



EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION

CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Ref. 21-3128

13 December 2021

Work Programme 2022

I Introduction

The objectives 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 2022 (preliminary meeting schedule can be found in Annex I):

- Meeting with EFTA Ministers (spring/summer)
- Meeting with the EFTA Standing Committee (spring)
- Seminar on employment and social affairs, organised jointly with EFTA working groups (spring)
- Joint EFTA advisory bodies' spring conference (spring)
- Meeting with the Ministerial Chair of the EFTA Council (autumn)
- Meeting with the three EEA EFTA Foreign Ministers (autumn)
- Meetings with the EFTA Parliamentary Committee (EFTA PC) throughout the year, as deemed of mutual interest

Through the close 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, and vice versa, when mutual benefits can be derived therefrom, especially by avoiding duplication of work in the two Committees as described in the EFTA CC Rules of Procedure (ref-14-46784), with reference to rules 17 to 20.

The EFTA CC may also plan and organise additional activities throughout the year. This may take the form of webinars, meetings or opinions issued 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 ‘Norwegian Workers’ will hold the chairmanship of the EFTA CC in 2022 as set out in the Note on the Rotation System of the EFTA Consultative Committee (ref. 16-3584).

II List of priorities in 2022

Third-country relations

The EFTA CC will continue to monitor and scrutinise developments in EFTA’s third-country relations. The committee will keep a strong focus on initiatives with relevance for the social partners. In particular, the committee will follow up on the implementation of the chapter on Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD), and the final steps in the implementation of measures to increase transparency in EFTA trade negotiations that were adopted by EFTA Ministers in October 2020 (ref. 20-3130). The EFTA CC will continue to monitor developments relating to the possible adoption of sustainability impact assessments of EFTA FTAs and the progress of newly adopted provisions on digital trade (e-commerce). The EFTA CC will further continue to discuss process and production methods (PPMs) as a possibility to ensure sustainable trade.

With regard to ongoing third-country processes the EFTA CC will continue to follow the EFTA–Mercosur legal review, and how the issues outstanding related to climate change and deforestation will be addressed. Further, the Committee will observe negotiations with India, Malaysia, Vietnam, Moldova, and the possible relaunch of the negotiation with Thailand. The EFTA CC will also follow the modernisation of EFTA FTAs especially with the update of TSD provisions in mind. The EFTA CC will continue to monitor existing trade agreements such as the EFTA–South Korea FTA, and those FTAs with a chapter on trade and sustainability such as Turkey and Indonesia.

Two EFTA CC observers will participate in the EFTA Parliamentary Committee’s third-country visit, that is planned in March 2022. 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 with a written and oral report.

EU priorities, horizontal issues and Single Market initiatives

The EFTA CC will follow closely various initiatives from the European Union that have an impact on the EEA EFTA States and are linked to employment and social affairs, keeping in mind the recent European Commission Action Plan to implement the European Social Pillar and the legislative and non-legislative initiatives proposed under the Action Plan.

A special emphasis will also be given to the European Commission’s initiatives under the European Green Deal and the Fit for 55 package, A Europe Fit for the Digital Age, and An Economy that Works for People.

The EFTA CC will continue to monitor the Commission’s proposals for a Directive on adequate minimum wages in the European Union, a carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM), and the Social Climate Fund, and other relevant Fit for 55 legislation, and the implementation of

the of OECD/G20 processes for fairer taxation. The EU's wage transparency proposal will be monitored and the EU's next steps with regards to platform work. Further the EFTA CC will follow files related to the digital development within the Single Market, such as the Digital Services Act, Digital Markets Act and AI.

The EFTA CC will continue to follow new initiatives and the implementation of the Single Market such as the proposed single market emergency instrument in the field of competition. The participation of the EEA EFTA States in EU Programmes will be discussed and scrutinised. Although not within the scope of the EEA Agreement, the committee may follow developments on areas that are relevant to the social partners, such as the European industrial strategy.

EFTA CC opinions and EEA CC reports and resolutions

The EEA CC will prepare reports and resolutions on the following topics in 2022:

- Social aspects of the Fit for 55 package
- Challenges and opportunities of increased use of artificial intelligence (AI) in work life

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 meeting with the relevant EFTA committees and WGs during spring 2022 as has become tradition.

If the epidemiological situation allows, the EFTA CC will consider organising, together with the EFTA Parliamentary Committee, a high-level spring conference.

EU social dialogue and relations with the EESC

The EFTA CC will invite representatives of the European social partners (e.g. ETUC, BusinessEurope and SGI Europe) to exchange views on topical issues on their agendas.

The EFTA CC will strengthen its contact with the EESC Single Market Observatory, the Sustainable Development Observatory, the Labour Market Observatory and other EESC bodies (ref. 19-4232). The committee might appoint special rapporteurs to follow the EESC bodies, as is stipulated in rule 18 of the EFTA CC Rules of Procedures.

EFTA relations with the EU

The EFTA CC will follow developments in EFTA's relations with the EU, both regarding EEA cooperation and the Swiss–EU bilateral agreements, including the EEA Financial Mechanism, keeping in mind issues pertaining to the situation of rule of law and human rights in the beneficiary states.

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.

Implementation and follow-up

This work programme for 2022 will be implemented throughout the year with guidance from the Chair of the EFTA CC. At the last meeting of the year, usually held in November, the committee will review this document, mindful of the progress made over the year in addressing specific topics. A yearly review report will be drafted by the outgoing chair with support from the EFTA Secretariat that will be shared with committee members and the public before the end of the year.

ANNEX I

Ref. 21-3126

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Provisional meeting schedule for 2022

| Dates | Place | Meeting |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| February/March | Brussels, Belgium or virtual (tbc) | Seminar with EFTA Working Groups EFTA CC Bureau EFTA CC meeting |
| March/April (tbc) | Videoconference | Briefing of the TCC Chair to the EFTA advisory bodies |
| Spring (tbc) | Brussels (tbc) | EFTA advisory bodies spring conference |
| Week of 9-13 May (tbc) | Bergen, Norway (tbc) | EEA CC Bureau EEA CC |
| 26-28 June (tbc) | Borgarnes, Iceland | Meeting of EFTA advisory bodies and EFTA Ministers Joint meeting with the EFTA Parliamentary Committee EFTA CC Bureau EFTA CC meeting |
| Autumn | Videoconference | EFTA CC Bureau EFTA CC meeting |
| November | Brussels, Belgium | Meeting with EEA EFTA Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting with EFTA Ministerial Chair Joint meeting with EFTA advisory bodies EFTA CC Bureau EFTA CC meeting |