

Opening of an EEA Grants Exhibition

Brussels, 25 November 2019

Statement by Ambassador Gunnar Pálsson
Head of the Mission of Iceland to the EU

Distinguished guests and colleagues,

I know that you are all here for the long speeches. Let me therefore warn you that I may disappoint you, as I do not have in mind to speak at length.

I want to start by thanking Norway for taking the initiative on this fine exhibition.

We are rapidly coming towards the end of the 25th EEA anniversary year, regrettably so, as I think our celebration of this highly successful agreement has brought a great deal of welcome attention to it. There can be little doubt that the EEA grants have been an important part of this remarkable success story and I am glad that we are able to mark the important contribution that the grants have made through this telling exhibition that we are opening here today.

At the moment we are, as everyone knows, going through a certain transition here in Brussels with a new Commission at the European Union taking the helm, hopefully in a few days time. While the new Commission will have many different preoccupations early in its term, the three EEA EFTA States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, have chosen to use the opportunity and highlight issue that are of particular concern to them, mainly the good functioning of the EEA

internal market. In effect, the Single Market is an essential component of our close cooperation with the European Union and we see the EEA Grants as one way of reinforcing that cooperation.

A market, of course, does not amount to much without people, and although goods, capital and services are all of the utmost importance, it is the people of the European Economic Area who eventually keep the wheels turning. We are proud therefore of being able to contribute significantly to the human dimension of European cooperation by means of the EEA Grants, through the building of know-how, among other things.

As our exhibition here today demonstrates, the EEA Grants cover a range of topics, including topics where my own country likes to maintain particular focus; green energy - notably geothermal - blue growth, research & innovation, education, culture, civil society as well as gender equality. Like our partners, we like to play to our strength and share knowledge and experience in areas we know best. However, it is also fair to say that cooperation under the EEA Grants has not been a one way street. The fifteen EU Member States that we are privileged to work with under this financial mechanism have many things to share as well. Numerous partnerships have been formed and the bonds between our countries thereby strengthened.

We look forward to staying on that same path, building on what we have achieved with our partners in the EEA Grants. In this way also, we strengthen the foundation of the EEA Agreement for the years to come.

Thank you for your attention.