



EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION

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EFTA MINISTERIAL MEETING Trondheim, 24 June 2013

COMMUNIQUE

On 24 June 2013, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) held its summer Ministerial meeting in Trondheim, Norway. The meeting was chaired by Mr Trond Giske, Minister of Trade and Industry of Norway.

Ministers of the four EFTA States (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) signed free trade agreements with the Central American States of Costa Rica and Panama, represented by Ms Anabel González, Minister of Foreign Trade of Costa Rica and Mr Ricardo Quijano, Minister of Trade and Industry of Panama; and with Bosnia and Herzegovina, represented by Mr Mirko Šarović, Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations.

A joint declaration on cooperation was signed with Myanmar, represented by Mr Pwint San, Deputy Minister of Commerce.

The international economic and trade environment

The EFTA Ministers noted the uneven pace of global economic recovery and discussed the ongoing challenges faced by economic operators in an environment characterized by considerable macroeconomic and policy uncertainty. They recalled the essential role of open markets in supporting sustainable growth in the increasingly interconnected global economy.

Ministers discussed the launch of negotiations between the European Union and the United States on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. They noted the significance of this initiative and agreed to monitor future developments closely.

The EFTA Ministers reiterated their strong commitment to the rules-based multilateral trading system of the World Trade Organization. They expressed their concern about the state of play in the WTO negotiations. The Ministers called on all WTO Members, particularly major players, to work with flexibility and realism in order to ensure significant outcomes in Bali with a view to creating momentum towards a successful conclusion of the Doha Development Agenda.

Preferential trade relations

The EFTA Ministers welcomed the addition of the free trade agreements with the Central American States of *Costa Rica* and *Panama* and with *Bosnia and Herzegovina* to EFTA's expanding network of preferential trade relations. EFTA now has 26 such agreements with 36 partner countries and territories outside the European Union. This world-wide network is further complemented by six joint declarations on cooperation. In this context, Ministers welcomed the signing of a joint declaration with *Myanmar*.

Concerning EFTA's ongoing negotiating processes, Ministers welcomed the progress achieved since the beginning of the year in the negotiations with the Customs Union of *Russia, Belarus* and *Kazakhstan*.

Ministers noted the continued active engagement with partners in Asia and reiterated the priority accorded to enhancing trade relations with this dynamic region. They took stock of developments in the negotiations with *India* and confirmed their willingness to move this process forward to its conclusion as soon as possible. They noted the progress made in the negotiations with *Indonesia* and *Vietnam*. Ministers expressed their satisfaction that negotiations are imminent with *Malaysia* and reaffirmed their strong interest in resuming talks with *Thailand* this autumn.

Ministers reiterated EFTA's interest in further developing existing free trade agreements, such as the agreements with *Canada, Chile, Korea and Mexico*. They agreed to continue exploring possible options for resuming negotiations with *Algeria*, as well as developing closer trade relations with *Pakistan*, the *Philippines* and potential partners in the Sub-Saharan African region.

Relations with the European Union

The EEA EFTA Ministers welcomed the reviews of the European Economic Area (EEA) undertaken by the European Union (EU) and the EEA EFTA side in recent years, and appreciated the fact that all of the reviews underlined that the EEA Agreement had proven to be a solid platform for EEA EFTA participation in the Internal Market, as well as for the EEA EFTA States' relations with the EU.

Whilst acknowledging the need for a further reduction in the number of EU legal acts pending incorporation into the EEA Agreement, the Ministers welcomed the positive results produced by the joint efforts over the last year to reduce this number. Almost 500 legal acts were incorporated into the Agreement in 2012 – the highest number in a single year since 1999. Ministers noted with satisfaction that important legislation had been incorporated thereby ensuring a level playing field for the EEA EFTA States in areas such as consumer rights, goods, telecommunications and environmental and climate issues.

Ministers noted with concern the challenges related to EEA EFTA participation in EU agencies and programmes, and underlined the importance of timely involvement of the EEA EFTA States in new EU programmes, in order for EEA EFTA applicants to be included in the first calls for proposals.

A key priority this last year has been to find a solution, together with the EU, regarding the EEA EFTA States' participation in the European Financial Supervisory Authorities, which will ensure that the structure of the EEA Agreement is respected. Ministers called on all parties to maintain the focus on this issue.

The EEA EFTA Ministers welcomed the 2012 results of the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism for the 2004-2009 period. The funding has had a positive impact at local level and a majority of the projects exhibited good quality for the grant money spent.

Finally, Ministers were informed on the state and the perspectives of the relations between Switzerland and the European Union, especially on the possible solutions in order to develop and strengthen the bilateral way.

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

Norway: Mr Trond Giske, Minister of Trade and Industry (Chair)

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

Liechtenstein: Ms Aurelia Frick, Minister of Foreign Affairs

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
