

EFTA-India trade deal 'one step' closer to reality

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The Swiss government has submitted a 'dispatch' on the free-trade pact between India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) to Parliament, as a first step towards ratifying the ambitious deal that could open up the Indian market to Swiss exports.

Besides Switzerland, the EFTA nations also include Iceland, Norway, and

Liechtenstein.

"On September 4, the Federal Council adopted a dispatch on the free trade agreement between the EFTA states and India... In its dispatch, the Federal Council commends and sets out the content of the agreement and places it in the overall context of Switzerland's relations with India. Parliament is expected to debate the dispatch in the

upcoming winter or spring sessions," a press statement from the Swiss government said.

However, a Swiss official said that before the Parliament approval, the trade deal will now be open for public consultation involving cantons, civil society and business communities. An association of citizens or a political party can ask for a referendum

during the public consultation if they could collect 50,000 signatures.

In 2018, after EFTA and Indonesia signed a free trade agreement (FTA), a Swiss non-government organisation Public Eye highlighted deforestation in Indonesia for palm tree cultivation as well as the death of orangutans. These concerns triggered a nationwide referendum in Switzerland which the government managed to win by 51 per cent votes.

