EU-Switzerland relations

2023/2042(INI) - 04/10/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 538 votes to 42, with 43 abstentions, a resolution on EU-Switzerland relations.

Members recalled that the European Union and Switzerland are close cultural and political allies who share the same values, such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights, the protection of minorities, social equality and social and environmental sustainability. The EU and Switzerland are major economic partners with an interest in shared economic prosperity. They enjoy a long-standing relationship based on shared values and the objectives of peace, commitment to multilateralism and a rules-based international order.

Foreign and security policy

The resolution highlighted the EU's strong interest in cooperating with Switzerland as a like-minded partner on international peace, security, human rights and defence matters, in particular **in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine**. Members welcomed Switzerland's alignment with EU sanctions adopted in this context and its adoption of all EU sanction packages to date. They encouraged Switzerland to maintain its commitment to the international rules-based order and to closely and consistently apply and implement all adopted EU restrictive measures as it has already done so far and to prevent their circumvention. Switzerland is also encouraged to amend its legislation to allow for the confiscation of Russian assets.

Parliament welcomed the fact that Switzerland had moved closer to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, particularly on issues of **humanitarian assistance, civil protection, the fight against terrorism and climate change**, and that it was taking part in several CSDP missions. It also welcomed Switzerland's announcement in November 2021 to participate in certain projects of the Permanent Structured Cooperation and that potential participation and its intent to participate in the European air defence sky shield initiative.

Switzerland is encouraged to undertake a revision of its **practices in regard to sanctions**, in order to align itself more systematically with sanctions taken by the EU, including when these are based on human rights violations under the EU global human rights sanctions regime.

Members welcomed Switzerland's participation in the **summits of the European political community**. They noted the cooperation between the EU and Switzerland on international migration. They regretted that, to date, Switzerland has not fulfilled the conditions for participation in the European Union's civil protection mechanism.

Economy, labour market and access to the EU internal market

The resolution underlined that safeguarding, strengthening and deepening strong, stable and sustainable trade relations with Switzerland, the EU's fourth largest trading partner, remains a high priority. Members considered that a modernised and mutually beneficial relationship, underpinned by an **ambitious agreement**, should not only reduce barriers to trade but should also create a level playing field for EU citizens and economic operators, generate trust, stability, jobs, growth and welfare, ensure the non-discriminatory protection of workers' rights.

Parliament reiterated that 71 % of the Swiss population is in favour of joining the EEA, while the majority also wants full access to the EU single market and participation in EU cooperation.

Members are concerned about any lack of implementation of certain agreements with the Union by Switzerland and its subsequent adoption of legislative measures and practices that might be incompatible with those agreements, in particular measures affecting the free movement of persons. They urged Switzerland to **apply the relevant EU acquis** and to comply with its obligations under the 1999 agreement on the free movement of persons, in particular on posted workers.

Members are concerned that basic bilateral agreements are slowly phasing out and no longer secure frictionless market access as a result of the non-incorporation of new developments in the EU acquis. They noted that the model based on individual bilateral agreements instead of a package agreement is outdated. They recalled that the adoption of a package agreement for existing and future agreements that enable Switzerland's participation in the EU single market to ensure homogeneity and legal certainty remains a precondition for the further development of a sectoral approach.

The Commission is called on to propose a mandate for negotiating a modern EU-Switzerland investment protection agreement which was concluded 50 years ago.

Energy, climate and the environment

While welcoming the high degree of political alignment between Switzerland and the EU in the area of energy and climate policies, Parliament called on the Commission and the Swiss Federal Council to find avenues of cooperation on the EU's Fit for 55 package, and Swiss participation in various aspects of the European Green Deal, notably the REPowerEU plan, and also industrial alliances, including the European Solar Photovoltaic Industry Alliance, the European Clean Hydrogen Alliance and the European Battery Alliance.

Members noted with concern that Switzerland did not sufficiently support the EU's push to remove fossil fuel protections from the Energy Charter Treaty. In this regard, they invited Switzerland to consider withdrawing from this Treaty, following the example of several EU Member States. They also stressed that an **electricity market agreement** would create a conducive basis for continued and close cooperation between the EU and Switzerland, in particular on fossil-free electricity and clean gases.

Research and innovation, development, education and culture

The resolution underlined the importance of EU-Switzerland cooperation in research, innovation and development. It called for the EU and Switzerland to find a common approach to the benefit of citizens in order to achieve mutually beneficial cooperation, especially as regards **Switzerland's participation in all EU programmes** in the 2021-2027 period. Members are convinced that a more stable, future-oriented partnership will benefit both sides and help Switzerland's association to Erasmus+ and other European programmes. They insisted on the fact that the free movement of persons is a precondition for participation in Erasmus+.

Institutional framework and cooperation

Parliament regretted the Swiss Federal Council's decision to terminate the negotiations on the EU-Swiss institutional framework agreement in May 2021 after seven years of negotiations. It stressed that a second failure in negotiating an agreement on EU-Swiss relations would be damaging for both the EU and Switzerland and risks weakening their political role.

Members welcomed the political statement following the conference of cantons of 24 March 2023 advocating Treaty-based relations with the EU based on shared values, reaffirming their position to continue and deepen the bilateral agreements, and their willingness to support the Federal Council in negotiations. They expect the progress in exploratory talks between the Commission and the Swiss Federal Council to be stepped up with a view to obtaining the required clarifications and assurances to adopt a mandate for negotiations.

Members called on both sides to use this window of opportunity for talks on a possible new negotiation package and a cooperation agreement between the EU and Switzerland, and to reach an agreement before the end of the term of the current Commission and Parliament.