

## Report of the Norwegian Chair of the EFTA Standing Committee

First half of 2023

### **EEA Outreach:**

A New Years' reception was held in the EFTA House in January for the wider EFTA community in Brussels, including Universities and businesses from the Member States. The EFTA Secretariat held an EEA Seminar in March in a new format. The seminar included presentations in the morning, which were also streamed online, and in-person workshops in the afternoon. Over 90 people attended in person and over 150 online and the new format was well received by the participants as evidenced by post-event surveys.

During the Norwegian Chairmanship, work continued to ensure the EEA EFTA States' equal rights and obligations when participating in EU programmes. Meetings were held with DG EAC and DG RTD covering, respectively, Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. EEA EFTA participation has also been regularly addressed in Working Group meetings.

### **Decision-shaping:**

During the Norwegian Chairmanship, it was highlighted in a variety of fora the integral role of the EEA EFTA States in the Internal Market, European supply chains and the European twin transitions, and underlined that the EU must take into account its EEA obligations, also where relevant in its trade policy. Notable examples are the 59<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Committee in Strasbourg on 15 March, the Joint Committee briefing on EU's state aid policy for the Internal Market and the EU's response to the IRA and, most recently, in the 24 May EEA Council.

Furthermore, a particular focus was given to initiatives stemming from the 30-year anniversary of the Single Market. This was inter alia done by inviting DG GROW and the Secretariat General of the Commission to present the two Commission Communications marking the anniversary, namely "The Single Market at 30" and "Long-term competitiveness of the EU looking beyond 2030" for the Working Group on Enterprise Policy and Internal Market Affairs. The presentation took place in April.

Two EEA EFTA Comments were sent to the EU during the first half of 2023. The first was a comment on the Proposal for a Regulation establishing a Single Market Emergency Instrument and repealing Council Regulation (EC) 2679/98. The comment was also presented by the Chair to the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) in the European Parliament. The second comment was on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market (European Media Freedom Act).

The EEA EFTA States got invited – upon request – to all the expert groups and comitology committees under Digital Markets Act and the Digital Services Act, and participated actively in these.

### **Incorporation of legal acts:**

During the first half year of 2023 a total number of 328 acts were incorporated in 174 Joint Committee Decisions, entailing a decrease in the total number of acts awaiting incorporation over the period. The number of outstanding acts after the last EEA Joint Committee meeting under the Chairmanship was 465 acts. Furthermore, by the end of the Chairmanship the number of acts where the constitutional requirements were more than six months have passed since their adoption had also decreased to 26.

A new computer system for approval of Joint Committee Decisions has been rolled out by the EFTA Secretariat. The "online forms project" has progressed significantly in recent months, including several changes to enhance the user-friendliness and functionality of the form. The use of SharePoint to streamline work processes and enhance productivity and collaboration with the Member States has been increased. This includes a platform for the Subcommittees I-V and EFTA Working Groups. As of June 2023, over 500 individuals have joined and been trained to use the SharePoint platforms.

The fast track procedure for the approval of acts for incorporation into the EEA Agreement was amended, following work undertaken by the previous chairmanship, to include the following groups of acts:

- Geographical indication on wine and spirit drinks (Expert Group on Wine and Spirit Drinks)
- Novel Foods (WG Food Chain)
- Establishment of the European List of ship recycling facilities (WG on the Environment)
- Third-country equivalence decisions in the field of financial services (WG on Financial Services)

An action plan on outstanding acts with a compliance date before 2019 was drawn up and shared with the EU Side in the Joint Subcommittee I-IV.

In May, the first joint Subcommittee V meeting was held for the first time in several years.

An ad hoc working group under the auspice of Subcommittee V was established to assess whether, and if so, the drafting of adaptation texts could be streamlined, as well as to assess the benefits and possible drawbacks of drawing up consolidated versions of EEA legal texts.

In April, a special meeting on EU initiatives and acts with a complex relation to the EEA Agreement and distinct horizontal dimensions was organised by Subcommittees I-IV to coordinate the work among the EEA EFTA States. It included experts from capitals in different working and expert groups, as well as delegates from Subcommittees I-IV and V. It was decided to establish a horizontal structure to assess the related practical effects on the Internal Market and the EEA EFTA States' participation therein. Dedicated task forces on the proposals for a Net Zero Industry Act, the Critical Raw Materials Act and the Chips Act were established.

The Digital Platform Task Force was established to prepare for the incorporation of Digital Markets Act and the Digital Services Act into the EEA Agreement, and a task force for the Secure Connectivity Programme was also established. Preparatory meetings with the EU side have been organized on incoming EU acts, including the upcoming Commission proposal for reform of the electricity market design, Critical Raw Materials Act, the Digital Markets Act, the Digital Services Act, EEA relevant legislation in the Fit for 55 Package, the Digital Finance Package and the proposal of a Green Deal Industrial Plan, most notably the Net-Zero Industry Act and adaptations to state aid rules.

#### **Financial Mechanism:**

The negotiations with the European Commission regarding a new period of the Financial Mechanism and, in parallel, regarding arrangements for trade in fish and marine products between some of the EEA EFTA States and the EU, continued with a view to a swift conclusion.

Preparations for a specific exhibition on the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms in the European Parliament in September was carried out and save the date will be sent out before the summer. The aim of the exhibition is to spread knowledge of the contributions of the EEA EFTA States to reduce economic and social disparities in the EEA.

#### **Synergies between the three EFTA House organisations:**

Work has continued in order to further enhance the synergies between the three EFTA House organisations. The EFTA House' Joint Facilities and Service Team has been operating harmoniously and efficiently throughout the year, and a joint recruitment process for the team leader is now in its final steps. A new HR/Payroll system has been implemented across the institutions and collaboration in the area of information security has been carried out between the IT teams of the institutions.