

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

RESTRICTED

GPA/W/29

11 November 1996

(96-4772)

Committee on Government Procurement

Original: English

REQUEST FOR OBSERVER STATUS

Communication from the European Free Trade Association

The following communication, dated 30 October 1996, has been received from the Secretary-General of the European Free Trade Association.

I am writing to you to request that the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) be granted observer status in the Committee on Government Procurement of the World Trade Organization pursuant to the "Guidelines for Observer Status of International Intergovernmental Organizations in the WTO" adopted by the General Council on 18 July 1996. As you may be aware, EFTA enjoyed full observer status in the old GATT system. Observer status has been granted to EFTA on an *ad hoc* basis in several WTO bodies of particular interest since the establishment of the World Trade Organization. In the light of the above-mentioned Guidelines a more permanent arrangement is sought by EFTA.

The work done in the Committee on Government Procurement is of immediate relevance to EFTA, not only in terms of relations between its Member States (i.e. Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), but also as regards implementation of the Agreement establishing the European Economic Area and the Free-Trade Agreements concluded with 12 third-country partners. Provisions in the Stockholm Convention establishing EFTA and the above-mentioned Agreements relate directly to the work of WTO. It is vital for EFTA and its Secretariat to have the possibility to observe the development, implementation and interpretation of WTO rules and provisions. The immediate interest is to ensure the compatibility of EFTA activities with WTO provisions and that the two develop in harmony. In a wider context, EFTA believes that a complementary, mutually reinforcing relationship should exist between the multilateral trading system on the one hand and regional trade agreements on the other. I believe EFTA has much to contribute towards that end and that its relations with the WTO will prove mutually beneficial.