



EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION

CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

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Work Programme 2021

I Introduction

The aim and mission of the EFTA Consultative Committee (EFTA CC) are threefold:

- To take part in the shaping of the EFTA and EEA agendas, and influence policies in the areas that affect the social partners;
- To be a forum for dialogue among social partners from all EFTA countries, and a link to social partners in the EU and EU accession countries;
- To raise awareness of the social and economic aspects of EFTA's free trade agreements (FTAs) and the European Economic Area, and the role of the social partners.

To reach the aims outlined above, the EFTA CC will conduct the following meetings in 2021:

- One meeting with EFTA Ministers (spring/summer)
- One meeting with the EFTA Standing Committee (spring)
- One meeting with the Ministerial Chair of the EFTA Council (autumn)
- One meeting with the three EEA EFTA Ministers (autumn)
- One seminar on employment and social affairs, organised jointly with EFTA working groups (spring)
- Joint meetings with the EFTA Parliamentary Committee (EFTA PC) throughout the year, as deemed of mutual interest

Upon invitation from the EFTA Parliamentary Committee (EFTA PC), the Chair and Vice Chair of the EFTA CC will attend as observers in the EFTA PC delegation visit to a third country with which EFTA has – or is negotiating – a free trade agreement. Depending on the epidemiological situation, the visit may be replaced by online meetings.

Through the cooperation between the EFTA CC and various bodies of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), through the so-called “osmosis” procedure, members of the EFTA CC may participate in relevant meetings of the EESC.

The EFTA CC may also plan and organise additional activities throughout the year, either on its own or together with EFTA bodies. This may take the form of webinars, meetings or opinions issues based on the many policy areas mentioned in the Work Programme. The Work Programme is flexible and can be adapted to new developments in EFTA and the EU.

The ‘Swiss Workers’ will hold the Chairmanship of the EFTA CC in 2021.

II List of priorities in 2021

Third-country relations

The EFTA CC will continue to monitor developments in EFTA's third-country relations and contribute to keeping a strong focus on matters of relevance to the social partners. In particular, the Committee will follow up on the implementation of the chapter on 'Trade and sustainable development', the chapter on 'E-commerce' and the measures to increase transparency in EFTA trade negotiations. The Committee will also follow up on the ratification process of the FTAs with Mercosur, Indonesia and Turkey and ongoing negotiations with India, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Two EFTA CC observers will participate in the EFTA Parliamentary Committee's third-country visit, which usually takes place in November. Depending on epidemiological situation, the visit may be replaced by online meetings. Linked to this visit, the EFTA CC members may organise a supplementary programme to establish contact with social partners. The participating CC observers will brief the rest of the Committee on the visit afterwards.

EU priorities and horizontal issues

The EFTA CC will follow closely initiatives linked to employment and social affairs of the European Commission as outlined in the Commission's Work Programme for 2020 and 2021.¹ An emphasis will be given to the European Commission's initiatives under 'the European Green Deal', 'A Europe Fit for the Digital Age' and 'An Economy that Works for People': notably on the Commission's proposals for a Directive on 'adequate minimum wages in the European Union', a carbon border adjustment mechanism, a digital levy/tax, platform workers, foreign subsidies and public procurement.

The EFTA CC will also follow closely the EU-UK negotiations on the future relationship and implications for EFTA and the EEA Agreement, the negotiations on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027, and the work linked to the Conference on the future of Europe.

Single Market initiatives

The EFTA CC will continue to follow new initiatives and the implementation of the Single Market. In particular, the Committee will focus on proposals under the New Industrial Strategy, the proposal for an action plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights and other dossiers linked to employment and social affairs.

COVID-19 related measures

The EFTA CC will follow closely new measures introduced in EFTA Member States and the EEA in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee will focus especially on measures related to social and economic policies, as well as the impact of the pandemic on the economy and labour markets of EFTA countries.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2020-commission-work-programme-key-documents_en
https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2021-commission-work-programme-key-documents_en

EFTA CC opinions and EEA CC reports and resolutions

The EEA CC will prepare reports and resolutions on the following topics in 2021:

- An action plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights
- An EU digital levy and implications for the EEA

The EFTA CC will consider issuing EFTA CC opinions on EEA and free trade issues relevant to the social partners.

Joint events with other EFTA committees and working groups (WGs)

The EFTA CC will consider organising a joint webinar with the relevant EFTA committees and WGs during spring 2020.

If the epidemiological situation allows, the EFTA CC will consider organising, together with the EFTA Parliamentary Committee, a high-level conference to mark the inauguration of the EFTA House.

EU social dialogue and relations with the EESC

The EFTA CC will invite representatives of the European social partners (e.g. ETUC, BusinessEurope and CEEP) to exchange views on topical issues on their agendas and will strengthen its contact with the EESC Single Market Observatory, the Sustainable Development Observatory, the Labour Market Observatory and other EESC bodies.

EFTA relations with the EU

The EFTA CC will follow developments in EFTA's relations with the EU, both with regard to EEA cooperation and the Swiss-EU bilateral agreements, including the EEA Financial Mechanism.

The Swiss delegation of the EFTA CC will on a continuous basis be invited to provide updates on Swiss-EU bilateral relations and keep the other members informed of how the latest EEA developments are also of relevance to Switzerland.

Other issues or topics to be addressed

Over the course of the year, the EFTA CC will in addition aim at addressing country policy developments within the EU and EFTA surrounding responsible business laws (human rights, due diligence, liability etc). It may also address dispositions for processes and production methods (PPM) in ensuring sustainable and ethical trade.

The rapid rise of protectionism has serious effects on EFTA economies' growth and employment. The CC will consider the impact of this development and discuss policies against protectionism.

III Provisional meeting schedule for 2021

Date	Place	Meeting	Participation
9 March (14:00-15:00)	Videoconference	EFTA CC Bureau	Bureau members
10 March (10:00-11:30)	Videoconference	EFTA CC	All members
10 March (14:00-15:00)	Videoconference	Meeting with EFTA Standing Committee	All members
18 March (10:00-12:00)	Videoconference	Meeting with EFTA Working Groups	EFTA CC + WGs
30 March (14:00-15:30)	Videoconference	EFTA CC and EFTA PC	EFTA CC + PC
28 April	Videoconference	EEA JPC	EFTA CC Chair and Vice-Chair invited as observers
31 May (08:45-09:15)	Videoconference	EFTA CC Bureau	EFTA CC Bureau Members
31 May (09:30-10:45)	Videoconference	EFTA CC	All members
31 May (11:00-13:00)	Videoconference	Meeting with EFTA Ministers	All members
31 May (14:00-16:00)	Videoconference	EFTA CC & PC	All members
23-27 August	Reykjavik	EEA JPC Session	EEA CC Chairs invited as observer
13 September (14:30-16:00)	Videoconference	EFTA CC	All members
21 October (14:00-16:00)	Videoconference	EFTA CC	All members
8-12 November (TBC)	TBC	EFTA PC FTA 3 rd country visit	EFTA CC Chair and Vice-Chair invited as observers

23 November	Brussels	EFTA CC Bureau	EFTA CC Bureau Members
23 November	Brussels	EFTA CC	All members
23-24 November (TBC)	Brussels	Meeting of EFTA advisory bodies	EFTA CC & PC
24 November (TBC)	Brussels	Meeting with EFTA Ministerial Chair	EFTA CC & PC
24 November (TBC)	Brussels	Meeting with the EEA EFTA Ministers of Foreign Affairs	EFTA CC & PC
14 December	Brussels	EEA CC Bureau	EEA CC Bureau Members
14 December	Brussels	EEA CC	IS, LI, NO Members CH as observers

Annex I

STATUS ON EFTA's THIRD COUNTRY RELATIONS

In 2021, EFTA CC will particularly focus on:

- Ratification and entry into force of finalised agreements: the accession of Guatemala to the EFTA-Central America FTA, bilateral agricultural agreements with Israel and the FTAs with Ecuador, Turkey, Indonesia and Mercosur;
 - Ongoing negotiations with India, Malaysia and Vietnam (negotiations with Algeria; Honduras, RuBeKa (Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan) and Thailand are currently on hold);
 - Ongoing and potential negotiations on extending the scope of existing FTAs to areas such as trade in services, investment, government procurement, intellectual property rights and sustainable development, e.g. with Canada, Chile, and Southern African Customs Union (SACU);
 - Update bilateral agricultural agreements with the Palestinian Authority;
 - Continue preparations for negotiations with Moldova, continue scoping exercise with Pakistan and monitor situation in Kosovo;
 - Joint declarations on cooperation: Kosovo, Nigeria, Moldova, Mauritius, Mongolia, Myanmar and Pakistan;
 - Discussions to seek closer cooperation with the East African Community (EAC);
 - Inclusion of model provisions on labour and environmental standards in FTAs (sustainable development chapter) as well as on gender related issues and follow-up concerning their implementation;
 - Inclusion of model provisions on digitalisation/e-commerce in EFTA's FTAs;
 - EFTA measures on transparency in trade negotiations, especially with regards to the increased cooperation foreseen with EFTA Advisory Bodies;
 - The European Union's trade policy and negotiation of FTAs.
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