

E U R O P E A N E C O N O M I C A R E A
F O R U M O F L O C A L A N D R E G I O N A L A U T H O R I T I E S

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FIFTH MEETING OF THE EEA EFTA FORUM

Ísafjörður

21-22 June 2012

Opinion on the Review of the EEA Agreement

Rapporteur: Christian Haugen

The EEA EFTA Forum of Local and Regional Authorities:

- A. Noting that 20 years have passed since the signing of the EEA Agreement on 2 May 1992 in Porto.
- B. Noting the reinforced subsidiarity principle set out in the Lisbon Treaty and its explicit reference to the local and regional dimension and self-government.
- C. Noting the role of the Forum as a body in the EFTA structure.
- D. Acknowledging the impact of EU law on local and regional authorities in the EEA EFTA States through the EEA-agreement.
- E. Emphasizing that the local and regional authorities of the EEA EFTA States Iceland and Norway face several challenges different to those of local authorities in the European Union.
- F. Having regard to the Council Conclusions of 14 December 2010 on EU relations with EFTA countries.
- G. Having regard to the Norwegian EEA Review Report *Outside and Inside – Norway's agreements with the European Union* presented in January 2012.
- H. Taking note of the resolutions by the EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee and the EEA Joint Consultative Committee of May 2012;
- I. observes that the Lisbon Treaty did away with the clear division between EEA-relevant Internal Market policies and other EU policies and that local/regional authorities in the EU Member States increasingly use EU Structural Funds to reach targets set by the Internal Market legislation whilst corresponding support is not available for local and regional authorities in EEA EFTA States;

2. observes the EEA Agreement has given rise to an ‘additional level of governance’ which poses a challenge to the traditional relations between national and local/regional levels of governance;
3. observes that limited political engagement in the EEA EFTA States has led to a form of a ‘democratic deficit’ where the administration are left to take important decisions on EEA issues without strong political guidance and that bureaus and agencies at national level increasingly receive policy signals directly from the European institutions and bodies/agencies;
4. underlines the need for stronger political engagement in the EEA EFTA States on EEA matters to address democratic concerns and to safeguard local self-government;
5. calls on the EEA EFTA States to consult the local/regional level on questions concerning the EEA relevance of new EU legislation, technical adaptations and/or exceptions;
6. calls on the EEA EFTA States to carry out a study of the interplay between the Internal Market and EU regional policy, with a view to examine the effects on local and regional authorities;
7. stresses the need for reflection on how to effectively involve and consult local and regional authorities throughout the entire policy process, from pre-pipeline at European level to implementation at local/regional level;
8. asks the EEA EFTA States, when transposing EEA legislation, to take into account its impact on the municipal sector, including through cost analysis, and encourages the establishment of task groups with representatives of all levels of government on a ministerial level to this end;
9. asks the EEA EFTA States to avoid ‘gold-plating’ when transposing EU legislation to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens and complexity to safeguard the right to self-government at the local and regional level;
10. acknowledges the need for local and regional government to build competence and knowledge of the EEA Agreement and for central government to improve their understanding of how the EEA affects the local/regional level.