



EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION

Ref. 15-5958
23 November 2015

EFTA MINISTERIAL MEETING, GENEVA, 23 NOVEMBER 2015

COMMUNIQUÉ

On 23 November 2015, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) held its biannual Ministerial Meeting in Geneva. The meeting was chaired by Mr Vidar Helgesen, Minister of EEA and EU Affairs of Norway.

The EFTA Ministers reiterated their strong commitment to the rules-based multilateral trading system of the World Trade Organization (WTO). They emphasized the need to achieve credible outcomes, which reaffirm the importance of the WTO, at the Tenth WTO Ministerial Conference taking place in Nairobi, Kenya, in December. The Ministers also exchanged views on the impact on EFTA's work of regional agreements and ongoing negotiations, namely the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), as well as the recently launched "Trade for All" strategy of the European Union.

The Ministers met with Ambassador Michael Punke, Deputy U.S. Trade Representative, to pursue the trade policy dialogue with the U.S. and to discuss developments in the TTIP negotiations between the U.S. and the European Union.

The Ministers reviewed the state of play in EFTA's free trade negotiations with *India* and confirmed their readiness to move the process forward to its conclusion as soon as possible. They reaffirmed EFTA's commitment to advancing the negotiations with *Malaysia*, the *Philippines* and *Vietnam* and reiterated their interest in resuming negotiations with *Indonesia*. They also welcomed the successful start of negotiations with *Georgia*.

The Ministers noted that the negotiating processes with *Algeria*, *Thailand* and *Russia/Belarus/Kazakhstan* remained on hold and agreed to continue to monitor the situation.

Ministers recalled EFTA's decision to launch negotiations on a free trade agreement with *Ecuador* with the aim to start in the course of next year. They also reiterated EFTA's interest in exploring the deepening of trade relations with the *Mercosur* States. They expressed support for formalising cooperation with the *East African Community* through the signing of a joint declaration and agreed to continue to pursue ways to strengthen ties with countries in *Sub-Saharan Africa*. Ministers reiterated their interest in exploring the scope for developing closer trade relations with *Australia*.

The EFTA Ministers welcomed the prospect of developing and expanding the agreements with *Canada* and *Mexico*. They also reviewed the work undertaken so far

on the expansion of the free trade agreement with *Turkey*. They expressed support for exploring the scope for developing further the existing agreement with *Chile*.

The *EFTA Parliamentary Committee* met with Ministers to discuss recent developments and priorities in EFTA's trade relations with the world.

EFTA's network of preferential trade relations outside the European Union currently comprises 25 free trade agreements with 36 countries and territories. This network is complemented by 6 joint declarations on cooperation.

Attending:

Norway: Mr Vidar Helgesen, Minister of EEA and EU Affairs (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
