

Communiqué issued after the ministerial meeting of the EFTA Council in Vienna (24 May 1965)

Caption: On 24 May 1965, the final communiqué issued by the ministerial meeting of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Council in Vienna gives a positive account of EFTA's activities and calls for a strengthening of its relations with the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee: A retrospective view of the political year in Europe 1965. March 1966. Paris: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/communique_issued_after_the_ministerial_meeting_of_the_efta_council_in_vienna_24_may_1965-en-4b809b5b-144a-43e0-92b0-aa51dee045b4.html

Publication date: 25/10/2012

Communiqué issued after the ministerial meeting of the EFTA Council, Vienna (24th May 1965)

1. The EFTA Council met at ministerial level in Vienna on 24th May 1965. Dr. Fritz Bock, Federal Minister for Trade and Reconstruction, was in the Chair. Delegations of five member countries were led by their Prime Ministers. Dr. Klaus, the Federal Chancellor, welcomed the delegates.
2. Ministers examined the situation as it exists today in Europe, after five years of successful development of EFTA. They discussed the likely consequences for Europe of the deepening division resulting from the continued separate evolution of EFTA and EEC. A heavy responsibility rested on the governments to seek to ensure closer co-operation between EFTA and EEC and to pursue such policies as would promote to the greatest extent possible the growth of trade, the expansion of their economies and the welfare of all the peoples of Western Europe.
3. Ministers considered that a hardening of the division could only be arrested by new initiatives. They firmly believed that steps could and should be taken to bring about closer and more continuous contact between the two groups, in order to facilitate the removal of trade barriers and the promotion of closer economic co-operation in Europe, which are the fundamental objectives of EFTA. They agreed that it would be desirable to seek to arrange meetings at ministerial level between the two groups at the earliest opportunity which offered prospects of a fruitful result.
4. Ministers therefore decided that the Council should be charged with the task of recommending what procedural arrangements might best facilitate contacts between EFTA and the EEC, and what substantive issues of policy might be the subjects of discussion between them, and that this report should be submitted to the Ministerial Council of EFTA at its meeting in Copenhagen in October with a view to a meeting between EFTA and the EEC as soon as possible thereafter.
5. Ministers then considered a number of substantive ideas for increasing and strengthening co-operation between EFTA and the EEC, and for co-ordinating where practicable their policies in relation to developments of special economic concern to the two groups. These ideas include possible ways of reducing obstructions to freer trade between the two groups, functional collaboration in fields of research and development and the harmonisation throughout Europe of regulations and standards important for the manufacture and movement of goods.
6. Ministers again stressed the paramount importance they attach to a successful outcome to the Kennedy round as the principal means for the lowering of barriers to trade, both worldwide and in Europe, they confirmed the intention of all the member countries of EFTA to continue to work towards its success. Furthermore Ministers stressed their determination to co-operate with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.
7. Ministers reaffirmed their determination to intensify co-operation within EFTA, in order to ensure the prosperity of its own members and to offer the best prospect of achieving a satisfactory basis for closer collaboration between the Association and the EEC. The transitional period of the Association would end in a year-and-a-half. They agreed that member countries should ensure that all necessary action was in train to secure that the Association would function to the fullest advantage of all of them when the stage of full freedom of trade provided for in the Convention was reached.
8. They accordingly instructed the Council at official level to examine the further progress to be made in EFTA with this in view and to report to them in time for their next meeting. The report would deal in the first place with the internal arrangements of EFTA, including the economic development committee, with due regard to the objectives of the Association as set out in Article 2 and Articles 22 and 27. Secondly, the report would cover the external aspect of EFTA activities, taking into account the arrangements proposed for joint discussions with the EEC. Thirdly, the Council were instructed to review the institutional arrangements of EFTA.

9. Ministers made it clear that a vital step in the consolidation of EFTA was the elimination of the United Kingdom import charge. They noted the continued strengthening of the balance of payments of the United Kingdom, and welcomed the statement of the British Prime Minister that the surcharge would be removed as soon as possible.

10. Ministers took note with great regret of the wish expressed by the Secretary-General, Mr. Frank Figgures, to leave the Association and return to the British Treasury on 1st November of this year. They congratulated him on his appointment to an important post and expressed their deep appreciation of the outstanding services which Mr. Figgures has rendered to the Association and the member governments since he became Secretary-General in September 1960.

11. At the invitation of the Danish Government, the next meeting at ministerial level will take place in Copenhagen on 28th and 29th October 1965.