

The Experiences of Turkey as an Enlargement Country in the Second Round of Peer Review

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Abstract

In this document the preparations made by Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) for the second round of peer review in the light of her experiences she gained in the first round and the related activities carried out in November 2015 as well as the enhancement measures put in place in the aftermath of these activities will be addressed.

Keywords: Peer Review, Enlargement Countries,
Code of Practice, Turkish Statistical Institute.

1. Background-1st Round Peer Review

The activities within "Peer Review" which were realised in all the countries within the European Statistics System between 2006 - 2008 were also carried out as from 2010 in candidate and potential candidate countries including Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey.

In this context, the process in question, in which the conformity level of TurkStat and the Turkish Statistical system to EU standards was evaluated, designed with the aim to carry out an external monitoring at the National Statistics Authorities and evaluate them in terms of statistical quality and ethic principles was realised in two phases.

In the first phase the related reference documents and the "Self Assessment Questionnaire" was filled out and submitted to the "Peer Review Team" by TurkStat. In the second phase, on the other hand, the "Peer Review Team" which was composed of two independent experts from EU member countries and two executives from Eurostat carried out a review and

monitoring visit. "Peer Review" action was realised between 24-27 May 2011 under the coordination of Eurostat aiming to examine and evaluate the Turkish Statistical System and the coordinating role of TurkStat in this Statistical System. The final report regarding the action was relayed on July 29, 2011 through Eurostat to TurkStat.

2. Being pilot country

In accordance with the decision taken at the PGSC (Policy Group on Statistical Cooperation) meeting held in Antalya, Turkey in October 2014, Serbia would be the first pilot country among the Enlargement countries and the 2nd tour of peer review would accordingly be realised in this country. However Serbia declared that she stood down from the candidacy for pilot country in the Strategic Information Meeting held in Luxembourg on March 18, 2015 and President of the Turkish Statistical Institute declared that Turkey could realise this project.

From that date on, TurkStat hit the road to carry out an intensive and comprehensive work schedule. However an important point that should be underlined is that, already from the beginning of 2014, TurkStat had turned its focus on the Peer Review Action which was then planned as a project to be realised in the near future.

3. 2nd Round Peer Review

The 2nd round of Peer Review began to be implemented in the countries included in the European Statistical System and Eurostat, and it was completed for these countries and Eurostat as of June 12, 2015. On the other hand, Turkey was designated as pilot country for the Peer Review process to be carried out in the enlargement countries in the Strategic Information Meeting that was held on March 18, 2015 in Luxembourg with the participation of the Presidents of the institutions of the statistical offices in the enlargement countries.

In this context, two important stakeholders the Central Bank of The Republic of Turkey and the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, designated as partner in the project, made intensive efforts together with the Turkish Statistical Institute in the first place. First, three

questionnaires and the English versions of the legislation regulating the Turkish Statistical System and those of various policy and strategy documents forming part of the system were relayed to the Peer Review Committee on October 16, 2015. Then a delegation paid a visit to TurkStat between 3-6 November 2015 and the Turkish Statistical System and TurkStat were subjected to a comprehensive evaluation by the international experts during the visit. Besides the visit paid to TurkStat, the delegation also had intensive and comprehensive talks with the representatives of stakeholders, academic communities, media, press and non-governmental organisations where TurkStat as well as Turkish Statistical System were discussed in detail.

On the last day of the visit, the members of the Delegation met with the senior managers of TurkStat in a meeting of general evaluation and shared the first impressions they had during the visit. Thereby they stated that TurkStat gave a very good example of preparations within the scope of Peer Review, the developments in the Institute were highly impressive, the conformity level to the 15 principles could be evaluated as "conform at a very high level" and the Turkish Law on Statistics built a very strong structure in respect of regulating the Turkish Statistical System.

The first draft report designed by the Delegation was delivered to TurkStat on November 25, 2015. It was underlined in the report that the Turkish Statistical System was in a better condition when compared with other national statistical institutions and systems. On the other hand, the Report included specific recommendations for TurkStat and the System, and the request to implement these recommendations within a calendar. Such recommendations and the subsequent implementation process is a principal application which every country should go through within the Peer Review. The report containing the views of TurkStat regarding the draft report was sent to the Peer Review Delegation on December 11, 2015, and the final report consequently designed was then delivered to TurkStat on March 23, 2016.

Then the Delegation requested the final opinion with regard to the report sent to TurkStat on March 23, 2016 with the request to include the points objected and develop improvement actions for the recommendations made in the report. After an intensive work schedule

TurkStat completed the process in question and sent the related report to Eurostat in May 2016.

3.1.Preparation

The preparation process can be approached in different phases. The preparations for the questionnaires, the ones for the documentation and the organisational actions undertaken both before and during the visit will be explained in detail.

The first step before the initiation of all these preparations is the determination of the unit that would steer the Peer Review process ensuring the execution of the essential coordination and secretariat works. Clear-cut job definitions is a essential condition both for the works to be carried out internally in the Institute and the cooperation with stakeholders and Eurostat.

As was the case during the 1st round of peer review, it was the Department of International Relations within TurkStat which was delegated with the executive function of the Peer review process. In this context, TurkStat Peer Review Team comprising of staff working in the coordination works with EU steered the process under the instructions of the senior management. However the Vice-President to whom the delegated department is affiliated also participated in all the works executed by the TurkStat Peer review team. In this sense, it can be said that the team was steered by Mr. Enver TAŞTI, the Vice-President.

3.1.1.Questionnaires

The preparations to be made for the questionnaires can perhaps be defined as the most intense part of the whole process. In the PGSC meeting held in 2014, it was decided that the enlargement countries should be subjected to the same process as the member countries; however, one exception was introduced for questionnaires as a result of which the enlargement countries had to fill out all the questionnaires except for “the Questionnaire on cooperation/level of integration achieved by the ESS”. Within this concept, TurkStat submitted two questionnaires:"Self-assessment questionnaire on the implementation of the

European Statistics Code of Practice" and "Questionnaire on the Coordination role of the NSIs".

Besides that, two important stakeholders, Central Bank of The Republic of Turkey and Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, designated partner institutions within the project, also made preparations on individual basis for the questionnaire of "Light Self-assessment questionnaire on the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice".

Even though the process for the submission of questionnaires was officially initiated by forwarding them by Eurostat to TurkStat in May, the predecessor process was already triggered in the wake of the Strategic Information Meeting held in March 2015. In the first place, the questionnaires were examined and a road map was designed in connection with the necessary actions to be undertaken. As the issue of creating organisational awareness had emerged as an important point in the light of the experiences gained in the first round, meetings were initiated where the senior executives in the institute participated and information was given about the process of the 2nd Round.

In this context, a decision was taken that the whole Institute should work in cooperation to complete the process concerning the questionnaires, and then the questionnaires and where necessary their translations in Turkish, were sent to all the departments to ensure the correct filling out and submission. TurkStat Peer Review Team that functioned as a kind of information desk in this process provided the essential support for the departments.

After that the questionnaires were completely filled out by all the units and sent to TurkStat Peer Review Team, all the responses from 19 departments within TurkStat were reviewed on the individual basis and the comments/responses were integrated into a single questionnaire. At this point the Team meeting under the chairmanship of the Vice-President as Team Leader carried out intense works to integrate all the responses into a single form and define a joint response for the whole Institute. In this process, the Team worked out all the responses except for the ones that remained undecided and therefore forwarded to the President of the Institute for further consideration.

In the next phase, the questionnaire and the responses worked out in this way were individually reviewed in several meetings chaired by the President with the participation of all

top management of TurkStat where the responses were finalized and integrated into a single questionnaire.

The same process also applies for the Questionnaire on the Coordination role of the NSIs whereby the responses received from all the units were subjected to the same process of integration into a single form to be sent to Eurostat as a joint response for the whole institute.

TurkStat Peer Review Team also prepared the necessary substructure for the submission of other questionnaires, in other words the ones within the “Light Self-assessment questionnaire on the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice” which had to be filled out by the Central Bank of The Republic of Turkey, and the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs designated as partner institutions in this process. In the first place, several visits were also paid to these institutions to raise awareness and presentations were realised to inform the personnel working in the units of statistics whereby the questionnaire was introduced, information was given as to how it should be filled out, and support was provided where necessary as done internally in the institute.

3.1.2.Documentation

The audit-base approach is an important aspect of the 2nd Round introduced differently from the first round of peer review process. The actions taken in connection with the requirement of documenting every point addressed in the questionnaire in accordance with this approach constituted one of the most important stages in the preparation process.

First, all the departments were required to list all the important documents in terms of organisational aspect in the light of the experiences gained both in the first round and within NSI guide, and send them to TurkStat Peer Review Team. Then an inventory was created in which the documents received and the existing ones were integrated into a joint list.

The most important issue that emerged during the documentation phase was the consideration on the processes and rules which were not integrated into written regulations although they had been in force for a long time. This is an issue which has subsequently turned into the most important benefit for TurkStat within the Peer Review; because in this process many

documents existing only in Turkish, the ones in draft condition, others postponed in terms of finalization, many others awaiting the final signatures were translated, reviewed and integrated into the inventory.

As reference should be made to several documents in the majority of the questions while filling out the questionnaire, the list created was so designed that it contained the number of the related question.

A similar documentation was also carried out for the questionnaires the partner institutions had to submit. All the documents referenced in the responses were collected and sent to Eurostat.

The whole process was completed on October 16, 2015; all the questionnaires and all the related documents were submitted to be forwarded to the Delegation.

3.1.3.Organisational Issues

As indicated above, the unit that would steer the Peer Review procedure was defined in the first stage of the organisational actions and the Department of International Relations was designated for this task. Mr. Enver TAŞTI, the Vice-President of the Institute, led the TurkStat Peer Review Team in this process.

Gathering of information formed the first phase of the organisational actions. The process was already followed up, the related documents were acquired in order to get informed about the process while the peer review process was still implemented in the member countries. Measures were taken in this stage by designing a gannt chart so as to follow up the process in an easy and complete way.

These activities were accelerated and other activities were initiated in parallel after it was confirmed that Turkey would assume the role of pilot country. Presentations were urgently realised to the Senior management of the institute whereby they were informed about the process and actions to be undertaken, the expectations from them and similar matters. Apart

from this, presentations were made to all the personnel in all the departments in an effort to raise awareness and ensure that all the staff embraces the project.

Activities of information, awareness raising and promotion for the process were not only carried out within the Institute; meetings were held with all the actors such as the partners, academics, professional organisations, non-governmental organisations that would be involved in the Peer Review to inform them about the process.

In this context, a great care was taken to carry out a transparent process in terms of organisation by sharing all the related documents with all the internal and external parties involved.

The activities in the stage before the visit paid by the Delegation is as much important as the ones executed in the preparation process. Besides the preparations made for the questionnaires, documentation, coordination and information, specific preparations had to be made for the visit of the delegation such as the determination of the institutions which would participate in the meetings during the visit, sending the invitations to these institutions and contacting them, where necessary, to give individual information. After the agenda of the visit was designed, the participants of the sessions included in the agenda were individually determined and they were informed about the time table in an effort to ensure that the process run smoothly.

The Peer Review Team of TurkStat participated in all the meetings except for the ones held for the senior management and the junior staff during the visit the delegation paid between 3-6 November 2015 observing the process to ensure that it proceeded without problems and create the final protocol at the end of the meetings.

But the organisational activities did certainly continue in the stage after the visit where the report was finalized and the improvement actions were developed.

3.2. Visit

The delegation realised a visit to TurkStat between 3-6 November 2015 during which the Turkish Statistical System and TurkStat were subjected to a comprehensive evaluation by the delegation. The delegation was made up of three members: Mr. Gerry O'HANLON, the former president of the Central Statistics Office of Ireland, Mrs. Pilar MARTIN-GUZMAN, the former president of the Spanish Statistical Office and Mr. Ferenc GALIK, the desk officer of Turkey.

During this visit of four days, besides the related persons from TurkStat, the Delegation also met with the representatives from many fields such as the stakeholders, academic communities, media, press and non-governmental organisations holding intense talks with them concerning TurkStat and the Turkish Statistical System.

On the last day of the visit, the members of the Delegation met with the senior managers of TurkStat in a meeting of general evaluation and shared the first impressions they had during the visit. Thereby they stated that TurkStat provided a very good example of a preparation process within the scope of Peer Review, the developments in the Institute were highly impressive, the conformity level to the 15 principles could be evaluated as "conform at a very high level" and the Turkish Law on Statistics built a very strong structure in terms of regulating the Turkish Statistical System.

4. Lessons Learned

Then the Delegation sent the first draft report to TurkStat on November 25, 2015, and the report which was finalized in the light of the opinions and recommendations of TurkStat was delivered on March 23, 2016. The improvement actions including the comments, reservations and recommendations with regard to the final report were then submitted to Eurostat in May 2016.

It was underlined in the report that the Turkish Statistical System was in a better condition when compared to other national statistical institutions and systems, and the Report included specific recommendations for TurkStat and the System, and the request to implement these recommendations within the scope of a calendar.

It is possible to say, as far as the 2nd Peer Review process of TurkStat is concerned, that the actions undertaken within the process have been as much important as the final report designed as a result of the review. In the first place, the function as a pilot country among the enlargement countries provides significant feedbacks for the road map to be designed for future projects in this field. Looking at the whole process from this point view, some points should, once more, underlined in a strong way:

- The support provided by the senior management level is an indispensable factor for a successful peer review action.
- As is the case for member countries, a visit of five days would provide a healthier process in terms of the review.
- The time granted for the submission of the questionnaires can be extended.
- The questions included in the questionnaire about the membership can be eliminated.
- A guideline can be designed to be used in the process of filling-out the questionnaires.
- Guides can be created to facilitate the order of importance in the documentation procedure.
- Recommendations can be designed with care and special focus to guarantee the conformity to SMART approach. Thus it can be ensured that the improvement actions to be developed be in compliance with this approach.

5. Conclusion

The Peer Review is an examination process where the National Statistical Systems are subjected to a reviewing with all the related processes in an overall manner. It is an opportunity of great significance in terms of harmonization of the National Statistical Offices and the National Statistical Systems with the European Statistical System and in respect of producing evidence that the statistical procedures are carried out in harmony and conformity with the fundamental statistical principles of quality and ethics applied all over the world in a comparative manner.

Nevertheless, the review in question should not only be regarded as an external examination. It should rather be considered as a process of an internal reviewing for the national statistical offices where the institutions have the opportunity to design a road map for the future by means of which they can have a clear picture of their strong and weak points, the opportunities and the difficulties, namely its current status, and the organisational and technical plans and projects they would realise in the future.

Regarding the peer review from this perspective, TurkStat sees the process as an important tool that can be helpful to observe its status, and set a higher level, at national and international level.

Not only the visit itself, but also the intensive phase before it can bring great benefits even though it is a difficult and fatiguing process and it can be turned into a stage of opportunity where a clear and detailed picture of the current status can be gained both in terms of unobserved deficiencies as well as strong points. TurkStat will exactly examine this picture in all its details and take firm steps forward towards the future to accomplish its objective to become one of the leading statistical offices in the light of these details.

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