Mr Halldór Halldórsson, Chair of the EEA EFTA Forum, welcomed the participants and opened the meeting.

1. Approval of draft agenda

The draft agenda for the seventeenth meeting of the EEA EFTA Forum was approved.

2. Approval of the minutes of the sixteenth meeting in Brussels, 16-17 November 2018

The minutes of the sixteenth meeting of the EEA EFTA Forum, which took place in Brussels on 16 and 17 November 2017, were approved.

3. Roundtable on current affairs

Mr Halldór Halldórsson, Chair of the EEA EFTA Forum, informed the Forum about the formation of the new government, a coalition of three pre-crisis parties, the Left Green Movement, the right-wing Independence Party and the centrist Progressive Party. The Prime Minister is Katrín Jakobsdóttir, leader of the Left Green Movement. He informed the Forum of the results of the local elections on 28 May and the political outcome. A record number of political lists, 16 lists in Reykjavík City - 80 in total were presented and the turn-out was a bit higher than 2014, up from 66.5% to 67.6%. The Independence Party is the largest municipal party with 113 councillors out of 502, the second largest is the Progressive Party with 49 councillors and the third is the Social Democrats with 29 councillors. A record 47% of councillors elected in 2018 are women, up from 44% after the elections 2014. Hot topics in the elections included whether traffic congestion in the capital area should be solved with a new collective traffic solution or by private car infrastructure investment, the lack of social housing and housing shortages in Reykjavík, more kindergarten and how to improve primary school results and Pisa scores. Are higher salaries for the teachers the solution?

The Chair also informed the Forum of challenges in the upcoming period: the trade unions are pressing for higher salaries. Inflation and weak currency are traditionally Iceland’s biggest economic challenge. Until now inflation has been low despite economic growth, but the krona has become very strong putting pressure on the export industry. Many companies will have a hard time coping with higher salaries, which might threaten the economic stability.
Mr Roland Krimm gave an update on Swiss EU relations. Negotiations on an institutional agreement are still not concluded, the EU is pushing very strongly for this framework agreement. Relations between Switzerland and the EU are very close: they are based on a network of agreements made up of some 20 main bilateral agreements and around 100 other agreements. The objective of this framework agreement is to organize these relations in a more orderly manner. Good progress has been made recently. An agreement on an arbitration mechanism for dispute settlement has been reached but serious obstacles remain. One is how to deal with state aid which is – in principle – forbidden in the EU, but Switzerland has no legislation in this field. This means that, basically, everything is to be built from scratch. The elephant in the room is Brexit. The EU wants to use Switzerland as a template for its future relations with the UK. Therefore, the EU is pushing for a final deal with Switzerland for the autumn. In other words, before Brexit negotiations enter their hot phase. Whether this is possible remains to be seen.

Another issue of interest is Switzerland’s bid for the Winter Olympics. Early June 54% percent of voters in the Canton of Valais said “No” to bidding for the 2026 Winter Olympics. Sion would have been the host city. Lots of voters thought the games would go over budget (estimated at CHF 2.4 billion). They said that Valais, a financially weak canton on the southern side of the Alps, would be better off investing in roads, hospitals and social services.

Ms Hilde Onarheim, Vice-Chair of the EFTA Forum, informed the Forum of Norway’s strategy for cooperation with the EU 2018-2021. The strategy states that “The EU is by far Norway’s most important trading partner, and the EEA Agreement is our most important trade agreement”. Although the EEA EFTA Forum is not explicitly mentioned, the strategy underlines the importance of cooperation with colleagues from the other EEA EFTA States when taking part in European networks. Moreover, the role of local and regional authorities, social partners and other actors is highlighted. The European Policy Forum (Europapolitisk Forum) will be further developed as a forum for dialogue on European issues between local and regional authorities and the Sami Parliament. The aim is to share information and formulate Norwegian positions as early as possible in the EU policy development process. The input from the Board of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities on the strategy focused on four key messages: developing a Europe closer to its citizens, increased skills and inclusion for working life, ambitious policy for conversion to the low-carbon society and support for the digital single market.

Mr Runar Bálsrud briefed the Forum on the ongoing municipal and regional structural reform in Norway. Firstly, all municipalities and counties were invited by the Government and Parliament to start conversations with their neighbours with the aim to merge to form larger units. This means that the whole of the local and regional government sector in Norway was involved in a process of reform. By the decision of the Parliament, the number of municipalities will be reduced from 426 to 354 from 1 January 2020. At the same time, a new regional structure was approved. Nineteen counties will be transformed into eleven regions from 2020. The two regions North- and South-Trøndelag have already merged into one Trøndelag. An expert group, mandated by the Government, recently tabled a report proposing more responsibilities and tasks to be decentralized. Mr Jon Askeland shared experiences from the process of merging Radøy municipality, of which he is the mayor, with the neighbouring municipalities Lindås and Meland.

Mr Jon Askeland then briefed the forum on the northern city of Bod’s bid to become one of the “European Capitals of Culture” in 2024. The European Capital of Culture was established by the EU in 1995. For one calendar year the “winner” organizes a series of cultural events with
a strong pan-European dimension. Bergen (2000- together with amongst others Reykjavik) and Stavanger (2008) have been European Capital of Culture. The winner for 2024 will be announced by the end of next year. It was also noted that the City of Oslo is Europe’s Environmental Capital 2018.

Mr Nils Røhne informed the Forum about the EEA and Norway Grants; the contribution of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway to reducing economic and social disparities and strengthening bilateral relations with 16 EU countries in Central and Southern Europe. Norway provides 97% of the funding. The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) has the role as Donor Programme Partner in four countries – Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia and Poland. Moreover, KS is a partner in several predefined projects in five different countries, covering regional and local development, combating poverty, anti-corruption, inclusion of marginalised groups and welfare technology. More projects with Norwegian local and regional authorities as partners are expected.

4. Cooperation with the CoR

Mr Eivind Lorentzen, Councillor for Regional and Local Affairs, Mission of Norway to the EU and Ms Guðrún D. Guðmundsdóttir, Head of the Brussels Office of Samband, updated the Forum on contacts for closer cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). The focus is a pragmatic approach; to first look at how to cooperate and on what, and then build formal structures later, if needed. The last president, now First-Vice-President of the CoR has expressed interest in closer cooperation with the Nordics. The missions of Norway and Iceland and KS and Samband met in April with the Mr Jiri Burianek, Secretary General of the CoR and his cabinet and experts. The next step is to identify topics and fields of interest and what CoR bodies it would be useful to meet with and identify local events that would benefit from CoR participation.

Ms Nils Røhne expressed his willingness to work on strengthening ties to the CoR and his willingness to participate in the July Plenary.

Mr Jon Askeland reflected on the issue of resources, are asked if they were willing to devote more resources to this work and noted the Boards of KS and Samband must look at this issue.

5. Developments regarding topics discussed by the Forum

Ms Guðrún Dögg Guðmundsdóttir, gave an update on developments since the Forum had adopted its opinion on the Circular Economy Package and its implications for the local and regional authorities, in particular the EU Plastics Strategy and new rules on single use plastics.

Mr Nils Røhne gave an update on developments since the Forum adopted its opinion on the Erasmus for local and regional representatives, in particular the CoR opinion on the topic.

6. Recent developments in the EEA

Mr George Baur, Assistant Secretary General, EFTA, updated the Forum on recent developments in EFTA and the EEA, based on the EEA Council Conclusions and the report adopted at its 48th meeting of 14 November 2017.
7. Future climate and energy policies in Europe and local and regional authorities

Ms Hrönn Hrafnsdóttir, Expert, City of Reykjavik gave a presentation on COP24 and cites, EU energy policies and Iceland, Reykjavik City’s plan to become carbon neutral by 2040 and Reykjavik’s mitigation and action plans.

Mr Halldór Björnsson, Research Group Leader, Weather and Climate, Icelandic Met Office gave a presentation on a recently concluded climate change impact assessment for Iceland.

Mr Runar Bålsrud gave a presentation on the process to localize Agenda 2030 in Hurdal and on Hurdal “the journey towards a sustainable valley” Ecovillage.

The rapporteur, Mr Runar Bålsrud, introduced the Forum’s opinion on future climate and energy policies in Europe and local and regional authorities.

The Forum discussed the opinion, amendments were proposed and adopted, and the opinion was adopted unanimously.

8. Equal pay and work-life balance for working parents

Ms Ellisif Tinna Viðisdóttir, Lawyer, Employers’ Affairs, Samband gave a presentation on the collective agreement system and the role of Samband as well as the Equal Pay Standard.

Ms Guðlaug Kristjánsdóttir, Councillor, Hafnarfjörður Municipality, gave a presentation on the experience of the Municipality of the Equal Pay Standard, challenges and opportunities.

Ms Eva Margrét Kristinsdóttir, Lawyer, Ministry of Welfare gave a presentation on the parental leave system in Iceland and work-life balance.

Ms Nathalie Sarrabezolles, President of Finistère Departmental Council, Member, the Committee of the Regions introduced the new work-life balance proposals of the European Commission and the views of the Committee of the Regions on the topic.

The Forum discussed the topic and the opinion and adopted it unanimously.

9. Brexit update

Ms Jóhanna Jónsdóttir, Expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, gave an update on Brexit and Iceland.

10. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Mr Nils Røhne was elected chair. The Vice-Chair will be elected following the General Assembly of Samband in September.

11. Next meeting (Brussels)

Possible meeting dates were 6 and 7 December 2018, to facilitate a possible joint meeting with the Committee of Regions which meets in Plenary on 5-6 December, and as Monday and
Tuesday were generally difficult for the Swiss delegation due to the weekly meetings of the Cantonal Governments.

The Chair asked the Secretariat to follow up on the dates.

12. Any other business

The Forum was informed of the invitation for the President, Mr Nils Røhne to participate as a guest in all CoR Plenaries.

The Chair closed the meeting, expressing appreciation for a fruitful meeting. He also thanked Ms Marie Sarrabezolles for her participation and thanked the Secretariat for its preparation of the meeting.
SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE EEA EFTA FORUM

Reykjavík
28 June 2018, 9:15-17:40
29 June 2018, 9:15-13:30

DRAFT AGENDA

Day 1 – Thursday 28 June

Morning – pre-meeting

9:15 Opening of meeting at Reykjavik City Hall

1. Approval of draft agenda

2. Approval of minutes from the sixteenth meeting of the Forum, Brussels, 16-17 November 2017

3. Roundtable on current affairs
   - Current local/regional affairs in Iceland, Norway and Switzerland

4. Cooperation with the European Committee of Regions

5. Developments regarding topics discussed by the Forum

10:45-11:00 Coffee break

6. Recent developments in the EEA
   
   Mr Georges Baur, Assistant Secretary-General, EFTA Secretariat

7. Future climate and energy policies in Europe and local and regional authorities
   
   Ms Hrönn Hrafnisdóttir, Expert, City of Reykjavik
   Mr Halldór Björnsson, Research Group Leader, Weather and Climate, Icelandic Met Office
   Mr Runar Bålsrud, Mayor, Hurdal Municipality

   Viewpoints from members

   Presentation by the rapporteur and adoption of opinion

13:00-14:30 Lunch at Messinn restaurant
14:30 Departure from City Hall by bus to Hellisheiði geothermal powerplant

Ms Marta Rós Karlsdóttir, Head of Natural Resources, ON Power, presentation, energy exhibition, tour

19:30 Dinner at Kolabrautin restaurant

Day 2 – Friday 29 June

9:15 Opening of second day, in Höfði House, Borgartún

8. Equal pay and work-life balance for working parents

Ms Ellisif Tinna Viðisdóttir, Lawyer, Employers’ Affairs, Samband
Ms Guðlaug Kristjánsdóttir, Councillor, Hafnarfjörður Municipality
Ms Eva Margrét Kristinsdóttir, Lawyer, Ministry of Welfare
Ms Nathalie Sarrabezolles, President of Finistère Departmental Council, Member, the Committee of the Regions

Viewpoints from members

Presentation by the rapporteur and adoption of opinion

10:45-11:15 Coffee break

9. Brexit update

Ms Jóhanna Jónsdóttir, Expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, EEA and Brexit Affairs

10. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

11. Next meeting

12. Any other business

12:00 Closing of meeting, lunch in Höfði
EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

FORUM OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF THE EEA EFTA STATES

Restricted Annex II to ref. 18-4131
Ref. 18-2177

SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE EEA EFTA FORUM

Reykjavík
28-29 June 2018

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ICELAND

Elected representatives

Ms Sigrún BLÖNDAL President, Regional Municipal Federation of Eastern Iceland

Mr Guðmundur B. GUDMUNDSSON Chair, Akureyri Chief Executive Board, President, Eyþing Regional Municipal Federation

Mr Halldór HALLDÓRSSON (Chair) President, Icelandic Association of Local Authorities

Mr Ármann Kr. ÓLAFSSON Mayor, Kópavogur Municipality, President, Regional Municipal Federation of the Capital Area

Mr Gunnar ÞORGEIRSSON Outgoing President, Regional Municipal Federation Southern Iceland

Ms Þórdís Lóa ÞÓRHALLSDÓTTIR Chair, Executive Municipal Board, Councillor, Reykjavík City Council

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Ms Anna Guðrún BJÖRNSDÓTTIR Director, Icelandic Association of Local Authorities

Ms Guðrún Dögg GUDMUNDSDÓTTIR Head of Office, Icelandic Association of Local Authorities
NORWAY

Elected representatives

Mr Jon ASKELAND Mayor, Radøy Municipality, Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities

Mr Runar BÅLSRUD Mayor, Hurdal Municipality, Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities

Ms Hilde ONARHEIM (Vice Chair) Member, Bergen City Council, Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities

Mr Nils A. RØHNE Mayor, Stange Municipality, Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities

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Mr Stig BANG-ANDERSEN Adviser, Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities

Mr Knut HJORTH-JOHANSEN Chief Adviser, Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities

SWITZERLAND

Mr Roland KRIMM Representative of the Swiss Cantons, Mission of Switzerland to the European Union

SPEAKERS

Mr Halldór BJÖRNSSON Research Group Leader, Weather and Climate, Icelandic Meteorological Office

Ms Hrönn HRAFNSDÓTTIR Climate Expert, City of Reykjavik

Ms Jóhanna JÓNSDÓTTIR Expert, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, EEA and Brexit Affairs

Ms Marta Rós KARLSDÓTTIR Head of Natural Resources, ON Power

Ms Eva Margrét KRISTINSDÓTTIR Lawyer, Ministry of Welfare

Ms Guðlaug KRISTJÁNSDÓTTIR Councillor, Hafnarfjörður Municipality

Ms Nathalie SARRABEZOLLES President of Finistère Departmental Council, Member, the Committee of the Regions
Ms Ellisif Tinna VÍÐISDÓTTIR  Lawyer, Employers’ Affairs, Samband

EFTA SECRETARIAT

Mr Georges BAUR  Assistant Secretary-General, EFTA Secretariat

OBSERVERS

Mr Erwan JEGOU  Head of Cabinet, Finistère Departmental Council
Mr Eivind LORENTZEN  Counsellor for Regional and Local Affairs, Mission of Norway to the European Union
SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE EEA EFTA FORUM

Reykjavík
28-29 June 2018

Opinion on future climate and energy action in the context of the 2018 Katowice UN Climate Conference (COP24); a local perspective

Rapporteur: Mr Runar Bålsrud

The EEA EFTA Forum of Local and Regional Authorities:

A. Having regard to the upcoming Katowice UN Climate Conference (COP24);

B. Having regard to the European Union Committee of the Regions (CoR) draft outlook opinion “Climate governance after 2020: a European and global perspective – a contribution to the UNFCC COP24” to be tabled at the CoR Plenary on 4-5 July 2018;

C. Having regard to the Forum’s opinion on “Local climate measures in the context of the 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP21)” of 17 November 2015;

D. Having regard to the Forum’s opinion on “the European Union 2030 framework for climate and energy policies” of 26 June 2014;

E. Noting the role of the Forum as a body in the EFTA structure.

1. Emphasising the key role played by local and regional authorities in achieving and strengthening national climate change strategies. As they deal with mobility, transport, urban planning, construction, energy and green infrastructure, local and regional authorities are indispensable players in the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience to the effects of climate change;

2. Underlining that local and regional authorities are instrumental in shaping the climate friendly communities of the future through long-term coordinated spatial and transport planning, policy formulation and provision of services in fields such as water supply, sewage, waste management, reduction of food waste, energy production and distribution, and ICT networks;

3. Stresses that local and regional authorities have a key role to play in moving Europe towards a carbon neutral society having significant legal powers and responsibilities in this field and being closest to the citizens;
4. Stresses the importance of standardised calculation methods with common baseline assumptions for municipalities to calculate the effects of emission reduction measures in a beneficial way;

5. Highlights that a market for emission reductions, where local and regional authorities can describe planned climate measures and sell the calculated emission reductions to the national government, is a feasible way to encourage municipalities to reduce their CO₂ emissions and become more climate-friendly;

6. Calls for increased funding to be made available to local and regional authorities to enable them to effectively carry out measures to mitigate climate change and for adaptation;

7. Stresses the importance of cooperation and calls for consultation with local and regional authorities in the formulation and implementation of all climate strategies as the competent authorities and in line with the principle of subsidiarity;

8. Calls for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) regulatory framework to formally involve local and regional authorities;

9. Calls on national governments in the EEA EFTA States to strengthen the focus on public procurement and reward schemes that favour green choices in municipalities and regions and for citizens in general;

10. Calls for coordination among all public authorities to be promoted and guaranteed, and for the involvement of the public, and of social and economic stakeholders, to be fostered;

11. Asks the EEA EFTA Ministers to take into account the opinion of the Forum in discussions on climate policy and the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24).
Opinion on Equal Pay and Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers

Rapporteur: Sigrún Blöndal

The EEA EFTA Forum of Local and Regional Authorities (the Forum):

A. Recognising that equality between women and men is a fundamental value of the EEA States, which is enshrined both in the Treaties of the European Union and in the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA Agreement);


C. Noting the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an initiative to support work-life balance for working parents and carers, COM/2017/0252;

D. Noting the different proposals and initiatives presented by the European Commission on 26 April 2017 related to the European Pillar of Social Rights;

E. Noting the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee EU Action plan 2017-2019 tackling the gender pay gap, COM/2017/0678 final;

F. Noting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations and its focus on gender equality and women’s empowerment;

G. Having regard to the EEA EFTA Comment on possible action addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers of 22 February 2016;

H. Having regard to the Resolution and Report of the EEA Consultative Committee on Work-life balance in the EEA of 8 May 2018;

I. Noting the reinforced subsidiarity principle set out in the Lisbon Treaty and its explicit reference to the local and regional dimension and self-government;
J. Acknowledging the impact of European Union law and policy on local and regional authorities in the EEA EFTA States through the EEA Agreement;

K. Noting the role of the Forum as a body in the EFTA structure:

1. Stresses the fundamental role of local and regional authorities in promoting work-life balance as service providers in fields such as education, child-care, elderly care, support for people with disabilities and social services in general. As employers, within the framework of the social dialogue, local and regional authorities can encourage fathers to take paternity and parental leave, allow flexible working hours, close the gender pay gap and combat stereotypes and change workplace culture;

2. Welcomes the Commission’s initiatives to promote work-life balance as women are still underrepresented in the labour market despite high qualifications, their terms and conditions of employment are overall worse than men’s as well as their career progression. Furthermore, the gender gap in earnings, social protection and pensions is still significant — with part-time work among women, due to unequal family and caring responsibilities, being an important explanatory factor;

3. Underlines that whilst equality between men and women is a fundamental goal, gender equality is also a vital factor and driver for economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness. Low female participation in the labour force means skills shortages, difficulties retaining workers, and lower productivity for businesses;

4. Stresses that work-life balance policies should be considered a social investment rather than only a cost. Against the backdrop of an ageing and shrinking population, and a rapidly changing world of work, policies to promote equal and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems are needed. Full female participation in the labour force, under equal conditions and supported with adequate childcare and social policies, are imperative for economic and social sustainability in Europe and to keep fertility rates from dropping further;

5. Highlights the importance of paid leave for both parents to counter gender stereotypes and unequal caring responsibilities and to enable both mothers and fathers to bond with their children from an early age;

6. Is of the view that deciding the level of compensation during leave is the competence of national authorities, including the social partners. Furthermore, challenges may arise from using sick pay as the basis for compensation as levels of sick pay vary greatly across Europe. Compensation at the level of sick leave could limit the take up of parental leave, especially by men, where the sick pay is markedly lower than the ordinary salary, while on the other hand it can entail excessive cost in some EEA EFTA countries where the sick leave compensation is the same as the ordinary salary;

7. Underlines that accessible, affordable and high-quality care facilities are fundamental for work-life balance and calls on the EEA EFTA States to improve care infrastructure and funding to provide such quality care services to families;
8. Is of the view that carers’ leave can contribute to a better reconciliation of work and
caring responsibilities and to improve talent retention, especially of women, in the
labour market;

9. Highlights the importance of flexible working conditions to allow workers with
caring responsibilities to reconcile them with full-time employment, and that the
flexibility consider interests of both the employee and the employer;

10. Emphasises the need to extend the rights provided for in the proposal for a Directive
on work-life balance for parents and carers to self-employed and atypical workers;

11. Underlines that working for gender equality is a shared task of European, national,
regional and local authorities;

12. Welcomes better data collection and stresses the need for data collection at local and
regional level to ensure effective, fitting and resource-efficient policies in this field;

13. Highlights that closing the gender pay gap is important for work-life balance and
calls on the European Commission and the EEA States to consider the use of
periodic equal pay certification based on an Equal Pay ISO Standard, as has been
done in Iceland;

14. Instructs the Secretariat to forward this Opinion to the EFTA Standing Committee
at Ministerial level.