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CSO PRESIDENT'S WELCOME ADDRESS

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Distinguished Guests, Dear Colleagues and Friends of Statistics, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this conference. As its co-organiser, I have the honour to host you in the beautiful city of Kraków, the uniqueness of which stems from its long and glorious history marked by splendid and original monuments, and from hearty hospitality of its citizens. As the former capital of Poland and one of the oldest academic centres in Europe, Kraków has become a fascinating place for many prominent artists and scientists. Its local atmosphere is conducive to reflections on the past inspiring also to forward-looking thoughts. Therefore, it seems an ideal place to host our conference. I hope that all of you will feel well accommodated, and that you will spend a pleasurable and unforgettable time in this extraordinary city.

We have gathered here to deliberate on the subject matter that is of key significance, both to common Europe-wide system of statistics and to each country-specific statistical system. I would like to greet all the attendees to this conference, devoted to the development of the European statistical system among the members of the Eastern Partnership. Thank you for your interest and for coming in such a great number, representing so many different countries and international institutions and organisations.

The importance of this event is also emphasized by the honourable patronage of the European Parliament, confirmed by the signature of Professor Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament, and the honorary patronage of Mr. Waldemar Pawlak, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Economy. In recognition of the weight of this initiative, the President of the Republic of Poland, Mr. Bronisław Komorowski, has also addressed this event's participants and organisers. Finally, the interest expressed by EUROSTAT, which organises one of the sessions, also underscores the importance of this meeting.

The main focus of this conference relates to one of the priorities adopted by the Polish Government, i.e. "The Relationship with the East." For this reason, it has been entered onto the list of the official events under the Polish Presidency. Its thematic scope is of utmost practical importance to the implementation of this priority, and to the strengthening of international cooperation at the European level. It is beyond any doubt that the process of strengthening our cooperation,

identifying development strategies in various countries, and coordinating them on the European scale, as well as assisting and cooperating in their implementation, and contributing to European integration, should be based on an accurate, modern and harmonised system of official statistics. Therefore, our aim will be to debate about directions and strategies to be adopted in order to overcome the challenges of bringing closer European official statistical systems and enhancing cooperation between EU Member States and their partners from Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Southern Asia.

While emphasising the need to pursue partnership cooperation, in order to upgrade the statistical systems in individual countries and their integration within common European statistics, one should agree to the necessity to get through a number of problems being faced by global and European statistics. The responsibility for facing those challenges is shared by the entire statistical community and it essentially requires adequate international cooperation. Such conclusions arose from the ISI Satellite Conference, which took place in Kraków two months ago and was devoted to Improving Statistical System Worldwide – Building Capacity.

The aforementioned conference - as well as the discussions held at other international meetings, including the recent World Statistics Congress in Dublin - indicates that each region and country is struggling with various statistical problems, which finds confirmation in our individual experience. This also concerns the European Statistical System, which is tackling new challenges.

The dynamics of socio-economic changes in the contemporary world, the supra-national threats of economic crisis, and the globalisation of economies and social life patterns, have highly elevated overall expectations towards official statistics.

This refers both to the scope of information and to the methodological standards, as well as to information comparability patterns in the international dimension. And it provides an incentive for the international community to intensify discussion on how official statistics should be modernised and improved. These issues fall down into the general expectation, which is to strengthen the essential and continually-increasing role of official statistics in today's world. Quality statistics provide the basis for an accurate diagnosis of the socio-economic situation, indispensable to monitoring the developing changes. It also constitutes a crucial element for the decision-makers and expands our knowledge of the reality we live in.

Such expectations are resulting in expanding statistical objectives, obliging us to implement innovative methods of data collection, processing and dissemination tools. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure a decreased statistical burden on respondents and good quality of statistical output.

The necessity to improve, modernise and revitalize the European Statistical System has been reflected in a number of clear-cut common European measures. Such types of measures are, however, both important and demanding, as the statistics in individual countries differ in their level of development - which

requires different ways of redevelopment or modernisation - and different support from various international institutions and organisations, through strong bilateral (partnership) cooperation. In addition, they function under diversified conditions, being determined by, among others, diverse historical experience. They also differ in methodological awareness and research experience, as well as in institutional arrangements, the type of legal regulations concerning statistical operations, and the scope of information produced and disseminated. Such a situation creates considerable challenges related to redeveloping and harmonising European statistics, including international cooperation and the anticipated effective support given to various groups of countries.

Irrespective of State borders, political divisions or location of our countries, socio-economic systems or other disparities, we all constitute one statistical family and we should aim at creating a consistent European statistical system, regardless of the fact that the ways of achieving this objective may be different. While respecting the historical distinctiveness and values of national statistical systems, we should all focus on accurate official statistics. In consideration of those objectives, we should establish a system of closer relationships with each other, learn about our respective problems and jointly work on suitable solutions, providing mutual support. **This will be our primary intention and the essence of this conference.**

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As a comprehensive understanding of the statistical systems in various partner countries paves the way for effective cooperation, it is, therefore, essential to determine specific stages of cooperation. This should start with identifying the key characteristics of statistical systems of partner countries, in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. This would lay the ground for creating development strategies, and for improving national statistics, by way of constructing a cooperation programme with all the elements necessary for it to work, including financial support. Afterwards, we should proceed with creating consistent cooperation, i.e. with the implementation of our common development strategy.

The principles of cooperation are essential to the successful modernisation of any statistical system. Representing Polish official statistics, we can state this with all our might, as we have ourselves experienced immense international support in the process of redeveloping Polish statistics during the transition period. That is, how we have learnt that such cooperation is both advantageous and effective, which is well-proven by the current shape of our statistics. We have benefitted from this support for many years in many ways, through a variety of forms, including bilateral (partnership) support, international projects, twinning agreements, study and expert visits, training sessions and workshops, and institutional support (from Eurostat, the World Bank, ILO, and FAO). The type and form of cooperation should reflect the needs of the partner countries and the specific stage of development in their respective statistical systems.

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For many years now, we have pursued cooperation with several Eastern European countries. Our principal objective is to share our experience with other countries which are redeveloping their official statistics, with a view to creating a system that is consistent with European Statistical System, what also is one of the priorities of Polish official statistics. We hope that this cooperation is beneficial and effective for both sides. For our partners, due to our familiarity with their statistical systems and with the redevelopment (modernisation) related problems they are facing. It is also beneficial, for a number of reasons, to Polish official statistics, as it fosters the consolidation of research-oriented working relations between our countries. The best example of it is being provided by cross-border research cooperation, which has led to interesting results in the surveys in fields which have not yet been sufficiently covered by official statistics so far.

Let me stress that cross-border cooperation is a very promising area for future cooperation in the field of regional statistics, due to the growing demand for such information among regional and local authorities. Our previous cooperation experience regarding regional statistics is very encouraging. It takes various forms, starting with joint publications, informational materials and databases, through jointly-organised conferences, seminars and substantive meetings, up to joint statistical surveys on border traffic and movement of goods and services. These are the fields in which our colleagues from regional statistical agencies cooperate with statisticians from neighbouring countries, much to our appreciation. I hope that our cooperation will continue, to the benefit of all partners. Therefore, we can draw a conclusion that it is necessary to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries and with countries having common roots of their statistical systems.

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For all these reasons, our conference – its topic and time and place - seems particularly well destined to play a significant promotional role. It is also meant to inspire further activities, aimed at improving statistics in Eastern Partnership countries. I hope this conference will provide a valuable insight, as there are still many essential questions to be answered in the foreseeable future, including:

- What needs to be done in each of the participant country to integrate them into European system of statistics, without a risk of being deprived of their historical identity and distinctiveness?
- How can international cooperation be coordinated in most effective way?
- What kind of target objectives should be attributed to national and international institutions, including Eurostat (programme-based cooperation, as well as methodological and educational cooperation), and in what form should they be produced under the current socio-economic conditions?

The conference programme is structured so as to attempt to reach practically relevant answers to those questions. And I hope that it will set-up directions for facilitating our further cooperation in efforts toward improving official statistics.

Let me once again welcome you to this meeting. Thank you for coming. I wish all of us have interesting discussions, inspiring further activity, and allowing us to create an efficient vision of international cooperation, aimed at excelling statistical systems in our respective countries, and fostering the development of common European statistics.

I wish you a good stay in Poland, and especially here, in Kraków.

