



Why Regional Cooperation in Statistics: A Perspective from Turkey

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Abstract

Statistics has a critical role since the international and local users need the data in order to make policy and conduct academic studies as well as to monitor the results. National Statistical Systems of all countries should meet the needs of users, accordingly, they need to develop/build capacity to cope with these challenges. Regional Cooperation in Statistics is one of the significant tools to develop the National Statistical Systems and to improve the capacities of National Statistical Offices. Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) has benefited from this tool especially since 2003 in the framework of EU accession process. On one hand, as a beneficiary, Turkey has reached remarkable results in close cooperation with Eurostat, EU-EFTA Member States and enlargement countries, namely Balkan Countries, under EU Programmes. On the other hand, since TurkStat has also an expertise provider role in her East and South, the experiences and knowledge gained by regional cooperation programmes funded by EU are positively affecting the development of National Statistical Systems of those countries.

Keywords: EU Programmes/Projects, regional statistical cooperation; Balkan cooperation in statistics; TurkStat cooperation initiatives.

Note: The opinions and arguments expressed in the document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Turkish Statistical Institute.

1. Introduction

The efforts of Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) to continuously improve its production have intensified since the beginning of year 2000 following the Helsinki Summit in December 1999, in which Turkey was announced as a candidate country to the European Union (EU). In the context of an EU membership application, Statistics play a vital role as it has to inform about all process and to prepare implementing the Statistical “acquis communautaire”. This has given TurkStat an opportunity to modernize the Turkish Statistical System (TSS) with key statistical products and to provide data for the EU negotiation process. In this respect, TurkStat has strong collaboration with EU and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Member States and enlargement countries under EU Programmes for a long time. In addition to the cooperation in the context of EU accession process, TurkStat also has a role in cooperation with MED countries, Central Asia and Caucasian Countries, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Countries.

This paper presents a regional perspective for statistical development from TSS. It will bring the specific case from Turkey that participates in and contributes to several and different regional initiatives with the EU, with the MED countries and with the countries in the East and the South.

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2. Background: How did the regional cooperation for EU accession start?

The first contact at the top level with Eurostat (the Statistical Office of EU) in 2000, ensured the exchange of views and determined the general strategy of TurkStat compliance studies to European Statistical System (ESS). During the evaluation process, a general framework of EU pre-accession strategy was drawn up, taking into account the priorities in the Accession Partnership and National Plan. A high level committee was set up to evaluate the situation at TurkStat and EU requirements for the compliance to ESS. The committee determined the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, namely applying SWOT analysis, in the process. TurkStat staff realized a number of missions to Eurostat in order to develop a road map on priority areas such as Agricultural Statistics, Business Statistics, National Accounts, Social Statistics and Business Registers.

Moreover, the detailed analysis of statistical works of TurkStat was undertaken in the “Global Assessment” exercise by the EU and United Nations experts in 2002. This exercise outlined all statistical activities, administrative and technical capacity, and the financial situation and legal framework of TurkStat and TSS. The report of Global Assessment was an international reference document to upgrade TSS and opened the way for future studies.

A general strategy was adopted with the strategic aim to reform and modernize the statistical system as a whole by strengthening the capacity to cope with the new challenges and undertake the responsibilities of ESS in line with the findings which were reached during the evaluation process. “European Commission Accession Partnership Document for Statistics” expressed the priorities for Statistics in short and medium term as well. In response to this document, TurkStat prepared the Statistics part of the National Plan.

Taking into consideration the needs of TurkStat identified above mentioned evaluations, “Upgrading the Statistical System of Turkey-USST” Programme was designed in order to accomplish the short and medium term priorities in the framework of EU Accession Partnership in a multi phased manner. The objectives and priorities of the Programme, which went much wider than the only EU accession process, were designed to achieve harmonization with EU statistical standards in several steps or phases that built on each other. The first Statistical Co-operation Programme of TurkStat under EU accession process was titled as Upgrading the Statistical System of Turkey (USST) Phase I, in short USST I (January 2003-March 2007). The important feature of USST I was to cover Multi Beneficiary Programme Grant Contract which ensures regional cooperation with enlargement countries although it was an EU national programme designed for Turkey’s statistical requirements.

After USST I, TurkStat has continued to implement EU national programmes, namely USST II (January 2007-November 2009), USST III (July 2011-December 2014) and Upgrading Information Technologies Infrastructure of TurkStat (August 2014-September 2017) as well as EU Multi Beneficiary Programmes (MBPs) which are PHARE 2005 Multi Beneficiary Statistical Co-operation Programme (January 2007-December 2008), Multi Beneficiary Programme (MBP) 2006 (January 2008-December 2010), Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) MBP 2009 (December 2010-November 2012), IPA MBP 2011 (September 2012- August 2014), IPA MBP 2012 (January 2014-November 2015), IPA MBP 2014 (October 2015-August 2017) and IPA MBP 2015 (July 2017-October 2019). Financial support of approximately 40 Million Euro, which is the total budget of those programmes, has been provided to TurkStat and other stakeholders.

In addition to the support of EU institutions, EFTA has been one of the key partners for TurkStat in EU accession process since 2002. The enhanced cooperation between TurkStat and EFTA for several years has made remarkable contribution in institutional strengthening and the improvement of official



statistics in Turkey. In this respect, EFTA's contribution to TurkStat studies towards compliance to ESS should be mentioned herein.

3. EU Multi Beneficiary Programmes in TurkStat

Multi-beneficiary statistical cooperation programmes have been designed with Eurostat for the enlargement countries as its beneficiaries.

The purpose of these MBPs is to upgrade the statistical systems of the beneficiary countries with a view to accession. Their objective is to improve the provision and quality of official statistics. They aim at integrating the beneficiaries' National Statistical Offices (NSOs) into the ESS, supporting sustainable capacity building of the NSOs to better meet the needs of their users by providing data that is in compliance with the EU acquis and intensifying efforts to improve the quality of statistical information.

MBPs include three components which are called as Technical Assistance (Task 1), Pilot Projects (Task 2) and Provision of Tailor-made Expertise (Task 3).

Technical Assistance (Task 1) covers participation in multilateral events disseminated in the Multi-Country List (MC-List) established by Eurostat. The meeting list is distributed to the beneficiaries and includes pilot project workshops, working groups of Eurostat, multilateral events specifically organised for beneficiaries, training courses (including European Statistical Training Programme-ESTP courses), activities planned by statistical institutions of the EU, EFTA, European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), beneficiaries and international organisations, such as workshops, seminars, task forces. Secondment of trainees to Eurostat and NSOs of EU Member States or EFTA countries and in-country courses also take place in this component.

Pilot Projects (Task 2) are related to data collection/compiling studies and methodological work in statistical areas.

Provision of tailor-made expertise (Task 3) targets the provision of study visits and consultancy services to beneficiary countries on specific statistical areas by EU and EFTA statistical offices and other bodies responsible for the production of official statistics.

The projects on several statistical areas below have been implemented in order to reach the international standards and EU Statistical Acquis under the EU MBPs:

- Business Registers
- Business Statistics
- Macro-economic Statistics (National Accounts, Price Statistics, International Trade Statistics)
- Agricultural Statistics
- Demographic and Social Statistics (including also Health Statistics, Household Budget Surveys, Education Statistics, Labour Statistics)
- Environmental Statistics
- Dissemination

4. Achievements of TurkStat through EU Cooperation

EU Programmes have provided comprehensive support to TurkStat in order to realize the methodological studies with technical know-how that is necessary for the compliance process with



ESS as by the same token they have contributed to improving the general capability of the Institute by providing technical assistance and tailor-made expertise. While these programmes have helped maintain proximity to ESS, accordingly the international standards, to fill residual gaps and to integrate quickly to statistical Acquis, which is a moving target, TurkStat has made great national efforts to upgrade the TSS and establish a new structure in this process. Legal infrastructure was established for TSS by adoption of New Turkish Statistical Law in 2005 with the important features such as creation of a Statistical Council, maintaining the professional and technical autonomy of TurkStat, transition to multi-year programming which covers Strategic Plans and Official Statistics Programmes prepared for five-year periods. Strengthening of the human resources structure with recruitment of qualified staff since 2003, establishment of Training and Research Center in TurkStat in 2006 and preparation of a formal regular programme for the staff to broaden their knowledge and skills are other examples for national efforts. It should be also stressed that TurkStat has played the critical role in capacity building process through the proper use of EU funds and other international resources, establishment of qualified project implementation team and good communication channels with the stakeholders.

There are several achievements under all EU programmes (national and MBPs) perspective, conducted by TurkStat in the period of 2003-2017. The achievements can be exemplified by participation of around 8000 people from TurkStat and the stakeholders in international and local activities such as study visits, training courses, meetings, conferences and traineeships in addition to the consultancy services of more than 11.000 man-day, language training courses (English) given to 210 TSS staff, technical assistance provided to 12 Ministries within TSS (namely main data providers) via several framework contracts and supply of IT equipment of approximately 9 Million Euro etc.

If we have a look from MBPs and regional cooperation perspective, we may express that these regional programmes have provided the opportunities for the beneficiary countries such as regular attendance to Eurostat meetings, participation in training courses (namely ESTP courses), organization of study visits to EU NSOs and traineeship programmes in Eurostat and EU Member States' NSOs. In the context of these activities, as of April 2017, 2477 people from TurkStat and TSS have attended to abroad meetings, training courses, traineeships organized by Eurostat, and study visits in ESS NSOs since 2003. Besides, methodological studies in TurkStat technical departments with the support of EU consultants and fieldwork in the regional offices have been realized. Several statistical projects with other beneficiaries under the MBPs have been implemented.

We can have a long list related to these achievements, however, it can be stated that the one of the most important results of MBPs is strengthening regional cooperation in Balkan region. Through these programmes, synergy among the Balkan countries has been created. Joint projects and activities designed for these countries has good effect of scale economies. The experiences of the countries have been exchanged through the workshops, meetings, study visits under the MBPs.

Moreover, a network has been established in Statistics Community. The cooperation among Eurostat, ESS Member State NSOs and the NSOs of enlargement countries, namely Western Balkan countries and Turkey for recent years has been improved. Although the enlargement countries are not in ESS, in the context of these regional programmes, they have attended to almost all ESS activities as if in the System and this has provided high motivation for these countries.

The opportunity to directly work with Eurostat (corresponding institution in EU) has been created and a strong cooperation has been achieved. Thus, the developments in NSS of the country have been monitored in an efficient way, the solutions have been proposed in order to cope with the challenges and the strategies for the harmonization have been drafted with the involvement of enlargement countries. For instance, the Eurostat Strategy for Enlargement Countries, 2014-2020 has been prepared



together with enlargement countries and the enlargement countries have taken place in Task Force set up to design the Strategy Paper and directly involved in drafting the Strategy.

The programmes have also contributed to establish a modern and integrated statistical system. More effective coordination with the stakeholders in TSS has been ensured. Team up culture has been established in the System. A common language for both international and national statistics community has been created as well as progress in harmonization with EU Acquis in statistics.

5. Cooperation with MED, Central Asia and OIC countries

As referred in previous sections of the paper, TurkStat intensified its efforts after getting candidacy status for EU accession in 1999 and it was a starting point for TurkStat, nevertheless, as a beneficiary TurkStat was part of MEDSTAT I (1996-2002) and MEDSTAT II (2006-2009) funded by EU.

TurkStat participated in the MEDSTAT I effectively. However, it could not fully participate in the MEDSTAT II since some overlaps emerged between Upgrading Statistical System of Turkey Programme and MEDSTAT II Programme. TurkStat only attended the MED-COMEXT Project (Trade Statistics), hosted a few training courses which have been realized in Turkey and participated in the meetings like Director's Committee Meetings and Partnership Group Meetings.

MEDSTAT Programme has been an important platform between EU and Mediterranean countries for the purposes of sharing knowledge and experience; and increasing knowledge on EU statistical standards and methods. In the EU harmonization process of TurkStat, MEDSTAT I and II have been beneficial programmes involving the complementary activities.

Whereas TurkStat has been involved in above mentioned EU Programmes and MEDSTAT I and II as a beneficiary since 1996, as an expertise provider it has implemented technical assistance programs on the basis of needs and requirements of the countries of the Caucasia, Central Asian Turkish Republics, Balkan and Islamic countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Sudan, Jordan, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Palestine, Tunisia, Niger, Vietnam, Somali) since 1994 mainly with the financial support of the Turkish International Coordination Agency (TICA).

Moreover, TurkStat has given consultancy services (45 expert missions) at other countries (Albania, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Egypt, Syria, Tajikistan, Uganda, Oman, Jordan, Yemen) in cooperation with Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) which has 57 member countries under OIC since 2007. Additionally, the training activities have been provided by TurkStat for the experts from various countries in Ankara with the support of SESRIC.

Through with these technical assistance activities, TurkStat aims at contributing to the sustainable statistical capacity building of these partner countries and strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations within Statistical Community. We can express that TurkStat shares its experiences and knowledge gained through EU accession process with other countries in its region. The achievements in especially EU accession process have provided TurkStat to become a statistical office whose technical assistance is requested for international projects for the third countries. TurkStat has attended to Kazakhstan Project (2012-2017) funded by the World Bank and implemented by Destatis as a subcontractor. Furthermore, as it has taken place in MEDSTAT IV (2016-2019) which is a regional statistical cooperation programme funded by EU as a member of consortium led by Expertise France and as an expertise provider.



TurkStat experts (during 2003-2017 period) provided the consultancy services of 1716 Working Days to the statistical offices of Central Asia, Islamic, Balkan, Middle Eastern and other countries and around 700 experts from relevant countries have participated in training programmes in Turkey. Moreover, TurkStat has been invited to make presentations as “best practice” to international events held by international organizations such as Eurostat, United Nations Agencies. It indicates remarkable contribution of TurkStat experts in consultancy activities (as consultants) in other countries’ statistical offices and increased efficiency of TurkStat in international statistics arena. This is a clear sign that the skills of TurkStat experts increased through the regional cooperation programmes funded by EU during the period of 2003-2017. It should be emphasized that the EU Programmes and EU cooperation process which were referred in the Section 2, 3 and 4, have made considerable contribution to TurkStat to support to other countries in its region.

6. Conclusions

Regional cooperation and programmes have a key role to develop national statistical systems through joint projects and activities, bringing synergies, creation of a common language, exchanging experiences, and establishing network in Statistics Community and among the experts of NSS. TurkStat has benefited from the regional programmes in the framework of EU accession process and these programmes have made an important contribution in the development of Turkish Statistical System with the national continuous efforts of TurkStat. The institutional capacity of TurkStat has been considerably developed in these years by means of the comprehensive studies and maintained with well-structured system since the capacity building is a continuous effort and new developments should be followed in the statistical arena without breaks. Thus, TurkStat has shared gained experiences with other regional cooperation initiatives like MEDSTAT Programme, technical assistance programmes with Central Asia, SESRIC etc.

In other words, the regional process around EU accession for TurkStat had a positive effect on other regional process around TurkStat. We may make a reference to the impact that is one of internationally agreed evaluation criteria for the programmes/projects for this case. The regional process regarding EU accession led to the development of TurkStat capacity and increase in the knowledge and experience of TurkStat experts. The enhanced capacity ensured to improve the efficiency of TurkStat in international statistics community. Thus, contribution of TurkStat experts in consultancy activities (as consultants) for other countries in its East and South has been accelerated. In this respect, TurkStat’s special role may be inspiring for other regional cooperation frameworks and countries.

At the end, regional cooperation approach in Statistics should be maintained in the future for the development of the countries’ statistical systems and international and regional organizations should play the role to design and implement the regional programmes.