

Draft EEA EFTA Statement

Statement on the occasion of the EEA Council meeting on 23 May 2022.

Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway reiterate the importance they attach to the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, which establishes a solid basis for a privileged relationship between the EEA EFTA States and the European Union. While it was regrettably not possible to adopt formal EEA Council conclusions in today's meeting, we underline the good functioning of the EEA Agreement and the high quality of our cooperation, all which were the object of an in-depth stock-taking and confirmation at our meeting.

This relationship is based on proximity, long-standing common values and European identity. It constitutes a vibrant contribution to the construction of a Europe based on peace, democracy and human rights. In these tragic times where war has returned to Europe, the EEA EFTA States are the closest of partners of the EU and stand in solidarity with Ukraine and its neighbouring states. As demonstrated by the response to the COVID pandemic, the EEA Agreement provides a robust and flexible framework for our cooperation. This continues to prove essential for the ongoing response to the pandemic with exchange of data, experience and views in relevant fora.

Through the EEA Agreement, the EEA EFTA States - Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway - and the EU are equal partners in the internal market. A well-functioning Internal Market is important for the prosperity and wellbeing of its citizens and for the global competitiveness and resilience of Europe. It is also key to ensuring a strong recovery and achieving a green and digital transition which is fair. The Internal Market should be further strengthened, rules should be applied, and new barriers should be prevented.

At today's EEA Council, it was underlined that many initiatives related to the twin green and digital transition are supported by EEA-relevant proposals and that it is essential to ensure an active involvement of the EEA EFTA States in their design and implementation. In this context, the EEA EFTA States welcome the European Commission's "Fit-for-55" and the Hydrogen and Decarbonised Gas packages. We are furthermore determined to work with the EU to speed up the digitalisation of industry and public services, in line with the objectives of Europe's Digital Decade.

We recognise the importance of strengthening the EU's health security response capacity and better equipping authorities to prevent and address future pandemics in a coordinated manner. We look forward to the continued close involvement of the EEA EFTA states to further enhance cooperation on these matters.

The incorporation of the EU programme regulations into the EEA Agreement last year marked an important milestone to deepen further our collaboration in areas of common interest. It is recognised that this cooperation will represent a substantial financial commitment from the EEA EFTA States and that the EEA Agreement guarantees equal rights and obligations when participating in these programmes.

Greater knowledge of the EEA Agreement throughout the EEA at all levels is in the interest of all Contracting Parties and the good functioning of the Internal Market. The EEA EFTA states underline the need to further strengthen communication efforts on the EEA Agreement and its benefits for citizens and businesses. This was also recalled at today's EEA Council.