

SNSF statement on the draft institutional framework agreement between Switzerland and the EU

The SNSF supports an institutional framework agreement between Switzerland and the European Union

Cutting-edge research requires a stable and open environment

Research, whether basic or applied, knows no boundaries. Global competition enables researchers to validate their ideas and results through cross-border exchanges with other researchers. Mobility plays a key role here, as it allows researchers to collaborate and share ideas and experiences, to tap synergies between disciplines, and to achieve a critical mass for the implementation of their projects. International cooperation is also of central importance for infrastructures: research facilities of international stature, such as CERN or PSI, increase Switzerland's appeal as a research location. Inversely, Switzerland benefits from having access to international infrastructure established in other countries.

Switzerland's openness for international cooperation not only enables locally based researchers to measure up against the best scientists in their fields; it also contributes to our ability to attract top talents to Switzerland to do research.¹ Much like the economy, research thrives on legal certainty and access to international cooperation networks.

Swiss research and European research are closely interlinked

Geographically, Switzerland lies at the centre of Europe and it is therefore all the more important that we participate in research projects on cross-border topics such as energy, resources, public health and the labour market. 65% of all international cooperation projects supported by the SNSF since 2011 have been conducted in collaboration with research groups from the EU, and 9% thereof with the United Kingdom. Alongside these joint projects, the EU is also an important destination for young researchers from Switzerland who wish to spend a period at a research institution abroad: 42% choose an EU member state as their destination - just as many as go to the USA - and 15% choose the United Kingdom.

Research depends on substantial sources of funding. The EU's framework programmes for education, research and innovation are specially designed to enable projects that no single member state would be able to conduct on its own (principle of European added value). Thanks to its associated status, Switzerland is equally entitled to access these programmes, even though it is not a member state. Switzerland has full voting rights in the European Research Area and in the research framework programmes (through the programmes' executive committees). It can influence strategy and participate in defining the framework conditions (roadmap for research infrastructures, equal opportunities, cross-border cooperation to address major societal challenges, open access to data and publications).

The SNSF has a nexus of agreements in place with research funding organisations in European countries. However, these agreements only complement the cooperation zone established by the

¹ Caroline S. Wagner, Koen Jonkers. «Open countries have strong science». *Nature* **550**, 32–33 (2017).
<https://www.nature.com/news/open-countries-have-strong-science-1.22754>

EU framework programme. Research needs to be funded both at national and at European level. These two elements reciprocally strengthen each other, thereby ensuring Switzerland's competitiveness in the research and innovation domain.

An institutional framework agreement would be a stabilising factor in the bilateral relationships between Switzerland and the EU

The draft proposal for an institutional framework agreement covers five bilateral agreements that regulate Switzerland's access to the single market, including the agreement on the free movement of people. While the SNSF is not directly affected by the five bilateral agreements, it is aware that these agreements are closely linked to European research. This became clear, in particular, with the yes vote in the referendum on mass immigration in 2014, which led to Switzerland's exclusion from the Horizon 2020 programme. The negative impact on Swiss research was almost immediate, and the consequences are still being felt today - in spite of Switzerland's full association since January 2017. Swiss research benefits from the free movement of people, as it facilitates knowledge exchange, recruitment of talented researchers and collaboration. The institutional agreement offers Switzerland the possibility of consolidating its bilateral relationships with the European Union and of clarifying legal disputes within a regulatory framework.

The SNSF has a government mandate to support research and to fund young researchers in Switzerland with public money. This mandate includes the task of facilitating the internationalisation of Swiss research. The SNSF calls on the Federal Council to find a means of maintaining secure and stable long-term cooperation with the EU which allows Switzerland to continue its full participation in the European Research Area and maintain its association to the European framework programmes in the long term. In the SNSF's opinion, this goal can only be achieved through an institutional framework agreement with the European Union.

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