

## The Federation of European National Statistical Societies



28. February 2020

FENStatS General Assembly

Dear FENStatS members, dear colleagues,

I would like to inform you about some news and activities that have taken place in the past months. It seems most important to me that the strategy debate, which some of us have been wanting to have for some time already, should now be launched in concrete terms. Furthermore, the FENStatS conferences and the strengthening of the professional independence of the statistical community(ies) will be addressed. Finally, I would like to add a few more points that are currently topical.

I. First of all, I would like to touch on the strategic orientation of the Federation. Many of us are moved by questions about the future of our profession. In times of great technical developments and political upheavals, it is necessary to define more precisely the core of what statistics are and what added value we can offer for the solution of societal problems. The American Statistical Association has submitted a report (<https://www.amstat.org/ASA/News/Statistics-at-a-Crossroads-Recommendations-Are-Released.aspx>) on this subject, which contains recommendations in the "following six areas:

1. *Placing practice at the center of statistics, with support from theory and computation*
2. *Emphasizing the scientific and societal impact of statistical research, rather than publication quantity*
3. *Formulating foundational research to reflect modern data problems*
4. *Embracing the big research questions and grand challenges around statistical investigation itself*
5. *Evaluating methodologies using broader metrics than just narrow optimality*
6. *Training the next generation of statisticians and data scientists with modern skills of critical thinking, modeling, computation, and communication"*

Further, the Statistical Journal of the IAOS has opened a (equally strategic) discussion in the field of official statistics (<https://madmimi.com/s/4b169f>).

While we can build on many of these results, I do believe that we in Europe must also specify this strategy for ourselves, in relation to the information needs in European societies, with a view to possible research support from European

funds, on the basis of the data raw materials available in Europe, and aimed at improving statistical and data literacy in Europe.

I would therefore like to set up a Strategy Committee in FENStatS to prepare a corresponding orientation paper for discussion in the General Assembly.

**I therefore ask you to inform the Secretary General Maria Eduarda Silva of your willingness to participate by the end of March.**

II. Secondly, I wanted to update you on the planned CESS conference in Prague. On 15 January 2020 the organising committee of the conference took the following decision: *"Due to the exceptionally many international statistics conferences taking place in 2020 (for example, the IAOS Conference in Zambia, Quality Conference in Hungary, World Statistical Forum in Bern, DGINS Conference in Poland, ECB Conference) there is a risk to fragment the potential audience and not to achieve the CESS goals. In addition, the congestion of conferences in 2020 creates organisational and resources challenges for both organisers and participants. Moreover, in October 2020, there will be a number of national events dedicated to the celebration of the World Statistics Day on 20 October. In view of these arguments, the co-organisers agreed to cancel the CESS 2020 conference. Instead, the co-organisers (Eurostat, ECB, FENStatS, ESAC) would liaise during February to reflect upon alternative avenues for joint stakeholder meetings, such as a dedicated strand on European stakeholders in other conferences. The main orientation would be to avoid overlaps and achieve synergies within the wider context of European and international events."*

The FENStatS Executive Committee regretted this decision and considered the possibility of conducting the CESS on its own without the financial support of the two major sponsors. However, this option was rejected as unrealistic and too risky. Instead, the following mitigating measures and activities are envisaged:

1. The Statistical Society of Slovenia organises the 17th international conference Applied Statistics 2020 (AS2020), which will take place between September 20.-23. in Ribno (Bled), Slovenia (<http://conferences.nib.si/AS2020/>). Andrej Blejec, AS2020 OC Chair, has offered, in agreement with the Board of the Slovenian Statistical Society, that FENStatS could host a certain number of sessions, which are already prepared, in this conference. It is also kindly offered that the FENStatS General Assembly can take place in the margins of AS2020. A more precise specification of these possibilities must now be provided as quickly as possible.
2. A suitable event (workshop, satellite meeting or similar) within the framework of ISI WSC 2021 in The Hague is being considered. Furthermore, it is currently being examined in coordination with the European Statistical Advisory Committee (ESAC), whether and to what extent an ESAC-seminar in 2021 can be extended in such a way that it could accommodate topics and sessions relevant to FENStatS.
3. Another CESS conference should be envisaged for the year 2022. The earlier character and the unique selling proposition of this conference should be emphasized in this respect: Starting from statistical method research and method development, it will reach out to practitioners in the field of data generation and production of facts (official statistics and other areas) as well as to professional users of statistical methods (more complex models, econometrics, social research, epidemiology, etc.). Support from Eurostat, ECB and

others (collaboration, finance, selection of scientific themes) is naturally very welcome.

III. Thirdly, I would like to inform you that in cooperation between Stella Bollmann (the President of the Swiss Statistical Society) and myself a proposal for a session at the UN World Data Forum in October has been submitted. An initiative to strengthen the professional independence and integrity of statistics is proposed:

*"It is imperative to sustain or – in some cases – even gain back trust in statistics and informational governance. Recently, there has been an increasing number of quality management initiatives and public articulation against violations of ethical principles – yet, there is one essential basis missing: Sufficient and unbiased empirical evidence about the situation of (official) statistics in individual countries that is independent of the institutions concerned. The ultimate goal of this initiative is firstly the establishment of a global organization of professional statisticians anchored in civil society. Secondly, this organization is going to develop a suitable Index of Independence and Integrity of Statistics."* A number of important international statistical organisations (such as ISI, IAOS, ASA) support this proposal and will actively participate in the session.

I will keep you informed of further developments in this regard in the course of the year.

IV. Fourthly, I would like to point out that the accreditation decided last year has now entered the phase of practical testing by the committee headed by Magnus Pettersson. Anyone who is still interested in taking an active part should contact Maria Eduarda Silva or Magnus Pettersson as soon as possible.

V. Last but not least I would like to emphasize the financial contributions to the Federation. I would like to thank all of you explicitly for your participation in the financing of a (very moderate) budget for 2019 that gives us a small scope for activities. The treasurer Lola Ugarte will inform you again in the next weeks that in the new year there will be another time to contribute.

Best regards



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