

Report of the Working Group on the EEA co-operation

September 2019

Foreword

In the course of the 148th legislative session [of the Althing] the Minister for Foreign Affairs received a request from thirteen Members of Parliament for a report on the advantages and disadvantages of Iceland's membership of the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA Agreement) and the impact of the Agreement in Iceland.

The notes attached to the request for the report reveal that the Members see a need to “assess in an objective manner the advantages and disadvantages of the European co-operation, particularly in the light of the experience gained by Iceland during this period.” They also note that it would be prudent to shed some light on the challenges that lie ahead. Most prominent among these challenges is the impending exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union and the impact that this development could have on the status of the EEA Agreement.

Reference is also made to a report on Norway's membership of the EEA commissioned from experts by Norway, which was published in 2012. The notes attached to the Members' request for the report include the following comments:

 Serious questions arose regarding the democratic deficit and transfer of sovereignty resulting from Norway's participation in the EEA Agreement and the Schengen co-operation. The report revealed that the impact of the EEA Agreement had extended to a far wider range of social dimensions than had been visualised in 1992. No end to this trend appears to be in sight, as there is now a heated debate in progress in Norway concerning a legislative bill introduced by the Norwegian government concerning the country's participation in the EU's energy legislation package, with the decision already made by the EEA Joint Committee for the package to be incorporated into the EEA Agreement.

The comments of the Members conclude with the following words:

 It has clearly become an urgent matter for Iceland's interests to undertake a similar review of the consequences and functioning of the EEA Agreement in Iceland. Conducting such a review at the present time would be appropriate in light of the fact that the next turn of the year will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the EEA Agreement. A detailed and careful situation assessment of the EEA Agreement would also be a worthy undertaking with Iceland celebrating 100 years of sovereignty.

As these words indicate, the request for the report is linked to the debate and dispute in Norway regarding the third energy package, which was approved by the Althing with 46 votes to 13 on Monday 2 September 2019. But there were other underlying factors, as indicated by the phrasing “review of the consequences and functioning of the EEA Agreement in Iceland.”

In response to this request, Mr. Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson, Minister for Foreign Affairs, appointed a Working Group of three persons on 30 August 2018 with the following mandate:

- To summarise and assess the benefits to Iceland of participation in the EEA co-operation and the principal challenges faced by government in implementing the EEA Agreement;
- To assess the legal framework transposed into Icelandic law in the areas covered by the EEA Agreement and, additionally, to analyse the attendant business, economic, political and democratic dimensions;
- To survey trends in the relations between the EEA/EFTA states and the EU. An assessment should be conducted of the changes resulting from the United Kingdom's exit from the EU and the position of relations between the EU and Switzerland;
- To consider the reports that have been issued in recent years that address the relations between Iceland and the European Union. Account could also be taken of the extensive report prepared by Norway, which appeared six years ago, concerning Norway's relations with the EU;
- To compile a list of references and scholarly works relating to Iceland's membership of the EEA Agreement.

The Working Group was given one year to prepare and return its report. When it became apparent in June 2019 that the Althing would gather at the end of August to vote on 2 September 2019 on an important EEA matter, the Working Group decided to choose that date to conclude its assignment.

The members of the Group, in addition to myself, were legal experts Krístrún Heimisdóttir and Bergþóra Halldórsdóttir. We were joined by Pétur Gunnarsson, temporary advisor at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. We also had the assistance of Gaukur Jörundsson, lawyer, in the final months of the work.

The report attempts to place Iceland's membership of the EEA in the historical context of the development of international co-operation on economic and financial affairs since the end of the Second World War. The substance of the Agreement is described, and the procedures employed in amending its annexes. An examination is included of trends in domestic governance in the light of the Agreement. The policy areas of the Agreement are outlined, and its institutional framework described. An account is provided of all laws passed by the Althing since 1992 to 2 September 2019 with EEA relevance. The Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs authorised the Working Group to publish a report containing summaries of constitutional opinions that have been prepared with regard to the EEA participation. The publication of these opinions enhances the value of the report, while at the same time ensuring consistency and precision in deliberations on this sensitive aspect of the matter.

An attachment to the report lists the names of 147 individuals consulted by the Working Group in Iceland, Brussels, Vaduz and Oslo. In fact, the number was greater if larger meetings are included.

Apart from discussions with the parties listed in the attachment, the Group has communicated with representatives of government agencies and enterprises that provided valuable assistance in the work of completing of the report.

In brief, it is safe to say that all the people with which the Group held discussions, apart from representatives of *Frjálstland* in Iceland and *Nei til EU* in Norway, felt that the EEA Agreement was alive and well. They felt that the Agreement was of material use and benefit for those operating within its framework.

On Iceland's joining the EEA, Icelandic society was transformed. To undertake a comparison of the past and present would require an extensive examination of the development of Icelandic society far beyond the resources and time available to the Group. In actuality, it is doubtful that going back to the past would serve any useful purpose in light of the radical nature of the changes that have occurred.

The objective of the Group was not to render judgment on the advantages and disadvantages of the EEA co-operation, but only to establish the facts to enable readers of the report to arrive at their own conclusions.

An attempt is made to explain in an organised manner matters that have proven complex and difficult and are linked to the EEA membership in one way or another. This should make it easier for politicians and the general public to weigh and assess the rights, obligations and benefits of the Icelandic people that derive from the EEA membership.

As regards Britain's exit from the EU, the Group faced the same problem as others, namely the problem of not knowing what form the exit will take or when it will take place.

In closing, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who assisted us for their help and support. To my colleagues in the Group I extend my thanks for the pleasure of their collaboration and their company. I speak for all of us when I extend special thanks to Pétur Gunnarsson, who put in an extraordinary effort to meet all our requests with good humour and outstanding solicitude.

16 September 2019

Björn Bjarnason

Commemorative Statement of the EEA Prime Ministers

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the EEA Agreement, the prime ministers of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway gathered in Brussels on 22 March 2019 and issued the following declaration:

- i. We reaffirm our shared values of democracy, individual freedom, the rule of law and human rights, and a common commitment to open societies and open economies. We rededicate ourselves to building a peaceful and economically strong Europe for future generations.
- ii. For 25 years, the EEA Agreement has guaranteed equal treatment, legal certainty and predictable conditions for citizens and businesses. The two-pillar structure ensures uniform interpretation and application of EEA law through parallel institutions for surveillance and judicial review. The overall balance between rights, obligations and benefits is key to maintaining the integrity of the EEA.
- iii. The EEA Agreement also provides a framework for extensive rules-based multilateral cooperation in Europe. It promotes prosperity, innovation, competitiveness and general welfare, and plays a key role in fostering high social, consumer and environmental standards.
- iv. Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway contribute actively to shaping EEA relevant EU legislation and programmes through their participation in EU committees and expert groups.
- v. The EEA is a manifestation of solidarity among the countries of Europe in overcoming shared social and economic challenges. The EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms are making a lasting contribution to reducing social and economic disparities in the EEA and supporting a free and vibrant civil society, to the benefit of Europe as a whole.
- vi. During the last 25 years, Europe has undergone profound changes. The positive spirit of cooperation has allowed for adaptations and pragmatic solutions to meet our common challenges. Taking stock of these achievements, we reconfirm our support for the EEA Agreement as the cornerstone of our relations with the European Union.

Executive summary

I. From Bretton Woods to the EEA

The first chapter of the report describes the historical background of Iceland's entry into negotiations on joining the EEA in 1989. Until that time, Iceland had not been in step with its neighbouring countries in multilateral trade matters. For example, Iceland did not accede to the European Free Trade Association until 1970. Price controls and capital controls continued in effect and did not end until the country became a member of the EEA on 1 January 1994. The membership effectively freed the country from its economic shackles.

Disputes on Iceland's international trade relations proceeded to some extent along ideological lines until the time that the membership of the EEA was finalised.

II. The membership in practice

The second chapter of the report describes the procedure for implementing the EEA membership. Three states, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, the EEA/EFTA states, work together towards this objective and a good balance has been achieved in their collaboration.

The principal obligation of states under the agreement is to implement legislation that ensures homogeneity based on the principles of the EEA Agreement concerning the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital in the single EEA market. Looking at the number of laws passed in Iceland over the 25-year period of the EEA Agreement reveals that 16% of these laws can be traced directly to the Agreement.

The membership of the EEA was a watershed in Icelandic society. Iceland has at times been criticised by other parties to the Agreement for delays in implementing acts rooted in the Agreement. Part of that problem is the requirement that all texts must be translated into Icelandic. The translation centre of the Foreign Ministry plays a key role in that work. The centre currently has 34 employees in Reykjavík and three establishments outside Reykjavík. The centre's term base currently contains about 80,000 entries.

Generally speaking, the EEA/EFTA states follow the recommendations of the EU Commission in deciding which acts have EEA relevance. It is pointed out that where it is considered necessary to take special action in defence of urgent Icelandic interests this needs to be done in a timely manner following detailed analysis and on the basis of a clear purpose. Alert attention to the interests of the EEA/EFTA states and influence at the decision shaping stage counteracts any potential democratic deficit. This requires

participation in the meetings of expert groups and comitology committees of the EU; the role and form of this participation is described in the chapter.

An overview is given of adaptations negotiated by Iceland to decisions of the EEA Joint Committee in 2005 to 2018. The government is warned against using the implementation of EEA rules as a vehicle for onerous parcels that do not fall within the scope of the EEA Agreement using a process known as “gold plating”.

It is noted that the EEA Agreement is narrower in scope than the EU partnership. It does not require membership of the customs union, it entails neither a requirement of participation in the common agricultural policy or common fisheries policy, nor in the monetary union, or participation in collaboration on foreign affairs or security.

Article 59 of the EEA Agreement provides for a wide margin of discretion as regards undertakings of general economic interest. To give an example, this scope is useful to Iceland in that it allows the operation of a Housing Financing Fund. It is left to the discretion of the Icelandic government to assess what constitutes general economic interest. Membership of the EEA does not entail a requirement of privatisation, but only assurance that all parties should be on an equal footing in comparable situations.

The chapter ends with an account of the process by which the effect of an act may be suspended under the EEA Agreement in the event of disagreement. This process has never been put to the test in the 25-year history of the Agreement, and the Agreement itself has no provisions on responses if no agreement can be reached on the incorporation of an act into the Agreement.

III. The three branches of government

This chapter discusses the impact that the membership of the EEA has had on the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.

It describes the work of government-appointed committees, which since 1997 have worked on adapting the ministries and administration to the EEA collaboration. All procedures in Iceland's government administration became more effective after a steering group formed by the Prime Minister's Office returned a report in 2015.

In the government offices close co-operation has been established between the Prime Minister's Office and the Foreign Ministry regarding the process of EEA affairs, together with an overview of upcoming matters in collaboration with the line ministries responsible for compliance with rules in the transposition of individual acts. A reservation made by a

government official at the right time and in the correct manner and with proper reasoning will accompany a matter throughout its process and facilitate its progress at all stages of administration and implementation in Iceland. Also, legal expertise has been enhanced in the government offices to deal with the constitutional aspects of the co-operation.

The preparation of a list of priorities and the introduction of a database has enabled improvement of the work of the Althing, the line ministries, the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office. This increases political influence in the decision-making process and administrative professionalism.

In the Althing, work has been in progress on formulating and implementing rules to ensure the timely and substantive involvement of Members of Parliament in EEA matters in their formation stage and before their incorporation into the EEA Agreement, in addition to defining the nature of issues that are referred to the parliamentary committees.

As regards the judiciary, a difference of opinion between the EFTA Surveillance Authority and the Icelandic government regarding the interpretation of Protocol 35 to the EEA Agreement remains unresolved.

IV. Scope of the EEA Agreement

This longest chapter in the report discusses the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital. These are the factors forming the four freedoms, the focal point of the EEA co-operation. The chapter also addresses competition rules and other common rules, together with universal provisions in the Agreement on environmental matters, personal privacy and consumer protection. The chapter concludes with a discussion of programmes on education, science and culture.

According to figures from Statistics Iceland, about 77.3% of Iceland's total exports of goods in 2018 went to EEA states, and 60.6% of all imports were brought in from EEA states. In 2017, just short of 50% of exported service went to the EEA and 72.8% of imports came from EEA states.

The main body of the text is interspersed with short accounts, or examples, that illustrate certain subjects. They carry titles such as "Inadequate Accreditation," "Aluminium benefits from EEA membership," "Russian trade and the EEA," "The story of the third energy package," "Children's medicines and intellectual property rights," and "Strengthens Iceland's film making."

The EEA is a unique international partnership because of the extensive consideration it gives to individuals and the unequivocal rights it confers. About 40,000 Icelanders have benefited from the opportunities offered by the European Erasmus Plus education

programme. Hundreds of thousands of European health insurance cards (EHIC) have also been issued to Icelanders in the course of the years, about 150 thousand of them in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The EEA Agreement places great emphasis on the important role of individuals in the exercise of the rights that they acquire with the Agreement and the judicial protection afforded to these rights. This is clear, for instance, from the provisions on freedom of movement. The idea of depriving citizens of these rights in the name of national sovereignty amounts to a contradiction in terms.

Along with environmental protection, climate matters are increasingly prominent in the EEA co-operation. In recent years, the co-operation of the EEA countries on the environment, and in particular on the climate, has greatly increased. Government authorities in Iceland and in Norway share a common objective with the EU countries with regard to the Paris Agreement.

In the opinion of associations of employers and employees the experience of the EEA Agreement has been excellent for twenty-five years. Stakeholders in the economy agree that the Agreement has been extremely important in opening up markets for businesses by removing restrictions on quantities, lifting technical barriers and reducing tariffs. Labour unions are also of the opinion that the Agreement has served the interests of Iceland well and improved the legal status of employees.

Iceland's marine and land resources remain under Icelandic control, while trading in marine products, agricultural goods and energy is subject to the rules of the common market. The free movement of marine goods into the single market is of crucial importance for the Icelandic fishing industry. After years of dispute regarding imports of agricultural products a legal resolution has now been achieved. Trade in industrial goods had already been freed of tariffs with an agreement between Iceland and the European Economic Community (EEC); the terms of that agreement were confirmed with the EEA Agreement. This is in addition to the benefit arising from the harmonisation of rules across the entire area, which makes the marketing and sales of industrial goods much simpler than before. The Icelandic government can establish firm limits on purchases of farms and land in Iceland. The Agreement affords freedom to take extensive measures to control land ownership.

Rapidly growing trade in services, particularly in the fields of telecommunication and transport, have transformed Iceland's economy, among other things with increased tourism. Rules on the freedom of movement have created rights for individuals to education, work and residence. The EEA Agreement has vastly improved access by people from the EEA to the Icelandic labour market.

It is worth recalling what Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the President of Iceland at the time, said on the occasion of the enactment of the Act on the European Economic Area on 13 January 1993: "the sovereignty and independence of nations is not primarily dependent on the form

of their relations with other countries of the world. Sovereignty and independence come from within, based on the identity, education and culture of the nation and its ability to stand on its own feet and speak with its own voice.”

It is beyond all doubt that the EEA collaboration has invigorated and strengthened cultural activities and educational institutions in Iceland to a greater degree than anyone anticipated, and no nation has been as active as Icelanders in taking advantage of the opportunities for diverse cultural relations in the arts, research, teaching and studies.

V. The two-pillar structure

The two-pillar structure is the foundation of the EEA co-operation, which the member states are required to observe. The EFTA Secretariat in Brussels, the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA) and the EFTA Court are counterparts of the EU institutions in Brussels, each in its own area of competence. The Secretariat plays a key role in information gathering, harmonisation and coordination. ESA is the counterpart of the EU Commission, while the EFTA Court has the ultimate responsibility of ensuring that the EFTA pillar is respected as an independent partner.

Since the EU External Action Service took over representing the European Union towards the EEA/EFTA states on the basis of the Lisbon Treaty of 1 December 2009, the relations have grown in prominence within the EU institutional framework.

The nature of the EFTA institutions is described, as well as the demands on ESA following the increase in the number of the EU’s agencies, which have created a grey area in the relations between the EEA/EFTA states and the EU, giving the EFTA-pillar an increased role in decision-shaping in specialised areas.

The agencies are discussed and Iceland’s participation in their work is described.

Appended to the description of the EFTA Court is a brief summary of the Icesave dispute.

The EU places unmistakable trust in the EFTA pillar, and the EFTA Court is a central institution confirming this trust.

VI. Icelandic regulatory bodies – The EEA and the municipalities – EEA Grants – Third countries

This chapter brings sixteen Icelandic regulatory bodies into the discussion. Each of them has a statutory role that to some extent can be traced to the EEA Agreement. The extent of their influence on life in Iceland varies. Without the Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority and its functions in the European co-operation the situation regarding exports and imports of foodstuffs would be completely different, and worse, and the same can be said of the Icelandic Medicines Control Agency. The participation of the Icelandic Transport Authority in international co-operation on aviation safety is crucial for all air transport to and from Iceland.

The Union of Local Authorities in Iceland is an active participant in the co-operation between European local communities, which has developed in close connection with the EEA collaboration. The Icelandic local governments have posted a staff member in Brussels, so that within the Union of Local Authorities there is considerable depth knowledge regarding developments within the EEA.

When the EEA co-operation was launched, the EEA/EFTA countries contributed to a cohesion fund to narrow the gap between the rich and poor member states of the co-operation. The enlargement of the EU in 2004 brought about the establishment of the Iceland, Liechtenstein Norway grants, an influential funding scheme, particularly because of the contributions from Norway, which also runs another parallel scheme, Norway grants, to facilitate its bilateral projects with beneficiaries. The funds contributed to the EEA Grants also benefit the EEA/EFTA states themselves because of the policy pursued by the scheme.

The countries referred to under the title third countries are Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Andorra, Monaco and San Marino. The United Kingdom is included in the group because of the result of the British referendum in 2016 and the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the EU. Switzerland is engaged in a dispute with the EU concerning over 100 bilateral agreements that the Swiss have concluded with the Union in the course of the years. A draft agreement on a resolution of the dispute has been prepared, but a resolution is unlikely to materialise this year. The three small countries each have their separate status vis-à-vis the EU. The EU's problems with the third countries in Europe have served to entrench the EEA co-operation.

VII. The development of Icelandic legislation with regard to the EEA in 1992-2019

The last substantive chapter of the report is in three sections.

The first section, “From Brussels to Austurvöllur”, describes the process of the incorporation of acts into the EEA Agreement and their transposition in the EEA/EFTA countries. The section details the rules and procedures used for this purpose.

The second section is headed “Icelandic legislation grounded in the EEA 1992-2019”. The decision was made to survey the number of acts of law that have been passed in Iceland which originate directly from Iceland’s membership of the EEA, the titles of the acts, their number each year and their proportion of the legislation passed over the period in question. The conclusion of the survey was that a total of 3100 acts of law were passed over the period, i.e. 1992-2019, (in legislative sessions 116-145). Of these 3100 acts of law, 485 had their direct origin in the membership of the European Economic Area, that is to say 16% of the laws enacted over the period. A list showing the titles and subjects of all these acts is published here for the first time.

The third section of the chapter is titled “Eighteen opinions on constitutional law 1992-2019”. When it appeared in the course of the work of the Working Group that the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had compiled an overview of opinions relating to constitutional law with reference to EEA and Schengen matters and the position taken by Althing with regard to the opinions up to and including 2016, the Group decided to appeal to the two ministries to update the list to September 2019 so as to include opinions relating to the bill for an act on data protection in 2018 and the third energy package in 2019. The publication of this overview should enable politicians and the general public to obtain an understanding of where the limits lie in debates over whether Icelandic sovereignty is being encroached with the participation in the EEA and Schengen co-operation.

VIII Persons consulted by the Group

This section lists 147 identified persons with whom the Working Group held discussions; in addition to these persons, however, the Group met with other people at large meetings, although they are not referred to by name. The procedure has been observed of not citing proceedings from these meetings, but minutes were kept, and they are preserved as the Group’s working documents. Readers of the report will note that in one case the rule of not citing identified persons is broken; this was done at the express request of those involved.

IX References

The references list various sources relating to the EEA co-operation and Iceland's participation. First comes material published by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, followed by reports relating to the EEA, then opinions concerning constitutional issues relating to the EEA Agreement, followed by books and book sections in Icelandic concerning the EEA co-operation, student's essays and a list of sources in foreign languages.

Fifteen points on improvements:

1. Since 1992, no comparable opportunity has materialised for a trade and co-operation agreement with the EU that matches the participation in the EEA. No bilateral agreement could replace the EEA Agreement. Doubts regarding the constitutionality of full participation in the EEA co-operation weakens Iceland's position vis-à-vis its partners, especially Norway and Liechtenstein.
2. Constitutional disputes relating to the EEA membership need to be brought to a conclusion, either by recognising that the membership has achieved a constitutional status like other unwritten constitutional rules or by inserting a provision on the membership in the Constitution.
3. It needs to be recognised in deed that the participation in the EEA shapes Icelandic society; the participation should not be regarded as foreign encroachment. It should be confirmed that integration is an integral part of free international co-operation and that sovereign states are at liberty to decide how far to proceed on that path.
4. On the basis of the EEA Agreement, the Icelandic government is afforded scope to take independent decisions and defend Iceland's interests. If there is a desire to expand this scope, an unequivocal position should be taken as to what the changes should involve, and they should be presented jointly by the EEA/EFTA countries. The EU will not take the initiative in making any such amendments to the EEA Agreement.
5. The EEA/EFTA countries should place serious emphasis on strengthening the two-pillar structure and safeguard the credibility of its institutions. The system will not survive unless the EFTA pillar is strong. It needs to be ensured that the EFTA

Court continues to enjoy respect and trust both inside and outside the EEA/EFTA pillar. A response is needed to the increased specialisation in the collaboration with the EU's agencies by reinforcing the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA).

6. The assignment of competencies of the EU Commission to agencies gives the EEA/EFTA countries greater scope to influence decisions than they had before vis-à-vis the EU Commission. The agencies and their work should be seen as presenting opportunities for the EEA/EFTA countries, and not a threat.
7. If Iceland were to stand outside the legislative co-operation within the EU, and if it planned to function based on homespun rules, this would entail a significant risk of isolation, stagnation and regression in all sectors of the Icelandic society. This applies particularly to the economy and the industries and the areas most affected by technological advances. In this regard the translation centre of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs plays a key role as an invaluable venue for innovation and translation.
8. In the European Economic Area there is tension between countries in the north and the south, particularly in the social dimension and with regard to the rights of labour unions and workers. In order to safeguard institutes of general economic significance and the core values of Icelandic society in this regard, the Nordic legislative co-operation should be made more influential in the shaping of EU legislation. The report of the Nordic Council of Ministers of 2018, prepared by Inge Lorange Backer, suggests some good ways to achieve this.
9. Reports produced under the aegis of the Althing and state government are evidence that a great deal of effort has been spent on deliberating on the best means of governance regarding the EEA co-operation. A firm decision needs to be made on the handling of EEA matters within the Cabinet by means of a presidential decree on the division of ministerial responsibility. It needs to be recognised in the government system that large parts of the EEA co-operation are entirely domestic matters, and the role of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs should be defined accordingly.
10. A foundation should be laid for greater discipline in all management and procedures regarding EEA affairs on the home front. An administrative coordination centre for EEA affairs should be established within the government with a permanent staff that continuously monitors everything that concerns the

policy area in question at the decision-shaping and implementation stages.

11. A governmental priority list compiled annually on principal EEA matters should be followed up in a systematic manner. Specific policy areas should be given greater weight in the ministries with trained staff and decision-making based on political guidance. By strong arguments and coordinated efforts the EEA/EFTA countries can achieve significant results within the EEA in advancing their interests.
12. A human resource policy needs to be shaped regarding government participation in the EEA co-operation. The people who do this work need to be given the opportunity to obtain specialised knowledge through study and research leaves at foreign universities, academies or research institutes.
13. Greater research activities should be promoted on EEA matters and in more disciplines than law. Through co-operation between the government, stakeholders and research institutes a think tank should be established on EEA affairs to serve as an advisory agency, contribute to the public debate and organise seminars.
14. Politicians, ministers and members of parliament need to devote more attention to EEA matters; without their participation it is impossible to promote Iceland's political viewpoints. The Althing should enhance its relationship with the EU Parliament by posting a liaison officer in Brussels.
15. Over the years, tens of thousands of Icelanders have taken advantage of the rights conferred by the EEA participation, including the right to seek an education or seek medical help in other countries. To create a balance between rights, obligations and benefits has been, and remains, one of the chief objectives of the EEA co-operation. This should be respected by Icelandic government authorities.