

On January 28, 2008, Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland finally signed a Free Trade Agreement that would mean, among other things, increased access for Canadian business to some of the wealthiest and most sophisticated economies in the world. It would be the culmination of 10 years of gruelling work, umpteen meetings and incessant emails. We weren't sure we would ever see the day....

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

BY COLLEEN BROCK

The Canadian delegation first landed in Reykjavik, Iceland one bright, sunny morning in the spring of 1998. We were highly enthusiastic about launching a new and welcome free trade negotiation with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which includes Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Our team would be negotiating the rules of origin and trade facilitation. Rules of origin are used to determine which goods originate in the territories of the signatory countries. This is a critical process since the benefits of the

due to the differences in our systems of administration, our group would have to meet twice as often as the other negotiating groups. There was some compensation for all this hard work. When we met in June 1999 in Oslo, Norway, for example, we were treated to a cruise on the Oslo Fjord, and, in November 1999, we spent a weekend in Liechtenstein—both unforgettable experiences.

Our last 20th century meeting took place in Geneva in May 2000. I had just assumed the role of lead on rules of origin and we seemed to have reached agreement on

“On the last day, a huge bowl of ice was rolled in to hold the champagne... It sat for almost an hour, untouched, before it was wheeled backed into the kitchen. The little tease was repeated at least four times during the afternoon and evening.”

FTA flow only to those goods.

We quickly learned that despite having similar economies, we had completely different systems of origin verification—the European system is export-oriented, while the Canadian system is import-oriented. We were handed a copy of the rules of origins/customs procedures that had been previously negotiated between EFTA and another trading partner. The EFTA group suggested simply erasing the name of the previous trading partner and substituting Canada in its place. We thanked the EFTA lead and indicated that we might possibly have different thoughts on the issue, prompting a set of lengthy and challenging negotiations.

Our next meeting was in Ottawa in the fall of 1998. Early in the negotiations, it became obvious to both sides that due to the challenging and critical issues that the rules of origin negotiating group covered, and in particular,



JOB WELL DONE: Colleen Brock with Trade Minister David Emerson at an event celebrating the signing of the EFTA agreement, with Chief Negotiator David Plunkett in the background.