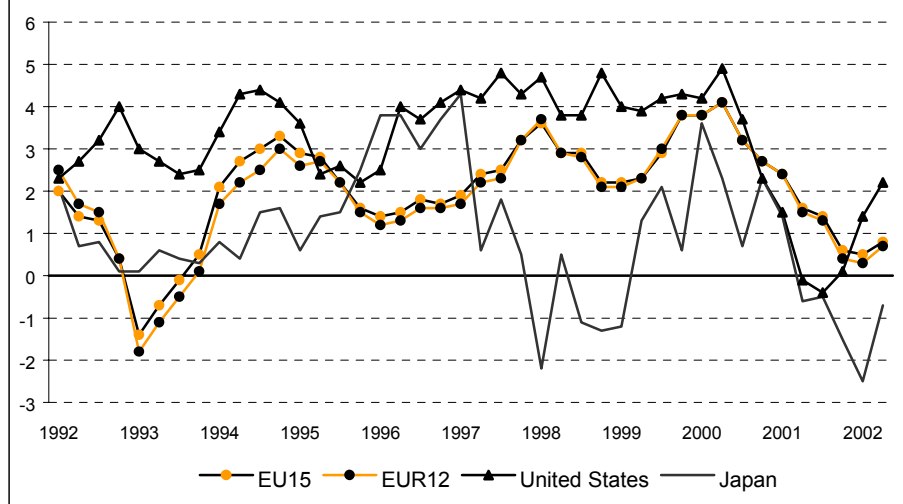


QUARTERLY ACCOUNTS

Ten years' data on growth of GDP

Ingo Kuhnert

Figure 1. GDP, Percentage change compared to the same quarter of the previous year, EU15, euro-zone, US and Japan seasonally adjusted, at constant prices (1995)



Quarterly National Accounts have a long tradition in some European Union Member States, and for some countries main aggregates from quarterly accounts may be available for a time span well in excess of thirty years. The European Council regulation introducing the European system of National Accounts ESA95 ⁽¹⁾ asks Member States to provide backward calculations just to 1970 in the case of main aggregates and back to 1980 or 1990 for some more detailed accounts.

The calculation of quarterly National Accounts series for the EU15 and the euro-zone by Eurostat must take into account that, for some Member States, National accounts for years earlier than 1995 were not compiled according to ESA95 and that, for Germany, no comparable figures including the economic territory of the former GDR can be provided for years earlier than 1991. German backward calculations are restricted to the territory of the former Federal Republic of Germany. Thus at present, Eurostat is calculating series for the European aggregates back to 1991, and backward calculations will present a break in 1990. While having series starting in 1991 may not be too long a period covered, eleven years' data available now means that it may be worthwhile to have a look at the development in some European aggregates for more than the latest four quarters covered in Eurostat's regular quarterly *Statistics in focus* publications.

Given the limited space available, we will focus mainly on GDP as a widely used global indicator to study the development of the European economy by having a look at the presence of cycles, at the relation of the European aggregates to the series of some of the bigger Member States and by verifying to which extent movements in GDP are related to movements in the main expenditure components.

⁽¹⁾ Council Regulation 2223/96 of June 25th 1996. Annex B to this regulation specifies a transmission programme indicating which variables are to be transmitted by National Statistical Institutes to Eurostat, when the transmission is due and which periods shall be covered. Member States were granted certain well specified derogations with respect to the standard transmission programme.

Statistics in focus

ECONOMY AND FINANCE

THEME 2 – 57/2002

NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

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Economic Business Cycles

The fact that economic aggregates do not climb on a steady trend but rather experience occasional booms of activity and recessions is a well-known and well-observed phenomenon. Virtually every economist recognised the existence of fluctuations in the general level of economic activity. But the concept of a regular cyclical pattern, according to which these fluctuations were recurrent in a precise periodic way, was only put forward late in the 19th century.

Nowadays, the analysis of cyclical behaviour of the main macroeconomic variables is one of the major topics in the field of short-term analysis. A correct identification of relevant cycles allows the identification of turning points and also, in a multivariate framework (leading indicators) to anticipate and forecast them.

There is a long tradition of analysis and identification of economic cycles in Anglo-Saxon countries, especially in the United States, where the analysis and identification of Business Cycles is due to the seminal work of Burns and Mitchell (*Measuring Business Cycles*, NBER, 1946). In Europe the cyclical “culture” became common to analysts, policy makers, and economic agents more recently and a specific methodological framework is still at issue.

In particular, the identification of the euro-zone business cycle is a major issue for short-term economic analysis, but creates some difficulties. Specifically, we must seek to understand and explain the pattern of the Euro-zone's business cycle by using time series data over a period where this zone did not exist. Moreover, the system to provide Euro-zone economic information is still work-in-progress and the current set of euro-zone economic indicators is still incomplete, particularly when compared to the statistics available on the US economy.

Nevertheless, to estimate the business cycle, analysts have to face two main problems. The first one is the multiplicity of economic approaches and statistical methods to define the so-called “cycle”. The second one is the multiplicity of economic indicators depicting the many faces of economic activity: GDP, Employment, Industrial Production Index, Business Climate, etc.

In the economic literature three basic approaches to analysing business cycle fluctuations can be outlined: the classical business cycle, the growth cycle (deviation cycle) and the growth rate cycle.

In a **classical business cycle** the fluctuations refer to the level of the economic activity and to the sign of the changes — a recession is almost always associated to a negative growth rate. Pagan (*Toward an understanding of some business cycle characteristics*, Australian Economic Review, 1997) defined classical cycles as: “...*hills and valleys in a plot of the levels of the series...representing the general level of economic activity*”. The main drawback of this approach is the fact that it requires very long time series, not always available. Moreover, typically growing economies do not show clear evidence of such cycles in levels.

In contrast, **growth cycles** are defined as fluctuations in the stationary part of the economic activity from its long-run trend. In fact, they are also referred as “*deviation cycles*” since the fluctuations are calculated as the difference from the trend. This approach requires the estimation of the trend component and the most common methods are the Hodrick-Prescott filter (HP), the Baxter and King band pass and the unobserved components approach.

The **growth rate cycle** is based on the ratio of the most recent figure to the average of the preceding twelve months. This approach can be considered as an alternative, and very simple, way to obtain detrended series. The main advantage of this approach is that it is particularly suitable for real time monitoring and forecasting of the economic activity.

In selecting the indicators for identifying business cycles, GDP is the main gauge for economic activity. Still, different variables may follow distinct cyclic patterns, exhibiting lead/lag relationships.

Development of GDP by country

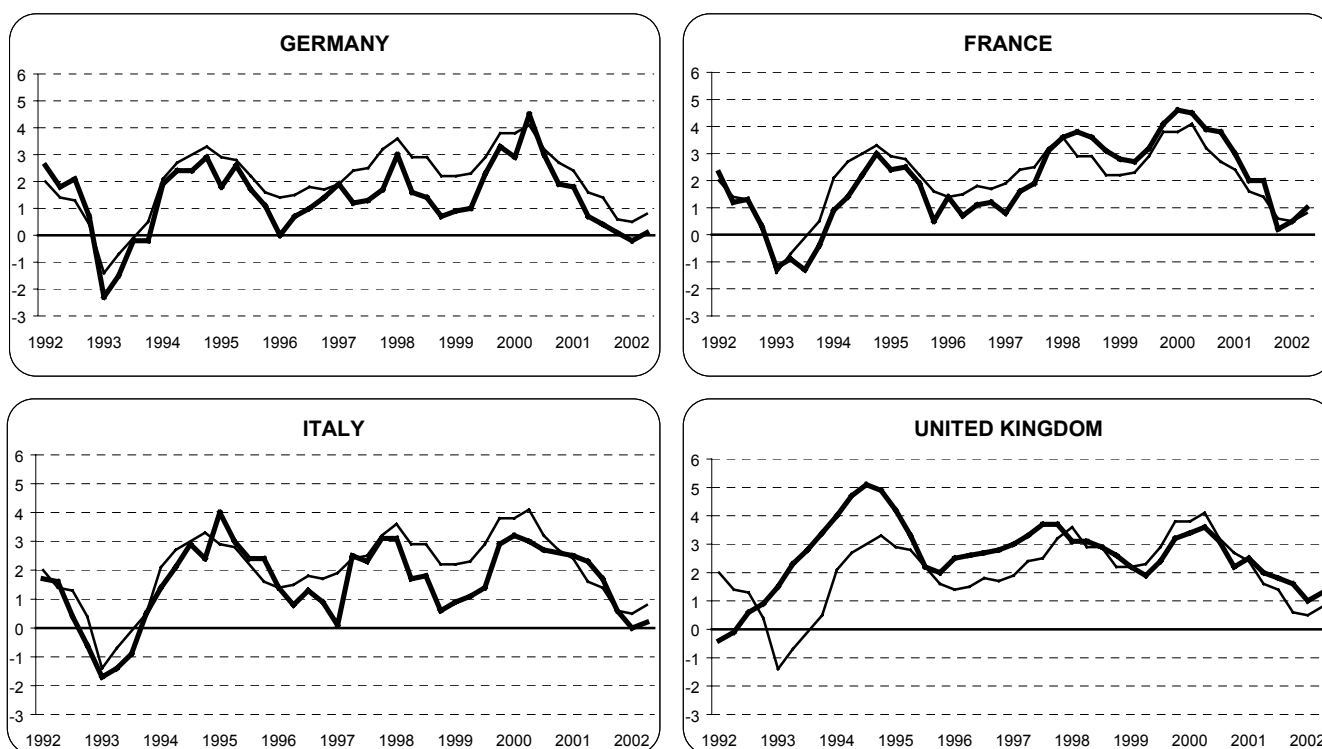
Figure 1 shows the percentage change of GDP compared to the same quarter of the previous year. Hardly surprisingly, the euro-zone (EUR12) and the EU15 show very similar movements, while the United States enjoyed higher growth rates and only in declining from the 2000 high passed below European growth. Japan, on the other hand, follows a quite distinct path through the decade and has suffered from relatively low growth since 1997.

Figure 2 shows the corresponding values for the EU15 as a thin line in contrast to the three biggest economies inside the euro-zone, that is Germany, France and Italy, and the United Kingdom as the major non-euro-zone economy in the EU15, each of them given by a bold line. The three euro-zone countries exhibit quite similar developments, while the UK has a somewhat distinctive pattern, which is true most notably in the early nineties. To allow an easier comparison, the following table also states the occurrence and size of minima and maxima seen in Figure 2 and relates them to the corresponding extremes in the European series.

Occurrence of minima and maxima in growth rates for the EU15, the euro-zone and the biggest Member States, quarter of occurrence and value for the growth rate compared to the same quarter of the previous year

Minima											
EU15		EUR12		D		F		I		UK	
1993q01	-1.4%	1993q01	-1.8%	1993q01	-2.3%	1993q03	-1.3%	1993q01	-1.7%		
1996q01	1.4%	1996q01	1.2%	1996q01	0.0%	1995q04	0.5%	1997q01	0.1%	1995q04	2.0%
1999q01	2.2%	1998q04/99q01	2.2%	1998q04	0.7%	1999q02	2.7%	1998q04	0.6%	1999q02	1.9%
Maxima											
EU15		EUR12		D		F		I		UK	
1994q04	3.3%	1994q04	3.0%	1994q04	2.9%	1994q04	3.0%	1995q01	4.0%	1994q03	5.1%
1998q01	3.6%	1998q01	3.7%	1998q01	3.0%	1998q02	3.8%	1997q04/98q01	3.1%	1997q03/04	3.7%
2000q02	4.1%	2000q02	4.1%	2000q02	4.5%	2000q01	4.6%	2000q01	3.2%	2000q02	3.6%

Figure 2. GDP by country, Percentage change compared to the same quarter of the previous year, seasonally adjusted, at constant prices (1995)



Development of GDP by main components

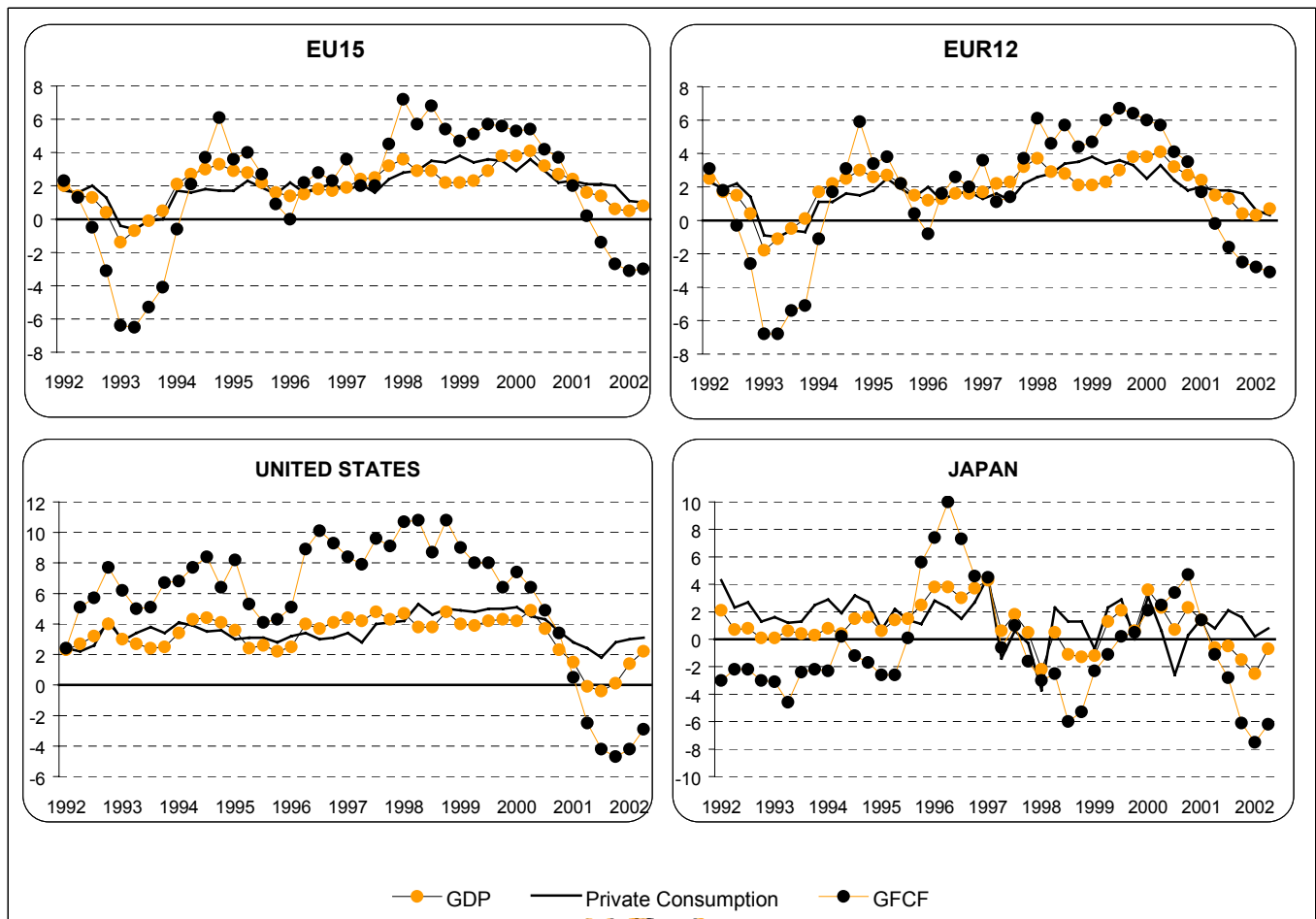
Turning from Member States to components of GDP in search for an explanation of the cycles observed for European GDP, figure 3 shows the temporal development of growth for the two main components of GDP from the expenditure side, that is private final consumption expenditure (i.e. consumption expenditure by private households and non-profit institutions serving households) and gross fixed capital formation. Government consumption and the external balance, on the other hand, will not be shown here.

The two time series show coherence in the overall direction of movement, but volatility is notably higher for investments than for private consumption. Since private consumption expenditure is usually the far bigger component — around three times the value of investment — GDP cycles will follow closely those of consumption.

Tables T1, T2 and T3 provide recent figures for GDP growth over the period 1991 to 2001 and the first quarters of 2002 both for the EU15 and for the euro-zone (EUR12). For the latest quarters in particular, results will still be subject to revisions.

Growth rates are expressed as percentage change compared to the same quarter of the previous year (t/t-4) and to the previous quarter (t/t-1), where the (t/t-4) growth rates are given both calculated from seasonally adjusted data (table T1) and calculated from raw data (table T3). As long as the seasonal pattern is supposed to be basically repeated every year, comparing the same quarter of different years should give a growth rate broadly unaffected by seasonal effects; thus the (t/t-4) growth rates are commonly calculated from raw data. We have chosen to indicate both since Eurostat's regular quarterly publications are usually based on t/t-4 rates calculated from seasonally adjusted, not raw data. The missing values for 1991 are due to the lack of data for 1990, so that the respective base for calculating growth rates may be missing.

Figure 3. GDP and main components, Percentage change compared to the same quarter of the previous year, seasonally adjusted, at constant prices (1995)



T1
GDP, private consumption expenditure and gross fixed capital formation, Euro-zone and EU15

Percentage change compared to the same quarter of the previous year — seasonally adjusted — at constant prices (1995)

	year	Gross domestic product at market prices				Household and NPISH final consumption expenditure				Gross fixed capital formation			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
EU 15	1991	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	1992	2.0	1.4	1.3	0.4	1.7	1.6	2.0	1.3	2.3	1.3	-0.5	-3.1
	1993	-1.4	-0.7	-0.1	0.5	-0.4	-0.6	-0.1	0.0	-6.4	-6.5	-5.3	-4.1
	1994	2.1	2.7	3.0	3.3	1.7	1.6	1.8	1.7	-0.6	2.1	3.7	6.1
	1995	2.9	2.8	2.2	1.6	1.7	2.3	1.9	1.5	3.6	4.0	2.7	0.9
	1996	1.4	1.5	1.8	1.7	2.2	1.6	1.9	2.1	0.0	2.2	2.8	2.3
	1997	1.9	2.4	2.5	3.2	1.7	2.1	1.6	2.4	3.6	2.0	2.0	4.5
	1998	3.6	2.9	2.9	2.2	2.8	2.9	3.5	3.4	7.2	5.7	6.8	5.4
	1999	2.2	2.3	2.9	3.8	3.8	3.4	3.6	3.5	4.7	5.1	5.7	5.6
	2000	3.8	4.1	3.2	2.7	2.9	3.6	2.9	2.2	5.3	5.4	4.2	3.7
	2001	2.4	1.6	1.4	0.6	2.3	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.0	0.2	-1.4	-2.7
2002	0.5	0.8			1.1	1.0			-3.1	-3.0			
EUR 12	1991	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	1992	2.5	1.7	1.5	0.4	2.3	1.9	2.2	1.4	3.1	1.8	-0.3	-2.6
	1993	-1.8	-1.1	-0.5	0.1	-0.9	-1.0	-0.6	-0.7	-6.8	-6.8	-5.4	-5.1
	1994	1.7	2.2	2.5	3.0	1.1	1.1	1.6	1.5	-1.1	1.7	3.1	5.9
	1995	2.6	2.7	2.2	1.5	1.8	2.5	1.9	1.4	3.4	3.8	2.2	0.4
	1996	1.2	1.3	1.6	1.6	2.0	1.2	1.6	1.7	-0.8	1.6	2.6	2.0
	1997	1.7	2.2	2.3	3.2	1.3	1.6	1.2	2.2	3.6	1.1	1.4	3.7
	1998	3.7	2.9	2.8	2.1	2.6	2.8	3.4	3.5	6.1	4.6	5.7	4.4
	1999	2.1	2.3	3.0	3.8	3.8	3.4	3.6	3.3	4.7	6.0	6.7	6.4
	2000	3.8	4.1	3.2	2.7	2.5	3.3	2.4	1.8	6.0	5.7	4.1	3.5
	2001	2.4	1.5	1.3	0.4	2.0	1.8	1.8	1.6	1.7	-0.2	-1.6	-2.5
2002	0.3	0.7			0.6	0.3			-2.8	-3.1			

T2

GDP, private consumption expenditure and gross fixed capital formation, Euro-zone and EU15

Percentage change compared to the previous quarter — seasonally adjusted — at constant prices (1995)

	year	Gross domestic product at market prices				Household and NPISH final consumption expenditure				Gross fixed capital formation			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
EU 15	1991	:	0.1	0.0	0.7	:	0.4	-0.2	1.1	:	-0.4	0.0	1.3
	1992	1.2	-0.6	-0.1	-0.2	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.5	1.5	-1.4	-1.8	-1.4
	1993	-0.6	0.1	0.5	0.5	-1.4	0.2	0.5	0.6	-2.0	-1.5	-0.5	-0.1
	1994	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.3	0.1	0.8	0.5	1.6	1.1	1.0	2.2
	1995	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.8	0.3	0.0	-0.7	1.5	-0.3	0.4
	1996	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.3	1.0	0.2	0.7	0.2	-1.6	3.7	0.4	-0.1
	1997	0.5	1.1	0.7	1.0	0.7	0.6	0.2	1.1	-0.3	2.1	0.4	2.3
	1998	0.8	0.4	0.6	0.3	1.1	0.6	0.7	1.0	2.2	0.7	1.4	1.0
	1999	0.8	0.5	1.3	1.1	1.4	0.2	0.9	0.9	1.5	1.1	2.0	1.0
	2000	0.8	0.8	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.3	0.3	1.1	1.1	0.9	0.5
	2001	0.5	0.1	0.2	-0.2	0.9	0.6	0.3	0.2	-0.6	-0.6	-0.7	-0.8
2002	0.4	0.4			0.0	0.5			-1.0	-0.5			
EUR 12	1991	:	0.2	0.0	0.9	:	0.7	-0.4	1.5	:	-0.2	0.1	1.4
	1992	1.4	-0.7	-0.1	-0.2	0.5	0.2	-0.1	0.7	1.7	-1.4	-2.0	-0.9
	1993	-0.8	0.1	0.4	0.4	-1.7	0.1	0.3	0.6	-2.7	-1.4	-0.5	-0.6
	1994	0.8	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.1	0.2	0.7	0.5	1.4	1.3	0.9	2.2
	1995	0.4	0.6	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.9	0.2	-0.1	-1.0	1.7	-0.6	0.4
	1996	0.2	0.7	0.6	0.2	1.1	0.0	0.6	0.0	-2.2	4.1	0.4	-0.1
	1997	0.3	1.1	0.7	1.0	0.7	0.3	0.2	1.0	-0.7	1.6	0.7	2.1
	1998	0.8	0.4	0.6	0.3	1.1	0.4	0.8	1.1	1.6	0.2	1.7	0.9
	1999	0.8	0.5	1.3	1.1	1.5	0.0	1.0	0.8	1.9	1.5	2.3	0.6
	2000	0.8	0.8	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.1	0.2	1.5	1.2	0.8	0.0
	2001	0.5	0.0	0.2	-0.3	0.9	0.6	0.2	0.0	-0.3	-0.7	-0.6	-0.9
2002	0.4	0.4			-0.1	0.3			-0.6	-1.0			

T3
GDP, private consumption expenditure and gross fixed capital formation, Euro-zone and EU15

Percentage change compared to the same quarter of the previous year — not seasonally adjusted — at constant prices (1995)

	year	Gross domestic product at market prices				Household and NPISH final consumption expenditure				Gross fixed capital formation			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
EU 15	1991	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	1992	2.4	1.0	1.1	0.6	1.8	1.4	1.8	1.6	3.5	0.3	-0.6	-2.8
	1993	-1.7	-0.4	-0.1	0.5	-0.9	-0.4	0.2	-0.1	-7.1	-6.1	-4.8	-4.3
	1994	2.4	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.3	1.6	1.6	1.4	0.1	2.2	3.0	5.5
	1995	3.2	2.6	2.0	1.7	1.8	2.5	1.9	1.2	4.1	3.4	2.3	1.5
	1996	1.1	1.5	2.0	1.9	2.2	1.4	1.9	2.3	-0.6	2.5	3.4	2.0
	1997	1.2	3.0	2.5	3.2	1.1	2.4	1.7	2.5	1.9	2.9	2.5	4.6
	1998	4.1	2.4	2.9	2.3	3.1	2.6	3.4	3.5	9.3	4.2	6.5	5.3
	1999	2.0	2.4	2.8	3.8	3.8	3.6	3.6	3.5	4.9	5.2	5.1	5.8
	2000	4.7	3.9	2.9	2.2	3.5	3.9	2.5	1.9	6.6	5.2	3.4	3.5
	2001	2.3	1.6	1.4	0.6	2.5	2.0	1.9	2.0	2.1	0.5	-1.6	-2.7
2002	-0.1	0.9			0.6	0.9			-4.3	-3.0			
EUR 12	1991	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	1992	2.9	1.3	1.4	0.6	2.4	1.6	1.9	1.8	4.5	0.5	-0.3	-2.2
	1993	-2.2	-0.7	-0.4	0.0	-1.4	-0.7	-0.3	-0.9	-7.9	-6.4	-4.8	-5.2
	1994	2.1	2.3	2.4	2.6	1.7	1.1	1.3	1.2	-0.3	1.9	2.4	5.2
	1995	3.0	2.5	1.9	1.5	2.0	2.7	1.9	1.0	4.2	3.0	1.7	1.1
	1996	1.0	1.2	1.9	1.6	2.0	1.0	1.5	1.9	-1.5	1.7	3.3	1.6
	1997	0.8	2.8	2.4	3.3	0.7	1.9	1.4	2.3	1.8	2.2	1.9	3.7
	1998	4.3	2.3	2.8	2.2	2.9	2.5	3.3	3.5	8.4	2.9	5.4	4.6
	1999	2.0	2.3	2.9	3.9	3.7	3.5	3.7	3.2	5.1	6.2	6.0	6.6
	2000	4.7	4.2	2.9	2.2	3.2	3.7	1.9	1.3	7.6	5.5	3.3	3.3
	2001	2.4	1.6	1.3	0.5	2.2	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.8	0.2	-1.6	-2.7
2002	-0.3	0.7			0.1	0.3			-4.2	-2.9			

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➤ Databases

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