

*Book launch event – “The Handbook of EEA Law” – Brussels, 15 December 2015*

**Welcoming remarks by Dag Wernø Holter, Deputy Secretary-General of EFTA (Brussels)**

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my privilege to wish you all a warm welcome to the EFTA Secretariat here in Brussels and to this book launch event for “The Handbook of EEA Law”. A special welcome, of course, to Dr Carl Baudenbacher, President of the EFTA Court and editor of the book, who will present his remarks at the end of the programme, and to our two other speakers, Ambassador Sven Svedman, President of the EFTA Surveillance Authority, and The Honourable Ian Forrester, Judge of the General Court of the European Union.

When the first initiative was taken, more than 25 years ago, to establish “a new, more structured partnership” between the EU and the EFTA countries, it was an acknowledgement of the fact that EFTA and its Member States – seven States at the time – had played and would continue to play their role in the broader process of European integration, set in motion by the establishment of the European Communities in the 1950s. The initiative, taken as we know by the then Commission President Jacques Delors, was bold and innovative.

The negotiations that followed led to the Agreement on the European Economic Area. Like the initiative, the Agreement was ambitious and innovative: in terms of principles and objectives, the extension of the Single Market to the participating EFTA States; in terms of decision-making procedures, whose purpose it was to ensure a homogenous and dynamic regulatory framework within an area governed by different principles of international law; and in particular in terms of institutional solutions, by creating institutions on the EFTA side mirroring those of the EU for surveillance and litigation.

Over the more than 20 years that the EEA Agreement has been in force, our cooperation has led to the development of what we now refer to as “EEA law”. This has become an important legal field for our Member States, and indeed for all 31 States presently party to the EEA Agreement. However, with the successive enlargements of the EU since 1994 – first with the former EFTA States and then with the Central and Eastern European countries – and the resulting shift of balance between the EFTA side and the EU within the EEA, knowledge of this dimension of European integration and of European law may be weaker than it ought to be. It is therefore of great importance that a comprehensive “Handbook of EEA Law” is now being made available.

As President Baudenbacher points out in his foreword to the Handbook, there are indeed few monographs on the law of the European Economic Area. The new Handbook will “comprehensively address the breadth of law encompassed by the EEA Agreement for the benefit of practitioners, legal scholars and students alike”. The Handbook covers the main features of the Agreement, the decision-making procedures in their full scope and the two key legal institutions – the EFTA Surveillance Authority and the EFTA Court. It further deals with EEA law seen from the national perspectives of the three EEA EFTA States – Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway – and with the full material breadth of the Agreement. A very comprehensive approach indeed!

Allow me to conclude these brief welcoming remarks by congratulating you, Dr Baudenbacher, as well as your collaborators and all the contributors to the Handbook, on this achievement. I am convinced that it will represent a very important contribution to the knowledge of the EEA, and a most valuable tool for all those who in some way or other are set to “practise the EEA”. We also appreciate that you have chosen to launch the Handbook here at the EFTA Secretariat in Brussels tonight. It is an honour and a pleasure to be able to receive you. Again, a warm welcome to all of you, and we look forward to your presentations.