



**EFTA MINISTERIAL MEETING
Schaan, 22 June 2015**

COMMUNIQUÉ

On 22 June 2015, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) held its summer Ministerial meeting in Schaan, Liechtenstein. The meeting was chaired by Ms Aurelia Frick, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liechtenstein.

Ministers of the four EFTA States (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), together with representatives from Costa Rica, represented by Ambassador Álvaro Cedeño Molinari, Guatemala, represented by Ambassador Eduardo Sperisen-Yurt, and Panama represented by Ambassador Alfredo Suescum, signed a protocol on the accession of Guatemala to the Free Trade Agreement between the EFTA States and the Central American States.

The EFTA Ministers also signed a Joint Declaration on Cooperation with Ecuador, represented by Mr Gonzalo Salvador, Ambassador of Ecuador to Switzerland.

The international economic and trade environment

The EFTA Ministers called on all WTO Members to take the necessary steps to ensure the timely implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement and the rest of the Bali package. They stressed the importance of advancing the post-Bali work programme in view of securing substantive outcomes at the 10th WTO Ministerial Conference in Nairobi.

Ministers exchanged views on possible implications for the EFTA States of the ongoing negotiations between the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). They underlined in this context the importance of continuing TTIP-related exchanges with both of these key partners.

Preferential trade relations

The EFTA Ministers welcomed the accession of *Guatemala* to the Free Trade Agreement with the Central American States. EFTA's global network of preferential trade agreements outside the EU now consists of 25 agreements with 36 countries and territories. Seven Joint Declarations on Cooperation complement this network. In this context, Ministers welcomed the signing at the Ministerial meeting of a Joint Declaration with *Ecuador* and decided to launch negotiations on a free trade agreement, with the aim to start in the course of next year.

Ministers reviewed developments in EFTA's ongoing free trade negotiations. They reiterated EFTA's readiness to work towards the expeditious conclusion of negotiations with *India*. Ministers also expressed their interest in resuming the negotiating process with *Indonesia* at the earliest opportunity. They reviewed the progress made in the negotiations with *Malaysia* and *Vietnam* and welcomed the successful start of negotiations with the *Philippines*.

Ministers noted that the negotiating processes with *Algeria, Thailand* and with *Russia/Belarus/Kazakhstan* were currently on hold and agreed that they will continue to evaluate the situation.

Ministers expressed satisfaction with the imminent start of negotiations on a free trade agreement with *Georgia*. They also welcomed the initiation of exploratory dialogue with the *Mercosur* States and expressed their interest in examining the possibility to develop closer trade relations with *Australia*. They recalled their interest in developing a closer relationship between EFTA and *ASEAN* and in strengthening ties with free trade associations and individual countries in *Sub-Saharan Africa*.

Ministers took stock of ongoing work related to the modernisation of some of EFTA's existing Free Trade Agreements. They welcomed in particular the ongoing negotiations on the expansion of the Free Trade Agreement with *Turkey* and expressed their support for exploring the scope for developing the existing Agreements with *Canada* and *Mexico*. Finally, Ministers welcomed the positive developments concerning the implementation of EFTA's Free Trade Agreement with the *Gulf Cooperation Council*.

Relations with the European Union

Ministers from the three EFTA countries participating in the European Economic Area (EEA) took stock of recent developments in the EEA Agreement. While considerable progress had been made in a number of areas since the last Ministerial meeting, Ministers noted that several challenging issues remained unresolved.

Ministers reiterated that a reduction in the number of legal acts awaiting incorporation into the EEA Agreement was a priority. In this context, Ministers welcomed the adoption of the new EEA EFTA procedures for incorporating EU acts into the EEA Agreement, and mentioned that some positive signs were already starting to be evident, including the increased pace of incorporation of EU legal acts.

The EEA EFTA Ministers noted that it was the joint responsibility of the EU and the EEA EFTA States to ensure the smooth functioning of the EEA Agreement, and emphasised in particular the need for solutions with regard to EEA EFTA participation in several EU agencies. In this context, Ministers noted the political conclusions on the European Supervisory Authorities for financial markets and the technical work being undertaken in order to set up the two-pillar structure as envisaged in the conclusions. They also underlined the need to ensure participation in agencies in the areas of energy (ACER) and telecommunications (BEREC) in accordance with the EEA Agreement.

Ministers noted the ongoing negotiations for a new Financial Mechanism for the period after 2014, which were continuing in order to reach a mutually acceptable solution.

Ministers were informed by Switzerland on the work in progress regarding the implementation of new constitutional provisions on immigration voted by the Swiss people on 9 February 2014. The respective constitutional provisions call for a limitation of immigration and revision of the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP). The Swiss government is in contact with its European partners to find solutions for the AFMP and, by extension, for the EFTA Convention. To this end, Switzerland and the EU have been engaged in intensive consultations since February 2015. The Swiss government aims to maintain and further develop the bilateral framework with the EU by continuing negotiations in different issue areas.

Advisory bodies

Ministers held meetings with EFTA's two advisory bodies, the Consultative Committee and the Parliamentary Committee. They discussed various issues related to the functioning of the EEA Agreement and recent developments in the EEA, third-country relations, and the relationship between the EU and Switzerland.

Attending

Liechtenstein: Ms Aurelia Frick, Minister of Foreign Affairs (Chair)

Iceland: Mr Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade

Norway: Ms Dilek Ayhan, State Secretary, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries

Switzerland: Mr Johann N. Schneider-Ammann, Federal Councillor, Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research

EFTA: Mr Kristinn F. Árnason, Secretary-General
