

Prime Minister  
Gro Harlem Brundtland

EFTA Meeting of Heads of Government  
Vienna, 24 May 1991

The EEA-negotiations.

Mr. Chancellor, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Now entering the final phase of the EEA negotiations, our task is to focus on the unresolved issues. This is normal. We have set ourselves ambitious goals within a tight time frame.

While focusing on remaining challenges, let us not lose our perspective on what we have already achieved. Two years ago we began our negotiations on broadened cooperation between the European Community and the EFTA countries. Our challenge was clear: By 1 January 1993 the EC internal market will be in place. Fundamental interests of all the EFTA countries are involved. At the Holmenkollen meeting in March 1989 we responded to the challenge. We declared our readiness to enlarge and structure the cooperation between our 18 countries.

Since then we have come a long way:

- A comprehensive EEA agreement is in sight.
- We have reached agreement on the *acquis communautaire* to be integrated into the agreement.
- We have agreed to extend cooperation to fields beyond the internal market such as the environment, education, research, and the social dimension.
- We have agreed on the basic elements of the institutional set-up, including an independent EEA Court and a common process of decision-shaping and decision-making.

These are major achievements. The EEA process has added an important political dimension to Western European cooperation. This is not only to the benefit of our own countries. It may also serve as a model for the integration of the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe.

Europe has indeed undergone radical changes since the beginning of 1989. But the EEA process is as necessary as it was at the outset. Nothing has changed the EC goal of creating the internal market by 1 January 1993. Our economic operators will now be facing new challenges and opportunities.

We have therefore no time to lose. Whether we have applied, or may apply for membership, we all need to have the EEA in place 18 months from now. We all need the common legal framework which only the EEA can offer.

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At the outset there were those who said that countries from two organizations as different as the EC and EFTA could not find common ground in a project as ambitious as the EEA. We have proved them wrong. By speaking with one voice the EFTA countries have achieved a great deal. In a pragmatic way we have found common solutions.

The breakthrough at the ministerial meeting in Brussels last week was a clear demonstration of political will. We must take advantage of this momentum in the final phase of the negotiations. The Ministerial Declaration provides very clear guidelines for our work in the coming weeks.

Let there be no doubt about the scope of the agreement we are working towards. Let there be no doubt about the time frame. As we now turn to the remaining issues, let us not reopen discussions we have already concluded. Let us base our efforts on the pragmatic approach which has served our work so well until now.

We will in particular need to close our ranks on the EFTA side. We have committed ourselves to creating an EFTA pillar which can serve our interests in balanced cooperation with the EC. Our meeting here in Vienna should confirm the determination of the member countries to adhere to this commitment. Hesitation on this point will only weaken our position in the EEA.

We must now devote hard work to the drafting of treaty texts. We have agreed to integrate the environment into the agreement. Satisfactory solutions have been found, important principles have been accepted.

We should see to it that the environment, as well as the social dimension, be included among the overall objectives in the preamble of the EEA agreement.

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Among the most difficult remaining issues are fish and those related to the reduction of regional and economic disparities; agriculture and the creation of a financial mechanism; a fund.

These three areas are interlinked. Progress in one of them will be contingent on development in the others. We shall have to deal with them in a coherent and parallel fashion. Only then can we hope to secure the balance between them, and their place in the overall balance of the treaty.

I welcome the pragmatic approach that has been suggested on the EFTA side regarding how the final negotiations on these issues could be organized. At the level of the HLNG, a combination of multilateral and bilateral approaches would

give all parties the necessary flexibility to advance in these fields.

The EFTA countries tabled their demand for free market access for fish and other marine products at the opening of the negotiations. The EC has so far not presented their common position. As far as we know, this is largely due to internal EC discussions.

This situation is a matter of major concern which now impedes progress in the negotiations as a whole. An EEA agreement without a satisfactory solution to fish, will not meet our requirements for a balanced and equitable solution.

The fishing industry provides the only basis for economic activity and settlements in large parts of Northern Norway and along the coast.

For Norway, an agreement on fish would have to respect two basic principles: Firstly, we stand firmly behind the EFTA position in rejecting a linkage between access to markets and access to resources. There is free trade in fish in EFTA, and there is free trade in fish in the EC. Thus, there should be free trade in fish in the EEA.

Secondly, as is the case for other products and markets, the agreement must establish a uniform system for trade in fish in the EEA. The basic idea of the EEA is to ensure equal conditions for market operators. There should be no exception for fish.

I have had a full report on the discussions of the fish issue from yesterday's meeting of EFTA Ministers. I would only like to reiterate what Mrs. Nordbø pointed out; that free and equal access for fish in the entire EEA would be of fundamental political importance for the acceptability of the agreement.

In order to achieve this objective, Norway is prepared to contribute constructively. This we will do in recognition that the EFTA countries may participate differently when contributing towards a balanced solution. We now need a realistic offer from the EC side to EFTA which would provide the basis for finding solutions to the remaining issues.

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Hard work and dedication will be required of our negotiators in the weeks to come. Let me express my admiration for the way the Austrian presidency has conducted the negotiations on our behalf. We feel that the process is in good hands.