

REPORT OF THE LIECHTENSTEIN CHAIR OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE FIRST HALF OF 2022

Timely incorporation of EEA-relevant legal acts

During the Liechtenstein Chairmanship, a total of 195 JCDs incorporating 336 acts were adopted by the Joint Committee which amounts to an average adoption of close to 50 JCDs at each JC meeting. This is a good trend which, if maintained in the second half of 2022, could lead to the incorporation of close to 700 EU legal acts in 2022. Among the legal acts adopted, various deserve special mention such as 'the Tobacco files' and 'the Organic Production package', the regulation on approval and market surveillance of motor vehicles, the regulation setting up rules and procedures in safety assessment of clinical trials, the Covered Bonds Regulation, the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive from 2010, the revision of protocol 4 on rules of origin, the Regulation establishing a European Maritime Single Window Environment, the act amending the General Block Exemption Regulation in the field of State Aid, the directive on waste from electric and electronic equipment and a total of 24 COVID-19 related acts.

Reducing the processing time for the incorporation of EU legal acts

During its Chairmanship, Liechtenstein also prioritised the reduction of the backlog, building on work initiated by the preceding Norwegian Chair. After the Joint Committee meeting on the 8th of July, the number of outstanding legal acts was once again close to the 500 mark (502). To make progress in fields with a particularly high backlog, the Secretariat organised a meeting between representatives from the WG Energy and the heads of delegations of SC I-IV in April to identify action points and Sub-committees I-IV received detailed reports with statistics and action points from the WG on Transport and the WGs on Statistics and Financial Services are working on a report that will be presented in September. The Liechtenstein Chair also tasked the Secretariat to assemble information on the incorporation procedures with the aim of furthering continued efforts on the EEA EFTA side to increase the speed of the incorporation procedure.

Constitutional requirements

The Liechtenstein Chairmanship also put an emphasis on the matter of constitutional requirements. The Secretariat was tasked with a memo to provide an overview of the status quo, also informing about the number of JCDs that cannot enter into force due to their link to JCDs awaiting the lifting of constitutional requirements. In this context, the Liechtenstein Chair invited the EEA EFTA States to have a closer look at how procedures to deliver bills to national parliaments could be accelerated in response to an increased interest of the EU in this aspect of the incorporation process.

Transfer of EEA file to the European Commission

During the Liechtenstein Chairmanship, the transfer of the EEA file from the EEAS to the European Commission took place. Excellent working relationships were established on all levels and a welcome increase of momentum in cooperation with the EU was witnessed, also underlined by the high commitment of Vice-President of the Commission Maroš Šefčovič to his new file, exemplified i.a. by his participation in the EEA Council and the inauguration of the EFTA House in May.

EEA Council

The first EEA Council with the new EU counterparts was a full success with an excellent level of attendance from the EU side and substantial discussions on topics of great urgency for Europe (reducing strategic dependencies in the fields of raw materials and energy; Russian war on Ukraine and Arctic). Regrettably, it was not possible to adopt Council conclusions due to an outstanding agreement with the EU side on the paragraphs on the EEA Financial Mechanism.

Enhancing knowledge of the EEA - EEA Outreach

Under the Liechtenstein Chairmanship, outreach activities to enhance the knowledge of the EEA continued. The EFTA House was successfully inaugurated with a great level of attendance and very positive feedback from invitees. The Secretariat also made use of the new premises, inviting key Commission services to EFTA House visits (7 visits from: DG AGRI, DG ENERGY and CLIMA, DG CNECT, DG ENV, DG R&I, DG MOVE and the COM Legal Service). Work on hosting the EEA Council in the EFTA House in November also progressed and the regular biannual seminar on the EEA was held in February.

Decision-shaping

Active outreach to the EU side to ensure the interests of the EEA EFTA States are duly taken into account in the drafting process of EEA relevant EU legal acts also continued during the Liechtenstein Chairmanship. Four EEA EFTA comments on the Union Secure Connectivity Programme and the proposals for a Regulation on European Green Bonds, a Regulation on general product safety as well as on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism were submitted to the EU as well as a letter on cyber security sent to the Director General at DG CNECT on behalf of the Standing Committee Chair.

EU programme participation

During the Liechtenstein Chairmanship, the participation of the EEA EFTA States in the Invest EU programme was finalised.

Other activities - Financial Mechanisms

Finally, during the Liechtenstein Chairmanship, the negotiations on a possible sixth EEA Grants period took off. Two meetings, one on chief negotiator level and one on technical level, were organised on the financial contribution throughout which the EEA EFTA and the EU side outlined the general parameters of their positions.