

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE EFTA STATES

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EEA EFTA COMMENT ON THE SINGLE MARKET ACT

1. GENERAL REMARKS

Europe is currently facing economic challenges. As equal partners in the Internal Market through the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, the EEA EFTA States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway welcome the European Commission's initiative to re-launch the Single Market which provides the foundation for future growth and job creation. It is important that the crisis will not be used as an excuse to resort to protectionist and trade distorting measures, but rather that we continue to develop and improve the functioning and efficiency of the Single Market.

The proposals in the Commission's Communication "Towards a Single Market Act for a highly competitive social market economy" should contribute to achieving the goal of smarter, sustainable and more inclusive growth in Europe, as set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy. The EEA EFTA States support the aims and proposals in the Single Market Act and are committed to playing an active role in this initiative.

2. SPECIFIC ISSUES

Better implementation and enforcement of Single Market legislation

The potential of the Single Market may be unleashed to a larger extent through better implementation and enforcement of legislation across the EEA. It is important to simplify and ensure *Smart Regulation* in order to reduce unnecessary burdens, especially on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of the European business community. Thus, improved access to capital markets and closer follow-up of the Small Business Act are important proposals.

The EEA EFTA States support the European Union (EU) in promoting regulatory convergence and using international standards as a tool for global market access. We welcome the upcoming legislative reform of the European Standardisation System and support the improvement of this successful system. The simplification of public procurement legislation also represents an important step forward. It is vital to strike a balance between Single Market legislation and international instruments aimed at ensuring important social considerations. The proposal to consider a scheme for the Ecological Footprint of Products is positive, though the impact of such a scheme must be thoroughly assessed.

Promoting awareness and confidence in the Single Market

Easy access to information on the Single Market and existing assistance services is a core element in building confidence. We support the promotion of a “one stop shop” through the development of the “Your Europe” portal and view it as an important step in the re-launch of the Single Market.

Constructive dialogue with civil society, including the social dialogue, in the preparation of texts and proposals is important in order to create awareness and trust in the Single Market. Enhancing the social dimension of the Single Market could also encourage support for it. If consumers are to trust products circulating in the Internal Market, we need a strengthened system of market surveillance that functions well in all EEA States. Consequently, we support the emphasis given to coordinated market surveillance activities.

Creating a Digital Single Market

We need to remove barriers in the Single Market in order to take full advantage of the digital era. A true digital single market is only possible if we raise trust and confidence, as well as knowledge among consumers and businesses. Cross-border systems for mutual recognition of e-identification and e-authentication are crucial elements, needed in both the public and the private sectors.

Better governance of the Single Market

Shared responsibility and close administrative cooperation are essential for effective governance of the Single Market. In this respect we welcome the idea of extending the use of the Internal Market Information System (IMI) in the Single Market. The EEA EFTA States highly value the possibility to be able to participate in IMI on equal footing with the EU Member States.

We encourage the further development of SOLVIT and other alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms in the Single Market and will continue to cooperate actively in those networks.

Citizens' access to employment and lifelong learning is of key importance in meeting future challenges. We support the introduction of cards and schemes that promote mobility and employability among citizens in the Single Market. It is also necessary to modernise the system for recognising professional qualifications.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Creating a better functioning and more efficient Single Market by 2012 is an important task. We need an ambitious and well-focused Single Market Act. Actions that support the goals set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy and have a concrete impact on growth and employment should be given priority.

The EEA EFTA States will continue to participate actively and contribute to the further development of the Single Market. We would therefore emphasise the need to have the EEA EFTA States' participation in the Single Market reflected in the final Single Market Act.
