



EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION

Ref. 21776

25 November 2008

EFTA MINISTERIAL MEETING, GENEVA, 25 November 2008

COMMUNIQUÉ

EFTA Ministers were joined by Mr Luis Guillermo Plata, Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism of Colombia, for the signing of the EFTA-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

The EFTA Ministers welcomed the commencement of negotiations with India and look forward to the settling of the last outstanding issues in the negotiations with Peru. They endorsed the EFTA-Russia Joint Study Group Report and expressed their wish to start preparations for the opening of free trade negotiations in 2009. Ministers further expressed their readiness to launch negotiations with Albania, Serbia and Ukraine.

On 25 November 2008, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) held a Ministerial Meeting in Geneva under the Chairmanship of Mr Björgvin G. Sigurdsson, Minister of Business Affairs of Iceland.

Ministers from the four EFTA Member States, together with the Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism of Colombia, signed the EFTA-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Ministers welcomed the strengthening of trade and economic relations with Colombia and are confident that the new trade opportunities would contribute to economic growth and development.

Ministers look forward to the settling of the last outstanding issues in the negotiations with Peru and expect the Agreement to be signed in the course of 2009. They also expressed their hope that a free trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council be signed in the coming months.

The EFTA Ministers welcomed and endorsed the EFTA-Russia Joint Study Group Report, which concluded that a broad-based bilateral Free Trade Agreement between the EFTA States and the Russian Federation would significantly advance the economic relationship between the Parties. They expressed their wish to start preparations for the opening of free trade negotiations in 2009.

Ministers welcomed the commencement of negotiations with India. They underlined their interest in developing a stronger trade and economic relationship with India by reaching an early conclusion of the free trade negotiations.

Progress in ongoing negotiations with Algeria was noted with satisfaction and Ministers expressed hope for a conclusion of the negotiations in the first quarter of 2009. They also reiterated their wish to see negotiations with Thailand resume at the earliest possible opportunity.

Ministers discussed the further expansion of EFTA's free trade network and expressed their readiness to start negotiations with Albania, Serbia and Ukraine in the first half of 2009.

They noted with satisfaction the ongoing process with Malaysia on the development of closer trade and economic relations, and reiterated their readiness to engage in negotiations with Indonesia on the basis of recommendations by the Joint Study Group.

Ministers discussed the ongoing negotiations on the WTO Doha Development Agenda. They stressed their commitment to a successful conclusion of these negotiations and extended their strong backing to all efforts to move the talks forward. Ministers emphasised the importance of reinforcing the multilateral system and resisting protectionist tendencies in the context of the current financial crisis.

Ministers welcomed the interim report from the ad-hoc EFTA Working Group on Trade and Environment and looked forward to receiving the final report at their next meeting. Ministers furthermore decided to establish an ad-hoc Working Group on social and labour standards in Free Trade Agreements.

Ministers also met with EFTA's Parliamentary Committee and had a fruitful exchange of views on recent developments in EFTA's third country policies and on EEA matters.

Ministers Attending

Iceland: Mr Björgvin G. SIGURDSSON, Minister of Business Affairs

Liechtenstein: Ms Rita KIEBER-BECK, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Norway: Ms Rikke LIND, Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry

Switzerland: Ms Doris LEUTHARD, Federal Councillor, Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs
