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November Briefing note on Canada-EFTA FTA (1998)

Status of Negotiations

- ✎ The first round of negotiations were held in Ottawa on October 14-15, 1998. The two days of meetings included opening and closing plenary meetings. Working groups pursued specific questions related to market access (including tariff and non-tariff barriers, rules of origin and trade facilitation and customs procedures); agriculture; services and investment; competition and trade remedies: (covering competition, state monopolies, subsidies and anti-dumping) and government procurement. A discussion group on intellectual property also met.
- ✎ The meetings were cordial and helpful in clarifying a number of issues. Results fell into three categories: provisions for which there is sufficient agreement on principles to begin working from draft texts, provisions for which further work is required, and provisions for which there are strongly differing positions. Groups have agreed to programs of work prior to the next meetings which will be held in Geneva on November 23 and 24.
- ✎ Canada and EFTA confirmed their ambition to conclude a comprehensive trade agreement and to work towards concluding negotiations by mid-1999.

Background

- ✎ Through the Fall of 1997, Canada signed Trade and Economic Cooperation Arrangements (TECAs) with Switzerland, Norway and Iceland. The fourth EFTA member, Liechtenstein, has a customs union with Switzerland and therefore is covered by the Canada-Switzerland TECA. These arrangements provide a framework for discussions on bilateral and multilateral issues of common interest. They were also used throughout the spring of 1998 for preliminary exchanges on the scope of any possible bilateral trade agreement.
- ✎ The Government formally announced the launch of negotiations for a free trade agreement between Canada and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries of Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein on October 9, 1998.
- ✎ Prior to the announcement, an extensive program of consultation was

undertaken by the government. Minister Marchi sent approximately 400 letters to individual business persons, associations, academics, interested individuals, civil society representatives, and to provincial counterparts seeking views on Canadian interests, sensitivities and objectives. A DFAIT Website was created and regular briefings were provided to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, C-TRADE and SAGITs. As well, cross-Canada specific briefings/discussions were held in Toronto, St. John's, Montreal, Vancouver and Calgary. The negotiations are being undertaken with the support of a broad cross section of Canadians.

- ⌘ The Canada-EFTA FTA is an important initiative for Canada as it both complements and confirms long standing Canadian objectives for the liberalization of trade and investment and offers the opportunity to set new directions.
- ⌘ The Canada-EFTA FTA will be the first transatlantic agreement and will offer Canadians a number of important benefits. It will:
 - ⌘ re-inforce and build on our strong trade and investment relationships with the EFTA countries,
 - ⌘ enhance our history of shared values and activities in a wide range of multilateral fora,
 - ⌘ demonstrate the possibilities for cooperation between two important, economically well-developed regions,
 - ⌘ increase prospects for business as the publicity and discussions surrounding this agreement raise awareness of marketing and investment opportunities on both sides,
 - ⌘ provide immediate and tangible benefits to exporters and investors on both sides.

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