

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA
JOINT PARLIAMENTARY
COMMITTEE

31st Meeting

4 November 2008, Brussels

RESOLUTIONS

Adopted pursuant to Rules 11 and 13 of the Rules of Procedure,
at the 31st meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Committee

in Brussels, 4 November 2008

- ***Research and Education Programmes: The EEA and the EFTA States***
(Ref. **1087195**)

Co-rapporteurs: Ms Hanne DAHL (IND/DEM - Denmark)
Mr Øystein DJUPEDAL (Social Left Party - Norway)
adopted unanimously.

and

- ***Future Perspectives for the European Economic Area*** (Ref. **1087194**)

Co-rapporteurs: Ms Katrín JÚLIUSDÓTTIR (Social Democratic Alliance - Iceland)
Ms Bilyana RAEVA (ALDE - Bulgaria)
adopted unanimously

RESOLUTION

on

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMES: THE EEA AND THE EFTA STATES

The European Economic Area Joint Parliamentary Committee:

1. notes that the participation of the EFTA States in the EU programmes is one of the best examples of fruitful and mutually beneficial EFTA-EU cooperation in the Internal Market outside the four freedoms,
2. notes that on the basis of Article 78 of the EEA agreement and of Protocol 31, article 4 to the EEA Agreement, EEA EFTA States have had the possibility to participate in all education and training programmes from 1 January 1995,
3. notes that if Switzerland is to participate in EU education and training programmes as a full member, a bilateral agreement must be concluded,
4. acknowledges that at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, the EU set itself the goal of becoming by 2010 the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion"; and mindful of that in February 2005 the Lisbon Agenda was re-focused on actions that promote growth and jobs in a manner that is fully consistent with the objective of sustainable development,
5. welcomes that the new generation of EU programmes was included in the EEA Agreement in 2007, which opened up a wide variety of opportunities for EFTA citizens to cooperate in diverse policy areas such as youth, culture, health, environment, civil protection, energy and gender equality; and while allowing EFTA participants to find EU partners, the programmes also provide an opportunity for the EU to benefit from the expertise and best practices of EFTA States,
6. underlines the importance of the EFTA national agencies, national contact points, programme offices and project managers which are crucial for the administration of the new EU programmes in the EFTA States,
7. notes with interest that the total EEA EFTA commitments to the EU programmes from 2007 to 2013 are estimated at up to €1.5 billion and are equivalent to 2,28% of the total budget of each programme,
8. stresses that with the EEA grants and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, the EEA EFTA States will contribute a total of €1.239 billion

between 2004 and 2009 to the new EU member countries, as well as to Greece, Portugal and Spain; and welcomes the wide range of priority sectors that the financial mechanisms supports projects in, such as protection of the environment, conservation of the European cultural heritage, health and childcare and development of human resources as well as academic research,

9. highlights that the EEA Agreement provides the EEA EFTA States with the possibility to participate in the EU's research Framework Programmes on an equal footing with EU Member States,
10. welcomes that since June 2007, all four EFTA States have been participating in EU's Seventh Framework Programmes and that legal entities established in these countries have been able to receive Community contributions for contracts/grant agreements signed after 1 January 2007,
11. welcomes the fact that today, Switzerland is one of those countries investing the most in research, since expenditure on research and technological development (R&D) accounts for 2.6% of its GDP and that more than two-thirds of Swiss spending on research is accounted for by the private sector,
12. recognises that the European Parliament has gained considerable influence over the education and training measures with the introduction of the Co-decision procedure into the Maastricht Treaty and that in its role as co-legislator, it has been able to increase the budget for several Community programmes such as increasing the monthly Erasmus grant through negotiations with the Council,
13. regrets that cooperation in the field of education and training, like the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes or the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme through the open method of coordination, takes place on a purely intergovernmental basis, without any possibility of democratic scrutiny through the European Parliament,
14. welcomes that Iceland and Norway are taking part in the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, where the countries have exceeded the composite objective of the five benchmarks set for 2010 and are progressing in yearly averages; also welcomes that Norway and Iceland are among the countries which have developed comprehensive and coherent lifelong learning strategies and that their performance in the field of lifelong learning participation of adults is already way above the EU benchmark for 2010,
15. reminds that the objectives set under the Lisbon Strategy call for a faster modernisation of the EU Member States' education and training systems.
16. urges EU Member States' education and training systems to be made both more effective and more equal given the ever more competitive

international environment, the high number of unemployed young people, the unequal situation of young migrants and the needs of the employment market,

17. stresses the need to invest in the early stages of education and to support the integration of immigrant children in early education; and underlines the need to support initial and further training for teachers,
18. highlights that a major difficulty for setting up new European research infrastructures is the lack of an adequate legal framework allowing the creation of appropriate partnerships with partners from different countries; and urges a new legal form at Community level to be concluded as soon as possible,
19. underlines that EFTA countries' needs should be taken into account in all new initiatives that are established for further developing European Research Areas; and urges that rules of participation in the new initiatives should be shaped in a way which does not prevent EFTA countries and their research communities from participating fully,
20. stresses that Article 81(a) of the EEA Agreement stipulates that the EFTA States shall have access to all parts of a programme,
21. notes that the European Commission has over the last years set up five Executive Agencies which are direct subordinates of the European Commission, established in accordance with *Council Regulation (EC) No 58/2003* with a view to being entrusted with certain tasks relating to the management of one or more Community programmes,
22. highlights that the agencies are set up for a fixed period and that the running costs of the Agencies are covered by the EU programme budgets; and stresses that the EEA EFTA States contribute therefore automatically to the Executive Agencies on the same basis as for the programmes and according to the GDP-based proportionality factor,
23. emphasises that with the Executive Agencies being intrinsically linked to the EU programmes, which are incorporated in the EEA agreement, the EEA EFTA States shall have full access to the recruitment procedure as with all other activities of the agencies.
24. highly regrets the decision in July 2008 to block the employment of EEA EFTA citizens; demands further information from the European Commission on the merits of that decision; and strongly urges that this decision is reversed as soon as possible.

RESOLUTION

on

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES FOR THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

The European Economic Area Joint Parliamentary Committee:

1. recognises that the EEA Agreement is the most comprehensive international agreement ever concluded by the EU and by the three EEA EFTA States, and that the EU has gone through considerable changes in the 15 years of the existence of the EEA,
2. emphasises that the profound changes which are facing the EEA Agreement is an ongoing development and an accumulation of 15 years of treaty revisions and other developments,
3. welcomes the positive endorsement of the Lisbon Treaty by the European Parliament; and hopes for a positive conclusion of the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty, respecting the democratic will of all EU member states,
4. underlines that a positive conclusion to the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty would further blur the lines between the EEA relevant Internal Market and other EU policies,
5. recognises that the EU-EEA EFTA balance of power has shifted considerably in the period since the EEA Agreement was concluded and that today there are 27 EU Member States and three EEA EFTA States, the latter with a combined population of approximately one percent of the EU,
6. recognises that the EU has become a more heterogeneous interlocutor, making it less able to accommodate special concerns of the EEA EFTA States through adaptations, exceptions, and transition periods in the EEA,
7. highlights that in response to a number of unforeseen events in the international arena, the role of the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA) has arguably widened, with ESA conducting numerous inspections of food safety and airport security, which were not envisaged when the EEA Agreement was concluded,
8. recognises the rise in the application of 'soft law' measures which includes various types of policy instruments that share the characteristic of being not legally binding and constitutes a shift from the traditional

regulations, directives and decisions, which would be incorporated in the EEA Agreement, and thereby challenges the EEA EFTA States,

9. is aware that the changing balance of power among the EU institutions also affects the EEA Agreement, as legislation proposed by the Commission more often gets substantially amended by the Council and the European Parliament, which in turn diminishes the importance of EEA EFTA participation in expert groups assisting the Commission in preparing new legislation,
10. is mindful that whereas a clear distinction between the Internal Market and other EU activities is crucial to the EEA EFTA States, it is becoming increasingly irrelevant in the EU and as a result, a growing number of legal acts and policy initiatives that are relevant to the EEA also include elements that are not covered by the EEA Agreement; and warns that with the rise of these trends it is certain that the EEA EFTA States will see more new legal acts and policy initiatives which comprise elements which go further than the scope of the EEA and which will make it increasingly difficult to define EEA relevance, and consequently, to reach agreement on their incorporation into the EEA Agreement,
11. questions whether the EEA EFTA States can continue to deal with the rapidly growing number of legal acts and policy initiatives that are relevant to the EEA but also include elements that are not covered by the EEA Agreement on a case by case basis; and encourages a reinforced and coordinated approach among the EEA EFTA States,
12. notes that a lack of knowledge in the EU institutions of the rights and obligations contained in the EEA Agreement creates problems for EEA EFTA inclusion and participation in EEA relevant initiatives and committees as mandated by the Agreement,
13. highlights the on-going financial crisis and its impact on the economies of EEA States; points to the importance of legal certainty; asks the EEA States to examine the existing legal framework and ensure that obligations are clear; and to explore possibilities of an EEA-wide approach, which would include the European Central Bank participation, if considered necessary,
14. highlights the negotiations on a new Financial Mechanisms from 2009 onwards, which were launched in September 2008; and asks the negotiating sides to strive to reach a mutually acceptable conclusion in a timely manner so as not to jeopardise the functioning of the EEA Agreement, in order to avoid the situation in 2007 when the EEA was rendered in a legal uncertainty for a lengthy period of time,
15. asks the European Commission to provide the national parliaments of the EEA EFTA States with the legislative proposals which are sent to the national parliaments of the EU Member States for consultation when these regard matters of the Internal Market,

16. takes note of the Norwegian and the Icelandic Governments' recently published respective reports on Europe and EEA matters; and welcomes recent procedural changes in the EEA EFTA national parliaments in matters concerning EU and EEA affairs,
17. urges even more active participation by the EEA EFTA national parliaments in EEA matters with regard to strengthening bilateral relations with the European Parliament and the European Parliament political party groups,
18. asks the European Parliament to accommodate a more active participation by the EEA EFTA national parliaments by allowing them to establish representative offices in the premises of the European Parliament,
19. instructs its President to forward this resolution to the EEA institutions, the European Parliament and the EEA EFTA Parliaments.