

EEE 1602/26

DRAFT MINUTES

Subject: Draft minutes of the 61st Meeting of the EEA Council Brussels, 20
November 2025

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of the 61st meeting of the

EEA COUNCIL

Brussels, 20 November 2025

(Check against delivery)

CONTENTS

Page

1.	Adoption of the Provisional Agenda (doc. 1605/25)	5
2.	Approval of the Minutes of the 60 th meeting of the EEA Council held in Brussels on 21 May 2025 doc. (1606/25)	5
3.	Progress report by the EEA Joint Committee (doc. 1607/25)	5
4.	Adoption of the Draft Conclusions of the 61 st EEA Council (doc. 1608/25).....	5
5.	Resolution of the EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee adopted following its 63rd meeting in Akureyri on 25 May 2025 on the Annual Report of the EEA Joint Committee on the Functioning of the EEA Agreement in 2024 (doc. 25-961).....	5
6.	Assessment of the overall functioning of the EEA Agreement	7
7.	Orientation Debate: <i>The EU's simplification agenda and the EEA Agreement</i>	22
8.	Other business	33

Annex I:	List of Participants	34
Annex II:	Progress report by the EEA Joint Committee (doc. 1607/25)	38

The EEA Council held its 61st meeting in Brussels on 20 November 2025.

The meeting was chaired by Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, who led the EEA EFTA delegation. Minister GUNNARSDÓTTIR was accompanied by Mr Espen BARTH EIDE, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, and Ms Sabine MONAUNI, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liechtenstein, respectively.

The EEA EFTA side also included Mr Kurt JAEGER (Secretary-General of the European Free Trade Association – EFTA), and Mr Arne RØKSUND (President of the EFTA Surveillance Authority – ESA).

The EU side was led by Ms Marie BJERRE, Minister for European Affairs of Denmark. Minister BJERRE was accompanied by Commissioner for Economy and Productivity; Implementation and Simplification Mr Valdis DOMBROVSKIS, and Ms Claude VÉRON-RÉVILLE on behalf of Mr Matti MAASIKAS, Managing Director for Europe, representing the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Opening statement of Minister Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR, on behalf of the EEA EFTA side

Co-Chair, dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the 61st meeting of the EEA Council. This meeting continues to serve as an important forum for further strengthening our EEA cooperation. We look forward to having constructive discussions and exchanging views between close partners today.

Without further ado, I propose that we deal with items 1 to 5 on the agenda without prior discussion and move directly to item 6.

Opening statement of Minister Ms Marie BJERRE on behalf of the European Union

Dear colleagues from Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein, from the EFTA Secretariat and from the EFTA Surveillance Authority,

On behalf of the Council of the European Union, let me begin by expressing our appreciation for your hosting of our 61st meeting of the EEA Council - and the fourth time the EEA Council meets here in the EFTA House.

Before we go into the substance of our agenda, let me also express my thanks to the EFTA Secretariat for the excellent organisation and cooperation in the arrangements for the session.

Following your proposal, Minister, we would like to confirm our agreement on dealing with items 1 to 5 of our Agenda without prior discussion.

We are looking forward to a fruitful exchange!

Intervention of Minister Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR on behalf of the EEA EFTA side

Thank you very much.

Items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the agenda are therefore adopted.

1. **ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

The EEA Council adopted the Agenda, as set out in doc. 1605/25.

2. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

The EEA Council approved the Minutes of the 60th meeting of the EEA Council, which took place in Brussels on 21 May 2025, as set out in doc. 1606/25.

3. **PROGRESS REPORT BY THE EEA JOINT COMMITTEE**

The EEA Council took note of the Progress Report by the EEA Joint Committee, as set out in doc. 1607/25.

4. **ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT CONCLUSIONS**

The EEA Council adopted the Conclusions of the 61st EEA Council meeting, as set out in doc. 1608/25.

5. **RESOLUTION OF THE EEA JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE adopted following its 63rd meeting in Akureyri on 25 May 2025 on the Annual Report of the EEA Joint Committee on the Functioning of the EEA Agreement in 2024 (doc. 25-961)**

The EEA Council took note of the Resolution.

6. ASSESMENT OF THE OVERALL FUNCTIONING OF THE EEA AGREEMENT

Intervention of Minister Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR on behalf of the EEA EFTA side

Dear Ministers, Commissioner, colleagues.

Since our last meeting in May, the geopolitical and security landscape has not improved. Russia is escalating its illegal war in Ukraine, with brutal consequences. We stay firm in our support for Ukraine for as long as it takes.

While the ceasefire in Gaza offers a glimmer of hope, the situation remains very fragile in the Middle East and the humanitarian situation is still unacceptable.

We are faced with growing hybrid threats. The line between war and peace is blurring. Values and norms we once took for granted are being challenged, including peace, liberty, human rights, economic openness, rule of law, and respect for international law.

At the same time, our EEA cooperation is facing an unprecedented challenge. Earlier this week, the European Commission adopted safeguard measures against the import of ferro-alloys. We disagree with the Commission's proposal that subjects products from the EEA EFTA States to safeguard measures. Such product-specific safeguard measures have no place within the European Economic Area. The potential negative consequences for our co-operation could be much larger than the negative impact on the industry at hand.

The EEA Agreement is built on common rules, trust and mutual respect. Its success has rested on our shared values and commitment. The decision taken this week by the European Commission sets an unfortunate precedent. It seriously weakens the underlying premise of the EEA Agreement – namely that the EEA EFTA States are an integral part of the Internal Market.

It is important to underline that our industry follows the same rules and regulations as the EU industry. The introduction of safeguards contradicts the very logic and foundation of the EEA Agreement. This is the main reason we objected to the proposal.

We are still assessing our options and the next steps. However, one thing is clear. In today's global context, it is not acceptable that the bar for safeguard measures can be set so low within the EEA Agreement. The important benefits of the Agreement should not be eroded by unilateral action. This was not the intention of the founding fathers of the EEA. This situation is intolerable within our common market in terms of fair play and predictability for businesses and investment.

We request a dialogue between the Contracting Parties to address this situation going forward, to safeguard our unique and deep relationship.

Because for the EEA to survive, it must keep to its fundamental promise – that the EEA EFTA States are equal partners in the Internal Market.

Dear colleagues,

In this changed global context, security has become the key issue in most policy discussions. Our EEA cooperation is no exception. This will be well reflected in our discussions at this afternoon's conference on strong cooperation between EEA partners for a secure and resilient Europe.

In recent years, the EU has built up its economic security and resilience in the face of a more volatile world. We welcome the European Economic Security Strategy, and we share the ambition to create a more competitive and resilient Europe. We are also mindful that many of the proposed initiatives will impact our cooperation either directly or indirectly and are to be assessed with regard to their incorporation.

Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway bring significant strategic industries and technologies to the table as full members of our common Internal Market. We also have a high degree of political stability, commitment to the rule of law and respect for international law – all essential elements for predictable and reliable partnerships.

We need to continue our dialogue on economic security. The EEA EFTA States have much to contribute to the strengthening of European economic security. But closer partnership on economic security can only work if we have a truly well-functioning EEA where the EEA EFTA States continue to be an integral part of the Internal Market.

This brings us to our day-to-day work: updating the EEA Agreement. We are continuing in our common effort to incorporate EEA-relevant legal acts in a timely manner.

Since we last met, we have made progress in incorporating some of the long-outstanding acts. We have incorporated a further 252 acts into the EEA Agreement, in important areas of cooperation such as energy and financial services.

We have made considerable progress in the field of energy by adopting important decisions in the areas of renewable energy and energy efficiency. While there is still work to be done in this field, we are committed to further reducing the backlog in the area of energy, as well as in all other fields in the coming months.

There have also been positive developments in some of the longer-outstanding files, such as Genetically Modified Food and Feed, and the Regulation on Helicopter Offshore Operations. We will continue to work towards making progress on these and other files in the coming months.

And finally, on constitutional requirements, there are fewer Joint Committee Decisions waiting to enter into force due to constitutional requirements than at our last meeting in May.

We also welcome the adoption of EEA Council Conclusions at our meeting today.

Dear friends of the EEA,

I have spoken frankly today about the significant challenges we face in our partnership.

Europe is facing monumental challenges. War continues on our continent. Protectionism is rising across the world. Many European countries continue to suffer slow economic growth.

Our shared partnership in the Internal Market is the key to working together in addressing these challenges. To make all of us stronger and more prosperous.

But we need a unified EEA – not a fragmented one. We need an EEA that continues to live up to its promise of ensuring predictable terms for trade within the Internal Market. And we need an EU that seeks stronger partnerships – not to raise barriers to trade with its closest partners.

Thank you.

May I now invite the EU to make a statement?

Intervention of Minister Ms Marie BJERRE on behalf of the European Union

Allow me to start by underlining the importance of the regular meetings of the EEA Council.

They give us the opportunity to jointly assess the implementation of our most important instrument of cooperation - the European Economic Area Agreement - and to hold a useful exchange of views on its many various aspects.

The EEA Agreement, which unites our countries in the internal market, has always been the bedrock of our close and special partnership. This partnership has never been more important than now, and not only in terms of size and trade volumes.

I believe we all share the assessment of our EEA cooperation as a key factor in support of our continuous development, long-term shared prosperity, peace and stability.

In the current geopolitical context, marked by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East, and the new US administration, the special partnership between the EU and the EEA EFTA States has proven itself to be more important than ever. We continue to stand together - in solidarity and in unity - defending our common values such as democracy, rule of law and the commitment to an international rules-based order.

On the EEA Agreement, Commissioner Dombrovskis will provide a detailed report on recent developments and concrete progress achieved since we last met.

Before giving him the floor, I would like to highlight some important developments that have taken place since our latest EEA Council in May.

We welcome the incorporation of certain important pieces of legislation into the EEA Agreement, most notably three long pending energy acts incorporated in July – Energy Efficiency Directive, Renewable Energy Directive II and Energy Performance of Buildings Directive.

We hope for increased efforts to conclude discussions on some important pending legislations. Let me specifically highlight the importance the EU attaches to a level playing field, the remaining part of the energy backlog, and the oldest, still pending, acts in the field of genetically modified food and feed.

Furthermore, we welcome the continued joint determination to incorporate the relevant EU acquis into the EEA Agreement. That said, efforts to reduce the existing backlog and the timely incorporation of new acts need to continue; this in order to ensure the good functioning of the EEA Agreement, and avoid fragmentation of our internal market where the same rules should apply equally across the board.

We are very pleased with the gradual launch of the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms. We specifically welcome the launch of civil society funds in several Beneficiary States and the signatures of Memorandum of Understandings with eight Beneficiary States so far [Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia].

We encourage a swift conclusion of the processes also with the remaining seven Beneficiary States.

Efforts to drive economic growth remain necessary for meeting our long-term challenges. Europe's strength, resilience and global standing depend on our economic output, and is also of utmost importance for the green and digital transitions ahead of us. On both these, as well as on other relevant policy areas, we would like to reiterate the importance of continued close cooperation between the EU and the EEA EFTA states.

Finally, I would like to express our satisfaction that we are able to adopt EEA Council conclusions today.

This sends a strong and important signal of unity. We remain, and will continue to be, as closer partners as ever.

I will now give the floor to Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis.

Valdis, you have the floor.

Intervention of Commissioner Mr Valdis DOMBROVSKIS on behalf of the Commission

Dear Ministers, Representatives of the EEA EFTA institutions, Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen,

First, let me say that I am pleased by our continued very close cooperation.

Russia's ongoing and brutal full-scale invasion of Ukraine, rising geopolitical tensions, and global uncertainty all underline the importance of European unity and unity with our allies. In this context we appreciate your continued close alignment with the EU, both in the sanctions regime against Russia and in humanitarian, financial and military support provided to Ukraine. We are also glad to see an ever-closer defence cooperation between the EU and EEA EFTA States.

Second, let me turn to the implementation of the EEA Agreement and the incorporation of the EU acquis into the EEA Agreement. Since the last meeting of the EEA Council on 21 May 2025, 134 Joint Committee Decisions were adopted, incorporating 252 legal acts.

In this period, important pieces of legislation were incorporated. These include three long pending energy acts incorporated in July – Energy Efficiency Directive, Renewable Energy Directive II and Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, as well as the Regulation on European Green Bonds incorporated in October. There has also been significant progress in the field of financial services. The efforts to reduce the backlog are crucial to maintain a level playing field within the EEA. This is not only a legal obligation, but also our mutual interest. And there is no room for complacency.

New EEA-relevant EU acts need to be incorporated into the EEA Agreement without delay and we need to further intensify efforts to decrease the still extensive backlog of old pending files (standing currently at 638), including the pre-2021 backlog of 53 acts. The preparations for the last EEA Joint Committee of this year – to be held on 5 December – make us hopeful to conclude the year on a positive note on the incorporation work.

But, the work does not end with the adoption of Joint Committee Decisions. These decisions need to enter into force as soon as possible after their adoption. Constitutional requirements are an integral part of the EEA framework. We appreciate that the number of pending ones – older than six months – has decreased substantially from over 30 last year to just below 20 now. We appreciate the fact that this was clearly prioritised on your side.

Once in force, the acts incorporated into the EEA Agreement must be properly enforced. The regular Surveillance Policy Dialogue with the EFTA Surveillance Authority proves useful in this regard.

Third, as you know, in the EEA Agreement, the Contracting Parties agreed on the need to reduce the economic and social disparities between their regions. To this end, the EEA Agreement provides for a Financial Mechanism for the EEA EFTA States to contribute, in addition to the efforts already deployed by the EU in this regard. We are pleased with the gradual launch of the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms, and the signature of Memoranda of Understanding with nine Beneficiary States so far (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia). We would like to encourage swift conclusion of the process with the remaining six Beneficiary States (Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovenia). This way, the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms will address the needs on the ground without further delays and accompany increased EU investment into social and economic cohesion.

Fourth, let me mention a much-discussed issue lately – the Commission’s safeguard measures on ferro alloys. Safeguards are permitted under the EEA Agreement. The EEA EFTA States are part of the internal market but not of the common commercial policy. The EU has held consultations with the EEA EFTA States throughout the investigation and the concerns have been clearly heard.

I want to stress, that following these consultations, significant efforts have been undertaken to carefully design a measure. It balances the need for effective protection for EU producers with EU user industry interests while limiting the impact on EEA EFTA States as much as possible.

Every investigation is unique, and measures are based on facts and evidence collected through an in-depth investigation.

I would also like to recall that we exempted EEA EFTA States from the current steel safeguards as well as such exemption is also part of our proposal [of 7 October] on a new measure on steel. This is not easy to explain to other close trading partners.

With this in mind, I look forward to maintaining our fruitful and specific relationship.

Thank you.

Intervention of Minister Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR on behalf of Iceland

Dear Ministers, Commissioner, colleagues.

Thank you for your statements on behalf of the European Union.

Speaking now on behalf of Iceland, let me start by saying that it is useful to have this forum for frank discussions about the state of our EEA partnership. And today we need to have a frank discussion.

Our partnership is based upon our shared values, like you mentioned cochair: democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. Strong commitment to international co-operation is among those values. Believing that we should solve our differences by diplomacy – not might.

The EEA is also based on commitment to free trade. The belief that we all benefit from opening trade with goods, services and investment and we allow people to search for jobs across the EEA. These are the four freedoms that are at the core of our partnership. As a small and open economy, these values are essential for Iceland.

It is therefore of a great concern for us that these values and principle are increasingly coming under threat. We are witnessing great economic powers systematically undermining multilateral co-operation and the rules-based international system.

The EEA Agreement is by far the most important trade agreement Iceland has ever concluded. The EU is our most important trading partner. It is our most important friend. We have therefore followed closely how the EU's reaction to the increased global competition and the attempt to undermine our common rules.

At first we were hopeful. The EU stressed its commitment to the rules-based order very clearly. It has sought to portray it as a reliable partner and stressed that it plays by the rules.

Indeed, only last week the Danish presidency opened the EU-EFTA ECOFIN meeting by expressing concerns with the new changing global order - unpredictable, protectionism, and the economic impact this will have, In contrast, the EU was described as a predictable and reliable partner. That we are stronger together and the close ties between our economies.

Today, the mood is more mixed. Earlier this week, the European Commission for the first time in the history of the EEA Agreement used Article 112 of the Agreement to suspend fundamental rights that we enjoy under the EEA Agreement.

It is difficult to imagine that these measures could come at a worse time. This should have been a moment of unity and for common action, for example to fight for our common values. Instead, barriers are being raised within the internal market, which saddens me.

Playing by the rules, European rules, the industry targeted by these measures is an important industry in Iceland. It provides valuable jobs in a region that has been going through difficult times.

It remains to be seen what direct impact these measures will have. The ferro-alloy industry in Iceland is innovative and produces high quality products. But let me be clear. Any industry will have difficulties adjusting to such drastic, negative and sudden changes in their largest export market. And it is precisely this that worries us. The EEA partnership can only work if it meets its promise of delivering stability and predictability. The precedent has now been set. And sadly the EU has lowered the bar for using these types of measures.

This should really be the moment when the EEA partnership showed its value and relevance. It has never been more important that all the 30 EEA partners work closely together. Instead, we are faced with measures that undercut everything that the EEA Agreement should stand for.

We also find it worrying that the EU has sought to justify the measures by referring to technicalities and procedures. It has not acknowledged the underlying impact of the measures for the EEA co-operation. It has not provided its vision on how we can strengthen, in unity, the EEA partnership to address these challenging times. Later this afternoon, we will face our parliamentarians and representatives of the business community and trade unions. And we will have to inform them of our discussions here today.

We can expect them to ask whether the EEA Agreement is still relevant as a partnership under the current difficult geopolitical circumstances. Whether the EU still is a reliable partner that we can expect to play by the rules of the EEA Agreement. These are the kind of questions they will ask. What should I tell them?

I will tell them that Iceland is still as committed to the EEA partnership as ever. But I will also need to tell them that we are deeply concerned about the impact of the measures. We cannot hide the serious consequences they will probably have on our partnership.

We are disappointed – but we are not discouraged. We will continue to fight for the EEA Agreement. And I can only encourage the EU to change course and join us in this fight. To stay true to our partnership. To stop raising barriers and start working with us. That would be valuable if it is clear from the EU, I would like a clear message from the Commission.

With this, I give the floor to my dear colleague Espen.

Intervention of Minister Mr Espen BARTH EIDE on behalf of Norway

The Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Espen Barth Eide, based his statement on the following:

We understand that EU is responding to circumstances arising from outside the region, but we are facing the same threat. Should not divide us.

- Trade barriers between countries within the internal market undermine the very fundamental principle of the EEA Agreement.
- As you are aware of, not the outcome we argued for.
- We find it very concerning that the Commission seems to have re-purposed Article 112 of the EEA Agreement in order to extend WTO safeguard measures against products originating in the EEA EFTA states. In our view, the conditions for imposing safeguard measures in accordance with the EEA Agreement are not met in this case.
- Essential to preserve the integrity of the internal market.
This outcome creates uncertainty about market access among business actors from the EEA/EFTA states.
- Unpredictable framework conditions for products make it challenging to defend new, capital-intensive investments in sectors and products. (Example: Norway is encouraged to enhance European value chains through increased extraction of, for example, critical minerals and processing. Such capital intensive investments requires a predictable and stable framework).

- Norwegian business is closely integrated into European value chains and European industry, and we share many of EU's concerns. Although we do not agree with these measures. This has been a challenging process for all involved – Norway, Iceland, EU member states, the Commission. Does not serve our interests – we must find a way to avoid similar incidents as we move forward.
- Three proposals on how to move forward:
 - 1) The introduction of trimonthly consultations to review the impact of the ferro alloys safeguard measure: Important to carefully assess the effects on markets, flow of goods etc. However, we should explore how we could use this consultation mechanism to also include a more strategic outlook on potential trade issues coming our way.
 - 2) We also need to find a way to have a closer dialogue on trade on a technical level. Format should be EFTA3 + EU.
 - 3) A somewhat different issue, but connected is economic security: We need to get the structural dialogue on economic security fully up and running, as discussed when we met in Brussels in April. I understand the dialogue is moving forward, but need a stronger push from the top to fully fulfil its purpose.
- Finally: We are committed to maintaining our close partnership and contributing to a strong internal market. A key strength for Europe.

Intervention of Minister Ms Sabine MONAUNI on behalf of Liechtenstein

Dear Ministers, dear Commissioner, dear colleagues,

Europe today can feel like a shrinking space. Not in size, but in promise — the space for peace, democracy, and human rights is narrowing. And with it, the space for the prosperity, security, and partnerships these values have built.

Faced with global uncertainty, Europe often reacts defensively, be it with regard to its security or in response to protectionist economic policies. This is often criticized as a weakness of Europe, as a lack of firm grip or sense of reality. It is, however, also a healthy reflex, protective of the European project of the past 8 decades. Building up European economic and military defenses is necessary but it also risks shaping a world none of us desire. Europe must therefore balance protection with openness: defending its foundations while shaping the world we want to live in.

We acknowledge the EU's heavy lifting - on competitiveness, resilience, and economic security. Our message is simple: As you strengthen Europe, don't let the space for cooperation with your closest partners shrink. We are Europe too. See us as partners against Europe's shrinking space. See us as partners for growth.

In an era of global power blocs, Europe must unite, not fragment. Industrial policy, restrictive trade measures, and competitiveness initiatives should reinforce, not restrict, our common Internal Market. Besides the subject of safeguard measures, this also pertains to areas such as the participation of EEA EFTA States in future EU programs to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, economic security files to protect the Internal Market or EU preference criteria.

For Liechtenstein, keeping the EEA strong and functional is a priority. The Internal Market must remain open, homogeneous, and resilient if it is to live up to the ambitions set by Letta, Draghi and many others.

The EEA Agreement - and our enduring political commitment - give us the framework we need. Where it doesn't, we have always found, and will continue to find, practical solutions together.

The EU and the EEA EFTA States share enough trust, interests, and experience to join forces on reversing the trend of a shrinking Europe — and contribute to making it a growing space once more.

7. ORIENTATION DEBATE: The EU's simplification agenda and the EEA Agreement

Intervention of Minister Ms Marie BJERRE on behalf of the European Union

Dear colleagues, as you know, the current economic situation is challenging. Faced with increasing competition from third countries, supply chain disruptions and global uncertainty, many of our companies are struggling to remain competitive on the global market.

In order to tackle this issue, the EU is building on the reports by Enrico Letta [‘Much more than a market’] and Mario Draghi [‘The future of European competitiveness’]. We are also heeding the call by the European Council to launch a “simplification revolution” and drastically reduce administrative burdens for businesses.

The European Commission has proposed several so-called “omnibus” packages. Among other things, they should simplify existing legislation by streamlining reporting requirements, supporting digitalisation, and removing red tape. The “omnibuses” proposed so far relate to sustainability requirements, InvestEU, agriculture, defence, chemicals, digital, as well as the easing of certain requirements for small mid-cap companies, enabling them to scale up and grow more easily.

The Council has treated these proposals with the utmost priority.

As a result, we have been able to already conclude trilogues on CBAM, InvestEU and on the agriculture omnibus, and to agree mandates for negotiations with the European Parliament on small mid-caps and chemicals.

The simplification agenda goes beyond the “omnibuses”, however. The competitiveness of our enterprises, and the reduction of unnecessary administrative burden will remain guiding principles for European policymaking in the coming years.

Many of the legal acts currently being amended are relevant for the EEA, as they concern the functioning of the single market. I am convinced that the simplification agenda will strengthen our internal market and very much be in our mutual best interest.

I am very interested in hearing your perspective on the simplification agenda and any possible experiences, recommendations or concerns you may have in this area.

First, however, I would like to pass the floor to the European Commission, followed by the EEAS, for their comments on the subject

Valdis, please you have the floor.

Intervention of Commissioner Mr Valdis DOMBROVSKIS on behalf of the Commission

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to discuss simplification today. Especially, as I am the one in charge of coordinating simplification agenda in the Commission.

The EU and the EEA EFTA States are each other's privileged partners, sharing values and working towards common priorities.

One of those priorities is regaining competitiveness and ensuring the growth of our economies. This is why simplification is at the core of our competitiveness mandate and the Commission's action on which we are delivering at full speed.

We have an ambitious target: by the end of this mandate, we want to reduce administrative burdens for businesses by 25%, and 35% for SMEs. The entire Commission is mobilised behind these efforts. Each Commissioner is responsible for simplifying rules within his or her portfolio. And we have set out new tool such as implementation dialogues and reality checks to do so.

By now, we have proposed seven Omnibus packages in 2025. Together with other simplification initiatives, they would save over EUR 9.6 billion of administrative costs. Now it is time to build on our momentum.

More than half of the legislative initiatives in the 2026 Commission Work Programme have a strong simplification dimension, including in areas such as taxation and energy product legislation.

We will streamline reporting, accelerate permitting, and align legislation to changing market conditions.

In addition, we will continue to use implementation dialogues and reality checks, our new consultation tools, to find further opportunities for simplification. And before the next year kicks in, we will put forward further Omnibus and simplification packages focusing in areas such as environmental legislation, automotive, and food and feed safety, for example.

Finally, we will continue to stress test our rules in priority areas, such as financial, digital, energy, company, and consumer law.

Well-coordinated efforts across the EU institutions, Member States, and our partner countries in the European Economic Area are essential to ensure that rules and regulations are effective, proportionate, and easy to implement for citizens and businesses.

All our initiatives are crucial to strengthening our common internal market and cutting red tape for all our people and businesses. Your comments on our simplification proposals were highly useful in understanding how our agenda could work for the whole EEA. And we agree that simplification must reinforce our policy ambitions. Our aim is to reduce the burden without undermining the related policy objectives.

We will therefore stay the course on our consumer protection and environmental ambition. Delivering simplified and effective laws to our citizens and businesses is more important than ever.

And our simplification agenda aims to achieve precisely that. We count on your collaboration, in and outside of the EEA, to bolster our competitiveness and strengthen our common internal market.

Thank you.

Intervention of Ms Claude VÉRON-RÉVILLE on behalf of Mr Matti MAASIKAS, Managing Director for Europe, representing the European External Action Service

We in the EEAS are closely following the development of the EU's simplification agenda and the adoption of the six omnibus packages of EU legislation in view of their impact on external action.

Let me say a few more words on this.

Although it may seem indirect, the impact of simplification on external action is there, as it does affect the external dimension of EU regulation. Thus:

- by reducing fragmentation of instruments, we can have more coherent and flexible external policies;
- by streamlining procedures we deliver aid faster and more efficiently;
- by increasing transparency means we build stronger legitimacy and visibility of the EU's global role;
- by ensuring policy coherence we can have a more consistent external impact, e.g. by linking development, trade, climate, etc.

Allow me to delve deeper into one of the omnibus packages of simplification – on defence readiness. This package, adopted in June this year, has identified several problem drivers that need to be addressed through regulatory simplification in order to achieve defence readiness:

- burdensome processes in the European Defence Fund (EDF) programme;
- complex, lengthy and costly procedures for defence procurement;
- Member States' fragmented defence spending in procurement;
- bottlenecks in intra-EU transfers of defence-related products;
- lengthy and complex national permitting procedures for defence projects;
- implementation of the EU legislation on chemicals does not always support the objective of defence readiness by 2030;
- difficulties for EU companies to access finance.

To address these issues, the defence readiness omnibus will:

- reduce bureaucracy costs and time-to-delivery for European defence companies;
- unlock private capital flows to fund more defence investments;
- facilitate joint procurement of defence equipment by Member States.

Finally, let me echo the Commission's emphasis on the importance of the simplification agenda for strengthening the European internal market and the implementation of the EEA agreement. This can be achieved by more efforts in incorporating legislation, rather than by a "wait-and-see" approach "until after relevant EU legislation is simplified".

We know that you, on the EEA-EFTA side, watch attentively how the EU unrolls its simplification agenda. We appreciate your interest and are reading carefully your views, for example as they were expressed in the paper of the EEA-EFTA Standing Committee on simplification submitted last July. We are open to discussing concrete proposals in the established formats also in the future.

Intervention of Minister Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR on behalf of Iceland

Dear colleagues,

Iceland wholeheartedly supports the simplification agenda, and we encourage the EU to be bold in your approach. As part of our journey towards enhanced competitiveness, I concur with Letta's and Draghi's reports that simplification is an important pillar of this effort.

As a liberal politician, I would like to leave more to the market. However, I recognise that there are advantages to regulating for the whole EEA – for 30 single market members. It is certainly better for our business than to meet 30 different regimes in Europe. This matters also for competitiveness. However, in such a holistic approach we mustn't strangle our economies in red tape and stifle innovation in emerging and evolving sectors, such as tech and AI. Common regulation should support their positive development, not hamper their creativity and growth.

The call for simplification is not new to me. As leader of my party and more recently in government, I have had great many conversations with businesses. In the majority of these conversations, they point to the increasing regulatory burden in the last years. Entailing considerable costs associated with monitoring and reporting – often disproportionate to the goals these rules are supposed to achieve. Confusion caused by duplication and having to abide by sometimes conflicting norms.

This is in particular a considerable headache for small and medium sized companies (SMEs) who do not have the means to seek outside counsel. Also, for growing medium sized companies. I see the simplification agenda as key to making life easier for our businesses and entrepreneurs, whom we rely on for growth and prosperity.

In addition, I'm also increasingly concerned about the difference in regulatory costs for companies inside and outside the EEA. This leaves our companies on the left foot in international competition and risks pushing economic activity outside our internal market. In this regard, you should be well aware of our longstanding concern for the effect of the ETS system in aviation; and, during a recent public consultation on the review of that system Iceland submitted a contribution in this regard.

Coming from a small economy, where most of our companies are small or medium sized, we are often implementing rules that are intended for much larger economies and can entail disproportionately higher cost for the economy. I recognize the increasing efforts to address the situation of this group of companies in some of the omnibus-proposals. When it comes to administering the rules and setting up a surveillance framework, we also recognise that these systems cannot be scaled down indefinitely – leaving significant base costs, compared to the size of the sector under the rules. A case in point is the surveillance framework for financial services. In recent years the Governors of the Nordic Central Banks have been calling for simplification in this regard.

On specific initiatives, we welcome the adoption of the amendments to simplify CBAM and encourage the EU co-legislator to swiftly adopt the Omnibus I-package on sustainability and the simplification of CBAM. We also encourage the timely adoption of the fourth package for the benefit of SMEs.

Finally, I encourage the Commission to bring forward further omnibus-proposals quickly and recognise that there are several already in the pipeline. The EEA States can all contribute ideas, including through the fitness checks for existing legislation.

If the first omnibus packages alone can lower regulatory burden for companies by 35%, enable investments for tens of billions of euros and save billions of euros in surveillance costs. What can 20 or more of them do to enhance our joint competitiveness?

I will now give the floor to my colleagues from Norway and Liechtenstein. Let us start with Norway.

Intervention of Minister Mr Espen BARTH EIDE on behalf of Norway

The Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Espen Barth Eide, based his statement on the following:

- Norway fully shares and supports EU's ambition to simplify rules and strengthen competitiveness. Impressed by your significant and speedy efforts to make European business and innovation easier.
- This is needed – Europe needs to speed up and do its utmost to target the bottlenecks that are holding European competitiveness back.
- More efficient regulation and less unnecessary paperwork are crucial to reduce barriers and promote both competitiveness and trade.
- Simplification of rules is not just about cutting red tape — it is about using society's and businesses' resources more efficiently.
- It is about freeing up time and resources so businesses can focus on driving innovation and creating value.
- Two main tracks: One focuses on simplifying laws and regulations. The other focuses on digitalizing and making reporting to the authorities easier.
- Efficient use of technology and the development of robust digital solutions will be important in the simplification efforts going forward.
- My government is working to make regulations clearer and working processes more digital. With the result that companies spend less time and money on administration.
- Let me share with you a few examples:
- In recent years, we have made it easier to set up a company online, we have simplified the tax return with more pre-filled information for companies, and we have streamlined the building application process through digital tools.
- We are exploring new possibilities for digital wallets. Work on digital bookkeeping and e-invoicing will, over time, bring major simplification gains. These initiatives can also help fight economic crime.
- Norway is, along with all the Nordic countries, at the forefront of digitalisation.

- Smart technology and digital solutions have made our public services faster, more user-friendly and easier to use - especially for small and medium-sized businesses.
- I believe we have valuable experience to share and bring into our common efforts to create conditions for competitiveness in the whole EEA area.
- 99% of Norwegian enterprises are SMEs. The Omnibus proposals are expected to have a significant impact on our enterprises.
- Norway contributes actively and follows EU developments on simplification closely within the EEA.

Intervention of Minister Ms Sabine MONAUNI on behalf of Liechtenstein

Dear Ministers, dear Commissioner, dear colleagues,

The European Economic Area remains central to Liechtenstein's prosperity and long-term stability. Through the EEA Agreement, our country participates fully in a shared Internal Market that promotes growth, innovation, and cooperation across Europe.

For thirty years, Liechtenstein has been a committed partner in strengthening this market and enhancing Europe's competitiveness. As a highly diversified and open economy, we depend on clear, reliable, and efficient rules that promote innovation, competitiveness, and sustainable growth.

We can therefore only repeat that we welcome the EU's Simplification Agenda. Smarter and more transparent rules can unlock further economic potential and make the Internal Market more efficient. Simplifying procedures and promoting digital solutions will help reduce administrative burdens and strengthen competitiveness.

For Liechtenstein, it is particularly important that these efforts benefit small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up nearly all our businesses. We must help them focus on innovation and growth.

At the same time, simplification must not weaken our shared ambition to protect Europe's very foundations: Its environment, climate and people. The goal should be better regulation, - rules that are easier to follow but equally effective.

Liechtenstein remains fully committed to the EEA Agreement and to ever closer cooperation with the EU based on it. If successful, the Simplification Agenda can strengthen this cooperation even further in terms of economic output.

Together, we must ensure a well-functioning, competitive, and sustainable Internal Market that benefits all EEA citizens. Simplification, to tie this back to my previous statement, is yet another important element of EU efforts to turn Europe from a shrinking into a growing space again.

Liechtenstein is fully onboard.

Intervention of Minister Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR on behalf of EEA EFTA side

Does the Commission and the EEA EFTA side wish to make any further comments?

I conclude this item.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Intervention of Minister Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR on behalf of EEA EFTA side

Finally, that brings us to Item 8 on our agenda: 'Other business'. Would anyone wish to raise an issue under this item? It does not seem to be case.

Intervention of Minister Ms Marie BJERRE on behalf of the European Union

No, thank you, we do not have any topics to raise.

Closing remarks by Minister Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR on behalf of EEA EFTA side

Thank you. We have then concluded the items on our agenda. On behalf of the EEA EFTA States, I would like to express our appreciation for today's fruitful and constructive dialogue.

We would like to thank the Danish Presidency, the European Commission, the European External Action Service and the Council Secretariat for the excellent cooperation in preparing today's meeting. We look forward to its continuation with the Cypriot Presidency next year.

Our discussions on EEA cooperation in the context of security, resilience and preparedness will continue this afternoon, as this meeting room will transform into a conference venue for the high-level panel debate that the Icelandic chair and the Danish Presidency are co-hosting. We look forward to continuing our discussions, and we hope to see many of you there.

Closing remarks of Minister Ms Marie BJERRE on behalf of the European Union

From my side, I would like to thank you all for your attendance and your contributions to this very constructive meeting.

Closing remarks by Minister Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR on behalf of EEA EFTA side

The meeting is closed.

61st meeting of the EEA COUNCIL

(Brussels, 20 November 2025)

EFTA House

(Auditorium)

INDICATIVE LIST OF PARTICIPANTS - PLENARY SESSION

Icelandic Delegation

(EEA EFTA Chair)

H.E. Ms Þorgerður Katrín GUNNARSDÓTTIR	Minister for Foreign Affairs
H.E. Mr Stefán Haukur JÓHANNESSON	Ambassador, Mission of Iceland to the EU
Mr Aðalsteinn LEIFSSON	Political Advisor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Ingólfur FRÍÐRIKSSON	Deputy Director General, European Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Mr Finnur Thór BIRGISSON	Deputy Head of Mission, Mission of Iceland to the EU
Ms Katrín SVERRISDÓTTIR	Director of EEA Cooperation, Mission of Iceland to the EU

Norwegian Delegation

H.E. Mr Espen Barth EIDE	Minister of Foreign Affairs
H.E. Mr Anders EIDE	Ambassador, Mission of Norway to the EU
Mr Frode ANDERSEN	Director-General, Department for European Affairs and International Trade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ms Mette JØRANLI	Director, EU and EEA Section, Department for Europe and Trade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ms Astrid BERGMÅL	State Secretary for Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ms Iselin HEBBERT HAUKAAS	Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Liechtenstein Delegation

H.E. Ms Sabine MONAUNI	Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Environment and Culture
H.E. Mr Pascal SCHAFHAUSER	Ambassador, Mission of the Principality of Liechtenstein to the EU
Ms Andrea ENTNER-KOCH	Director of the EEA Coordination Unit
H.E. Mr Martin FRICK	Director of the Office for Foreign Affairs
Ms Nuscha WIECZOREK	Deputy Head of Mission, Mission of the Principality of Liechtenstein to the EU
Ms Kathrin NESCHER-STÜTZEL	Diplomat, Office for Foreign Affairs

EU Council Presidency

H.E. Ms Marie BJERRE	Minister for European Affairs of Denmark
Mr Jonas BERING LIISBERG	State Secretary for European Affairs and the Arctic
Ms Marie-Louise FRØLICH LORENTZEN	Senior Advisor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ms Anna NILSSON	EFTA WP Chair, Permanent Representation of Denmark to the EU

European Commission

Mr Valdis DOMBROVSKIS	Commissioner for Economy and Productivity; Implementation and Simplification
Ms Sofja RIBKINA	Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Dombrovskis
Mr Jan Hendrik DOPHEIDE	Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Šefčovič

EU Council Secretariat

Mr Nicolas KERLEROUX	Director, DG RELEX, Security and Crisis Management
Mr Efstratios PEGIDIS	Political Administrator, DG RELEX, Enlargement and Europe

European External Action Service

Mr Matti MAASIKAS	Managing Director, Directorate Europe
H.E. Ms Clara GANSLANDT	Ambassador, Head of EU Delegation in Reykjavik
Ms Claude VÉRON-RÉVILLE	EU Special Arctic Envoy, EEAS Head of Division Western Europe

EFTA Secretariat

Mr Kurt JAEGER	Secretary-General
Mr Knut HERMANSEN	Deputy Secretary-General
Mr Thordur JONSSON	Deputy Secretary-General
Ms Marit C. Schage ANDRIA	Director, Internal Market Division
Mr Pétur GUNNARSSON	Head of EEA Policy Coordination, EEA Coordination Division
Ms Karoline Lumholdt MATHISEN	Head of EEA Legal Coordination, EEA Coordination Division

EFTA Surveillance Authority

Mr Arne RØKSUND	President
Mr Árni Páll ÁRNASON	College Member
Mr Stefan BARRIGA	College Member

REPORT

Subject: Progress report of the EEA Joint Committee

Decision making

1. The EEA Joint Committee has adopted 134 Joint Committee Decisions (JCDs) incorporating 252 legal acts into the EEA Agreement since the 60th meeting of the EEA Council on 21 May 2025. In the period from 1 January to 24 October 2025, the EEA Joint Committee adopted 251 JCDs incorporating 445 legal acts. In comparison, during the period from 1 January to 25 October 2024, the EEA Joint Committee adopted 247 JCDs incorporating 469 legal acts.
2. On 1 October 2025¹, there were 615 legal acts awaiting incorporation, compared with 610 acts on 16 April 2025. Since April 2025, therefore, the overall number of legal acts outstanding has increased. Of the 615 legal acts outstanding on 1 October 2025, 195 acts are still in the early stages of the incorporation process, where the compliance date in the EU passed less than six months ago.
3. On 24 October 2025, the number of JCDs awaiting the fulfilment of constitutional requirements where the six-month period had expired was 19, compared with 22 in April 2025.

¹ The date reflects the most recent edition of the Monitoring List prior to the EEA Joint Committee meeting of 24 October 2025. This is a list of all acts outstanding where the compliance date passed two weeks prior to the Subcommittees I-IV meeting.

4. Important decisions incorporated since the 60th meeting of the EEA Council on 21 May 2025 include:
- Decision No 159/2025 regarding the disclosure of income tax information by certain undertakings and branches
 - Decision No 170/2025 regarding decisions of European standardisation organisations concerning European standards and European standardisation deliverables
 - Decision No 174/2025 on energy efficiency
 - Decision No 175/2025 on the energy performance of buildings and energy efficiency
 - Decision No 176/2025 on the calculation and promotion of renewable energy
 - Decision No 221/2025 on rules for calculating price differences between eligible aviation fuels and fossil kerosene, as well as for allocating allowances for the use of eligible aviation fuels under the EU Emissions Trading System
 - Decision No 243/2025 on European Green Bonds and optional disclosures for bonds marketed as environmentally sustainable and for sustainability-linked bonds
 - Decision No 247/2025 on the guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network

Decision shaping

5. The EEA EFTA States participate in 15 EU programmes and 18 decentralised agencies, as well as in the activities of six executive agencies.
6. Since the last meeting of the EEA Council on 21 May 2025, the EEA Joint Committee has taken note of EEA EFTA Comments on the following subjects:
- The European preference requirement in public procurement
 - The Omnibus proposals

Briefings in the EEA Joint Committee

7. In the period from 21 May to 24 October 2025, the EEA Joint Committee received briefings on:
- The Single Market Strategy
 - The Import Surveillance Task Force

Status of issues outstanding

8. Discussions on the following issues have not yet been concluded:

Energy:

- Regulation (EU) 2017/460 establishing a network code on harmonised transmission tariff structures for gas; Regulation (EU) 2017/459 establishing a network code on capacity allocation mechanisms in gas transmission systems and repealing Regulation (EU) No 984/2013; Regulation (EU) No 312/2014 establishing a Network Code on Gas Balancing of Transmission Networks and Regulation (EU) 2015/703 establishing a network code on interoperability and data exchange rules; Commission Regulation (EU) 2016/631 establishing a network code on requirements for grid connection of generators; Regulation (EU) No 1227/2011 on wholesale energy market integrity and transparency (REMIT); Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/2196 establishing a network code on electricity emergency and restoration; Regulation (EU) 2019/942 establishing a European Union Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators

State aid:

- Council Regulation (EU) No 734/2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 659/1999 laying down detailed rules for the application of Article 93 of the EC Treaty

Food chain:

- Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 on genetically modified food and feed (GM Food and Feed); Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/2122 on personal consignments

Transport:

- Regulation (EU) 2016/1199 on helicopter offshore operations (HOFO)

Competition policy:

- Directive (EU) 2019/1 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 to empower the competition authorities of the Member States to be more effective enforcers and to ensure the proper functioning of the internal market (“ECN+ Directive”); Directive 2014/104/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 November 2014 on certain rules governing actions for damages under national law for infringements of the competition law provisions of the Member States and of the European Union

Financial services:

- Directive 2014/49/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on deposit guarantee schemes (recast) – DGS III

Environment:

- Directive (EU) 2016/2284 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2016 on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants, amending Directive 2003/35/EC and repealing Directive 2001/81/EC

Statistics:

- Regulation (EU) 2016/1952 of the European Parliament and of the Council 26 October 2016 on European statistics on natural gas and electricity prices and repealing Directive 2008/92/EC; Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/2010 of 9 November 2017 amending Regulation (EC) No 1099/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on energy statistics, as regards the updates for the annual and monthly energy statistics; Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/1799 of 21 November 2018 on the establishment of a temporary direct statistical action for the dissemination of selected topics of the 2021 population and housing census geocoded to a 1 km² grid

9. The EEA Joint Committee has reiterated its determination to work towards the rapid conclusion of these issues.

Financial Mechanisms

10. The Agreement on the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Agreement on the Norwegian Financial Mechanism for the period 2021–2028 were signed on 12 September 2024 and entered into force on 1 August 2025. The two additional protocols on market access for fish between the EU and Norway, and between the EU and Iceland, also entered into force on 1 August. For the new period of the EEA and Norway Grants, the EEA EFTA States will contribute a total of EUR 3.268 billion to 15 Beneficiary States in the EU.

10. The three priority areas for the period 2021–2028 are:

- Green transition
- Democracy, rule of law and human rights
- Social inclusion and resilience

12. For the period 2014–2021, the EEA and Norway Grants allocated a total of EUR 2.8 billion. The period of eligibility for projects under both Mechanisms ended in April 2024. The final date for eligibility for support under the Fund for bilateral relations was 30 April 2025.
