

**For Official Use**

**STD/NAES/TASS/ITS(2003)6**



Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques  
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**English - Or. English**

**STATISTICS DIRECTORATE**

**National Accounts and Economic Statistics - International Trade Statistics**

**QUALITY REPORT ON BELGIAN FOREIGN TRADE STATISTICS**

**Document prepared by Filip Spagnoli - National Bank of Belgium**

*4th INTERNATIONAL TRADE STATISTICS EXPERT MEETING*

*Château de la Muette, Paris*

*7 April 2003 - 9 April 2003 (morning)*

*Beginning at 10.00 a.m. on the first day*

**English - Or. English**

Document complet disponible sur OLIS dans son format d'origine  
Complete document available on OLIS in its original format

**STD/NAES/TASS/ITS(2003)6**  
**For Official Use**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

QUALITY REPORT ON BELGIAN FOREIGN TRADE STATISTICS ..... 3

I. Introduction..... 3

II. Foreign trade statistics..... 3

III. What is quality?..... 4

    III.1 Timeliness..... 4

    III.2 Accuracy ..... 5

        III.2.1 Exclusions ..... 5

        III.2.2 Levels of thresholds ..... 5

        III.2.3 Adjustment rate for trade below threshold (Intrastat only)..... 5

        III.2.4 Adjustment rate for non-response (Intrastat only) ..... 6

        III.2.5 Estimation of statistical value ..... 8

        III.2.6 Revisions..... 8

        III.2.7 Information-sources ..... 9

        III.2.8 Checking the Information sources ..... 9

        III.2.9 Checks using "secondary" information-sources ..... 10

        III.2.10 Confidentiality ..... 10

        III.2.11 Actions to improve accuracy ..... 11

    III.3 Accessibility & clarity ..... 11

        III.3.1 Accessibility..... 11

        III.3.2 Clarity ..... 13

    III.4 Comparability ..... 13

        III.4.1 Comparability between countries ..... 13

        III.4.2 Comparability over time ..... 13

    III.5 Coherence ..... 13

## QUALITY REPORT ON BELGIAN FOREIGN TRADE STATISTICS

### I. INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this quality report is to provide the users of foreign trade statistics with a tool for assessing the quality of these statistics. This report is for public use. It provides a summary of some important quality indicators. The quality report will be updated regularly and will ultimately also include quality trends.

2. We are of course open to comments on the part of the users. If you have any questions, or if you feel that the list of indicators is not complete or that the definitions and figures given do not reflect your wishes, you can always contact the National Bank of Belgium, Foreign Trade Statistics, tel. +32 2 221.48.34 or by mail: [publication.foreigntrade@nbb.be](mailto:publication.foreigntrade@nbb.be), and we can adapt the report according to your suggestions.

### II. FOREIGN TRADE STATISTICS

3. Foreign trade statistics measure goods traded between Belgium and other EU Member States (Intrastat) and goods traded with third countries (Extrastat). They are the official source of information on EU arrivals, dispatches and trade balance. Community legislation in the field of foreign trade statistics ensures that the statistics are based on precise legal texts, directly applicable in the Member States and on definitions and procedures which, to a large extent, have been harmonised.

4. The Intrastat system, which came into operation on January the first of 1993, is based on a close link with the VAT system relating to intra-EU trade. The application of a threshold system means that the majority of traders are either exempt from submitting any declarations, or that the information which they have to provide is reduced.

5. Declaring parties provide the statistical information on extra-UE trade (Extrastat) while completing the customs formalities.

6. The foreign trade statistics are an instrument of primary importance for numerous public- and private-sector decision-makers. For example, foreign trade statistics:

- enable Community authorities to prepare multilateral and bilateral negotiations within the framework of the common commercial policy;
- enable Community authorities to evaluate the progress of the Single Market and the integration of EU economies;
- help EU companies to do market research and define their commercial strategy;
- constitute an essential source of information for balance of payments statistics, national accounts and economic studies.

7. This list, which is not exhaustive, demonstrates the diversity of the users and their needs.

### III. WHAT IS QUALITY?

8. Quality in statistics is assumed to rely on elements agreed by Eurostat and Member States and includes the following:

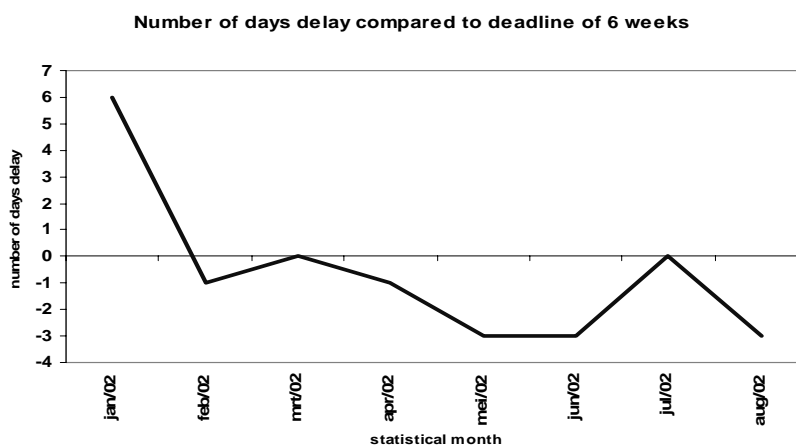
- Timeliness deals with: the publication calendar, reference period, etc.
- Accuracy deals with: exclusions, thresholds, non-response, adjustments, checks and corrections, confidentiality, etc.
- Accessibility deals with: availability, ease of access to data, different formats and conditions of data distribution, etc.
- Clarity deals with: ensuring data is adequately documented, assistance in using and interpreting the data, etc.
- Comparability deals with: conceptual differences between sets of foreign trade statistics over space and over time.
- Coherence deals with: to what extent statistics originating from other sources (such as balance of payments, national accounts, etc) are compatible with foreign trade statistics.

#### III.1 Timeliness

9. According to Commission Regulation (EC) N° 840/96, Member States shall transmit the monthly results of their Extra-trade statistics to the Commission (Eurostat) no later than six weeks after the end of the reference period.

10. For Intrastat, a distinction is made between the publication of overall results and detailed results. According to Commission Regulation (EC) N° 1125/94, Member States shall forward their monthly results of Intra-trade to the Commission (Eurostat) no later than eight weeks, in the case of data broken down by Member States, and no longer than ten weeks, in the case of detailed results. In fact, Belgium transmits and publishes Intrastat as well as extrastat global data after 6 weeks, simultaneously. Most of the time, this deadline of 6 weeks is respected, as is evident from Graph 1.

Graph 1:



### *III.2 Accuracy*

11. The aim of this section is not necessarily to provide figures on the accuracy of foreign trade statistics, but more realistically to inform users of the problems faced and existing limitations in ensuring accurate information. Where measures of accuracy are known, they are included. This section also informs users of the work being undertaken to improve accuracy.

#### *III.2.1. Exclusions*

12. There are certain items that are excluded from the official foreign trade statistics, e.g. items that are of no commercial value. A list of exclusions can be found in Commission Regulation (EC) N° 3046/92 and N° 840/96. Private persons are, apart from some exceptions, exempted from declaration of imports or exports of goods.

#### *III.2.2. Levels of thresholds*

##### *Intrastat*

13. Thresholds are set independently by Member States, in order to gather statistics that meet the coverage criteria required by Intrastat regulations. Each Member State sets these thresholds for both arrivals and dispatches in October before the year of trade. The thresholds serve to reduce the burdens on businesses. Companies below the threshold do not have to declare at all, or they are allowed to send in a simplified declaration.

14. In Belgium, each company with dispatches or arrivals exceeding € 250.000 on an annual basis is required to submit a monthly Intrastat declaration for the flow that exceeds this threshold. This obligation starts in the year that follows the year in which the threshold is passed. However, if during the year the total dispatches or arrivals exceeds € 1.250.000, the obligation starts immediately and is retroactive from the beginning of that year. Adjustments are made for trade below the threshold (see below).

15. Companies with intra-community arrivals or dispatches exceeding € 2.500.000, have to include delivery terms and mode of transport in their de-claration, on top of the data delivered by companies below this threshold.

##### *Extrastat*

16. The statistics of extra-EU trade comprise all merchandise traded between the Member States and Third Countries. According to Commission Regulation (EC) 840/96 statistical offices shall process declarations exceeding the statistical threshold of 800 Euro or 1.000 kg. Currently, no adjustments are made for trade below this threshold because the value of this trade does not exceed 1 % of total extra-EU trade value.

#### *III.2.3. Adjustment rate for trade below threshold (Intrastat only)*

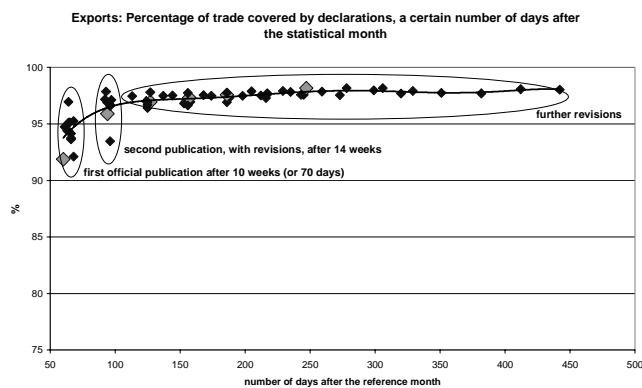
17. After the annual thresholds have been set, estimates should be made for the trade below threshold. The trade below threshold represents on a-verage 0,9 % of the total final intra EU dispatches and 2,1 % of the total final intra EU arrivals (data for 2001, with threshold at € 250.000). These estimates are made regularly and are included in each publication. They are based on VAT-data and they represent - together with a small amount for ultimate (incurable) non-response - the residual values short of 100 % in the right part of graphs 2 and 3 below.

III.2.4. Adjustment rate for non-response (Intrastat only)

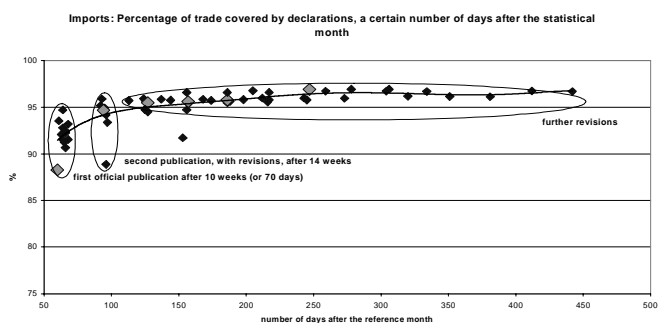
18. Despite being a legal requirement, some traders submit their declarations late, or not at all. Estimates need to be made for their trade.

19. The adjustment rate for non-response (only Intrastat trade, since Extrastat trade is supposed to be exhaustive) decreases in the course of the months subsequent to the reference month. See Graphs 2 and 3 (data for 2001).

Graph 2:



Graph 3:



20. Since these graphs show the rate of total estimates, they include the rate of estimates for below threshold trade. That is the reason why there remains a certain percentage of estimates even after considerable time. Even when the problem of late-response is almost completely solved, we still have to estimate the part of trade that is not included because of the threshold system (also called legal non-response).

21. These graphs also show that between 3 and 8 % of export data and between 5 and 10 % of import data has to be estimated in the first official publications after 10 weeks. See the left oval shape. (These percentages include estimates for non-response and estimates for thresholds; as estimates for thresholds are about 1 and 2 % for exports and imports respectively, the remaining percentages are estimates for non-response).

22. Here's an example in order to clarify the graphs: the left oval shape contains the percentages of trade covered at the moment of the first official publication, 10 weeks or about 70 days after the reference month. The different dots in this oval shape represent different first publications, publications of data for

January 1999, February 1999 etc. (until September 2002). The second oval shape from the left contains first revisions. For example, 70 days after the month of January, we publish a first result for January in our Monthly Bulletin for January (this is a dot in the first oval shape). 100 days or 14 weeks after January and 70 days after February, we publish our Bulletin for February, with first results for February (a dot in the first oval shape) *and* a second version of data for January (dot in the second oval shape). Of course, these kinds of revisions attain a higher percentage of coverage - and hence a lower percentage of estimates - than the first versions of data (first versions are in the left oval figure). This is the reason why the second oval figure is higher than the first one. The horizontal oval shape contains further versions of data, third, fourth etc. The green spots represent the evolution of data for March 2002.

23. Estimates for non-response are made regularly and are included in each publication.
24. In the first estimates after 6 weeks (not included in Graphs 2 and 3), the estimates are approximately 25 % of trade.
25. Initially, the adjustments are made using a constant-sample method (or, in other words, a trend-indicator method). As soon as VAT-data become available, new estimates are produced based on these VAT-data (in practice the VAT adjustments are calculated on a quarterly basis).
26. The constant-sample method extrapolates the trade flows on the basis of the trend of the returns submitted by a constant sample of companies at intervals of one year. This method is not ideal, because it is based on numerous assumptions that cannot take the variability of the non-response rate into account. However, it is a method which can be used after 6 weeks.
27. The accuracy of estimates is calculated as the difference between first estimates and final figures (final figures contain almost no estimates). This will be discussed in the paragraph on revisions.
28. For intermediary and final estimates, an adjustment method based on VAT returns has been developed. On the basis of the various VAT files, the enterprises that do not submit returns to Intrastat, either because they fail to submit or because they are under the threshold, are identified. By means of assumptions and correction factors adopted for harmonisation purposes, the level of non-response is estimated from their VAT returns. In the VAT files, no information is available on the breakdown of non-response by product and by country. This non-response is broken down by product and by country in proportion to the flows recorded (except for the diamond and motor vehicle assembly sectors, in which there is not, in practice, any non-response).
29. The VAT-method is also used for the calculation of estimates below the threshold. However, because the VAT-method cannot be used for first estimates - VAT-data are only available 2 to 3 months after the statistical month - and because the constant-sample method cannot calculate trade below the threshold, we use the VAT estimates for below threshold trade from the previous period as long as new estimates are not yet available.
30. Extra-EU is not corrected for non-response, apart from the first estimates published after 6 weeks. These estimates are calculated empirically, but are not repeated for subsequent revisions because the link with the customs-system guarantees that the problem of non-response is a minor one in extra-EU statistics.
31. All estimates are calculated for all detailed data elements, so as to guarantee coherence between the sum of the parts of the data, and the total data.

*III.2.5. Estimation of statistical value*

32. Trade values are published as “statistical value”. This is the value of goods at the border of our country (so-called CIF-FOB). It may differ from the amount agreed on the sales agreement (the invoice value) as a result of the delivery terms used in the transaction. Some Member States collect statistical value from the trader, other Member States, such as Belgium, collect invoice value and should therefore estimate the statistical value.

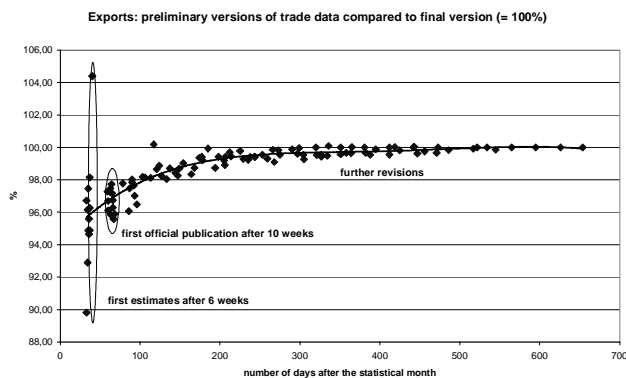
33. Belgium plans to use data on delivery terms and transport mode in order to estimate statistical value. However, as most of our trade is with neighbouring countries, the difference between invoice value and statistical value will not be very important.

*III.2.6. Revisions*

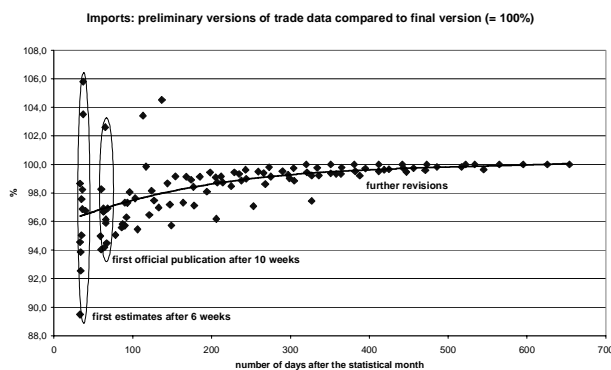
34. As was already evident from Graphs 2 and 3, trade figures are updated several times after the first publication. The average number of revisions is between 5 and 10. The later months of the year are revised fewer times than the earlier months of the year. This is because we have one annual "closure". Around the 10th month of the year+1, we calculate one final revision for the whole of the year. There is therefore less time and opportunity to revise later months of the year.

35. Even the first publication after 10 weeks is in fact a revision of the fast estimates which are calculated after 6 weeks. The quarterly bulletin (see Table 3) is also an occasion to revise the data. And finally, on the occasion of the final bulletin and the yearbook, we calculate a last version of the data. Data are considered final 10 months after the reference year.

*Graph 4:*



*Graph 5:*



36. Graphs 4 and 5 (data for 12 months of 2001) show that first estimates are systematically - apart from a few exceptions - and substantially lower than final data. The difference can be between 2 and 6 percent. In general, it takes more time for import figures to achieve their final level. After 200 days, figures can be said to have achieved their final status. Strictly speaking, revisions after 200 days do not seem to be necessary.

37. The National Bank intends to calculate the exact percentage of under-estimation, and to redress future estimations in order to take these under-estimations into account at the moment of publication.

38. In the meantime, the trade balance does not suffer from under-estimation because the under-estimation is about equal in both flows.

### *III.2.7. Information-sources*

39. This section may provide further information to users of the volumes involved and allow them to better appreciate the work involved in providing accurate foreign trade statistics.

*Table 1: General information on Providers of Statistical Information (PSI's) and number of declarations*

2001	Intra-trade	Extra-trade
Number of Providers of Statistical Information (PSIs)	22.957	14.306
Number of Declarations	344.347	2.598.498
Number of Transactions	8.126.891	3.069.229

40. The PSI-register of Intrastat is largely dependent on the information received from the VAT authorities (the monthly and quarterly VAT-declarations). Each month a magnetic tape is received from these authorities, containing all VAT declarations. These declarations enable the National Bank to determine who is an Intrastat-declarant and who is not.

41. For Extrastat, the problem of detecting declarants is not relevant, since the customs declaration is mandatory without a threshold.

42. For specific movements, alternative information sources are consulted (e.g. ship's register for vessels, aviation register for aeroplanes, the office of offshore fishing for sea-fish, wrecks and minerals, etc.).

### *III.2.8. Checking the Information sources*

43. Checking and correcting errors is labour intensive and the National Bank needs to make judgements about when to investigate a problem. Our computer program submits about 4,5 million errors or supposed errors per year to the people checking the declarations. This means that, given the total number of 11 million records declared each year (see Table 1), almost half of the records contains either an error or something which is worth investigating.

44. To check the quality of the data contained in the declarations, a number of controls are executed. The National Bank has an automatic control system, installed to perform a first control of Intrastat and Extrastat declarations at the moment of their arrival. The system checks for missing or erroneous codes (non-existent or expired codes) and missing data, and sometimes even adds, completes or changes these if possible; it also checks if data are plausible (e.g. a product A cannot weigh more than x kilograms per unit). Part of the errors are therefore corrected automatically. These are routine errors that are relatively

easy to correct and that do not influence significantly the final statistical results. Difficult or far-reaching errors, however, still require human intervention and often even contact with the declarant.

45. Moreover, certain problems can only be detected when the data have been aggregated, which is sometimes a few weeks after the arrival of the declarations. In particular indices and the chronological series are useful tools for detecting problems. Therefore, data destined for publication are also analysed and certain inconsistencies are detected on the aggregate level, for example by way of traditional outlier-detection systems.

46. The main errors made in the declarations are, in decreasing order of importance, implausible value, weight or supplementary unit (detection of this kind of errors is made by controlling the value/weight ratio, the value/units ratio or the units/weight ratio), omitted weight, omitted supplementary unit, and non-existing commodity code.

### *III.2.9. Checks using "secondary" information-sources*

47. The National Bank not only checks the internal coherence of its data. It also compares its data with the data from VAT declarations. As a supplementary check, the trade of goods recorded in the balance of payments is compared to the trade in goods declared for foreign trade statistics.

48. Another interesting check of the foreign trade statistics is a mirror study with a partner country. This can reveal some important gaps in statistics. In 2000, Belgian exports to the 14 other Member states were in total 13 % higher than the corresponding imports published by the other 14 Member states. This gap tends to grow slightly as the years go on. One possible explanation is the so-called Rotterdam-effect (or, better, Antwerp-effect). Goods which arrive in the EU via Belgium, are often directly shipped to the hinterland. Companies in the hinterland often forget to declare an arrival from Belgium because, in their mind, they are importing from a third country. However, this declaration is obligatory because, as a consequence of a customs-clearance in Belgium, these goods are in free circulation and no longer accompanied by a customs paper. Hence, there must be Intrastat-declarations to replace the customs declarations.

49. Belgian arrivals are much more in line with the other Member states' dispatches.

50. Finally, in the frame of adjustments based on the VAT return, the VIES listing (i.e. the VAT report of EU deliveries) is used to make corrections for triangular trade. The purpose of these secondary sources is to provide supplementary information, on top of the reported trade data. This secondary information can be used to check the credibility of the data or as a verification of traders' declarations.

### *III.2.10. Confidentiality*

51. Traders can have their trade data camouflaged if the published figures would enable them to be identified. All Member States have their own procedures and rules for guaranteeing confidentiality. Special procedures have to be installed because simply aggregating data before publication does not exclude the possibility of information relating to a trader showing up in the data.

52. Whether partly or completely suppressed, full data for suppressed commodity codes is re-introduced in higher level aggregations (i.e. HS2) where it is no longer possible to identify or deduce data for an individual trader, as may be the case on the less aggregated level of commodity codes (i.e. CN8). This allows complete data to be available to users but under broad commodity headings or at grand total level.

53. In Belgium, passive confidentiality is applied. When one or two companies represent - together or alone - more than 80 % of trade in a certain type of commodity, each of them is entitled to request that the publications of CN8 totals be ca-mouflaged, so that their individual declarations cannot be inferred from the publication.

54. In the table 2, the importance of confidentiality on the total trade data is illustrated. Confidentiality is mostly requested by declarants for their exports.

*Table 2: The effect of confidentiality on the total trade data*

(data 2001)		Confidential	Non confidential
Export value	Intra-EU	3,5 %	96,5 %
	Extra-EU	5,3 %	94,7 %
	Total	3,9 %	96,1 %
Import value	Intra-EU	0,4 %	99,6 %
	Extra-EU	1,3 %	98,7 %
	Total	0,7 %	99,3 %

55. The HS2-chapters that are most involved in ca-mouflaging are the chapters 93 concerning arms and ammunition, 28 for inorganic chemicals, 81 for metals and 79 for zinc.

### *III.2.11 Actions to improve accuracy*

56. In order to avoid errors and non-response as much as possible, the National Bank periodically organises roadshows all over the country to inform the declarants of their duty and of the Intrastat methodology. A help desk is also permanently available to declarants having problems while completing their declaration (methodological questions, technical problems, etc.). The declarants are also provided with a website, free manuals, CD-ROMs, software etc.

57. Traders above the thresholds are legally obliged to submit declarations within certain deadlines. The National Bank tries to ensure, by all possible means (persuasion, reminders, on-the-post assistance), that the declarants fulfil this obligation. If they nevertheless refuse to send a declaration in time, a registered letter is sent. Upon the expiry of the time-limit set in the registered letter, the declarant receives a visit and a record of evidence for hearing is drawn up by a senior official of the National Bank. This statement of evidence includes either the date by which the declarant promises to send in his declarations or the refusal by the declarant to participate. If the declarant fulfils his obligations and starts submitting his declarations within the time-limit agreed in the record of evidence, then the case is settled. If the declarant does not fulfill his undertakings, or if he fails to cooperate, a file for judicial proceedings is drawn up. This file as well as the statement of evidence are then sent to the Public Prosecutor, who takes over the case. In most cases, the statistical obligations are fulfilled before the file is sent to the Public Prosecutor.

## **III.3 Accessibility & clarity**

### *III.3.1 Accessibility*

58. Statistical data must be easily accessible by all users under equal conditions and available in the formats that users desire.

59. Foreign trade statistics are published at different levels of detail. The most detailed results that are published are broken down by approximately 10.000 subheadings of the Combined Nomenclature (CN at 8 digits). This tariff and statistical classification is based on the international classification known as the

Harmonized System or HS (depending on the level of breakdown, this could be 2 to 6 digits). Results are also presented in accordance with the Standard International trade Classification (SITC). Conversion tables allow recoding from the CN to the SITC. Imports and exports of goods are also classified according to other nomenclatures (NACE, CGCE ...).

60. Another breakdown of the statistics is on the country level. For exports and dispatches, the trading partner is the country or Member State of destination of the goods. For imports (extra EU trade), the trading partner is the country of origin. In certain cases (i.e. returned goods, works of art), the partner country for imports is the country of consignment. For arrivals (intra EU trade), the trading partner is the Member State of consignment of the goods. Table 3 contains the complete list of publications on foreign trade statistics.

*Table 3: List of publications*

#/year	Content	Available within
12	Press release: Monthly and cumulative results, in value; Development of Belgium's foreign trade; Growth percentages; Trade Balance; Comments	10 weeks
12	Monthly Bulletin: Monthly and cumulative results, in value; Development of Belgium's foreign trade; Belgian foreign trade indices; Belgian foreign trade by major partner countries; Belgian foreign trade by sections of the Harmonised System (22 sections); Monthly and cumulative results, in value, according to the "national concept"; Comments, including estimates after 6 weeks (for the month +1)	10 weeks
4	Quarterly Bulletin: Quarterly and monthly results, in value; Foreign trade by sections and chapters of the HS; By sections and divisions of the SITC; By Broad Economic Categories; By NACE/BEL branches and groups; By countries; Indices by SITC 1 digit	4 months
1	Monthly and Quarterly Bulletin (final results): Same as monthly and quarterly bulletin but final results	10 months
1	Yearbook: Detailed results by CN8 commodity code and by major countries combined	10 months
4	Regional Bulletin: Export data, in value; By region and by province; By country of consignment; By section of the HS	4 months

61. All these publications can be consulted free of charge on "[ww.bnb.be/DQ/N/PlanningPapPub.htm](http://www.bnb.be/DQ/N/PlanningPapPub.htm)" in PDF-format.

62. Our main statistical site - [www.belgostat.be](http://www.belgostat.be) - contains some of the information available in these PDF-files, but in a form more easily accessible.

63. Moreover, the Yearbook is available at "[www.nbb.be/IXD01BK/](http://www.nbb.be/IXD01BK/)"

64. Belgostat as well as the Yearbook-internet provide possibilities for data transfer to users' own platforms.

65. Tailor-made and detailed foreign trade data can be obtained at

National Bank of Belgium  
 Foreign Trade Unit  
<mailto:Publication.foreigntrade@nbb.be>  
 tel. +32 2 221.44.79  
 fax. +32 2 221.48.34

66. Our website ([www.nbb.be](http://www.nbb.be)) contains both electronic versions of our paper publications (mostly macro-economic or market publications) and a large database of detailed foreign trade data (on CN2 and CN8 level).

67. Further information concerning the content of the publications or to place an order, please contact the same address.

### *III.3.2 Clarity*

68. Clarity of publication depends on assistance provided in using and interpreting statistics, and in comments and analysis of results available. Figures carry with them the appropriate metadata, so that the user can understand and interpret them correctly.

69. Publications always include methodological notes. Every change in methodology is explained in the first publication according to the new methodology. Users can also contact our specialists (see the e-mail address and the telephone number given above).

## **III.4 Comparability**

### *III.4.1. Comparability between countries*

70. Comparability of foreign trade statistics of different countries may be affected by different definitions.

71. In the last years, some mirror statistics have been drawn up and studied, in which the Belgian data were compared with the data of partner countries. These studies revealed some important discrepancies, some of which could be solved (see above).

### *III.4.2. Comparability over time*

72. Comparability over time is another important aspect of quality. Changes due to definitions, coverage or methods and other changes can have an impact on continuity. Since the introduction of trade statistics, methodological changes have often been required. In 1993, the Intrastat system has been introduced. Before 1998, the trade of goods in Belgium was recorded for the BLEU (Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union) as a whole.

73. From 1998 on, Luxembourg and Belgium each publish their own trade statistics. Belgian trade statistics are published according to the EU concept, in which indirect transit is included. Through the years, other minor changes were also introduced (e.g. raising the declaration threshold). In response to the two major changes in 1998 (transition towards Belgian data based on the EU concept), the time series were retroactively recalculated up to 1993 according to the new methodology.

## **III.5 Coherence**

74. Statistics are coherent if they can be used together.

75. Apart from the foreign trade statistics information on external trade can be found in the business surveys (business cycles) and in VAT declarations. (Data in National Accounts and Balance of Payments originate from foreign trade statistics and therefore cannot be considered as a point of reference). These data must relate to one another. The National Bank regularly compares these different statistics. Graph 6 gives one example of such a comparison.

76. However, the compilation of the data and the production of the above mentioned statistics follow the recommendations (sources and methods) of different international organisations, i.e. Eurostat, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations (UN), World Trade Organisation, etc. (see Table 4). Different methodological choices can affect coherence.

Graph 6:

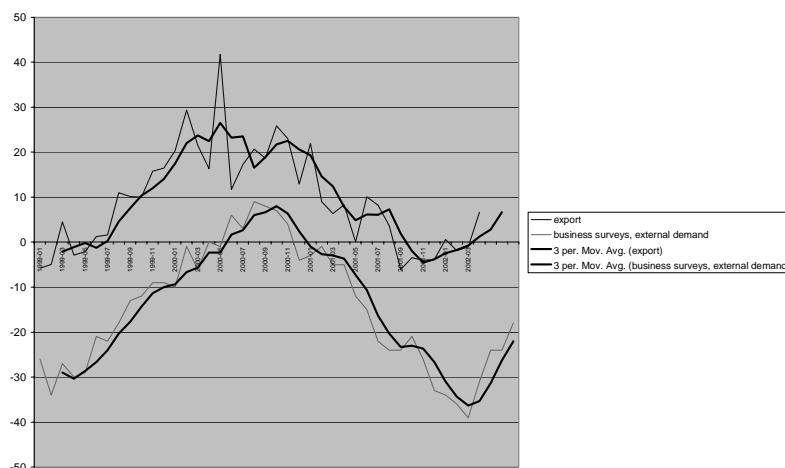


Table 4: Differences with other statistics

Belgian Trade statistics	Provisional/Final data			National Accounts			Balance of Payments			Trade statistics EU Partners		
	Yes	No	P *	Yes	No	P	Yes	No	P	Yes	No	P
Same Concepts & Definitions	X					X			X	X		
Same Classifications	X				X			X		X		
Same aggregation level	X				X			X		X		
Same statistical unit/object/population	X					X			X		X	
Same reference period	X				X		X			X		
Same correction methods			X		X			X				X

P stands for Partially