

**OSCE 12th Economic Forum
Prague, 31 May- 4 June 2004**

**“New challenges for Building up Institutional and Human Capacity for
Economic Development and Co-operation”**

Swiss Statement as Chair of EFTA at the Special Session on Integration

Mr. Chairman,

As actual Chair of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Switzerland would like to present the efforts of the EFTA countries with regard to integration.

EFTA, which today includes Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, was founded in 1960 on the premise of free trade as a means of achieving growth and prosperity amongst its Member States as well as promoting closer economic cooperation between the Western European Countries. In addition, EFTA countries wished to contribute to the expansion of trade in the world at large.

Based on these overall goals, EFTA today maintains the management of the EFTA Convention, the EEA Agreement with the EU – Switzerland having its bilateral agreements with the EU - and the EFTA free trade agreements with third countries.

Relations with third countries

With the goal of safeguarding the economic interests of the EFTA States, supporting and reinforcing the process of European and interregional integration, and of contributing to world-wide efforts in liberalising trade, EFTA has since 1990 established an extensive network of contractual free trade relations in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in the Mediterranean region. This network has been extended to countries across the Atlantic (Mexico and Chile) and into Asia (Singapore). At present - and after the recent enlargement of the EU - the EFTA network consists of twelve free trade agreements and nine Declarations on cooperation. Several more agreements are currently under negotiation, including with countries in the Middle East and Africa.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.