



# EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION

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27 October 2020

## EFTA MINISTERIAL MEETING

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### COMMUNIQUÉ

60 years after the establishment of EFTA in 1960, Ministers from Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland met on 27 October under Swiss Chairmanship through video conferencing for the annual EFTA Ministerial meeting.

#### **EFTA Trade Policy**

Ministers expressed their firm belief that the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic reinforces the case for open and rules-based international trade to fuel the economic recovery and ensure stable trading conditions, including supply chain security, with the multilateral system at its core. Ministers reiterated their consistent commitment to the rules-based trading system, both at the WTO and through free trade agreements.

Ministers also reiterated their commitment to the development of international trade relations that contribute to sustainable development. They assessed EFTA's experience in negotiating and implementing provisions on trade and sustainable development and discussed EFTA's priorities for the future. In this context, they also welcomed the conclusion of work towards the revision of the model chapter for trade and sustainable development. The revised chapter features additional provisions on climate change, biological diversity, sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, forest management, agriculture, inclusive trade, responsible business conduct, as well as a reinforced mechanism to settle possible disputes. Ministers further welcomed the progress made in developing a new chapter on e-commerce, which reflects EFTA's willingness and ability to adapt trade agreements to new economic needs and changing technology. Regarding transparency in trade negotiations, Ministers agreed on a series of new initiatives which will enhance the information for the general public and the cooperation with the EFTA Parliamentary Committee and the EFTA Consultative Committee.

Ministers further underlined the importance of continuity in EFTA's trade policy, as well as their willingness to continue negotiations with *India*, *Malaysia* and *Vietnam*, and the review of the existing agreements with the *Southern African Customs Union (SACU)* and *Chile*. They confirmed their willingness to continue negotiations with *Mexico* on modernising the agreement as well as updating the agreement with the *Palestinian Authority* to include revised agricultural protocols. Ministers further agreed to continue the preparations for negotiations with *Pakistan*, *Kosovo* and *Moldova* and expressed the desire to resume negotiations with *Thailand* shortly.

## **EFTA Advisory Bodies**

EFTA Ministers met on the same day in a joint meeting with the EFTA Parliamentary and the EFTA Consultative Committee. The parliamentarians from the four EFTA States together with the representatives from trade unions and employers' organisations from the four EFTA States met with EFTA Ministers to discuss EFTA's trade policy in general, as well as ongoing work on e-commerce, trade and sustainable development and transparency in trade negotiations in particular.

## **Relations with the European Union**

Ministers underlined their intention to continue a close cooperation with the EU on all matters related to the COVID-19 crisis. This included the swift incorporation of relevant and urgent measures into the EEA Agreement in order to maintain coherence of the Internal Market.

Ministers noted with concern the rise in the backlog of legal acts awaiting incorporation into the EEA Agreement. They stressed the importance of legal certainty and homogeneity in the EEA and called for action to be taken to remedy the situation.

Ministers discussed the participation of the EEA EFTA States in future EU programmes which are part of the 2021-2027 EU's multiannual financial framework. Final decisions on participation will be taken once there is clarity on the corresponding modalities.

Ministers also took stock of the negotiations on the future relationship with the United Kingdom after its withdrawal from the EU and the EEA. In this context, the Ministers informed about their respective regimes applicable as of 1 January 2021 and the status and ongoing work related to comprehensive frameworks for their future trade relations with the UK.

Ministers were informed by Switzerland on the state and prospects of the relations between Switzerland and the European Union (after the popular vote of 27 September on the free movement of persons). 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

## **Attending**

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| <u>Iceland:</u>           | Mr Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation              |
| <u>Liechtenstein:</u>     | Ms Katrin Eggenberger, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Justice and Culture  |
| <u>Norway:</u>            | Ms Iselin Nybø, Minister of Trade and Industry  |
| <u>Switzerland/Chair:</u> | Mr Guy Parmelin, Federal Councillor, Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research |
| <u>EFTA:</u>              | Mr Henri Gétaz, Secretary-General   |