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The EEA treaty

What does it mean?

Shortly before Easter, on April 14, the target was reached at last: the chief negotiators of the EFTA and EC states were able to initial the treaty setting up the European Economic Area (EEA).

The EEA is made up of the twelve members of the EC and the seven members of EFTA, which includes Switzerland. They have come together with the intention of abolishing as far as possible all obstacles still existing which prevent the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons. The EEA treaty is based on the principle of non-discrimination. This means, for example, that Swiss citizens will be treated in any other EEA country in the same way as citizens of that country.

The EEA treaty

For the EEA to come into being the states of the EC and EFTA have had to work out a treaty valid in international law. This treaty will have to be signed and ratified by the twelve EC states (governments and Parliaments). In Switzerland, the people and the cantons will have the final word in a national referendum.

It is intended that most provisions of the new treaty will come into force on January 1, 1993. But in one or two areas transition stages of up to five years have been negotiated. For us this means that sufficient time has been obtained to adapt present Swiss standards to those

contained in the EEA treaty. An additional "protection clause" allows some states (Switzerland among them) to set aside certain of the general provisions in cases of serious economic, social or ecological difficulty, but only until the situation has returned to normal. The EEA treaty defines the objectives which

the economic area without hindrance and that all limitations on cross-border investment in companies and property will be abolished.

● **Free movement of services** means that all obstacles to the transfer of transport and financial services, insurance, telecommunications, audiovisual instruments, etc. will be abolished. Insurance companies and banks will have complete freedom of establishment and will be able to do business throughout the EEA.

● **Free movement of persons** means the abolition of all quotas and residence permit procedures for citizens of EEA countries. There will no longer be restrictions on length of stay or on the right to take up domicile or exercise a profession, although it should be noted that this freedom is valid only for persons who are in a position to look after

Present situation

- Border controls for persons and goods
- Border formalities
- Limited freedom of establishment
- National restrictions on public tenders

- A whole range of national regulations
- National admission and licensing procedures

EEA objectives

- Establishment of the four freedoms:
 - free movement of goods
 - free movement of persons
 - free movement of services
 - free movement of capital
- flanking policies (social, education, research, environment, etc.)

- Harmonised regulations or mutual recognition of each other's national regulatory systems
- Harmonised admission and licensing procedures

are to be reached in common, as well as the basic rules for realisation of the now-famous four freedoms.

The four freedoms

● **Free movement of goods** means that there will be lower tariffs, no quotas, no differences in technical standards, no discrimination in favour of national products, etc. In the same spirit competition policies will have to be liberalised and non-tariff obstacles to trade, such as special provisions on standards and national legal regulations, all of which interfere with the free movement of goods, will have to come down. Free access to this huge single market will mean that economies in production will take place and that prices of many manufactured and consumer goods will drop.

● **Free movement of capital** means funds, loans and securities can be purchased and transferred throughout

themselves and their families financially, i.e. they must possess either employment, a pension or private means.

Additional agreements

These four basic freedoms are to be supplemented in many different areas, for example in social policies, in consumer and environmental protection, in company law, in research and development, in education and training.

Integration Office

Key dates

May 2, 1992:

Signature of the EEA Treaty.

During the month of May:

Adoption of the Federal Council's recommendation on the EEA Treaty by the parliamentary commissions.

End of August/Beginning of September:

Special Session of the National Council and the Council of States (the upper and lower houses of Parliament).

Probably December 6, 1992 or during the first half of 1993:

Referendum on the EEA treaty.

«EWR praktisch»

(EEA in practice) is the title of the latest series of information leaflets (available for the moment in German only) and obtainable free of charge from: Integrationsbüro EDA/EFD, Sektion Information, Bundeshaus Ost, CH-3003 Berne. Please include an addressed glue-on label with your request.