

Report of the Icelandic Chair of the Standing Committee - Second Half of 2022

EEA Council

The EEA Council was successfully held for the first time in the EFTA House under the chairmanship of Iceland on 23 November. Iceland was adamant in ensuring that all aspects of the meeting were well considered and the EFTA Secretariat, in excellent cooperation with the EU side, did an outstanding job to ensure the outcome. While formal EEA Council conclusions were regrettably not adopted at the meeting, the EEA EFTA States underlined the good functioning of the EEA Agreement which has served as a solid basis for cooperation with the EU for almost 30 years. The EEA EFTA States have expressed their willingness to host the next meeting of the EEA Council at the EFTA premises under their chairmanship in November 2023. The new, more substantive format of the meeting between the Standing Committee of the EFTA States at ministerial level and the EFTA advisory bodies proved productive and will serve as a model for future joint meetings.

Outreach

Iceland hosted, in cooperation with Norway and Liechtenstein, a successful seminar on energy and the steps towards the green transition. Participants included the Icelandic Minister of the Environment, Energy and Climate, Mr. Guðlaugur Þ. Þórðarsson, the Director General of the National Energy Authority of Iceland as well as representatives from Liechtenstein, Norway, the Czech Presidency of the Council, DG Energy and the EEA Grants.

The EFTA Secretariat and the EFTA Surveillance Authority furthermore organised a fruitful seminar on the future of financial services in the EEA, with the participation of Ms. Mairead McGuinness Commissioner for financial services, financial stability and the Capital Markets Union. As to further outreach activities during the autumn, the EFTA Secretariat organised a seminar on the EEA and a seminar for the Working Group Chairs and EEA Coordinators. Such events are important tools to improve the functioning of the Agreement.

Incorporation of EEA relevant acts

During the chairmanship, a total number of 279 acts were incorporated in 154 Joint Committee decisions which resulted in a total of 628 acts being incorporated in 2022.

Apart from numerous acts in the fields of financial services, food chain, transport, dangerous substances and related to COVID-19, the following acts may be highlighted:

- Invest EU Programme
- Framework Regulation on statistics
- 37 acts in the field of wine and spirits including the longstanding Regulation on vine plantings from 2018
- Directive on the promotion of clean and energy-efficient road transport vehicles

- Regulation on rail passenger's rights and obligations
- Regulation on the monitoring and reporting of data relating to CO2 emissions from passenger cars
- WEEE Directive (on waste from electrical and electronic equipment)
- Regulation on establishing a Single Digital Gateway
- Audio-visual Media Services Directive

A particular focus was made to reduce the backlog in the fields of energy, financial services, wine and spirits, statistics and transport. Constructive progress was made in the energy area, major efforts continued in the area of financial services, the wine and spirits backlog was tackled and outstanding acquis in the area of statistics was reduced significantly. Around 50% of the backlog in the area of transport had been foreseen to be reduced with the incorporation of the EASA file concerning aviation security.

Iceland placed major efforts to identify elements to speed up the incorporation procedure within the existing EEA EFTA procedures. The Secretariat delivered solid and practical proposals which were discussed and resulted in four areas being included under the so-called fast-track procedure. New working methods, including share point and online forms, will be key to ensuring swifter procedures in the future.

Work in capitals continued to reduce the number of Joint Committee decisions where entry into force is pending due to constitutional requirements. A number of acts are still awaiting entry into force due to the linkage to these decisions.

Decision-shaping

EEA EFTA States continued to identify and provide input to the EU on EEA relevant initiatives falling under the European Green Deal and other EU flagship initiatives. EEA EFTA Comments were made on the proposal for a Regulation on Green Bonds, the Commission proposal for a Regulation establishing the Union Secure Connectivity Programme, the proposal for a revised Construction Products Regulation and the upcoming Commission proposal for a front-of-pack nutrition label.

Iceland undertook bilaterally major outreach towards the EU institutions on the proposal regarding ETS and aviation due to the grave effects the act will have on the country.

Furthermore, following a request and consultations at various levels, EEA EFTA States were ensured participation for the first time in the Network and Information Systems Cooperation (NIS) Group responsible for the implementation of EU legislation in the cyber security area.

Synergies between the three EFTA House organisations

Considerable efforts and achievements were made to ensure that synergies and efficiencies were gained with the co-location of the three EFTA House organisations: the EFTA Secretariat, the EFTA Surveillance Authority and the Financial Mechanism Office. This includes efficient cost management

in relation to premises, running costs, services and infrastructure. In December 2022, the three sister organisations signed an agreement to establish a Joint Facilities and Service Team providing facilities services, including management of the building, reception and conference centre, amenities, and certain support services.

Participation in EU programmes

The EEA EFTA States continued to ensure that the EEA EFTA States' participation in the relevant EU programmes for the current programme period 2021-2027 is based on the rights and obligations set out in the EEA Agreement. This has included ensuring correct wording in various programme guides and calls for proposals.

Other activities – financial mechanism

The negotiations on a new period of the EEA Financial Mechanism and, in parallel, on market access for fish and marine products, which were launched on 16 June 2022, have been developing at a steady pace.