



EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION

12 November 2012

EFTA MINISTERIAL MEETING, GENEVA, 12 NOVEMBER 2012

COMMUNIQUÉ

On 12 November 2012, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) held a Ministerial Meeting in Geneva under the Chairmanship of Mr Össur Skarphéðinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland. The EFTA Ministers signed a Joint Declaration on Cooperation with *Pakistan*, represented by Mr Shahid Bashir, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the World Trade Organisation in Geneva.

Ministers expressed concern over weakening international economic activity and the projected slowdown in global trade this year. They underlined the importance, in such a context, of pursuing trade and investment policies that prevent protectionism and ensure open, competitive markets.

In this context, Ministers reviewed EFTA's activities in the area of free trade agreements. EFTA's network of preferential trade relations outside the European Union currently comprises 24 free trade agreements with 33 countries. This network is complemented by 6 joint declarations on cooperation globally. In this respect, Ministers welcomed the signing of a Declaration with Pakistan which will serve to strengthen economic cooperation and bilateral trade relations. Ministers also emphasised the importance of revising and updating existing free trade agreements in the light of global developments in this area.

Ministers welcomed the swift progress in the free trade negotiations with the Central American States of *Costa Rica*, *Guatemala*, *Honduras* and *Panama* and looked forward to their early conclusion. They took stock of progress made in the negotiations with the Customs Union of *Russia*, *Belarus* and *Kazakhstan* and called for continued momentum with a view to moving closer to a conclusion. Ministers emphasised their strong interest in remaining fully engaged with *India*. They noted the advances made in the negotiating processes with, respectively, *Indonesia* and *Vietnam*, and expressed their wish to see these move further forward in a timely manner. They reiterated their call for a conclusion of negotiations with *Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

Ministers welcomed the recent announcement of the start of negotiations on a free trade agreement with *Malaysia*. An agreement with that partner would considerably strengthen EFTA's network in the dynamic Asian region. They expressed their readiness to re-engage with *Thailand* at the earliest suitable opportunity. They agreed

to further seek possibilities to deepen trade relations with countries in *Sub-Saharan Africa*. They called for a joint assessment of recent developments with *Algeria*.

Ministers also discussed issues related to the unresolved mackerel negotiations.

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

Attending:

Iceland: Mr Össur Skarphéðinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade (Chair)

Liechtenstein: Ms Aurelia Frick, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Norway: Mr Roger Ingebrigtsen, State Secretary, Ministry of Trade and Industry

Switzerland: Mr Johann N. Schneider-Ammann, Federal Councillor, Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs

EFTA: Mr Kristinn F. Arnason, Secretary-General
