



## EFTA MINISTERIAL MEETING

Malbun, 24 June 2019

### COMMUNIQUÉ

On 24 June 2019, Ministers from Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland met in Malbun, Liechtenstein, for EFTA's annual summer Ministerial Meeting to discuss the broad range of EFTA's activities.

#### **EFTA Trade Policy**

Ministers expressed their concern regarding the increasingly uncertain global trade environment, both due to the uncertain outcome of the Brexit process and escalating trade tensions. They emphasised their commitment to remain a responsible and reliable partner dedicated to the values of free trade and a rules-based multilateral trading system as the best possible basis for inclusive economic development.

Ministers also reiterated their commitment to expanding and deepening EFTA's global network of Free Trade Agreements. In particular, Ministers hailed the progress made with Mercosur since the previous ministerial meeting and expressed their desire to conclude negotiations quickly. They furthermore confirmed their commitment to continue negotiations with *India*, *Malaysia* and *Vietnam*, and to conclude the update of the existing agreement with the *South African Customs Union (SACU)* as well as the bilateral agreements with the *Palestine Authority*. Moreover, Ministers looked forward to the start of negotiations on the modernisation of the current Agreement with *Chile* after the summer and continued respective discussions regarding the Agreements with *Canada* and *Mexico*. In addition to strengthening the trade ties with *ASEAN* and countries in Sub-Saharan Africa such as the members of the *East African Community (EAC)* and *Nigeria*, Ministers agreed to continue the preparations for negotiations with *Pakistan* and *Moldova* and to monitor developments in *Thailand*, with the aim of holding a technical meeting,

The UK is a major trading partner of all the EFTA States. Ministers reiterated their willingness to preserve the close trade relations between the EFTA States and the United Kingdom and expressed their determination to participate in any transitional arrangements until a permanent framework for future trade relations with the UK can be agreed. The EFTA States will continue to consult with each other to help achieve this goal.

Ministers welcomed the revision of EFTA's model chapter for trade and sustainable development. The modernized chapter now contains updated provisions based on recent developments in the field, including new provisions regarding gender equality and non-discrimination, climate change and the possibility to refer disputes to a panel of experts.

## **Relations with the European Union**

Celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA Agreement), the EEA EFTA Ministers re-confirmed their support for and commitment to the EEA Agreement as the continued basis for future relations between the EU and the EEA EFTA States

Ministers took stock of recent developments in the EEA Agreement and discussed what lies ahead in the cooperation between the EU and the EEA EFTA States.

The Ministers welcomed the positive contributions made by the EEA EFTA States to the decision-shaping process of EEA-relevant EU legislation and programmes, including by submitting EEA EFTA Comments to EU proposals. They also underlined the importance of early involvement in the EU legislative process and the need to make full use of the decision-shaping opportunities provided for in the EEA Agreement.

The Ministers noted with satisfaction that significant progress had been made across several important files since their meeting in June 2018, welcoming in particular the progress made with regard to acts in the field of financial services. The Ministers recognised that this positive development was the result of joint efforts between the EU institutions and the EEA EFTA States.

Acknowledging the contribution made by EU programmes to building a more competitive, innovative and social Europe, the Ministers underlined the importance of ensuring the continued participation of the EEA EFTA States in EEA-relevant programmes.

Moreover, Ministers welcomed the progress made in implementing the EEA Financial Mechanism for the 2014-2021 period. Noting that Memoranda of Understanding had been concluded with 14 out of 15 of the Beneficiary States, EEA EFTA Ministers reiterated the importance of honouring the common values that the EEA Agreement is based on in the implementation of the Financial Mechanism.

Ministers were informed by Switzerland on the state and prospects of the relations between Switzerland and the European Union. Switzerland aims at consolidating and further developing its bilateral relations with the EU. This requires the search for solutions to the institutional mechanisms of mutual market access. On this issue, Switzerland is seeking clarifications that would enable to reach a mutually satisfactory solution and sign the agreement.

### **Attending**

Iceland: Mr Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade

Liechtenstein/Chair: Ms Aurelia Frick, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Justice and Culture

Norway: Mr Torbjørn Røe Isaksen, Minister of Trade and Industry

Switzerland: Mr Guy Parmelin, Federal Councillor, Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research

EFTA: Mr Henri Gétaz, Secretary-General