

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

JOINT COMMITTEE

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1 Annex

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I General overview

The EEA Joint Committee met 11 times in 1998, adopted 122 decisions (compared to 107 decisions in the previous year) incorporating 824 acts, of which 644 were veterinary acts in the revised Annex I (compared to 146 acts the previous year) and held consultations on a number of important issues.

This report makes a general assessment of the work of the EEA Joint Committee in 1998, looking first at decision-making procedures and then at decision shaping. Following this overview is a sector-by-sector review of activity under the Joint Committee with particular reference to new legislation incorporated into the EEA Agreement.

Following the launch of the accession process on the EU side and consistent with previous discussions on the relevance to the EEA of enlargement in view of Article 128, the Commission Task Force Accession Negotiations provided briefings on a regular basis in the Joint Committee. The EFTA side expressed its appreciation at these briefings but reiterated its view that information on paper, particularly on more technical aspects, would be important. The EU Chairman stated that the Commission would seek to keep the EFTA side fully informed of developments, but pointed out that the final say on this matter rested with the negotiating partners.

Following its expressed intention to follow the implementation of the Amsterdam Treaty and its possible implications for EEA co-operation, the EFTA side, in the light of preliminary findings, raised the matter at the EEA Council meeting of 9 June 1998. As a result, the EEA Council noted that the Amsterdam Treaty integrates environmental considerations into all policies and actions undertaken by the Community and envisaged informal EEA ministerial meetings in the field of the environment.

Another matter raised in the autumn was the Financial Mechanism of the EEA. In the light of the objective laid down in Article 115 of the EEA Agreement, the EU Council proposed that the EEA Joint Committee be invited to begin discussions on the contribution of the EEA EFTA States to this objective, to supplement the efforts already undertaken by the Community in this respect. While not sharing the view of the EU side that there exists a legal obligation, the EFTA side expressed readiness in the Joint Committee to begin negotiations on a contribution to the objectives of Article 115. Negotiations continue between the Commission and the EEA EFTA States.

Nevertheless, in view of certain Joint Committee decisions on which the EU Council was not able to take a position, the normal functioning of the EEA Agreement appeared to be affected by non-conclusion of these discussions.

Decision making

Following determined efforts to accelerate decision taking by the EFTA side and the Commission services responsible for the EEA, the rate of decision making in 1998 increased significantly from the year before. An average of 11 decisions (compared to about 9 in 1997) was adopted per working month, representing an average of about 16 acts (13 in 1997) incorporated. This is not including Decision 69/98 which incorporated 644 veterinary acts. However, as the number of acts waiting to be incorporated still amounted to a significant number, the Commission and the EFTA Secretariat undertook a review of their procedures. This led to an improvement in the monitoring of acts under processing in the EEA system. It also revealed that while the rate of flow through the Joint Committee had increased considerably, at the end of the year there had been a significant increase in the number of acts awaiting incorporation into the EEA Agreement. This was to a large extent due to the inclusion of a new category of veterinary acts, which will now be incorporated on a regular basis.

Coping with this new category of acts will significantly increase the work of the Joint Committee in the future and it seems likely that the workload of the Joint Committee will continue to increase.

The matter of delays in the publication of Joint Committee decisions was raised by the EU side. The EFTA side recognised the problem and measures were put in place intended to ensure that enough resources were allocated to translation of the related acts into Icelandic and Norwegian. However, at the end of the year there still remained a significant time lag between adoption and publication of Joint Committee decisions.

The EFTA side raised the issue that EFTA participation in renewals or continuations of EU programmes can be endangered by delays in the provision of the necessary legal basis. EU programmes are often only adopted by the EU very close to their planned commencement, thus giving very little time for the completion of Joint Committee procedures and constitutional procedures in the EEA EFTA States where necessary. The strict application by the Commission of the Community's internal rules resulted at the end of the year in the exclusion of EEA EFTA representatives from informal participation in the Board of Governors of the Joint Research Centre, as well as in the management committees. At the same time the EEA EFTA States made provisional financial contributions early in 1999 in line with Protocol 32, calculated according to the proportionality factor as 1.96 per cent of the relevant Community budget. This provisional contribution can be recovered if no legal basis is in force by 30 June 1999.

Technical work on the revised Annex I on veterinary and phytosanitary measures was completed, and the 644 acts were incorporated into the EEA Agreement through Joint Committee Decision 69/98 of 17 July 1998. This Decision entered into force as planned on 1 January 1999, following completion of constitutional procedures in Norway.

Good progress was made in preparing the ground to begin work on finalising Protocol 3 (processed agricultural products) to the EEA Agreement. Norway (by the end of 1997) and Iceland (by the end of 1998) had finalised bilateral discussions as a prerequisite to further negotiations on Protocol 3.

A list of Joint Committee Decisions adopted by the EEA Joint Committee in 1998 is attached at Annex.

Decision shaping

The EEA EFTA States continued actively to contribute written comments and opinions through the information and consultation procedures, and EFTA comments were transmitted to the Commission on the following issues:

- the Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing new rules on aid to shipbuilding
- a Green Paper on Supplementary pensions (2/FS/W/002)
- the proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive on the legal protection of services based on, or consisting of, conditional access (COM(97) 356 FINAL)
- a proposal for a Council Directive amending for the second time Directive 90/394/EEC concerning carcinogens at work
- the Commission Communication "Towards a Europe of knowledge"
- the Green Paper on the convergence of the telecommunications, media and information technology sectors, and the implications for regulation (COM(97) 623)
- the Commission's report on harmonisation requirements related to support for renewable energy sources under the Electricity Directive (1/EM/W/015)
- the Commission Proposal for a Council Directive on Manning Conditions for Regular Passenger and Ferry Services between Member States
- the Commission draft communication on the application of EC competition rules to vertical restraints
- the proposal for a first European Community Framework Programme in Support of Culture (2000 – 2004) (4/CU/W/003)
- the proposal for a revision of Directive 90/220/EC on GMOs
- the proposals for new education, training and youth programmes (4/TD/W/006)
- the proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive approximating the legal arrangements for the protection of inventions by utility model (COM(97) 691 final) (1/IP/W/004)
- the proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) amending regulation (EEC) No 823/87 laying down special provisions relating to quality wines produced in specified regions (SCI/L 73/98)
- Commission proposal for an Energy Framework Programme
- the White paper on Renewable Energy Sources
- the Commission proposal on information and consultation on crude oil supply costs and the consumer price of petroleum products
- Commission proposal for a Directive on Airport Charges

EFTA experts also were also associated with the work of a wide range of EU committees during 1998. EFTA representatives were invited for the first time to the High-level Group on road safety.

It remains difficult to gauge objectively the effect of EFTA involvement in the EU decision shaping process, as the process is decentralised and involves experts from different ministries following numerous EU committees, which make it difficult to identify cause and effect of input. However, it is clear that the EFTA side generally makes good use of the opportunities afforded under the Agreement to be informed and provide input on EEA relevant matters from inception to adoption by the EU.

Institutional cooperation under the EEA

The Joint Committee agreed a response by its President-in-office on resolutions from the EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on a Common European Transport Policy and on the Information Society and the EEA. The President delivered this statement at the meeting of the JPC in Vaduz on 25 May 1998.

The President-in-office also delivered a statement on behalf of the Joint Committee to further resolutions by the JPC on the functioning of the EEA Agreement in 1997, on the Amsterdam Treaty, on the outcome of the Kyoto Summit and its implications for the EEA and on the free movement of workers in the European Economic Area. The statement was delivered by the President at the meeting of the EEA JPC in Luxembourg on 23 November 1998.

The EEA Consultative Committee, whose role is to strengthen contacts between the social partners in the EU and EFTA States and between the social partners and the intergovernmental bodies, held its annual meeting on 3 June 1998 in Reykjavik, where discussions covered the Single Market, the environment, enlargement and social policy.

II Activities by substance area during 1998, in particular incorporated legislation

In the field of the free movement of goods, 747 acts were incorporated into the EEA Agreement, of which 644 were veterinary acts incorporated by Decision 69/98 on the new Annex I.

Free movement of goods

Technical Regulations, standards, testing and certifications. In the course of the year the EEA Joint Committee adopted sixty-one decisions amending Annex II and Protocol 47, thus incorporating ninety-six new acts into the EEA Agreement. The new acts were technical regulations relating i.a. to dangerous substances, energy labelling, motor vehicles, cosmetics, wine, foodstuffs and maximum residue limits of veterinary medicinal products in food. Annex II and Protocol 47 now contain more than 1,200 acts.

Over the year, experts from the EEA EFTA States participated in more than one hundred committees, working groups and other bodies set up by the Commission in the field of TBTs (Technical Barriers to Trade).

EFTA comments were transmitted to the Commission on several issues within Annex II, including food additives, cereal based food for children, foodstuffs, dietetic food, and wine.

EMEA and medicinal product legislation

The progress made on the preparation for EFTA participation in the European Agency for Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMA) was not as rapid as expected. Despite agreement on a draft Joint Committee decision between the EFTA side and the Commission services and approval by the European Parliament, at the end of the year the draft Joint Committee decision had not yet been adopted.

At the same time the EEA EFTA States were due to make provisional financial contributions early in 1999 in line with Protocol 32, calculated according to the proportionality factor as 1.96 per cent of the relevant Community budget.

Mutual Recognition Agreements

A Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA), in relation to conformity assessment, gives an exporting country the right to test and certify products according to the importing countries' requirements, thus avoiding duplication of testing and certification by the importing country and simplifying trade.

Protocol 12 of the EEA Agreement provides that the Community negotiates MRAs with third countries on the basis that the third countries concerned will conclude with the EEA EFTA States parallel mutual recognition agreements equivalent to those concluded with the Community. The EC negotiations on MRAs with the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Switzerland were closely followed. In line with the signature of Agreements between the EC and the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the EEA EFTA States, in 1998, initialled such parallel Agreements with Australia and New Zealand and good progress had been made in negotiations with Canada. Signature of these MRAs was envisaged for early to mid 1999.

Veterinary matters

Intensive work over several years to incorporate a large number of veterinary acts resulted in the adoption of Joint Committee Decision 69/98 on new Annex I in July. This Decision incorporated at one go 644 new legal acts into the Agreement. The Decision entered into force as planned on 1 January 1999.

Meanwhile work continued on an additional package of acts adopted in the interim period (August 1996-September 1998) and a draft decision to integrate them should be adopted in the early part of 1999. The aim of this "catching-up" exercise was to adopt a

decision to enter into force at the same time as, or as soon as possible after the entry into force of the main Annex I, the desirability of which both the EU Council and the EFTA side had stressed.

Feedingstuffs

Due to the delays regarding the revised Annex I, no new acts concerning feedingstuffs were incorporated into the EEA Agreement in 1998, but thirty-four acts were under consideration by the EFTA side. A draft Joint Committee Decision containing 15 acts adopted up to 1998 was handed over to the EU side for further processing.

EFTA experts participated actively in the work of the EU Standing Committee on Feedingstuffs and its sub-groups. The EFTA side, in addition to taking part in discussions, handed over written comments to the Commission on various topics in the area of feedingstuffs.

Public Procurement

A draft Joint Committee decision incorporating Directives 97/52/EC and 98/4/EC amending four Directives (92/50/EEC, 93/36/EEC, 93/37/EEC and 93/38/EEC) which had been made necessary by the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) under the WTO as well as the adjustments necessary to take account of accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden to the EU, were cleared by the EEA EFTA States and handed over to the Commission in June 1998.

Competition

The rapid incorporation of block exemptions into the EEA Agreement, in order to avoid the creation of a legal gap, continued to be discussed in the Joint Committee and a “faster-track” procedure was put in place. Amendments to the Merger Regulation and new procedural rule on merger control were incorporated into the Agreement. A new form for the notification of mergers was adopted by the EEA EFTA States.

In July 1998, the EEA EFTA States presented comments on the Commission Communication on the application of the Community competition rules to vertical restraints.

Intellectual Property Rights

No new acts were incorporated in the field of intellectual property. EFTA comments were handed over to the Commission on the proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive approximating the legal arrangements for a utility model.

Directive 98/44/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions was adopted on July 6 1998. This is a controversial directive, which may give rise to problems. The Directive was under examination in the EEA EFTA States at the end of the year.

Energy

During 1998 decisions regarding energy-labelling of household washing-machines and washer-dryers were adopted by the Joint Committee. The Commission Directive on energy labelling of household lamps is expected to be incorporated into the EEA Agreement in the beginning of 1999 together with a Directive on dishwashers. The Directive on Common Rules for the internal market in electricity was cleared by the EEA EFTA States and is expected to be incorporated into the EEA Agreement in the first half of 1999.

During 1998 an agreement on the provision for a conciliation procedure under the Directive on transition of electricity was reached between the EEA EFTA States and the Commission.

EFTA comments were submitted to the Commission on the Commission proposal for an Energy Framework Programme (27/3/98); on the White paper on Renewable Energy Sources (18/3/98); on the Report on Harmonisation Requirements for Renewable Energy Sources (26/6/98); and on the Commission proposal on information and consultation on crude oil supply costs and the consumer price of petroleum products (25/11/98).

State Aid

Commission Decision 2496/96/ESCE establishing Community rules for state aid to the steel industry was incorporated into the EEA Agreement in March 1998. In addition, an Agreement was concluded between the EEA EFTA States concerning an amendment to Protocol 3 to the Agreement establishing a Surveillance Authority and a Court of Justice. The amendments to Protocol 3 were necessary to take account of the new procedural rules introduced by the Commission Decision on aid to the steel industry.

A Joint Committee Decision on Council Regulation 1540/98 on aid to shipbuilding was cleared by the EEA EFTA States and handed over to the Commission. The Regulation is expected to be incorporated into the EEA Agreement early in 1999. The Regulation will be replaced by the OECD Agreement when this is ratified by the USA.

Protocol 3 (processed agricultural products)

Protocol 3 had not been finalised during the original EEA negotiations. In order to prepare for further work on this negotiations have been carried out over the past two years on adjusting to the new WTO regime the relevant parts of the bilateral free trade agreements between Iceland and Norway on the one hand and the EU on the other. Agreement between Norway and the Commission having been reached in 1997, an agreement was reached between Iceland and the Commission at the end of 1998 opening the way for work to start on finalising Protocol 3 to the EEA Agreement.

Free Movement of Services and Capital

In the field of the free movement of services and capital, 30 acts were incorporated into the EEA Agreement.

Financial Services

Seven new legislative acts were integrated into Annex IX (financial services) in 1998, including the Cross-border credit transfer Directive, the Investor Compensation Directive and a number of amendments to existing directives in the Annex, such as the solvency ratio Directive and the Capital Adequacy Directive.

In 1998, EFTA experts continued to participate in a number of working groups assisting the Commission in preparing new proposals, and specially nominated delegates observed meetings of the Banking Advisory Committee and of the Insurance Committee.

In relation to the free movement of capital for Liechtenstein, the Joint Committee noted with satisfaction that no extension of the transition period under Annex XII had been requested and that the review provided for had been completed.

Telecommunications services

A draft EEA Joint Committee decision concerning the inclusion of Directive 95/46/EC on the protection of individuals regarding the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data was agreed between the EEA EFTA States and the Commission services. The decision foresees the EEA EFTA States' participation as observers in the Working Party on the Protection of Individuals with regard to the Processing of Personal Data as set up by the Directive. Furthermore, it includes provisions to ensure the complete effectiveness at the same time within the whole European Economic Area regarding measures adopted by the Commission in accordance with Article 31 of the Directive. Presently the proposal is under consideration in the EU Council.

The focus in the EEA in 1998 was on the implementation of the regulatory framework for the liberalisation of the telecommunications market after 1 January 1998. Decisions incorporating the remaining acts for the 1998 regulatory framework into the EEA Agreement are expected to be adopted by the EEA Joint Committee in the beginning of 1999. These include the revised open network provision (ONP) Directive for *Voice Telephony*, the *Interconnection* Directive and the *Licensing* Directive.

The EEA EFTA States made comments on the Green Paper on convergence between the previously separate sectors of telecommunications, broadcasting and information technology in May 1998, and EFTA experts participated in a conference on convergence organised by the Austrian Presidency in Vienna in November.

The EEA EFTA States were invited to the Licensing Committee in March 1998, and representatives from the EEA EFTA States also participated in a meeting of the High Level Committee of Telecommunications Regulators in Vienna in September.

Audiovisual services

A decision on incorporating the Directive amending the 1989 Television without Frontiers Directive is expected to be adopted by the EEA Joint Committee in the beginning of 1999. It was agreed that the EEA EFTA States would provide, in the framework of the review under Annex X, a report to the EU side on the need for a continuation of the exception which allows the scrambling of advertisements for alcoholic beverages on television.

The EEA EFTA States participated in the Audiovisual Conference, organised jointly by the UK Presidency and the Commission in Birmingham, where the key issues relating to future audio-visual policy in Europe were discussed.

In March, the EFTA side forwarded a common EFTA EEA position on the proposed Directive on the legal protection of services based on, or consisting of, conditional access.

Information services

EEA EFTA States were invited for the first time to take part in the meetings of the Working Party on the Internet in November.

Transport

EFTA experts participated actively in the various EU expert meetings and were associated with the work of comitology Committees chaired by the Commission.

Inland transport (including inland waterways): In road transport decisions incorporating five acts into the EEA Agreement were adopted. These acts related to driving licences, road telematics and increased freedom for international passenger transport services. In inland waterways, one legal act on structural improvements was integrated in the Agreement. A draft Joint Committee decision on Commission Regulations (EC) No 3298/94 and (EC) No 1524/96 – Ecopoints had been prepared by the end of the year and adopted in January 1999.

Maritime Transport: The EEA EFTA States presented comments on the Commission proposal on new manning requirements for regular passenger vessels in intra Community trade.

Civil Aviation: EC legal acts on air carrier liability and the limitation of the operation of so-called Chapter II aircraft, were incorporated into the EEA Agreement.

EFTA Statements were presented to the EU side on the establishment of a European Safety Aviation Authority and on the Commission proposal for a harmonised approach to setting air port charges, taking also into consideration proposed amendments by the European Parliament.

Experts from EEA EFTA States were invited as observers in the negotiations between the EU and the CEECs on the establishment of a European Common Aviation Area (ECAA) with ten central and eastern European countries (CEECs). The Agreement will create mutual access to air transport markets, including freedom of establishment, equal conditions for competition, as well as harmonisation of rules on safety and the environment.

Postal services

The EEA Joint Committee adopted a decision to incorporate into the EEA Agreement European Parliament and Council Directive 97/67/EC on common rules for the development of the internal market of Community postal services and the improvement of quality of service.

Free Movement of Persons

In the field of the free movement of persons, 6 acts were incorporated into the EEA Agreement.

Protocol 15

The transitional period for Liechtenstein on Free Movement of Persons established in Protocol 15 of the Agreement came to an end on 31 December 1997, and during 1998, the Commission and the Liechtenstein authorities held regular discussions to prepare the review and the basis for a solution. Liechtenstein introduced safeguard measures as from January 1998. These measures still restrict taking up residence in Liechtenstein, but allow frontier workers to take up employment without restrictions. The Joint Committee was regularly updated on the situation, both with regard to the discussions on a solution, as well as concerning the safeguard measures that Liechtenstein had introduced.

Social Security

Council Regulation (EC) No 118/97 amending and updating Regulations (EEC) Nos. 1408/71 and 574/72 and Council Regulation (EC) No 1290/97 containing miscellaneous amendments to Council Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71 were integrated into the EEA Agreement in July 1998. In addition three Decisions of the Administrative Commission on Social Security for Migrant Workers concerning the model forms necessary for the application of Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71 were incorporated into the Agreement during the year.

Mutual Recognition of Diplomas

Commission Directive 97/38/EC amending Annex C to Council Directive 92/51/EEC on a second general system was incorporated into the EEA Agreement in the beginning of the year. Furthermore, the EFTA side submitted to the Commission a draft EEA Joint Committee decision to incorporate EP/Council Directive 97/50/EC amending Directive

93/16/EEC concerning the free movement of doctors. Discussions continued on the EFTA side concerning the incorporation of the EP/Council Directive 98/5/EC to facilitate practice of the profession of a lawyer on a permanent basis in a Member State other than that in which the qualification was obtained.

European Employment Services

Iceland and Norway have been fully integrated in the EURES-network (EUROpean Employment Services) since the EEA Agreement entered into force in 1994. Four new EURES INFO centres were opened in Norway 1998, increasing the centres to a total of eight from the previous year.

Iceland continued throughout the year to be active in informing its small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) about the EURES-network and the possibilities it offers to employers wanting to recruit employees from across Europe.

Horizontal and flanking policies

In the field of horizontal and flanking policies, 41 acts were incorporated into the EEA Agreement in 1998.

Social Policy

In the field of **equal opportunities** a Joint Committee decision incorporating into the EEA Agreement Council Directive 96/97/EC amending Directive 86/378/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security schemes was adopted with the date of 6 March 1998.

In the field of **labour law** three Joint Committee decisions, on posting of workers (European Parliament and Council Directive 96/71/EC), on the extension of the European Works Council Directive to the United Kingdom (Council Directive 97/74/EC) and on part-time work (Council Directives 97/81/EC and 98/23/EC) were adopted.

With regard to **public health**, the Joint Committee adopted a decision ensuring EEA EFTA participation in the Community programme on Health Monitoring (European Parliament and Council Decision No 1400/97/EC).

In the area of **health and safety at work**, the Joint Committee adopted decisions incorporating the following legislation: Council Directive 97/42/EC of 27 June 1997 amending for the first time Directive 90/394/EC on carcinogens at work and Commission Directives 97/59/EC and 97/65/EC regarding biological agents. In both cases, EFTA experts had submitted comments prior to the adoption of the acquis on the EU side. In October 1998, representatives from the EEA EFTA States met with the Director of the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work in Bilbao to discuss possible participation of the EEA EFTA States in the Agency's project on "State of Occupational Safety and Health in the European Union". Following a request in 1997

for EEA EFTA participation in the Scientific Committee for Occupational Exposure Limits (SCOEL), an expert from the EFTA side was invited to attend the meeting of the Committee on 8 to 9 December 1998.

Consumer Protection

The Joint Committee adopted decisions on EP/Council Directive 97/55/EC on misleading advertising so as to include comparative advertising and on Council Directive 98/6/EC on consumer protection in the indication of prices of products offered to consumers.

The EFTA side continued to follow developments in the nine new scientific committees. Two experts from one EEA EFTA State had been appointed, one to the Scientific Committee on Cosmetics and non-food Consumer Products and one to the Scientific Committee for Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment.

Research and Development

The Fourth Framework Programme formally came to an end in 1998. A last round of project contracts was concluded during the year, and many of these projects will continue to be funded into the next century. The EEA EFTA countries participate on equal terms with EU Member States in the Fourth Framework Programme, with the exception of voting rights in the management committees.

The Fifth Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration Activities (1998-2002) (FP5) was adopted by the European Union in December 1998. The budget (13 700 million ECU) represents an increase, although small, in real terms from FP4 (11 764 million ECU). A draft EEA Joint Committee decision to ensure EEA EFTA participation was adopted by the Joint Committee in February 1999. At the beginning of 1999 the EEA EFTA States made provisional financial contributions to the budget lines for this programme.

Education, Training and Youth

In May 1998 the Commission published its proposals for the next phase of the Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth programmes planned to start up in the year 2000. The EFTA side presented comments on the new proposals in October 1998.

In August 1998 the Community action programme European Voluntary Service for Young People (1998-99) started up, following the work of the pilot action from the previous year. An EEA Joint Committee decision to ensure EEA participation in the new programme has been adopted by the Joint Committee in February 1999.

Environment

Over the year the EEA Joint Committee adopted six decisions in the field of environment, incorporating legal acts in the areas of air quality, hazardous waste and Eco-labelling. As regards decision shaping, the EFTA side had a number of discussions with the Commission on policy documents and new legislative proposals. The main issues discussed were climate change, genetically modified organisms, the framework directive on water, noise policy, Eco-labelling, substances that deplete the ozone layer, incineration of waste and the proposal for a directive on end of life vehicles.

As a follow-up to the conclusions from the EEA Council in June 1998, the issue of a possible informal meeting at ministerial level between the EFTA EEA and the EU side was discussed during the autumn. The possibility will be further investigated.

SMEs

In 1998, the EEA EFTA States continued their participation in the Third Multi-Annual Programme for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises as well as in the management committee of the programme.

A draft Joint Committee decision on EFTA participation in the budget line on Joint European Ventures under the Community Growth and Employment Initiative was handed over to the EU side.

Tourism

Representatives from the EEA EFTA States participated in the meeting of the EU Advisory Committee on Tourism as well as in the two conferences organised by DG XXIII on tourism and the EURO and on the fight against child sex tourism.

Culture

Co-operation between the EEA EFTA States and the EU in the area of culture continued in 1998 through EEA EFTA participation in the three Community cultural programmes Kaleidoscope (artistic and cultural events), Ariane (books and reading) as well as Raphael (cultural heritage preservation). In order to include a formal reference to the three programmes in the EEA Agreement, a draft EEA Joint Committee decision was prepared in May 1998. In the autumn the EFTA side presented a draft Joint Committee decision to incorporate into the Agreement the prolongation of Ariane and Kaleidoscope.

In May 1998, the Commission presented a proposal for a first framework programme in support of culture. The EFTA EEA States forwarded comments on the proposal in October 1998.

Civil Protection

The EEA EFTA States have submitted a draft regarding participation in the Community action programme in the field of civil protection. Pending a Joint Committee decision being in force, EEA EFTA States participated as observers in the meetings. EEA EFTA

Representatives also attended the annual meeting of Directors General for Civil Protection of the Community.

The Joint Committee in spring adopted decisions incorporating two Council Resolutions on strengthening Community co-operation on civil protection and on improving mutual aid between Member States in the event of natural or technological disaster.

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