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**After “Free Dissemination”,
an integrated communication strategy**

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After a brief presentation on the initial success stories arising from the decision to make all of Eurostat’s non-confidential data available free of charge on its website, this address will set out the stages involved in the new integrated communication strategy which is being developed: its objectives, priorities, principles for action, etc. Lastly, three examples will be given of how this strategy is to be implemented: the rules for disseminating news releases, the policy for helping certain user groups and a new cooperation policy between European Statistical System websites.

1. The success of “Free Dissemination”

On 1 October 2004 Eurostat made all its (non-confidential) data **available free of charge on its website**, including, in particular, the “New Cronos” database, which gives users more than 4 500 different possibilities to produce multidimensional tables (detailed classification, time series, etc.) as well as detailed external trade and industrial production (Prodcom) data. What is more, all Eurostat publications may be downloaded free of charge.

This decision, which was taken at the beginning of 2004 by Michel Vanden Abeele, led to a great deal of work for Eurostat staff, both on the information technology side (to ensure that the system could deal with greatly increasing demand without the response time suffering) and for the thematic units (to provide the metadata and documentation needed for proper data use).

Four months on, an initial evaluation revealed the success of this decision:

- The number of users of Eurostat’s website **increased five-fold** between September 2004 (150 000) and January 2005 (790 000). The weekly growth rate was in the order of 3 %. The number of extracts from the “New Cronos” database also increased five-fold during the same period, reaching almost 145 000 in January 2005. In particular, downloads at weekends have increased by a factor of 10. The number of downloads of electronic products (PDF) increased more than four-fold between September 2004 and January 2005 (340 000). Extracts from the Comext database (external trade and industrial production) also increased eight-fold.

- In January 2005, the site was accessible 99.5 % of the time, while the New Cronos and Comext databases were accessible 100 % of the time. Around 90 % of download requests were satisfied within five seconds.
- On the other hand, sales of publications seem to have been strongly affected, and have **decreased by a factor of two** (3 800 copies sold in Q4 2004 plus January 2005 against 7 500 in the same period of the previous year).

The Eurostat website is constantly developing, in terms both of IT architecture and ease of access (a new home page is already available), thus allowing us to launch a real promotion campaign for the site.

2. An integrated communication strategy

The major step of making Eurostat's statistical information available free of charge has resulted in great changes to the entire dissemination process (particularly paper publications) and has prompted the management committee to give more wide-ranging consideration to the office's communication strategy. The wish to progress from the simple idea of disseminating (or making available) information to thinking about how it can be communicated is immediately clear. This must involve, on the one hand, recognition of the differences between target groups and users – whose specific needs must be taken into account and for whom messages must be specially tailored – and, on the other hand, Eurostat's wish to become more well-known and improve its image.

At the current (provisional) stage of the consideration process, some initial objectives, priorities and principles for action have been identified.

2.1 Three objectives

- To be the **first-choice source** for European statistical data.

Of course, this objective reflects our mission, but the fact remains that it is not always achieved in some areas where users tend to consult other sites which are better presented, easier to use, or which they are in the habit of using.

- To increase our **level of service** to users, maximise the exposure of our data in general and provide better service to our main users with a public service approach favouring access free of charge.

With this second objective, we aim to balance the levels of priority given to different users (see below) and continue in the direction already taken under "Free Dissemination".

- To accompany our figures, as far as possible, with **clear and objective comments**.

With this objective, we aim to encourage the use of our data by the wider public.

We should also remember that any communication strategy depends crucially on the **quality of data** available and that the best possible communication strategy would not make up for shortcomings in this fundamental area. However, the quality and relevance of European statistics is the subject of a more general objective above and beyond the communication strategy.

2.2 Target groups, the media and intermediaries

So as to try to put in place an integrated communication policy often marked by different types of audience (or target groups) and media (or information carriers), we thought it useful to start from a table cross-referencing precisely these two groups.

Bearing in mind the essential role played by **intermediaries** (journalists, websites, NSIs and commercial redistribution companies), we have included them among both the target groups and the media. The other media (publications, websites) have been broken down into different categories according to their ease of access for the wider public. You will note the particular presence among the target groups of the Community institutions, which are Eurostat's most important partners.

TARGET GROUPS AND MEDIA
FOR A DISSEMINATION/COMMUNICATION POLICY

TARGET GROUPS		MEDIA									
		Intermediaries			Eurostat publications			Eurostat website		Direct contacts	Promotion tools (SIGMA, lists, etc.)
		Journalists	Websites -NSIs	Redistributors	Press SIF	Pocket Books	Panorama, DVD	Home page, Summaries	New Cronos		
Intermediaries	Journalists				×	×		×		×	
	Websites-NSIs					×	×	×	×	×	
	Redistributors								×		
General public		×	×					×			
Students, teachers		×	×			×	×	×	×		
Researchers Analysts			×	×		×	×	×	×	×	×
Companies (professional associations)		×	×	×		×	×	×	×		×
European Commission		×			×	×		×	×	×	×
Other European Institutions		×						×		×	
International organisations (incl. ECB)							×		×	×	×

On the basis of the close interactions shown in this table and the objectives set out earlier, it seemed to us that the **target groups** to concentrate on (in order of priority) should be as follows:

- The general public (including students) and journalists (as an intermediary for the general public).
- The European Commission (to contribute to its proposals for Community policies) and the other European institutions (particularly the ECB).
- Lastly, the wider community of researchers, governmental analysts, professional associations and international institutions.

Logically, the following are included among the **media**:

- Eurostat's website (particularly its home page and summaries).
- Short publications (SIF and Pocket Books) and direct contacts.
- Websites of the NSIs (as an intermediary for Community information).
- Lastly, promotional tools (SIGMA, lists of special contacts, etc.).

Does this mean that these priorities must be strictly applied to the actions carried out and to the human and financial resources committed? Is it really possible not to answer a request from a Commissioner's cabinet on the pretext of making the website more user-friendly for students? Certainly not, and the priorities set out above should be understood as entailing preferential, but not exclusive, allocation of resources hand-in-hand with individual treatment of specific cases.

2.3 Principles for action

Before providing a list of concrete actions, a number of important principles for action should be mentioned:

- The dissemination of statistics must be an integral part of the work of the units which produce statistics.

Although this principle sometimes appears self-evident, we feel it is very important to reiterate it.

- Eurostat must put in place a **system for monitoring** the levels of use and satisfaction of the various user groups.

Currently, this is far from being the case, even though important progress can be expected through intelligent use of the website.

- Efforts must be agreed on for **keeping pace with the current situation** (in political, economic and social terms).
- The **website** must be the main dissemination/communication tool.
- The system of (paper) **publications** should develop in such a way as to increase the relative importance of simple publications dealing with data selected for their broad interest (i.e. which would potentially be of interest to a wide public).
- An active policy for **“training”** our users must be put in place.
- This integrated communication policy should be **followed up** on three levels (new projects to be proposed and evaluated by a group of rank-and-file officials, actions to be managed and followed up by a management-level group, decisions to be taken by the management committee).

At this stage, the overall set of implementation measures for this new communication policy is far from being fully formulated. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this address, we felt it was important to give three examples – which have reached different stages of planning and realisation – of how this strategy is to be implemented.

3. Three examples of the implementation of this strategy

3.1 Clear rules for disseminating news releases

Like many other statistical offices, Eurostat has precise rules (which can be consulted by the public) for the dissemination of its news releases.

Each year, Eurostat publishes around 150 news releases in three languages (English, French and German), which are embargoed until 11.00 CET. These news releases concern two types

of statistics: Euro-Indicators (short-term statistics concerning inflation, unemployment, industrial production, etc.) and other statistics covered by different, more in-depth forms of publication (SIF, Panorama), in relation to which, news releases aim to facilitate journalists' summarising work by emphasising particularly newsworthy aspects.

Every Friday morning at 11.00, the Eurostat press office releases the **publication schedule for Euro-Indicators** for the following week to around one thousand journalists as well as the press offices of the NSIs. On Friday afternoons, the publication schedule for the other news releases for the following week is available only internally (and not to journalists), as it is not always definitive.

The three language versions of news releases are disseminated **under embargo**:

- On the evening before publication (between 18.30 and 19.00) to the Commissioner's spokesperson, for information and to enable him/her to prepare possible answers to journalists' questions at the press conference.
- On the publication day at 10.00 to accredited press agencies in Brussels (only for Euro-Indicators), the Commissioner and the press offices of the NSIs.

Finally, their general dissemination at 11.00 (in particular on the Eurostat website) enables interested journalists to ask questions during the daily 12.00 press conference which takes place in the Brussels press room.

However, on the evening before their publication, and under embargo, Eurostat sends DG ECFIN the European statistics on the quarterly changes in GDP, because, on the same day, DG ECFIN publishes its growth forecasts for the subsequent two quarters. However, no national data are sent. Similarly, under certain circumstances, news releases on specific areas are disseminated under embargo to the Commission Directorates-General concerned.

With regard to data concerning debt and public deficits, when a reservation is expressed about a Member State, the State in question and the President of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council are informed two working days before publication, in accordance with the code of best practice adopted by Ecofin on 18 February 2003.

A presentation on these rules to the Statistical Programme Committee, and the discussion which followed, revealed that the 10.00 **embargo risked being broken** (with potentially

serious consequences for the financial markets) as some Member States managed to get around it by “sealing” journalists in a room without the possibility of communicating with the outside world during the embargo, but nevertheless giving them the opportunity to prepare their reports.

3.2 A policy for helping certain user groups

Ever-increasing internet access on the one hand, and the policy of free dissemination on the other, have greatly changed Eurostat’s approach to its users, an approach previously characterised by the “datashops” system.

Thus, the help currently provided to **users** no longer involves directly giving them the data which they are looking for, but rather gives them the **independence** to help themselves to the data made available to them (free of charge and in a flexible format). So as to do this, Eurostat, together with the NSIs, has organised a basic support network through a system of grants covering between 15 and 20 persons per year in the NSIs (and two or three per year at Eurostat). Help from Eurostat’s production units is also possible when requests are too specialised or complex.

This general policy, which takes account of new means of communication and has led to increased productivity, does not completely deal with certain user groups which Eurostat’s integrated communication policy aims to favour.

I am referring specifically to **journalists**, given their role as information intermediaries through the press and the audiovisual media, and **officials of the European institutions**, given the high priority assigned to them in the list of target groups set out above.

In 2004, therefore, two “media support” officials in Eurostat replied to almost 1 640 questions from journalists and two others responsible for “institutional support” were consulted almost 1 150 times, without counting replies given by the thematic units. While it is true that the increased level of free dissemination might reduce the number of such requests, we believe the proportional reduction will be limited.

On the other hand, the priority given to the other favoured users listed above (NGOs, international organisations, local governments, commercial redistributors) has been greatly reduced. However, for these users, a very high level of downloads has been made possible within the framework of “free dissemination”.

In the longer term, the question arises as to whether this policy of helping users should be extended to other user groups in accordance with available resources (which will possibly be freed up as internet use increases). Perhaps we should turn our attention to the more specific needs of **universities (students and teachers)** over and above the information available online. Given that they are our future professional users, it would be useful to train them to the best possible degree.

3.3 A new policy of cooperation between ESS websites

Given the priority assigned by Eurostat and many NSIs to internet-based dissemination, and the policy of “intermediaries” which Eurostat wishes to follow, better coordination of the websites of European Statistical System members is essential. What is more, our users have the right to expect easy and coordinated access to the various different national and European statistics.

While it is true that, at present, there are various links between websites (including, on occasion, direct access to Eurostat databases), the situation remains varied and disorganised.

A number of proposals for increased cooperation have been made within the “dissemination” group organised by Eurostat, which brings together the various Member States. Particular emphasis has been given to flexibility. It has been stressed, therefore, that this cooperation should take place on a voluntary, low-cost basis, with each country progressing at its own pace and aiming for quick and noticeable results (for users).

At this stage, the following four courses of action have been chosen:

- Displaying the **ESS news** on the different sites.

On the basis of some common general rules, each statistical office can make available to everyone a series of “in-brief” news items, which can be taken by other offices and put on their own sites.

- Common news release schedule.

On the basis of a common structure and presentation method, it is proposed that users be able to access the news release schedules of the various offices (including Eurostat) as well as a common schedule (in English). Direct access to the various news releases

themselves must also be possible. However, this initiative must be coordinated with a similar IMF project for disseminating certain economic and financial data.

- Sharing reference statistical tables.

A number of national offices already refer to European (or even international) data when disseminating their national data. However, a certain degree of harmonisation is still desirable.

This could be done by starting from a subset of between 100 and 200 reference table chosen from the 1 000 basic (so-called “predefined”) tables already published by Eurostat on its website. Each NSI involved would be responsible for translating the headings and methodological references and for the link to their own national data, which could be more complete and detailed.

- Common “**key words**” system.

Access to data on different websites and user searches are made much easier by having an index of key words. A relatively short list of these key words in the area of statistics, containing about 1 500 words, seems the most efficient way (for users) and the cheapest way (in terms of preparing the index).

Here again, a certain degree of harmonisation between statistical bodies could help users. Thus, it is proposed to prepare this common list of some 1 500 statistical key words, while leaving open the possibility of including a limited number of complementary national terms.