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Federal Councillor

Ignazio Cassis

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

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Consultation on the results of the Switzerland-EU negotiation

Dear Federal Councillor Cassis,

The ETH Board and the institutions of the ETH Domain welcome the fact that the “Stabilisation and Development of Swiss-EU Relations” package is being put out for public consultation. Following detailed analysis of the aspects relating to Education, Research and Innovation (ERI), the ETH Board fully supports the Federal Council’s objectives of pursuing the bilateral path by means of the negotiated package of agreements. Indeed, the entire Bilaterals III package will strengthen scientific and economic cooperation with the European Union (EU). Stable and regulated relationships with the EU are essential to preserve scientific excellence, stimulate innovation and strengthen Switzerland’s international competitiveness. The Bilaterals III package offers a harmonised legal framework that is indispensable for academic cooperation, talent mobility and investment in cross-border research.

Benefits of close scientific collaboration within the EU programmes

The EU Programmes Agreement (EUPA) is a key element of Bilaterals III that enables Switzerland’s association with the world’s largest and most prestigious programmes promoting research, innovation and education. Thanks to Bilaterals I, Switzerland’s association with the European cooperation programmes in the field of research and innovation (R&I) has strengthened Switzerland’s scientific competitiveness internationally and thus promoted the excellence of the institutions in the ERI domain, to the benefit of society.

The EUPA agreement enables Switzerland to participate more systematically in EU programmes and simplify the renewal of Switzerland’s association with each new generation of programmes. Furthermore, the overall Switzerland-EU package provides mechanisms for resolving possible institutional conflicts and thereby preventing Swiss participation in the EU programmes from being called into question. It thus ensures a more stable collaboration on ERI.

The present package stabilises and strengthens scientific collaborations between Switzerland, the EU member states and the other third countries associated with the European programmes. This greatly facilitates and increases the scope of Swiss collaborations, including beyond the EU. Such a result aligns not only with the ETH Domain institutions’ international collaboration objectives, but also with Switzerland’s international ERI strategy of July 2018.

The ETH Board particularly welcomes the fact that the formal signature of the agreement on the EU programmes by mid-November 2025 will enable the provisional application of EUPA and thus

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retroactive association with Horizon Europe, Euratom and Digital Europe as of 1 January 2025, with the ITER infrastructure as of 1 January 2026, and with Erasmus+ as of 1 January 2027.

The ETH Board is pleased that, as of the beginning of 2025, Swiss researchers and innovators can once again participate in almost all **Horizon Europe** and **Euratom** calls for projects, as well as in some **Digital Europe** calls, thanks to a transitional arrangement. Following the signature of the agreement in November, projects that receive a positive evaluation will be funded directly by the EU and no longer by the current Swiss transitional measures.

The institutions of the ETH Domain note with great satisfaction that Switzerland has obtained full access to calls for projects in strategic areas, such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, communication and network technologies, and space-related topics. Switzerland's return to the EU's R&I programmes as an associated country enables it to coordinate international scientific collaborations once again, and to participate actively in their strategic development. This strengthens the attractiveness of the Swiss institutions and allows them access to extremely competitive sources of financing that complement national funding.

Association with the **Erasmus+** education programme can take place as of 1 January 2027, provided that the Swiss Parliament approves the necessary budget by October 2026. The opportunities offered by association with Erasmus+ will not only meet the growing demand for student mobility at all levels (both professional and academic education), but will also confirm the strategic positioning of the Swiss educational institutions within the European Universities Alliances, new flagship instruments for tertiary collaboration in Europe. These alliances, from which ETH Zurich and EPFL benefit, but which the Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP) funds only partially, strengthen international cooperation between the higher education institutions, increase their global visibility and stabilise their partnerships within the European Research and Education Area. Full integration into Erasmus+ will provide access to a significantly higher funding than that offered by the Swiss mobility programme, thereby increasing opportunities for participation (e.g. internships, partnerships, joint teaching programmes, etc.).

The ETH Board notes that association with Erasmus+ is part of the overall Switzerland-EU package and calls on the Swiss Parliament to ensure that the investments required for such an association are not made at the expense of other budget lines in the ERI domain, which has already been severely affected by cuts under the 2027 Relief Package. Higher education institutions must also be provided with all the tools and resources they need to ensure a smooth transition back to full membership of the Erasmus+ programme.

In the year following the entry into force of the health agreement, the ETH Domain institutions will be able to participate in the "Crisis preparedness" section of the **EU4Health** programme, actively contributing to pandemic prevention, digital health, and research and development for new medications, which the ETH Board warmly welcomes.

The EU Programmes Agreement is linked to the overall package

Although the EUPA agreement will apply provisionally as soon as it is signed, it will only enter into full force once the overall Switzerland-EU package has been ratified (by the end of 2028). This is another reason why the ETH Board supports the Bilaterals III package as a whole.

The ETH Board is convinced that access to the European programmes in the area of education, research and innovation, covering the entire ERI value chain, will make its institutions more competitive and strengthen Switzerland's capacity for innovation. The ETH Domain benefits from and contributes to synergies between education, research and innovation, which Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ fund in a targeted manner via numerous instruments. The ETH Board accordingly supports the argument cited in the [Explanatory report, p. 457](#), which states that "systematic and

comprehensive participation in the form of association with Erasmus+ and the Horizon package offers enormous added value for the Swiss ERI area and is of strategic importance for its development. It is therefore an essential component of the national policy to promote mobility and cooperation in education, research and innovation.”

Serious consequences if the package fails

If the package were to fail, it would have serious consequences for the entire ERI sector, with long-term negative repercussions: damage to the reputation of the higher education institutions and research centres, loss of influence in international cooperations, and a weakening of Switzerland's position as a centre for science and innovation. The ETH Board therefore draws attention to the long-term negative effects of a possible failure and emphasises the strategic importance of successfully implementing Bilaterals III.

The free movement of persons is essential to education and research

The free movement of persons with the EU is essential for the good functioning of the leading educational and research institutions. Switzerland's innovative capacity is therefore strengthened by it.

In order to maintain free movement, including a safeguard clause, the agreement on the free movement of persons will introduce a new policy of non-discrimination in tuition fees, which will entail amending the ETH Act. The ETH Board accepts this amendment to the law and welcomes the financial compensation measure designed to mitigate the reductions in income.



The stabilisation package thus maintains the principle of free movement of persons, which enables Switzerland to recruit the most talented researchers and the staff needed to maintain the excellence of Switzerland's educational and research institutions.

Geopolitical developments and prioritising relations with the EU

The institutions of the ETH Domain are key players in the fields of education, research and innovation. Their international competitiveness depends largely on stable relations with the EU. Against a backdrop of global instability and growing trade tensions, it is therefore crucial that Switzerland give the highest priority to its bilateral relations with the EU. This is of paramount importance for education and research. The ETH Board and the institutions of the ETH Domain reaffirm their support for the continuation of bilateral relations with the EU through Bilaterals III in order to guarantee Switzerland's long-term association with the EU programmes and maintain the principle of free movement of persons. The EU programmes not only enable international cooperation and direct competition, but also facilitate the recruitment of talent – both of which are of prime importance to the ETH Domain and the entire ERI sector. The ETH Board therefore reaffirms its support for stable and regulated relations between Switzerland and the EU.

Many thanks for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Michael O. Hengartner
President of the ETH Board