COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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Amended proposal for a

COUNCIL DECISION

on inter-administration telematic networks for statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States (Edicom)

(presented by the Commission pursuant to Article 189 a (2) of the EC-Treaty)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. Council Regulation (EEC) No 3330/91 of 7 November 1991 on the statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States defined a new system (Intrastat) for collecting directly from the consignors and consignees of goods the data necessary for compiling these statistics. It provides for the use of methods and techniques (e.g. automatic data processing and electronic data transmission) which will ensure that data are exhaustive, reliable and up to date, .

2. It was therefore proposed to introduce a data processing and telematic infrastructure based on a trans-European telematic network - to which businesses would also have access - linking up the national and Community statistical systems.

3. This set of measures covers the design, development and introduction of the telematic network and promotion, support, monitoring and coordination relating to all the parties involved.

4. This programme, which draws on the general and multisectoral work carried out under the IDA (Interchange of Data between Administrations) multiannual programme, was the subject of Council Decision 94/445/EC of 11 July 1994 on inter-administration telematic networks for statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States (Edicom).

5. Following the appeal lodged by the European Parliament and endorsed by the Commission, Council Decision 94/445/EC was annulled solely on the grounds that it had an inappropriate legal basis.

6. The interim evaluation reports and the reports by experts drawn up after the first two years of the Edicom programme testify to its importance and usefulness and clearly state that it should be continued.

7. The viability of the investments already made and the modernization of the collection and processing operations which are essential for compiling reliable and up-to-date statistics on the trading of goods between Member States depend on the continuation of the programme and the rapid adoption of this Decision in order to limit the effects of this interruption in the progress of work.

Amended proposal for a

COUNCIL DECISION

on inter-administration telematic networks for statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States (Edicom)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 129d, third paragraph, thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

In cooperation with the European Parliament,

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions,

Whereas completing the internal market depends on the elimination of physical frontiers between Member States; whereas a satisfactory level of information on the trading of goods between Member States must therefore be ensured by means other than those involving checks, even indirect ones, at internal frontiers;

Whereas it is necessary to collect directly from the consignors and consignees the data necessary to compile statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States, using methods and techniques which will ensure that they are exhaustive, reliable and up to date, without giving rise for the parties concerned, in particular for small and medium-sized businesses, to a burden out of proportion to the results which users of the said statistics can reasonably expect;

Whereas Council Regulation (EEC) No 3330/91 of 7 November 1991 on the statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States[1] lays down that the conditions should be created for increased use of automatic data processing and electronic data transmission for the purpose of facilitating the task of the parties responsible for providing information;

Whereas it is necessary to ease the burden which statistical returns place on businesses, while at the same time improving the circulation of statistical information with a view to the creation of the European information market;

Whereas an essential objective of Council Decision 95/468/EC of 6 November 1995 for a Community contribution for telematic interchange of data between administrations in the Community (IDA)[2] is to carry out feasibility studies, including validation schemes; whereas that Decision should be supplemented by operational measures, particularly in the statistical sphere;

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1 OJ L 316, 16.11.1991, p. 1.

2 OJ L 269, 11.11.1995, p. 23.

Whereas the compilation of harmonized statistics, in particular with a link between statistics on trade and other economic statistics, should be ensured in order to contribute to market transparency and to the evaluation of the competitiveness of businesses;

Whereas the promotion of the use of harmonized standards and concepts at European level will ultimately lead to the elimination of duplication and to economies of scale, while facilitating the emergence of new services in the field of statistical telematics;

Whereas standardization carried out at international level in the sphere of electronic interchange (EDI) contributes to facilitating international trade and to simplifying relations between undertakings and administrative authorities;

Whereas the establishment of common statistical standards for the production of harmonized information is an activity which can be carried out effectively only at Community level, in collaboration with the Member States; whereas such standards will be implemented in each Member State under the authority of the bodies and institutions responsible for the compilation and dissemination of official statistics;

Whereas the Court of Justice has annulled Council Decision 94/445/EC of 11 July 1994 on inter-administration telematic networks for statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States (Edicom)[3] on the grounds of inappropriate legal basis and, so that the programme can be continued, a new Decision must therefore be adopted on the appropriate legal basis;

Whereas the interim evaluation reports and the reports by experts drawn up after the first two years of the Edicom programme testify to its importance and usefulness and state that it should be continued,

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1

A set of measures, hereinafter referred to as "Edicom" (Electronic Data Interchange on Commerce), shall be implemented to facilitate the conversion of regional, national and Community systems towards interoperable systems at European level, as a first stage, for the collection of returns on the trading of goods between Member States from businesses, the validation and pre-processing of such returns and the dissemination of the statistics derived therefrom.

These systems shall be based on distributed information systems at regional, national and Community levels, the interoperability of which shall be guaranteed by the development and use of harmonized standards and communication procedures.

These systems shall be based in particular on the use of electronic data interchange (EDI) for the transmission of statistical returns. Computerized procedures may be made available to the competent national and Community authorities and to the parties

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3 OJ L 183, 19.7.1994. p. 42.

responsible for providing statistical information by agreement with the competent national authorities.

These systems shall be developed in a way which takes account of the requirements associated with compiling statistics on internal trade.

Article 2

1. Edicom shall run for five years from 1 September 1996.

2. The Commission shall, in the framework of the interim report referred to in the first indent of Article 8, and on the basis of a report by experts, evaluate the application of Edicom and, if appropriate, propose amendments to this Decision.

Article 3

Measures shall be undertaken only where a clear need for Community action has been established, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. Edicom may, by agreement with the competent authorities in the Member States and bearing in mind the preferential use of existing technologies and products, comprise in particular:

- the design, development and promotion of software for the collection, validation and transmission of statistical information, and assistance to Member States in making that software available to businesses;

- the design, development and promotion of software for the acceptance, validation, processing and dissemination of data, providing assistance for, and making that software available to, the regional, national and Community bodies responsible for collecting statistical information, and where necessary the upgrading of equipment;

- the design, development and promotion of formats for the exchange of information, on the basis of European and international standards, and making them available;

- the design, documentation and promotion of the methods, procedures and agreements to be used in the exchange of information;

- making software and services suppliers aware of the requirements of national and Community statistics.

Article 4

In implementing the measures, the following general aims shall be taken into account:

- to facilitate the introduction and use of these systems, by means of promotion and awareness campaigns aimed mainly at businesses and users and conducted by the competent Community bodies by agreement with national and regional bodies,

- to undertake special measures for the benefit of less-developed regional and national bodies to enable them to take part in these systems,

- to promote the use of the most appropriate telematic technologies and tools to meet the needs of the statistical system, and their incorporation into the various computer environments of the authorities concerned.

Article 5

1. The Commission shall be responsible for the implementation of Edicom. It shall be assisted by:

(a) the Committee on the Statistical Programme of the European Communities, established by Council Decision 89/382/EEC, Euratom[4], in drawing up, quantifying and approving the annual work programme, in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 6;

(b) the Committee on statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States, set up by Regulation (EEC) No 3330/91:

- for the approval of calls for tenders and the evaluation of projects and measures of a total value of more than ECU 200 000, in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 6,

- for measures to implement Edicom other than those referred to in point (a) above and in the first indent of this point, in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 7.

2. The Commission shall keep the Committee set up under the Council Decision for a Community contribution for telematic interchange of data between administrations in the Community (IDA) regularly informed of the progress of the measures.

Article 6

1. The representative of the Commission shall submit to the Committee a draft of the measures to be taken. The Committee shall deliver its opinion on the draft within a time limit which the chairman may lay down according to the urgency of the matter. The opinion shall be delivered by the majority laid down in Article 148(2) of the Treaty in the case of decisions which the Council is required to adopt on a proposal from the Commission. The votes of the representatives of

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4 OJ L 181, 23.6.1989, p. 47.

the Member States within the Committee shall be weighted in the manner set out in that Article. The chairman shall not vote.

2. (a) The Commission shall adopt the measures envisaged if they are in accordance with the opinion of the Committee.

(b) If the measures are not in accordance with the opinion of the Committee, or if no opinion is delivered, the Commission shall, without delay, submit to the Council a proposal relating to the measures to be taken. The Council shall act by a qualified majority.

If, on the expiry of a period of three months from the date of referral to the Council, the Council has not acted, the proposed measures shall be adopted by the Commission.

Article 7

The representative of the Commission shall submit to the Committee a draft of the measures to be taken. The Committee shall deliver its opinion on the draft within a time limit which the chairman may lay down according to the urgency of the matter, if necessary by taking a vote.

The opinion shall be recorded in the minutes; each Member State shall have the right to ask to have its position recorded in the minutes.

The Commission shall take the utmost account of the opinion delivered by the Committee. It shall inform the Committee of the manner in which its opinion has been taken into account.

Article 8

The Commission shall submit to the European Parliament and the Council:

- by 31 December 1998, an interim report on the progress of Edicom,
- on the conclusion of Edicom, a report on its implementation together, where appropriate, with proposals for further measures.

Article 9

This Decision is addressed to the Member States.

Done at Brussels,

For the Council
The President

Report on EDICOM actions in 1994 and 1995

by the Experts' Group

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February 1996

PREFACE

The formation of an Experts' Group was agreed at the meeting of the "Committee on statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States" held in Luxembourg, December 18 and 19, 1995.

Five Member countries agreed to participate in the Experts' Group:

Austria, which was represented by Mr. Gerhard ECKER,
Denmark, which was represented by Mr. Jens THOMASEN who has also acted as chairman of the group,
France, represented by Mr. Antoine EGEA,
Greece, represented by Mrs. Athanassia XENAKI, and
the Netherlands, which was represented by Mr. Vick SMEETS.

The group was assisted by Eurostat, represented by Mr. Uwe KUNZLER and Mr. Bert RECTOR.

The group has met once in Luxembourg, February 5 and 6, 1996 and has moreover exchanged views by phone and fax.

This report was finished on February 29, 1996.

EDICOM Experts' Report

1. SUMMARY

The report by the EDICOM Experts' Group evaluates the application of EDICOM based on the achievements of 1994 and 1995.
Chapter 2 provides background to the conception of EDICOM, focusing on the introduction of the internal market and the new INTRASTAT system.
In Chapter 3, the aims of the report are described.
In Chapter 4, the Council Decision is analysed, and the objectives and aims are outlined in detail.
In Chapter 5, an analysis of the EDICOM actions in 1994 and 1995 is presented, based on the Interim EDICOM report 1996.
In Chapter 6, the EDICOM actions are evaluated. Special attention is given to software developed for the enterprises, national administrations' and Eurostat, and to standards for the exchange of data.
In Chapter 7 it is concluded that considering the conditions, the length of time the EDICOM project has been implemented, and the experiences and results achieved, EDICOM has given value for money.
Chapter 8 contains the Group's proposals concerning priorities, aims, and budgetary needs for the period 1996-1998.

2. BACKGROUND

INTRASTAT introduced
Statistics on commodity trade between Member States of the Community were directly influenced by the introduction of the internal market from January 1, 1993. Until that time, trade statistics had been based upon information supplied on the customs document - the SAD. With the abolition of customs control at the internal borders a new system had to be designed for collecting trade data. This new system is known as the INTRASTAT system and is based upon Council Regulation 3330 / 91.

Ease the burden on enterprises
An important aim of the Intrastat system, as described in the above mentioned regulation, is that the collection of trade data should be conducted in such a way as to ease the burden of enterprises supplying information.

This has been achieved in three ways:

- by introducing statistical thresholds in the Member States which exempt most small companies from supplying information at all (Intrastat Regulation Art. 28),
- by reducing the number of data elements collected compared to the SAD,

- by obliging the Commission to provide an environment conducive to the use of automatic data processing and electronic data transmission (Intrastat Regulation Art. 34).

EDICOM and IDA

This obligation gave rise to the idea of the EDICOM project.
The framework for this project, which was initially scheduled for five years beginning in 1994, was laid down in the Council Decision of July 11, 1994. However EDICOM, created to encourage the use of telematic technologies in transmitting data, is closely linked to another project run by the Commission, namely the IDA project. This project concerns feasibility studies on the implementation of trans-European information networks for the interchange of data between administrations.

In Article 2, Paragraph 2, of the Council Decision it is stated that " The Commission shall ... and on the basis of a report by experts evaluate the application of Edicom and, if appropriate, propose amendments to this Decision".

3. THE AIM OF THE REPORT

The aim of the Experts' report, which must be regarded as complementary to the Interim EDICOM Report 1996, is to provide information and facts to the Commission for the evaluation of EDICOM and if appropriate, the proposal of amendments, and for the estimation of the necessary funds for 1996, 1997 and 1998.
Explanations of acronyms and abbreviations used in this report can be found in Chapter 6 of the Interim Report (Annexe 6.2).

4. ABOUT EDICOM

In Article 1 of the Edicom Decision it is stated that :

Objectives and aims
"A set of measures, hereinafter referred to as 'Edicom' (Electronic Data Interchange on Commerce), shall be implemented to facilitate the conversion of regional, national and Community systems towards interoperable systems at European level, as a first stage, for the collection of returns on the trading of goods between Member States from businesses, the validation and pre-processing of such returns and the dissemination of the statistics derived therefrom".

EDICOM measures may include:

Main measures
- the design, development, and promotion of software for the collection, validation, and transmission of statistical information, and assistance to Member States in making that software available to businesses,

- the design, development, and promotion of software for the acceptance, validation, processing, and dissemination of data. Providing assistance for, and making that software available to, the regional, national and Community bodies responsible for collecting statistical information, and where necessary the upgrading of equipment,
- the design, development, and promotion of formats for the exchange of information, on the basis of European and international standards, and making them available,
- the design, documentation, and promotion of the methods, procedures, and agreements to be used in the exchange of information,
- making software and service suppliers aware of the requirements of national and Community statistics.

In implementing these measures some general aims had to be taken into account:

General aims

- to facilitate the introduction and use of these systems, by means of promotion and awareness campaigns aimed mainly at businesses and users, conducted by the competent Community bodies by agreement with national and regional bodies,
- to undertake special measures for the benefit of less-developed regional and national bodies to enable them to take part in these systems,
- to promote the use of the most appropriate telematic technologies and tools to meet the needs of the statistical system, and their incorporation into the various computer environments of the authorities concerned.

Value for money criteria

Generally the measures implemented must guarantee value for money by ensuring that the benefits are in keeping with the allocation of resources.

Financial aspects

The initial budget for the first two years was 20 million ECUs which was divided evenly over the two years. When the three new Member States joined the Community in 1995 the EDICOM budget was extended by 2 million ECUs to a total of 12 million ECUs for 1995.

and Responsibilities

Eurostat is responsible for the implementation of EDICOM. It is assisted by the 'Committee on the Statistical Programme of the European Communities' and the 'Committee on Statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States'.

Many EDICOM activities for 1994 and 1995 were conducted by, and under the direct responsibility of, the national administrations in the Member States. Other actions were conducted centrally by Eurostat.

5. EDICOM ACTIONS IN 1994 AND 1995

The implementation of the EDICOM decision has resulted in a large variety of projects and initiatives to facilitate the collection and dissemination of data by electronic means.

In order to ensure proper planning and implementation of EDICOM, a set of Action Plans were specified by the Member States and Eurostat.

Although there are national differences in organization, needs, and priorities, a set of common features appear after studying the Interim report.

The initiatives contained in the Action Plans have been grouped under headings in order to simplify and structure their presentation.

Five headings have been chosen to present an overview of the 1994 and 1995 EDICOM Actions.

A. Actions aimed at the providers of data
B. Actions within the national administrations and Eurostat
C. Actions aimed at the users of trade statistics
D. Actions concerning analysis and methodological studies
E. Actions concerning administration and management

A. Actions aimed at providers of data

Development of electronic forms
Special software packages have been developed to facilitate the INTRASTAT declaration process and make use of EDI-based declarations.

Software packages
These systems offer the functionality of data entry, including validity checks of the data entered. The packages can also be used to import data from existing administrative sources within the companies e.g. accounting systems. Various help facilities are available i.e. code lists including consultation of the Combined Nomenclature containing codes for approximately 10.000 commodity items, default values and calculation facilities.
The software packages have been developed to also make use of telecommunications in the transmission of data from the companies to the national administrations.
At the central level, Eurostat in cooperation with a private company, has developed the IDEP/CN8 package which is used in the majority of Member States and normally supplied free of charge to the enterprises.
Two Member States have developed their own software - the Netherlands developed CBS-IRIS, which is also used in Germany, and Portugal developed IDEP-INE.

Promotion and distribution
In the preparation phase of INTRASTAT, and in conjunction with Eurostat, a survey of trading firms was conducted in most Member States. These surveys were designed to obtain an overview of the level of automation used to process logistical information.
Afterwards initiatives followed, the main objectives being to raise future data providers' awareness of the statistical returns in INTRASTAT and to provide information on the data requirements of the INTRASTAT Regulation at company level. Logos, brochures and technical documents were presented for use at national as well as European level.

Nomenclature
Eurostat prepares and maintains the commodity nomenclature - the CN8 - used to classify the goods traded. The nomenclature is kept in a text module from which all Member States' versions are extracted.
The printing and distribution of the nomenclature is generally done by the Member States.

B. Actions within national administrations and Eurostat

Integration of information systems
The change towards electronic data interchange between the data suppliers and the national competent administrations urged the need for message standards. Priority has been given to develop a message for the transmission of INTRASTAT returns by companies. The UN / Edifact was adopted as the standard as there is a growing practice in the field of commerce to apply Edifact for internal and external communication.

Development of computer systems
A number of Member States have been forced to modify or change their computer systems in order to comply with the rules and conditions laid down in the INTRASTAT Regulations. The changes concern all parts of the statistical system, i.e. collecting, checking and dissemination routines.

Disk / fax system
Several Member States have installed hardware and software to handle INTRASTAT returns on diskettes or tapes. The installations provided by Eurostat to the Member States can process various formats, convert the information - mostly EDIFACT messages - to the appropriate internal standards, handle the returns, and send messages to companies when their declarations cannot be processed properly.

OCR system
Hardware to read the large number of standard INTRASTAT paper declarations was installed in only a few Member States, i.e. Germany, Austria and France. An efficient use of the OCR technique requires firstly, that paper declarations are the dominant way of reporting and secondly, that a centralized processing solution is chosen as economies of scale are only possible in this instance.

Equipment upgrading
For a number of Member States the INTRASTAT system meant that new technical requirements and demands had to be met. This phase of modernizing equipment has been possible by the support of EDICOM funds.

Personnel and training
Both Eurostat and the Member States have been forced to employ more people in order to cope with the numerous and complex problems encountered during the first three years of INTRASTAT. Along with the implementation of new information systems, intensive training of employees has been necessary.

C. Actions aimed at users of trade statistics

Data distribution
The dissemination of statistics compiled in INTRASTAT is done at national as well as European level. Eurostat provides the monthly EU results based on data from the Member States. The figures on trade between the Member States are available in the COMEXT database. This uniform client-server system was developed to handle the large datasets involved and to provide users with facilities to specify files or tables to be extracted and to retrieve the data. COMEXT also contains statistics for the trade between Member States and non-Member States.
A monthly abstract of the database is transferred to the COMEXT CD-ROM which is distributed to the Member States and other subscribers and contains user-friendly software.

D. Analysis and methodological studies

Analysis and methodological studies
The introduction of INTRASTAT, entailing changes to the collection of trade data from a customs-based system to a new, business-oriented system, has caused many problems at company level and at national administrative level, consequently effecting Eurostat as well. In other words statistics on trade between Member States have, for the last three years, been facing problems of quality and timeliness.

The Intrastat difficul-ties are here to stay?
The problems encountered were expected to be of an incidental nature. However, it turned out that the problems were of a profound and complicated nature and that there are no quick solutions to the problems.

A lot of effort has been made to clarify the problems and also to propose solutions with the objective of improving the quality and exhaustiveness of statistics on the commodity trade between the Member States.

Quality studies undertaken
Based on the proposals and recommendations of a group of experts, who analysed several of the quality problems, the Member States committed themselves to implementing appropriate methods for improving the quality of the INTRASTAT statistics.

A comprehensive study of the INTRASTAT systems implemented in all Member States - including the new three - was carried out in the last part of 1995 with the purpose of comparing the application of the Regulations, the data collection and processing systems, adjustment and control procedures and the reliability of the results. Interview teams consisting of two Eurostat representatives and two Member State representatives have reported on the systems in each country based on a common list of questions.

The opinion of companies and users
In order to collect impressions of the present system, an opinion poll was launched. One part of the poll was aimed at the reporting companies, another was directed towards the users of trade statistics. The aims of the opinion poll, which was based on two questionnaires (one form for reporters, and another for users), were to obtain a clearer view of the reporting companies' perception of the system, including their proposals for changes, and to ascertain the users perception of the quality of trade statistics and the level of detail they require.

Seminar organized
The results of the opinion poll are therefore not only relevant for the present system but certainly also for the future system and framework. The changes, and especially the future framework, will be discussed in March 1996, where these issues are on the agenda during a two day seminar entitled INTRASTAT.

E. Administration and management
During the planning and implementation phase of most of the tasks carried out under the EDICOM project, Eurostat and Member States were forced to set up steering committees to ensure the large number of tasks were constantly moving in the right direction.
Furthermore, regular meetings of the EDICOM task force have required preparation of documents, translations and special consultative missions.

6. EXPERIENCES OF THE 1994 AND 1995 ACTIONS

From reading the Interim report it appears that the ideal, basic conditions were not present for EDICOM when this project started.
The national administrations were far from being at the same technical level.
The enterprises' readiness to use PC's and modems differed between Member States.
The technical infrastructure for data communication was not available in all Member States.

In other words the EDICOM project had to focus heavily on development and improvement in these areas.

To summarize the accomplishments, i.e. the results achieved and the experiences gained, and to evaluate the 1994 and 1995 Action Plans, the Experts' Group has chosen to examine three major areas of EDICOM.

1. Software for the enterprises and other actions to reduce their reporting burden
2. National administrations' and Eurostat actions
3. Standards for exchange of data

1. Software for the enterprises etc.

Within the framework of EDICOM, three software products were developed for the enterprises. The CBS-developed package, CBS-IRIS, which is used in Holland and Germany, the Portuguese IDEP-INE, which is used in Portugal, and the Eurostat developed IDEP/CN8 package, which is used in all other Member States except the UK., where the private software houses are the sole suppliers of these or similar products.

Stability reached

The programs have now been stabilized after a number of "children's diseases", and are accepted by the enterprises. Most countries have chosen to provide the software free of charge or at a symbolic price in order to make these data entry solutions attractive. The distribution of the programmes is either handled by the national administrations themselves or in co-operation with software companies.

Especially for IDEP there was a serious problem of delay when Intrastat was first introduced. Furthermore, the above mentioned programmes contained too many bugs. However, these conditions have improved satisfactorily, and the organisational framework within Eurostat has been strengthened.

Software companies

The national administrations have established close co-operation with software companies to set up standards on conformity, i.e. a guarantee now exists that for certain software products the Intrastat declaration generated conforms with the standards in the relevant country. In a number of countries IDEP and CBS-IRIS have become the de-facto standard for electronic forms and output formats.

Telecommunication

The software provided by the national administrations usually produces a diskette as output to be sent and later processed by a national administration unit. Some countries, however, have introduced telecommunications. Successful results have been reported in Holland, and in Belgium and Austria using CBS-IRIS and IDEP respectively. In the UK the experiences with EDI are also positive. Telecommunications by networks or telephone lines are generally seen as growing in the Member States.

The CN-8

As a service to the enterprises, an electronic list of commodities has been developed containing the official Combined Nomenclature (CN8) which must be used when the goods traded are declared for statistics. The CN8 is also available in paper format and distributed in the Member States. As with the software some Member States provide the CN8 free of charge, others make a small charge.

Helps-desks

In most countries help-desks have been set up to support the software users when they make their electronic INTRASTAT declaration and face problems. These help-desks are very successful and highly appreciated by the declarants.

In some countries the software help-desks are integrated, or at least cooperate, with the Intrastat help-desks.

Eurostat has also established a help-desk with the aim of supporting the national administrations when serious problems arise. This service has proved to be very valuable and is an efficient way of collecting, recording and solving software problems.

Promotion

Promotion campaigns for the software have been conducted at a national level. The rate of success differs from country to country. Most countries have been reluctant to promote IDEP on a large scale because, until recently, the product hasn't been stable enough and/or the Member States have not been ready to launch the package. Some countries have also offered training courses for new users of the electronic forms.

Communication

Regular communication in the form of, for instance, a newsletter, has not been widely used due to high postal costs except in countries with a relatively low number of users.

2. National administrations' and Eurostat actions

These actions have primarily focused on software development, the setting up of statistical processing systems and the upgrade of equipment.

Registers

A great deal of effort has been devoted to establishing comprehensive INTRASTAT registers in the Member States, i.e. records of the enterprises performing EU trade. The register plays an important role, facilitating the communication flow with the enterprises, and indicating, for instance, IDEP, CBS-IRIS, IDEP-INE users. The general experience is that maintenance is difficult, in the sense that the completeness and correctness of the register can be somewhat uncertain. In addition, maintenance is a heavy workload.

Processing systems

The national administrations have developed their own INTRASTAT routines for validation and processing of declarations including

telecommunications. Individual solutions are, for example, also seen for reminders. Some Member States have installed network systems facilitating the communication between the administrations.
However, uniform functionality cannot be used due to national variations, thereby limiting harmonisation.

Disk/fax
The experience with disk/fax systems, which are installed in the majority of Member States, has generally been good. These systems have been developed as standard, stand-alone systems, i.e. they are not at the moment integrated with the register of enterprises. Fax returns to the enterprises therefore concern only diskette reading problems at the moment, not acknowledgments or reminders.

OCR
Other systems for data capture have been installed, providing valuable experience. For instance, diskette copy boxes, OCR and scanner systems.

IDEP, CN8, COMEXT
At Eurostat level, major progress has been made. The development of IDEP has already been mentioned.
The maintenance of CN8 now takes place in a new text handling system thereby improving the chances of timely deliveries to the Member States. Prior delays have now been reduced. However, at Member State level, the printing of the CN8 is a considerable task as is the following distribution.
COMEXT can now be accessed in an open database system and complementary to this, extracts are available on the COMEXT CD-ROM.

Other actions
In a few Member States the idea of sending trade statistics to the enterprises in return for their INTRASTAT declarations is being examined. Behind this initiative lies the hope of improved motivation by the companies in supplying timely, exhaustive and correct monthly declarations.

The recruitment of staff in the Member States for INTRASTAT and EDICOM has not been an easy task. Special attention has also been given to the training and education of the personnel.
Furthermore, a necessary upgrade of equipment has taken place in several Member States.

Quality improvement a must
Many efforts have been devoted to examining the quality problems in INTRASTAT, which are also reflected in EDICOM (garbage in = garbage out). Individual studies have been made as well as common actions. There are no immediate signs that the problems will disappear quickly, although substantial improvements have already been made.
The general quality of trade statistics is still not satisfactory, influenced by a large proportion of non-response, partial declarations, errors in commodity codes etc.

To improve the situation the national administrations have put a lot of effort into making INTRASTAT statistics reliable, timely and accurate. In the coming years these efforts will continue and may even have to be intensified.

3. **Standards for exchange of data**

The Experts' Group finds that there is widespread use of EDIFACT messages, e.g. CUSDEC/INSTAT and CUSRES/INSRES.
Other EDI standards are also used ,e.g. X.400 lines.
It seems that teleprocessing is in an elementary phase, however expanding. Experience also shows that attempts to introduce advanced telecommunication solutions have not been successful partly because few enterprises are linked to VANs and possess the know-how. Another restriction is the relatively high costs of VAN connections, which are rarely used, or established solely for statistical declarations. Simple solutions have proved to be the right choice to start with ("crawl then walk" solutions).
The national administrations have, from the start, announced certain standard file formats for INTRASTAT EDI-declarations, and a Community paper standard format has been introduced, which was even prepared for OCR.
The national administrations have made agreements with software suppliers and network owners to ensure implementation of uniform standards.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Since the introduction of the INTRASTAT system, there have been many achievements in the field of EDICOM developments.
Considering the conditions and the length of time that the project has been running, the Experts' Group finds that the EDICOM project has been implemented, and that the experiences and results achieved have given value for money.

Valuable projects have been started, some have been finished and others still run and have to be continued.
It has been demonstrated that:

- the IDEP, CBS-IRIS, IDEP-INE software is now stabilized and ready for full scale promotion and wider use,
- telecom solutions are expanding, but must not be forced,
- a satisfactory number of enterprises use EDI declarations,
- the opportunity to modernize equipment at national and Eurostat level brings the administrations more in-line technically,
- the Intrastat problems known are handled but far from solved, and new problems are expected to arise

The value for money argument can also be put this way: if the EDICOM initiatives were to be stopped now and no new versions of IDEP, CBS-IRIS, IDEP-INE were developed, no new CN8 available, no help-desk assistance was to be given etc., the Intrastat system would meet even more serious problems.

8. PRIORITIES, AIMS AND BUDGETTARY NEEDS FOR 1996-1998.

The Experts' Group recommend the continuation of EDICOM with the following priorities and aims for 1996, 1997 and 1998. An indication of the annual budgetary needs is also given.

- Continue and intensify promotion of the use of electronic forms (software packages) developed by the national administrations or Eurostat. 2½ million ECU,
- follow developments of hardware and software to recognize the need for amendments or renewal of equipment or programmes, e.g. EDIFACT translators, disk/fax systems, Windows 95. 2½ million ECU,
- follow developments on telematic networks and tele-transmission and adapt systems to these, e.g. use of Internet to send CN8, thresholds, and other messages to the enterprises. 2 million ECU,
- continue and strengthen the existing data-communication initiatives. 1 million ECU,
- examine the dissemination of statistics as a means of motivation for the enterprises providing Intrastat declarations. 1 million ECU,
- continue and improve the quality and availability of trade statistics. 2 million ECU.

For organisation, follow-up, meetings and other overheads an annual amount of 1 million ECU is reserved.

However, the amounts may vary for the priorities in the course of the 3 years.

According to this an annual total amount of 12 million ECU is needed, accumulating to a total of 36 million ECU for the 3 year period.

The experts' group also finds that the conclusions from the seminar about INTRASTAT in March 1996, may influence the priorities and aims listed and make a revision necessary. This may even influence the budgetary needs.

Financial statement

1. TITLE OF OPERATION

- Proposal for a Council Decision on inter-administration telematic networks for statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States (Edicom).

2. BUDGET HEADINGS INVOLVED

- 1996 budget - Article B5-721 IDA (networks for the interchange of data between administrations).
- 1997 preliminary draft budget - Heading B5-7211 - Networks for intra-Community statistics (Edicom).

3. LEGAL BASIS

- Article 129 D, third paragraph, of the Treaty.

4. DESCRIPTION OF OPERATION

4.1. General objective of operation

The aim of this operation is to introduce a computerized and telematic infrastructure based on a trans-European network interconnecting the national and Community statistical systems and to which businesses also have access.

The telematic network will not only perform the standard functions of transporting information but will also offer general telematic services such as service bureau, information dissemination hosts, messaging services, etc.

The Community and National Statistical Systems cover the data processing infrastructures, in terms of both software and hardware, required by the collection centres, the national authorities responsible and Eurostat for the processing of the statistical information collected and disseminated. All these Community and national systems will have to be harmonized and interconnected in order to cope with the internal market and in particular to meet its requirements of interoperability.

Access to the telematic network will be available to businesses via telematic forms and publications. In addition, the data processing systems of businesses will be able to connect directly to the network on condition that they comply with its standards of information structure (Edifact, etc.) and communication protocols and provide prior evidence that they do so.

4.2 Period covered and arrangements for renewal or extension

Multiannual operation (1996-2000), as there is an ongoing demand for statistical information (continuation of an operation which began in 1994).

5. CLASSIFICATION OF THE EXPENDITURE OR REVENUE

5.1. Non-compulsory expenditure

5.2. Differentiated/non-differentiated appropriations

5.3. Type of revenue involved:

Sale of statistics, partly covering the production of publications.

6. TYPE OF EXPENDITURE OR REVENUE

The Community budget contribution accounts for only a small percentage (in the region of 5%) of the actual cost of collecting the data, since the Community's statistical activities are largely carried out by the Member States. However, some expenditure is essential to encourage the standardization of data collection, processing and transmission to Eurostat.

- **Subsidy for joint financing with other sources in the public and/or private sector**

  NO

- **Interest subsidies**

  NO

- **Other**

  NONE

- **Should the initiative prove a financial success, is there provision for all or part of the community contribution to be reimbursed?**

  NO

- **Will the proposed operation cause any change in the level of revenue?**

  Indirectly. The results of the statistical work on indicators of own resources (GNP, VAT, customs duties) may be used to re-assess the general level of the budget.

- **Re-use**

This expenditure may generate income which may be re-used. The income which may be re-used is estimated at ECU 100 000 per year.

7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

7.1. Method of calculating the total cost of the operation

Point 9.2 gives a breakdown of the operation. The attached experts' report provides a breakdown of the costs.

These costs have been based on the implementation of the programme in 1994 and 1995, the prospects for further development (in particular the number of users of electronic forms and the number of Intrastat returns via telecommunications) and the processing costs incurred by the competent national authorities.

In the amounts shown for the period in question, the part devoted to development decreases while the costs of training, back-up, assistance and maintenance increase in proportion to the extension of the system.

The total cost of the programme is broken down as follows:

	1996	1997	3 years 1998-2000
OPERATING APPROPRIATIONS: B5/7	6	10	30
of which: contribution to the official public Statistical Institutes of the Member States	3	5	15
Provision of services to research institutes and private firms	3	5	15

7.2. **Breakdown by programme component (ECU million)**

	97	98	99	2000	2001
BREAKDOWN BY ACTIVITY					
I. Systems for reporting data and returning data to businesses Electronic forms	3.5	4.0	4.0	4.5	17.5
II. National and Community Statistical Systems Introduction of telematic services	4.5	4.0	4.0	4.0	18.5
III. International standardisation	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	5.0
IV. Promotion/Training/Back-up/ Supervision/Coordination	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	5.0
TOTAL	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.5	46.0

7.3. **Schedule to be completed for multiannual operations accompanied by amount deemed necessary**

Commitment appropriations in ECU million

	1996	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**Later years**	**Total**
Commitment appropriations	**6.0**	**10.0**	**10.0**	**10.0**	**10.0**	-	**46.0**
Payment appropriations							
1996	3.6	2.4					6.0
1997		6.0	4.0				10.0
1998			6.0	4.0			10.0
1999				6.0	4.0		10.0
2000					6.0	4.0	10.0
Later years							
Total	**3.6**	**8.4**	**10.0**	**10.0**	**10.0**	**4.0**	46.0

8. FRAUD-PREVENTION MEASURES; RESULTS OF MEASURES TAKEN

Statistical information is considered an objective means of assessing Community action programmes and thus helps to consolidate anti-fraud measures.

9. COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

9.1 Specific and quantified objectives; target population

The objectives are linked to the provisions of the Treaty on European Union relating to the completion of the internal market and to trans-European telematic networks.

This beneficiaries of this operation are: the Community institutions, the governments of the Member States, businesses, economic and social decision-makers in the Member States, research institutes, universities and the media.

The activities planned for 1996-2000 have four main objectives:

- to increase the effectiveness of data collection and dissemination by national and Community statistical organisations through the establishment of a European infrastructure to even out the structural differences between the Member States in the level of development of their data processing and statistical systems;

- to lighten the burden on businesses in making statistical returns and achieving harmonisation at European level, while improving the circulation of statistical information and thereby creating a genuine European information market based on the devolution of appropriate activities to the Member States;

- to obtain the comparable, harmonized and up-to-date statistical data required to supervise and monitor the policies associated with the internal market, particularly within the context of trade policy, obtain new statistics by product (Prodcom) at lower cost, and link up with intra-Community trade statistics (Intrastat), leading to a better assessment of the competitiveness of businesses and improved market transparency;

- to promote the use of harmonized standards and concepts at European level, eventually putting an end to the duplication of similar activities and introducing economies of scale, while at the same time promoting the emergence of new markets in the field of statistical telematics.

9.2. GROUNDS FOR THE OPERATION

This operation covers all the tasks of design, development and implementation of the telematic network or promotion, training, back-up, supervision and coordination in relation to all the parties involved. It will benefit from the general and multi sectoral work undertaken under the IDA programme and will concentrate on developing the statistical component of these projects.

I. **System for declaring information and returning it to businesses: electronic forms and dissemination**

The main aim is to collect statistical information directly from those with an obligation to provide it, and to return it to them as soon as possible.

Four activities are planned:

1. providing electronic forms:
   a) development
   b) dissemination.

2. incorporation of derived statistical declaration modules into commercial management software packages.

3. dissemination of electronic publications:
   a) development
   b) dissemination

4. making the telematic services available to those with an obligation to provide statistical information for their declarations by EDI.

II. **Community and national statistical systems: Adaptation to the rules of the internal market and to its requirements for interoperability.**

The telematic service, accompanied by all its advantages for, in particular, those responsible for providing statistical information, cannot be introduced without adapting and harmonizing the Community and national statistical systems to cope with the requirements of the internal market.

There are basically two such requirements: a) new regulations or amendments must be incorporated into the Community and national statistical systems; b) the Community and national statistical services must be interoperable.

The purpose of all developments is to harmonize the Community and national statistical systems and to create synergies.

The following operations are planned:

1. Incorporation of amendments to regulations in the systems.

2. Creating an interface between the systems and the collection points.

3. Adding telematic dissemination hosts to the databases.

4. Interconnection of the systems to the telematic service.

III. European and international standards: international standardization.

The interoperability of the computer applications of the various parties concerned (those with an obligation to provide statistical information. national authorities, Eurostat and users of statistics) is based mainly on the application of a corpus of standards some of which are still far from fully defined, particularly with regard to the structure of the interchanged data, protocols for electronic data interchange, and security and confidentiality procedures.

All this standardization work will have a European application while at the same time fitting into international standardization processes.

This standardization is essential at all levels of development for introducing the telematic network and, as such, is an associated horizontal activity. It involves the standardization of the following:

1. flows of statistical data (Edifact);
2. the EDI transmission system for statistical flows;
3. procedures for computer and telematic security, electronic signature and protection of confidential data.

IV. Promotion, training, back-up, quality control and coordination

These activities are horizontal in relation to all those described above. They are vitally important for the success of the project and its operational continuation:

1. the regulations: awareness/training of the parties responsible for providing information;
2. checking the returns;
3. telematic services: awareness, training and back-up for the parties responsible for providing information;
4. the products: awareness/training/back-up for economic operators;
5. products and services: quality control and monitoring their compliance with the standards;
6. coordinating the activities of all those involved.

9.2.1 Cost:

- The Member States are mainly responsible for financing this operation (point 6.1.), since they have well-established collection and processing facilities. If the Commission were to finance this programme in its entirety, **the costs would be extremely high** and **the results less reliable.**

- Given the very large number of units concerned, the development of new statistics and the introduction of a European network of data on businesses in particular will mean that for the Intrastat project alone about 500 000 businesses will have to thoroughly revise their traditional collection channels so as to guarantee the interoperability of the structures selected.

- The bulk of the costs are operating costs (equipment, staff, etc.), in proportion to the number of components at the various levels - businesses, regional centres, national institutes and Eurostat. They are met primarily by the Member States.

9.2.2 Spin-off effects:

- The improvement of statistical information and its dissemination facilitates the work necessary for implementing Community policies (on trade, competition, own resources, tariff statistics, agricultural levies, etc.).

- The responsibility and concerted mobilisation of the various participants in this highly devolved European structure will help to create the European statistical area.

- The operation encourages rather than competes against the private sector. The principle is to provide a set of products to be incorporated into the range offered by private businesses, which will thereby be required to meet minimum quality standards.

9.2.3 Multiplier effects:

- The planned programme is an encouragement to mobilize the budgets of the national statistical systems and to emulate and transfer experience and systems between Member States.

- Trade associations and other bodies representing businesses, research institutes and universities will have easier access to the data necessary for socio-economic studies and analyses.

9.2.4 Need for the operation:

- The data collection, processing and dissemination systems at European level for statistics on trade, industry and the regions are designed as distributed database architectures. This approach provides a greater wealth of databases at national or even regional level, helps avoid the duplication of data and systems and, thanks to the interoperability of these databases, presents new possibilities for compiling statistics and disseminating them to a wider public.

- The activities carried out at Community level aim to ensure that these networks run smoothly by minimising the effects of the differences in the level of development of the national systems, promoting synergies and exchanges between national authorities, developing modules which are common to the different national systems (economies of scale) along with the interfaces required to ensure interoperability between the national systems, and, lastly, by coordinating all the work.

- As with the collection of basic data from businesses, once the regulatory framework for these systems has been adopted, the aim of the Community activities will be either to encourage the wider use of national software or to develop software promoting the use of telematics in order to reduce the burden on businesses in making statistical returns.

9.3. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE OPERATION

Performance indicators:

The performance indicators adopted to assess the progress of work are:

For type I operations (see 9.2)

- Number of Member States using Intrastat electronic forms and/or electronic dissemination.
- Number of businesses per Member State using Intrastat electronic forms and/or electronic dissemination.
- Percentage of Intrastat returns on magnetic and/or telematic medium in relation to the total number of returns.

For type II operations

- Time taken to transmit data from the competent national authorities to Eurostat.
- Number of errors detected in the data.

For type III operations

- Number of Edifact messages (CUSDEC/INSTAT etc.)

For type IV operations

- Number of training seminars held for businesses and number of persons concerned.
- Number and frequency of assistance and back-up measures at national level.

Details and frequency of planned evaluations

The implementation of the programme will be monitored by the Task Force made up of representatives of the Member States and Eurostat, to be set up by the Committee on statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States with responsibility for supervising the Edicom programme and assisting the Commission in managing it.

Lastly, the implementation of the programme will be monitored by committees:

a) **Statistical Programme Committee** (Council Decision 89/382/EEC of 19 June 1989), made up of the Presidents and Directors-General of the National Statistical Institutes;

b) **Committee on statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States** (Council Regulation (EEC) No 3330/91 of 7 November 1991), made up of representatives of the national authorities responsible for trade statistics.

For each performance indicator, the figures for the objectives have been calculated on an annual basis and are being monitored as part of the corporate planning exercise being carried out in Eurostat. The evaluation will be carried out by the Edicom Task Force and presented to the Intrastat Committee.

The evaluation reports on the national measures will be drawn up in accordance with the contracts concluded with other national authorities, in which, inter alia, the timetable and practical arrangements for the work are laid down.

At Community level, interim and final evaluations reports will be drawn up by Eurostat and submitted to the Intrastat Committee for approval and will give a comparative cost-benefit analysis for each measure.

9.4. Consistency with the financial programming

Is the operation included in the DG's financial programming for the years in question?

YES: This operation, which was initially the subject of a Council Decision, was extended in 1994, 1995 and 1996 with appropriations under Chapter B5 72.

To which broader objective defined in the DG's financial programming does the objective of the proposed operation correspond?

Single general objective represented by the implementation of the 1993-1997 Statistical Programme of the European Community.

10. ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENDITURE (PART A OF THE BUDGET)

The effective mobilisation of the necessary administrative resources will result from the Commission's annual decision on the allocation of resources, taking particular account of any additional staff and amounts granted by the budgetary authority.

10.1 Impact on the number of jobs

Type of job		Staff to be engaged in managing the operation		of which		period
		Permanent jobs	Temporary jobs	by using existing staff in the DG or department concerned	by taking on additional staff	
Officials or temporary staff	A B C	2 1 1		2 1 1		1996 - 2000
Other staff			1 FND	1 FND		1996 - 2000
Total		4	1	5		

For additional staff, state when they will be required.

10.2 Overall financial impact of additional staff

(ECU)

	Amounts	Calculation method
Officials Temporary staff Other staff	----------	
Total		

The amounts express the total cost of additional staff for the entire duration of the operation if the period is fixed and for 12 months if it is not.

Costs of staff for managing the operation to be covered by existing resources are estimated at:

- officials (headings A1, A2, A4 and A5): ECU 400 000 x 5 = 2 000 000

- seconded national officials (A-1520): ECU 46 000 x 5 = 230 000

Total: 2 230 000

10.3 Increase in other operating expenditure incurred in the operation

(ECU)

Budget heading (N° and title)	Amounts	Calculation method
Total		

The amounts correspond to the total expenditure of the operation if its duration is fixed and for 12 months if it is not.

The cost of the meetings of the two committees provided for in Article 5 of the draft Council Decision, to be charged to heading A-2510 "Expenditure on meetings of committees whose consultation is compulsory in the procedure for drafting Community legislation", is estimated at:
3 meetings per year x ECU 15 000 = ECU 45 000 x 5 = ECU 225 000

The necessary resources will be mobilized by redirecting existing resources.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM

THE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL ON BUSINESS, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMEs)

Title of proposal: Council Decision on inter-administration telematic networks for statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States (Edicom)

The proposal

1. This proposal follows the decision by the Court of Justice to annul Council Decision 94/445/EC on Edicom solely on the grounds that it had an inappropriate legal basis. In terms of its content, this proposal is identical to the above Decision and does not place any new obligations on businesses.

   For the record, the purpose of this measure is to support the application of the Intrastat Regulation as regards the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics on the trading of goods between Member States by means of increased use of telematic networks and by promoting the exchange of data between businesses and national and Community administrations.

   On the basis of this Europe-wide measure, it is possible to increase the level of harmonization of data and procedures by using standardized electronic forms and to reduce the volume of statistical returns which businesses are required to make. The economies of scale achieved by these operations justify Community legislation.

The impact on business

2. This proposal will affect all businesses responsible for providing statistical information on the trading of goods between Member States (Intrastat), i.e. those which engage in intra-Community trade and generate turnover in excess of thresholds set for each Member State (currently a total of 450 000 European businesses).

3. By using the telematic networks and tools made available to them, businesses will not have to use the forms provided for in the Intrastat regulations.

   By means of a system of thresholds, these Intrastat regulations already exempt two-thirds of businesses from the obligation to make returns, and furthermore these returns are far simpler than those which applied before the introduction of the internal market.

   The national authorities make telematic tools available free of charge and provide training, back-up and assistance for businesses, which are thus able to use these facilities without taking any special measures.

4. The proposal encourages the emergence of new products for incorporating or deriving statistical messages into commercial software packages and thus promotes the development of this commercial sector.

Making the operations involved in statistical returns easier and reducing the resulting workload will have a positive effect on industrial competitiveness and, indirectly, on employment since more resources can then be devoted to production proper.

5. As mentioned above, the Intrastat regulations have already established a threshold system whereby either small firms will not have to make any returns at all or simplified returns can be made via electronic forms specially designed to be easier for small and medium-sized enterprises to use.

Consultation

6. A Europe-wide survey, carried out at the end of 1995, of a sample of 5 000 businesses reflecting the industrial structure of each country and including a large proportion of SMEs responsible for providing information and 2 000 users was the occasion for consulting a wide range of businesses and all trade federations.

An Intrastat seminar attended by over 400 people from various backgrounds (administrations, federations, SMEs, etc.) was held on 13 and 14 March 1996. The point of view of businesses was put forward during the proceedings - a record of which will appear as an official publication - by speakers from various bodies (UNICE, UEAPME, federations, etc.).

The results of this survey and the conclusions of the seminar show that there is a consensus regarding the extension of the Edicom programme and the development of all measures to promote the use of telematic tools.

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