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COUNCIL

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Council

DRAFT COUNCIL RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING A COMMITTEE ON STATISTICS

(Note by the Secretary-General)

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A. The international context

1. It is widely recognised that the strength of the OECD position in the international community relies not only on its constituency and working arrangements, but also on its reputation in statistics. In particular, the OECD plays a crucial role in collecting and disseminating large amounts of comparable statistics, and in developing innovative projects, able to bring substantive value to national statistics.

2. In dealing with a very wide range of statistics, the Secretariat has established relationships with National Statistical Offices of Member countries and a large number of other national data providers (Ministries, research institutes, etc.), as well as with other international organisations. These relationships are established both in substantive Committees and working parties, and in several international bodies.

3. In 2002, in the context of the OECD Statistics Reform, the OECD has created the OECD High Level Group (HLG) on Statistics¹ and, after the first two meetings of this body, heads of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) expressed **a general consensus on the usefulness of transforming the High Level Group into an OECD Statistics Committee**. The main reason for this is the need to bring together different areas of the statistically developed world, which have had much difficulty over the past ten years in identifying a common strategy. Now, because of globalisation and internationalisation, it has become much more important, both for policy makers and individual economic agents, to have comparable statistics describing the structure and the evolution of different economic areas. In fact, common (or comparable) definitions and classifications are absolutely crucial to an understanding of economic and social phenomena. At the same time, the development of the culture of “benchmarking” requires more and more comparable figures across countries and economic areas. Therefore, **a body to discuss the future of statistical co-operation in the OECD area and to make decisions to ensure the maximum degree of comparability of statistics among Europe, North America and Asian and Pacific countries is vital for the future of the international statistical system**. In addition, the OECD is a flexible forum, providing the possibility to involve other “big players” (China, Russia, Brazil, etc.) in building a common statistical culture and promoting the development of their statistical systems.

4. On the other hand, innovative ideas on the development of new ICT tools and models for statistics recently launched by the OECD have demonstrated the leading role the Organisation can play in orienting the future direction of the international statistical system. This role has been also recognised by quite a few other international organisations². In particular, innovative projects carried out by the OECD in this area over the last two years are strongly influencing the “vision” of the relationships between international organisations and NSOs. A similar expression of interest has been demonstrated regarding the recent development of the OECD Quality Framework, an approach that could be replicated by statistical divisions of other international organisations.

5. Finally, the OECD is a unique organisation that has developed a wide network of statisticians, involving experts from NSOs, central banks (CBs) and other national bodies producing statistics. The involvement of CBs is an element that cannot be underestimated, especially looking at the European experience, where close integration between NSOs and CBs has played a special role in promoting the international comparability and timeliness of economic statistics, as well as in improving the credibility and visibility of statistics vis-à-vis the media and other parts of society.

¹ In 2001 the Statistical Advisory Group, an informal “electronic group” with 11 OECD countries, had already been created to advise the Chief Statistician on the “statistics reform”.

² The OECD is now chairing the International task-force on statistical data and metadata exchange (SDMX), established in 2001 by the OECD with the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Bank for International Settlements, the European Central Bank and the European Commission (Eurostat).

B. Why a Statistics Committee?

6. The ultimate element to take into consideration when deciding on the transformation of the HLG into a Statistics Committee is its capacity to contribute to the improvement of the quality of OECD statistics and to reinforce the adoption by national agencies and other international organisations of statistical standards that have been developed by the Secretariat, in co-operation with Member countries. This co-operation has to be established both at technical and strategic levels. In particular, **the strategic co-operation should be established at the highest level, within a formal OECD body overlooking the broad range of statistics and statistical policy issues relevant to the Organisation.** In this respect, a Statistics Committee would be a key instrument to:

- improve the overall quality of OECD statistics, reinforcing the co-operation both among countries, and between them and the Secretariat;
- reinforce the role of the OECD in influencing the development of reliable and comparable statistics, both at national and international levels;
- improve the dialogue between policy makers, analysts and data providers.

7. In addition, there are also good reasons for creating a Statistics Committee from an “internal” perspective. The decentralised organisation of OECD statistics creates not only benefits, but also some challenges. Therefore, **the creation of a Statistics Committee would reinforce the overall coherence of OECD activities in this field**, especially in a historical moment in which the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions is a policy (and therefore statistical) priority. On the other hand, the quality of OECD statistics depends on the quality of data received, which implies a high degree of co-operation between the Secretariat and the national authorities in charge of statistical activities. From this point of view, the OECD situation is not optimal, because there is a need to further improve and extend the adoption of statistical standards by national authorities. A Statistics Committee could play an important role in strengthening the importance of OECD standards and expressing clear commitments by member countries (especially NSOs) to implement them in national activities. The recent report by Peter Nicholson, *Maximising the Impact of the OECD* [SG(2003)1], proposed the creation of such a Committee as one of its recommendations [R13] on the reorganisation of Committees at the OECD.

C. The mandate of the Committee

8. In establishing the mandate of the Committee, it is important to take into account the current existence of several statistical working bodies belonging to OECD policy committees. Given the important linkage between policy issues and statistical activities, as well as the recent reform of the budget process, the working programme of statistical bodies belonging to policy committees should continue to be decided according to current rules. On the other hand, some involvement of the Statistics Committee in the preparation of programmes of work adopted by “policy committees” would be highly beneficial for all parties involved.

9. In particular, the Statistics Committee would oversee activities contained in the Programme of Work and Budget output groups 6.2.1 (statistical co-ordination, including the OECD statistical programme of work) and 6.2.2 (statistical research, collection and dissemination). These two output groups cover, respectively, the activities carried out by the Statistics Directorate (STD) and related to the co-ordination and the development of the OECD statistical system (including the development of corporate tools, the co-ordination among STD and other Directorates, the co-ordination of OECD statistical activities with other international organisations, etc.), and specific subject matter involving economic statistics (i.e. national accounts, short term economic statistics, etc.). Therefore, the Committee would also discuss the overall

content of the OECD Statistical Work Programme (OSWP) and activities carried out by the OECD Chief Statistician to co-ordinate statistical activities developed by other Directorates (under the auspices of relevant policy committees).

10. As far as the biannual process of prioritisation is concerned, the relevant policy Committee would continue to make the final decision on the programme of work of the statistical body, but the members of the Statistics Committee would be asked (through electronic consultation) to give advice on the draft programme. As far as methodological recommendations (classifications, definitions, etc. developed by the OECD) are concerned, once the relevant policy Committee has approved the proposal prepared by the statistical body, the proposal would be transmitted to the Statistics Committee for final endorsement and the related commitment to implement it at the national level.

11. In conclusion, the main tasks of the Statistics Committee would be:

- to discuss the statistical policy of the OECD, both within the Organisation and vis-à-vis the rest of the world;
- to ensure that OECD statistics are produced according to high quality standards;
- to oversee STD statistical activities;
- to give advice to OECD Directorates and committees about their plans, highlighting gaps and challenges, and contributing to the development of an effective and well co-ordinated OECD Statistical Work Programme;
- to officially approve methodological recommendations elaborated on specific subjects, co-operating with other committees in charge of policy issues related to the latter. This approval would also be accompanied by a commitment to implement these recommendations at national level;
- to approve common standards for data and metadata exchange between the OECD and national data providers;
- to discuss any other topics submitted by the OECD Chief Statistician and relevant for conducting his/her tasks.

D. Frequency of meetings, costs and sunset clause

12. The Statistics Committee would function according to the normal OECD Committee rules. Therefore, the Committee would be chaired by a representative of one of the OECD countries and a Bureau would be created. **The High Level Group on Statistics and the Statistical Advisory Group would be disbanded.** The Committee should meet twice a year and written consultations should be carried out during the year through electronic means. The two meetings would have very different durations and agendas. For example, the main meeting could be organised in three half days and the agenda of the meeting divided into three parts (items for *formal decision*, items for *strategic opinion*, items for *information*). A second meeting would be shorter and would focus on comments to be provided for the draft programmes of work under the responsibility of other OECD committees and other administrative issues.

13. **The creation of the Committee would be budget neutral.** In fact, STD is already managing the High Level Group and the Statistical Advisory Group and paying related financial costs for translation,

interpretation, etc. **The existence of the Committee and its mandate should be reviewed after three years.**

14. The Secretary-General accordingly invites the Council to adopt the following conclusions:

THE COUNCIL

- a) noted document C(2003)217;
- b) adopted the draft Resolution of the Council concerning the Establishment of a Committee on Statistics set out in the Annex hereto.

ANNEX

**DRAFT RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A
COMMITTEE ON STATISTICS**

THE COUNCIL

Having regard to the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of 14th December 1960 , and, in particular, articles 1, 3, 5a) and 9 thereof;

Having regard to the Rules of Procedure of the Organisation and in particular Rule 18 a) iii);

Having regard to the Financial Rules of the Organisation;

Having regard to the Council's conclusions of 25 July 2002 on the *Structures of Committees and Multidisciplinarity: Recommendations* [C/M(2002)17].

Having regard to the recommendation contained in document C(2003)176, *Implementation of the Nicholson Report Recommendations* to convert the Meeting of Chief Statisticians into a Committee on Statistics;

Having regard to document C(2003)217 on the *Establishment of an OECD Committee on Statistics*;

Recognising that the creation of a Committee on Statistics would reinforce the overall coherence of OECD activities in this field;

Noting that, in this respect, a Committee on Statistics would be a key instrument to improve the overall quality of OECD statistics, reinforcing the co-operation both among countries, and between them and the Secretariat; to reinforce the role of the OECD in influencing the development of reliable and comparable statistics, both at national and international levels and to improve the dialogue between policy makers, analysts and data providers;

Noting that the creation of such a Committee would be budget neutral;

On the proposal of the Secretary- General;

DECIDES:

Article 1

A Committee on Statistics (hereafter the Committee) is hereby established.

Article 2

1. The Committee shall oversee the broad range of statistics and statistical policy issues relevant to the Organisation.

2. In carrying out its responsibilities it shall:

- a) discuss the statistical policy of the OECD, both within the Organisation and vis-à-vis the rest of the world;
- b) ensure that OECD statistics are produced according to high quality standards;
- c) oversee Statistics Directorate activities;
- d) give advice to other OECD committees and to OECD Directorates about their plans, highlighting gaps and challenges, and contributing to the development of an effective and well co-ordinated OECD Statistical Work Programme;
- e) officially approve methodological recommendations elaborated on specific subjects, co-operating with other committees in charge of policy issues related to the latter, and promote their implementation;
- g) approve common standards for data and metadata exchange between the OECD and national data providers;
- h) discuss any other topics submitted by the OECD Chief Statistician and relevant for conducting his/her tasks.

Article 3

1. The Committee shall maintain a close working relationship with other relevant bodies of the Organisation, seeking to ensure that statistics within the OECD are dealt with in a well-coordinated and horizontal manner.
2. The Committee shall maintain, as appropriate, and in conformity with the OECD rules, relations with other international organisations, seeking to achieve co-ordinated and complementary work programmes in areas of shared interest and mutual benefit.

Article 4

The Resolution shall come into force on 1st January 2004. It shall expire on 31st December 2006, unless the Council decides otherwise.

Article 5

The Annex to the Rules of Procedure of the Organisation shall be amended as follows: Committee on Statistics, its terms of reference are defined in the Resolution of the Council C(2003)217.