

PRIORITIES OF THE ICELANDIC CHAIR

FIRST HALF OF 2021

The purpose of this overview is to highlight the priorities of the Icelandic Chair of the EFTA Standing Committee during the first half of 2021. The priorities are supplemented by work programmes prepared for the EFTA subcommittees and selected EEA EFTA Working Groups.

COVID-19 response measures

Ensure continued cooperation and coordination with the EU on response measures to COVID-19, in particular regarding testing strategy and vaccine plans, as well as economic recovery. Continue to assess and ensure swift incorporation of urgent COVID-related acts which are deemed relevant.

Ensuring the good functioning of the Agreement - EEA Outreach

Maintain efforts to uphold the integrity and good functioning of the EEA Agreement. To this end continue to strengthen knowledge of the EEA Agreement and Financial Mechanisms and make full use of the available tools to spread information on the EEA. In addition to the biannual EFTA seminars, a seminar will be organised on Innovation in Climate and Energy Solutions in the context of the European Green Deal.

Participation in EU programmes

Finalise preparations for the incorporation of the new EU programmes into the EEA Agreement by 10 July 2021. Continue to prepare relevant draft Joint Committee decisions in view of submission to the EEAS early 2021, once the relevant acts have been adopted by the EU. Preserve the rights and obligations of the EEA-EFTA States in accordance with the EEA Agreement, both for the new 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and for the current programme period 2014-2020.

Incorporation of EEA-relevant acts

Maintain a level playing field in the European Economic Area, with continued focus on timely incorporation of new EEA relevant EU acts. This entails building on success measures in 2019 and turning around the negative 2020 trend. It is pivotal that all parties to the Agreement honour their responsibilities by securing necessary resources in this regard. Focus will be on critical acts such as the NIS Directive and Cybersecurity Act, BEREC, EASA, energy acts, as well as acts in the field of transport and financial services where a relatively large numbers of acts are outstanding.

Decision-shaping

Identify and provide input to the EU on relevant EEA matters presented in the 2021 Commission's Work Programme. Emphasis will be placed on measures arising from the European Green Deal, Europe's Digital Decade, Action Plan on Anti-Money Laundering, as well as the European Pillar of Social Rights with a view to enhancing social fairness of the digital and green transitions. Efforts to scrutinize pre-pipeline and pipeline issues will be continued and EEA EFTA comments prepared where appropriate. In this regard, it is particularly important to identify at an early stage possible two pillar issues related to major pieces of new EEA relevant legislation.

Other activities

Continue close dialogue between the EEA EFTA States and the EU UK Task Force in order to preserve the interests of all parties concerned in the context of the future relationship with the

UK, in particular the good functioning of the internal market. Ensure the full implementation of the EEA Separation Agreement following the expiration of the transitional period.

As the current EEA Financial Mechanism (2014-2021) is coming to an end, prepare to review the need to address economic and social disparities within the European Economic Area, in accordance with Article 11 of Protocol 38c of the EEA Agreement. In this context, consider also the experience of the bilateral aspects of EEA Grants and explore ways to further strengthen bilateral relations between the donor states and the beneficiaries.