products the CES has produced in the past fifty years. It was also suggested that alternative authors to theme 6 could be Sten Johansson or Carlo Malaguerra. The Bureau agreed that the introductory part should be written by Mr. Malaguerra and that he should decide which of the chapters or themes would be discussed during the seminar session (on the basis of texts submitted in English). Mr. Malaguerra should also be responsible for deciding on the form of presentation of the historical part in the plenary session. The Bureau designated Mr. Malaguerra as editor of the "History book" with the help of Tom Griffin. The book will be produced after the plenary session. The deadline for contributions is 22 March 2002. Chapters that were not selected for discussion in the session could also be tabled (in English) as hand-outs at the plenary session.

22. Regarding the process and ownership of the publication, it was agreed that the publication should be a product of the Conference and that the Bureau would review the chapters, but that authors alone would be responsible for their opinions. The main problem would be to get the authors onboard and to have them deliver the chapters in time so the publication could still be produced in 2002. Mr. Kelly confirmed that the UNECE could take responsibility for publishing the publication.

23. The second part of the Seminar, for which Mr. Fellegi was responsible, would be concerned with the future of the Conference. He envisaged that there would be contributions from both international organisations and individual countries, all addressing the same three issues: current strengths, suggestions for the future and practical follow-up suggestions. There was general agreement with this approach and only a couple of suggestions for change were made. Mr. Cook, who was down as author did not feel that he, as a recent arrival to Europe, could represent Western Europe and Donald Murphy was suggested instead. It was also suggested that CIS should be added to the organisations' list and a pre-accession country to the list of country authors.

24. The chairman outlined a very provisional timetable of the Plenary. It would begin on Monday 10 June p.m. with a formal business part, which would be followed next day by a one-day Seminar. The last day would be made up of a Ceremonial part in the morning followed by a formal part which would include the decisions about the future. The Bureau's proposal for the future should be discussed at that stage of the meeting.

25. Regarding the speakers for the Ceremonial part the Bureau recognised that it would probably have to be limited to the ECE Executive Secretary and OECD Secretary General as it would be unlikely to get UN Secretary General Kofi Annan or the President of the Commission of the EC to attend the session and most Bureau members thought that recorded speeches should be avoided. A suggestion was also made to consider asking a distinguished statistician to deliver a keynote address. The following provisional programme was proposed:

1<sup>st</sup> day (Monday, 10.06.2001) – formal business part

2<sup>nd</sup> day (Tuesday, 11.06.2001) – seminar (part A. 1/2 day; part B. 1/2 day)

3<sup>rd</sup> day (Wednesday, 12.06.2001)

– Morning: ceremonial speeches (Request will come from Mr. Longva before Christmas)

(Action by the ECE Secretariat with respect to the ECE Executive Secretary and by the OECD with respect to the OECD Secretary General)

- Afternoon: winding up (Bureau concrete proposal).

26. As to the list of possible additional initiatives that had been outlined by the secretariat, there was agreement that the book of CES history; a special issue of the Statistical Journal with papers from the Seminar; and possibly the posters and postcards as well as an anniversary declaration signed by ECE Executive Secretary should be retained.

## V LIST OF POSSIBLE PROGRAMME ELEMENTS TO BE REVIEWED IN DEPTH

27. In view of the Celebrations at next year's plenary, the chair proposed that only one topic was chosen for in-depth review. In the discussion the following topics were proposed as candidates for review: 1.2 *Managerial and policy issues of direct concern to president of national statistical offices*; 2.2 *Statistical data collection and processing*; 2.3 *Dissemination and interchange of statistical information*; 2.8 *Sustainable development indicators*; and 3.1 *Implementation of the national accounts*.

28. The Bureau agreed that topic 2.2 *Statistical data collection and processing* should be selected with an additional focus on data requests from International organisations. Norway offered to prepare a country paper on that topic and OECD and IMF should also be asked to contribute with updates and innovations in their work. **(Action by the ECE secretariat in requesting papers from OECD, the IMF and Statistics Norway).**

## VI WORK CARRIED OVER FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR

29. The only issue carried over from last year concerned the Fundamental Principles. As it had already been agreed that a chapter (Theme 6) of the Celebratory History Book would be dedicated to the Fundamental Principles, this was taken care of. It was however suggested that UNSD would write to countries and ask them for information about the implementation of the Fundamental Principles which would allow them to fill in the gaps on their website. **(Action by UNSD).**

## VII OTHER WORK DELEGATED TO THE CES BUREAU

30. Three short papers prepared by the secretariat served as background for the Bureau's deliberations on this agenda item. The first one concerned a proposal for inter-sectoral work between the CES and other PSBs or organisations. A proposal for including a work session on environmental health and statistics in the Conference's work programme for 2002/2003 was discussed: this would involve a collaboration between statisticians, health specialists and environment experts. WHO had already expressed interest in such a collaboration and Mr. Giovaninni would inquire with the OECD Directorate on Social Affairs whether they would be interested in co-sponsoring the meeting. **(Action by ECE and OECD).**

31. On the topic of indicators UNSD informed the Bureau that the *Friends of the Chair* report would be put on the website of the UNSD in December. The chair suggested that the report should be tabled for discussion at a future Bureau meeting. The relationship of UNSD's indicators to Eurostat's "structural indicators" was also discussed. The Chairman noted that there seems to be an ever-growing demand for indicators and there is a need to verify that the burden for statistical offices was kept to the minimum. **(Action by UNSD).**

32. As requested by the 2001 ECE Commission the Bureau discussed how it could contribute to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration's goals. A cross-classification of the CES work programme with the goals defined in the Millennium Declaration showed that there is considerable scope for contributions from statistics. It was agreed that, for the next Bureau meeting, the Secretariat should prepare a more detailed paper outlining the main areas where there is scope for contributions from the Conference's current and future activities. **(Action by ECE).**

33. As requested by the Conference at the 2001 Plenary, the Secretariat had prepared a proposal for further work by the CES in the field of small area statistics. This could be in form of convening a meeting in PA 2 on best practices in producing small area statistics. There was some hesitation to this, as small area statistics are not always under the control of statistical offices (e.g. UK) and it was also thought that this work could be easily merged with GIS. The chair therefore suggested that ECE, Eurostat and OECD discuss together what potentials they see for joint future work by them. **(Action by ECE, Eurostat, OECD).**

## VII DATES AND VENUE OF FUTURE MEETING

34. The previously agreed dates of 21-22 February were confirmed [and have also in the meantime been confirmed by Mr. Franchet]. The Bureau noted that if the UN Official holiday Eid Al Adha falls on Friday, 22 February 2002, the Bureau meeting would not be able to be held in Palais des Nations on that day. The Bureau agreed that if that possibility materialised, the Bureau meeting should then, if possible, be scheduled to take place in the EFTA meeting facilities in Geneva instead. **(Action by the Chairman).**

**(Supplementary note by the ECE Secretariat: Since discussion at the next meeting will have to cover both the Rapporteur Reports and the draft updated version of the Integrated Presentation**

**(as well as other topics), it may be difficult to cover all these topics adequately in a one-and-a-half-day meeting).**

**VIII ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

35. The Bureau agreed to postpone its discussion about the impact of the September 11 events on the Conference's work programme until the time of its February 2002 meeting.

-----