

STATEMENT

Association of Switzerland to Horizon Europe and Erasmus+

Safeguarding our common opportunities

December 2021

The current standstill in the association of Switzerland to the Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ programmes is disadvantageous for both Switzerland and the European Union in terms of lost opportunities. Switzerland plays a key role in advancing European research and education. European universities are united in their request for both the European Commission and the Swiss government to:

1. disconnect negotiations on Swiss participation in EU programmes from the wider institutional and political negotiations;
2. facilitate rapid opportunities for education institutions, research performing organisations, researchers and learners in the EU and Switzerland to fully cooperate through participation in the EU programmes.

There is no existing formal requirement that links EU programmes with negotiations on the Institutional Framework Agreement. Therefore, Europe's universities expect that the transition of Switzerland to be fully associated to Horizon Europe as well as to Erasmus+ will take place as planned.

In practical terms, the timeframe for restarting institutional and political negotiations is long; the negotiations for the last Institutional Framework Agreement took more than eight years. This pace is too slow for Europe's universities. If the agreement on association to the EU programmes is only finalised once the institutional and political issues are resolved, full partnerships between EU and Swiss entities would, at the earliest, begin when the present programme period is half over. This would mean losing billions of euros in potential investment in research cooperation, and learners would miss out on life-changing possibilities for mobility without association to the Erasmus+ programme. The lost opportunities in innovation cooperation in the heart of Europe would deprive everyone of new solutions for the digital and green transitions as well as weaken Europe's position globally.

Consequently, Europe's universities urge Switzerland and the EU to agree on a separate pathway for fast tracking negotiations on Swiss association to EU programmes, with a timeline swiftly established. Moreover, it would be highly beneficial for the European research and higher education community for Swiss entities to have full and funded access to the programmes at an early stage. Ideally, this would happen before the final agreement has been reached, as has been the case for UK entities in Horizon Europe.

It is key that both parties show goodwill and understanding of the needs of the knowledge sector. The participation of third countries in EU programmes is not an instrument that should be used as a carrot or stick. It is highly useful as a tool to promote excellence for mutual benefit, and is defined as a key instrument in the [EU's Global Approach to Research and Innovation](#).

Science diplomacy is a tried and tested tool to build trust. In the present situation, forging a separate pathway for negotiations on research and education issues would foster the rebuilding of trust and strengthen the future relationship between the EU and Switzerland. It is time to fully value the opportunities that association provides the EU and its partners and safeguard these opportunities from becoming entwined in other political questions.

This statement has been endorsed by the EUA Council, representing 34 European national university associations and national rectors' conferences.