



UNITED NATIONS  
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
STATISTICS DIVISION

**International Trade Statistics – a first step towards Vision 2020  
Seminar for countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia  
Vilnius, 26 – 30 September 2011**

## **Opening Statement**

**Seminar on International Merchandise Trade Statistics,  
Vilnius, Lithuania 2011**

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Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this workshop on the Methodology and Data Compilation of International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS). With fourteen trillion US dollars worth of goods in annual international trading, we can appreciate the importance of IMTS for giving us a feel for the pulse of the world economy, monitoring trade policy and market research.

It is not surprising therefore that international merchandise trade statistics are always in a high demand and consequently all countries compile them to the best of their capability. Through improvements in technology, these trade statistics have become more easily available to users all over the globe. I am glad that the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade) has been able to play an instrumental role in this respect.

The impact of the financial crises on global trade flows highlighted the need for more short term trade statistics to analyze the global economy in a more timely manner. In this respect, detailed monthly trade data are made available by many countries, but are not readily accessible at the global level. To meet this user demand and to enhance the policy relevance and analytical value of the internationally available trade data, UNSD started the collection of monthly and quarterly data on merchandise trade. We are very grateful that many countries provided their monthly data for testing purposes and that a significant number of countries provide this data on regular basis already. UNSD is in the process of upgrading UN Comtrade and hopes to disseminate monthly (or quarterly) data to the general public starting in 2013.

Due to changes in trading practices, customs policies, information technology and the needs of policy makers, business community and general public, the international recommendations for IMTS were revised. In 2010, at its forty-first session (23 - 26 February 2010) the Statistical Commission adopted *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2010* (IMTS 2010) and endorsed its implementation programme, including the preparation of the revised IMTS Compilers Manual and continued technical assistance activities. Further, the

Commission requested that more attention is given to strengthening institutional arrangements in countries to ensure that proper national coordination mechanisms exist for the compilation of high quality international merchandise trade statistics. In a number of countries, even with well-established trade statistics, there are still concerns regarding the quality and international comparability of data, necessitating bilateral and multilateral reconciliation exercises.

The Global Forum on Trade Statistics in February 2011, jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) in Geneva, followed-up on the 2010 Statistical Commission's decisions and made explicit demands to improve the relevance of international trade statistics by connecting and integrating it with other economic statistics. The Global Forum further urged closer cooperation among the national agencies involved in the compilation and dissemination of international trade statistics to realize those improvements. While countries are starting to adjust their systems to comply with IMTS 2010, it is timely to give direction and emphasis of the data compilation issues for these statistics.

Therefore, as a follow-up to the Global Forum on Trade Statistics in February 2011 in Geneva and the adoption of the new recommendations in 2010, UNSD, in cooperation with Eurostat and Statistics Lithuania, is organizing this seminar for countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The seminar will focus on the implementation of IMTS 2010 with emphasis on linking trade and other economic statistics.

The revised IMTS 2010 provides updated or new recommendations and clarifications regarding the key concepts. In addition, the scope of the recommendations has been extended to cover the entire statistical process, thereby giving better and comprehensive guidance to compilers. In particular, new recommendation on institutional arrangements, data sources and data quality but also on linking trade and business statistics have been added and provide important reference points for the review and possible improvement of a country's external trade statistics. Currently, UNSD, in cooperation with the Expert Group on IMTS and with the support of other countries is drafting the updated IMTS Compilers Manual, which aims to provide further guidance and best practices regarding the various elements of the new recommendations, among them the recommendation to better link trade and business statistics.

The main goals of this workshop are thus to explain the new and updated recommendations, to discuss the implementation plans of countries and for countries to share their experiences in the compilation of IMTS, also with view on identifying and discussing issues and best practices for inclusion in the updated IMTS Compilers Manual.

As mentioned, this workshop is organized by UNSD, in cooperation with Eurostat and Statistics Lithuania. I am pleased that all of you accepted our invitation and came here to Vilnius for five days of discussions. We thank Statistics Lithuania for hosting this workshop and for organizing it together with us. We also thank the Government of the Republic of Lithuania for providing their support to this event as the host country.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you fruitful deliberations and to express my appreciation of your professional contribution to this important meeting.

Thank you.