COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Brussels, 12 December 2006
16634/06 (Presse 362)

# 26th meeting of the EEA Council on 12 December 2006
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## Conclusions

1. The twenty-sixth meeting of the EEA Council took place in Brussels on 12 December 2006 under the Presidency of Mr. *Jonas Gahr Støre,* Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway. The meeting was attended by Mr. *Þorsteinn Ingólfsson* Ambassador, Special Representative of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland and by Ms. *Rita Kieber-Beck*, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liechtenstein, from the EEA - EFTA side, as well as by Ms. *Paula Lehtomäki*, Minister for European Affairs of Finland, representing the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, by Members of the Council of the European Union and by the Representative of the European Commission responsible for EEA Council matters, from the EU side.

2. The EEA Council noted that within the framework of the Political Dialogue the Ministers discussed Lebanon, Sudan and Kosovo.

**P R E S S**

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3. The EEA Council regretted the lack of progress made with regard to Bulgaria and Romania becoming Contracting Parties to the EEA Agreement in view of the importance of timely conclusion of the respective Enlargement Agreement. The EEA Council urges all parties to step up efforts in order to conclude these negotiations rapidly.

4. The Ministers underlined the importance for all Contracting Parties to ascertain that public authorities and other relevant actors throughout the European Economic Area remain well informed about the EEA Agreement.

5. The EEA Council noted the progress made in the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs with a stronger focus on the National Reform Programmes (NRPs), as well as on the Community Lisbon Programme. With energy policy co-ordination being identified as one of the main priorities of the Lisbon Strategy, the Strategy has become increasingly relevant to the EEA - EFTA States. Furthermore, the EEA Council welcomed the EU's broad approach to maritime management that is expressed in the Maritime Policy Green Paper. The EEA - EFTA States look forward to contributing to further discussions on the future EU Maritime Policy.

6. The EEA Council welcomed the adoption of a joint policy framework document for the Northern Dimension Policy, aiming at strengthening all Partners', Participants' and other actors' commitment to the Policy.

7. The Ministers appreciated the progress made in the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism and of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. The Financial Mechanisms are now in the stage of project generation and implementation. The importance of openness, transparency, broad participation and efficiency in the implementation was underlined. The EEA Council welcomed the launch of calls for proposals in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Malta, Estonia, Spain, Lithuania and Cyprus, which will make close to 400 million euros available to potential applicants. The EEA Council reiterated that the Financial Mechanisms provide opportunities to strengthen relations between the EEA - EFTA States, Norway and the beneficiary EU Member States.

8. Regarding the review of the overall work in EEA co-operation, the EEA Council noted the Progress Report of the EEA Joint Committee. The Ministers welcomed the continuation of well-functioning co-operation, the speedy incorporation of new legislation for the Internal Market into the EEA Agreement and reaffirmed the importance of the timely EEA - EFTA participation in EEA-relevant EU Agencies.

The EEA Council in particular:

- Reaffirmed the importance of EEA - EFTA participation in EEA-relevant EU programmes. This participation is co-financed by the EEA - EFTA States and contributes to the strengthening of the EEA co-operation outside the four freedoms of the Internal Market, thereby promoting the common political and economic goals attached to the EEA Agreement. The EEA Council encouraged all Parties involved to make every effort to achieve a timely participation of the EEA - EFTA States in EEA-relevant EU programmes under preparation for the period 2007 - 2013;

- Welcomed the integration of the modernisation of the public procurement rules into the EEA Agreement;

- Looked forward to a Decision by the EEA Joint Committee on EEA -EFTA participation in the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in the near future;

- Welcomed the progress made in expanding the scope of the EEA veterinary legislation to Iceland;

- Welcomed the progress made on the Greenhouse Gas Emission Trading Scheme;

- Welcomed the launching of the review on the basis of Article 19 of the EEA Agreement with Norway with the objective of achieving progressive liberalisation of trade in agricultural products.

- Recalled the aim of maintaining the good functioning of the Internal Market in the field of civil aviation and welcomed the integration of the common rules and principles governing the organisation of the European airspace (Single European Sky) into the EEA Agreement;

- Recalled the aim of maintaining the good functioning of the Internal Market, including the field of free movement of persons and called for a rapid integration of the outstanding acquis also in this field according to the provisions of the EEA Agreement;

- Welcomed the new EU Innovation Strategy, in particular the ten priority actions set out at national and European levels;

- Welcomed the close dialogue on the development of a future Internal Market Policy and noted the need to extend the consultations to the planned Fundamental Review of the Single Market;

- Acknowledged the EEA - EFTA stake in the efforts to establish an improved general framework for services in the Internal Market;

- Welcomed the continued EEA - EFTA contributions to the decision-shaping process of EEA-relevant EC legislation and programmes through i.a. participation in appropriate committees and working groups, and through EEA - EFTA Comments.

9. The EEA Council held an orientation debate on the prospects for a revitalisation of the Doha Round and its possible implications.

10. The EEA Council recognised the desirability of inviting EEA - EFTA Ministers to attend relevant informal EU Ministerial Meetings as well as Ministerial Conferences on the basis of EEA - EFTA participation in the Internal Market. The EEA Council also recalled the practice of inviting the EEA - EFTA States - at the level of officials - to political dialogue meetings with relevant Council Working Parties in troika format and expressed its appreciation to the incoming German Presidency for the continuation of this practice.

11. The EEA Council noted the Resolutions of the EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee adopted at its 27th meeting in Brussels on 10 October 2006 on *The Implementation of EEA* Legislation and on *Enlarging the European Economic Area: Experiences and Perspectives.* It also noted the Resolutions of the EEA Consultative Committee adopted at its 14th meeting in Höfn, Iceland on 25 June 2006 on *The Future of the Northern Dimension Policy* and on *The Lisbon Strategy – More Sustainable Growth through National Reforms and Increased EEA Co-operation*.

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