

Eurostat's Input and Candidate Countries: Agricultural Statistics

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ABSTRACT: A review of Eurostat's efforts and activities to assist ten Eastern European Countries (Candidate Countries) become members of the European Union is presented.

1. Political Background

Ten Eastern European Countries, so called Candidate Countries (CC), have applied for membership in the European Union (EU). Based on the AGENDA 2000 and the decision taken by the European Council on 12/13 December 1997 in Luxembourg, the European Commission (EC) will start accession negotiations for 5 countries as from March 1998 — Hungary, Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. In parallel, the preparation of the negotiations for the other 5 CC will be accelerated. The negotiations will define the terms and conditions on which each applicant accedes.

One of the objectives is that the new members apply the *acquis communautaire* (the set of obligations met by current Member States) upon accession. In order to accelerate the process of harmonisation, a reinforced pre-accession strategy has been set up by the EC. This involves establishing so-called "accession partnerships" (AP). The AP will facilitate a bilateral approach to the various aspects involved in preparing the countries that embark on accession negotiations.

Phare, the EU's aid programme to Central and Eastern Europe, has been reoriented towards these objectives and will continue to operate as an accession tool. Phare, together with other EU resources such as the funds for agriculture and the Cohesion Fund, will provide the financial framework.

2. Eurostat's Framework

Against the background of the AP, statistics also has to produce "Statistical accession partnership documents". A first aim is a clear picture of how far the present situation falls short of the *acquis communautaire* on EU statistics. A second aim is to meet the need of EU negotiators for the best available data as a background to accession negotiations. **Agriculture is one of the priority areas for accession work**, so agricultural statistics is a priority also. Agricultural statistics are among the best-developed statistics in the EU. They are needed as an information source for development and administration of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which still absorbs nearly 50 percent of the total EU budget. The present EU system on agricultural statistics consists of 5 main domains:

1. Farm structure surveys and forestry statistics,
2. The economic accounts of agriculture and price statistics,
3. Crop and animal production statistics, fishery statistics and aquaculture,
4. Agro-industry, and
5. Land use.

In order to meet the urgent needs of the European Commission in Brussels, Eurostat is preparing country-specific dossiers with assessments of the extent of adoption of the *acquis communautaire* on the

5 domains mentioned above and with basic information for negotiation. As a first step, Eurostat is putting together a coherent, structured and handy statement of the *acquis communautaire* on agricultural statistics. This goes beyond the formal, legal requirements to include the full range of common practices and actions necessary for a well-functioning system — gentlemen's agreements, methodological documentation (e.g. handbooks), reports from Member States on their own statistical methodologies, coding structures of Eurostat's databases, etc. The assessment will be made in close cooperation with the National Statistical Services of the CC. Based on a "National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA)" to be prepared by each of the CC, strategic country-specific proposals for providing suitable technical assistance will be developed by Eurostat by the end of 1998. These proposals will also draw on the expertise of agricultural statisticians from EC Member States.

3. Eurostat's Input for Assistance

There is certainly a huge CC demand for assistance in developing the different domains of agricultural statistics. By the end of 1998, Eurostat will be clear about the volume and will be able to say which countries need what kind of assistance, for which domains and on what time schedule. Eurostat, as a centralised body normally without direct involvement in data collection, has neither the profile nor the human resources to provide all the assistance necessary. Thus, the implementation of assistance has to be mainly supported by the EU Member States if the EU funds available are to be put to good use. Some EU Member States are already active in these countries in the context of national, bilateral assistance programmes. Eurostat, together with the National Statistical Services of EU Member States, will be seeking by end of 1998 to set up a framework to ensure maximum possible coordination of EU support activities.

Up to now, the concrete input by Eurostat for supporting CC has been as follows.

- **Institution building:**

The overall aim is that the CC build up statistical systems which comply with Council Regulation EC/322/97. This regulation ("on Community statistics"), sometimes called the "Statistical Law", sets out essential requirements for official statistics in a democracy. Within this general framework, Eurostat seeks a countrywide, transparent and reliable official information system on agriculture, meeting of course national as well as EU needs. Of particular importance is the coordination between the Statistical Office, the Ministry of Agriculture and other statistical services involved.

- **Capacity building:**

Eurostat finances through Phare the participation of the CC statistical services at relevant Eurostat Working Groups and Committees and at international seminars, such as those managed by the Inter-secretariat Working Group for Agriculture (IWG.AGRI) composed of OECD, FAO, UN/ECE and Eurostat or more general such as Eurostat's imminent "FADO" seminar ("Future Agricultural Data Outline" — what "agricultural" statistics will the EU need ten years hence).

To allow statisticians from the CC to become fully familiar with the EU-system Eurostat will be offering a 6-month training possibility for "stagiaires" coming from the statistical services. This activity will start mid-1998.

- Data collection:

Since 1996 Eurostat has been working with the official statistical services in CC countries and receiving the available data on agriculture which broadly correspond to EU requirements. As might be expected, coverage is best for current production statistics. Eurostat aims to reinforce the dataflows — the regular updating according to the political needs and the *acquis communautaire*, the extension of the data scope to other agricultural domains not yet covered, and the collection and verification of the methodologies applied. The data are managed, stored and made available via Eurostat's databases.

- Pilot projects:

In the framework of Phare, pilot projects are targeted towards the transfer of know-how for compiling statistics in key areas. Eurostat is preparing a project on “economic accounts in agriculture”, led by Eurostat, for implementation in 1999.