

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

### Second half of 2024

This year we celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the entry into force of the EEA Agreement, and 30 years of successful, mutually beneficial and prosperous cooperation within the European Economic Area.

While the EEA EFTA States' cooperation with the EU has developed steadily in recent years, the climate and biodiversity crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's illegal war against Ukraine, increasing geopolitical tensions and the challenges relating to Europe's competitiveness highlight the importance of continued and deepened commitment.

While the EEA Agreement represents stability and predictability, it is also vital that the EEA cooperation is up to speed with an EU that is rapidly adapting to a changing international landscape.

The Single Market is one of Europe's most valuable assets in a changing world, and its main long-term engine to ensure future prosperity and welfare, as highlighted in the EU's Strategic Agenda 2024-29. A strong Single Market enhances resilience and economic security in the face of crises and serves as a tool to address strategic dependencies. Therefore, continued political commitment to the Single Market will be of utmost importance in the years to come.

Following the European elections in June 2024, a new European Commission will be established during the second half of 2024. As the new Commission takes office, it is also expected to issue new political guidelines, priorities and work plans. An important priority for the second half of 2024 will for the EEA EFTA States, under the Norwegian Chair, thus be to establish a close working relationship with the new Commission, and to be a partner in the development of its policy and legal initiatives relating to the functioning of the Single Market and the European Economic Area.

The Norwegian Chair of the EFTA Standing Committee has identified two priorities for the second half of 2024. The priorities are supplemented by the work programmes of the EFTA Subcommittees and Working Groups.

#### **1. Incorporation of legal acts:**

Taking into account the key objective of maintaining a dynamic and homogeneous European Economic Area, based on common rules and equal conditions of competition, and to underpin the EEA EFTA States as the EU's closest and most reliable partners, a key priority will be to ensure timely incorporation of EEA relevant EU legal acts into the EEA Agreement.

A particular focus will be put on reducing the backlog, including in areas where the backlog numbers are high, and on long outstanding files.

In addition, keeping a close eye on new legislation with consequences for the internal market will be necessary. Consequently, following up the report from the Task Force on Files with Distinctive Horizontal Dimensions will be a priority.

## **2. Outreach:**

Making use of the opportunity that the anniversary provides, we will continue the outreach on the EEA cooperation. A particular focus will be on the incoming Commission and new members of the European Parliament.

*Key messages* will include:

- On the basis of 30 years of close cooperation under the EEA Agreement, the Schengen Agreement and a number of additional bilateral agreements, the EEA EFTA States are full members of the Single Market and the EU's closest and most reliable partners
- The 30 EU and EEA EFTA Member States are closely integrated and interconnected, and share economic strengths, opportunities and vulnerabilities. The EEA cooperation thus has a particular relevance in the current geopolitical environment, also in relation to economic security and trade policies.
- While economic cooperation lies at the core of the EEA Agreement, it is also based on a set of fundamental values and principles. The EEA EFTA states are closely aligned with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, most notably in the joint efforts to support Ukraine, including on sanctions against the aggressor.

The *outreach activities* will include:

- Continuation of the anniversary digital outreach, capitalising on the dedicated anniversary website, special video series and other visual products created to highlight the impact the EEA EFTA States and the EU have achieved together over the last 30 years - and how they can work together to solve critical challenges such as decarbonisation. In the preparations of the new programme period 2028-2034 on the EU side, underlining that the participation of the EEA EFTA States follows from, and must be in accordance with, the provisions of the EEA Agreement
- Exploring whether the Draghi and Letta reports can provide opportunities to contribute targeted input on the EEA cooperation
- Making use of the EFTA House as a relevant venue for outreach, including by:

- organising an exhibition on the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms from the period 2014-2021, demonstrating the contributions of the EEA EFTA States to reduce economic and social disparities in the EEA
  - organising an event for relevant stakeholders after the EEA Council in November to mark the end of the anniversary year
- Continue to identify and provide input to relevant EU legislations and measures in the pre-pipeline and pipeline stages through inter alia making active use of the EEA EFTA comments as an instrument for influencing the EU decision-making process, in addition to having meetings with officials from EU institutions and other written statements
- Organising in Luxembourg together with Eurostat an EEA 30th anniversary event aimed at Eurostat staff to raise awareness about the EEA Agreement and statistical cooperation between the EFTA States and the EU in the framework of the EEA Agreement and beyond