

Switzerland's current status in the European Research Area

Research

Since 2004 Switzerland has been fully associated to the Framework Research Programmes (FP) of the EU as an “Associated Country”. This means that researchers and institutions in Switzerland were treated in the same way as any other partner from an EU Member State. Switzerland paid a contribution to the EU and researchers from Switzerland could participate on an “all you can eat” basis. During the 7th Framework Programme FP7 (2007 – 2013) in particular, Switzerland had a positive return on its investment. Researchers from Switzerland were very successful in participating in the European Research Council (ERC), which was created in 2007 as a new funding scheme for excellent individual researchers.

The 8th Framework Programme “Horizon 2020” (2014 – 2020) started on January 1, 2014.

After the federal vote on mass immigration on February 9, 2014 the European Commission suspended the ongoing negotiation to associate Switzerland to Horizon 2020, downgrading Switzerland as a “Third Country”, not able to receive any more EU funding. The most negative consequence was that Switzerland was excluded from the ERC, the very prestigious sub-programme of Horizon 2020, which funds Europe's best scientists with up to € 3 million per grant.

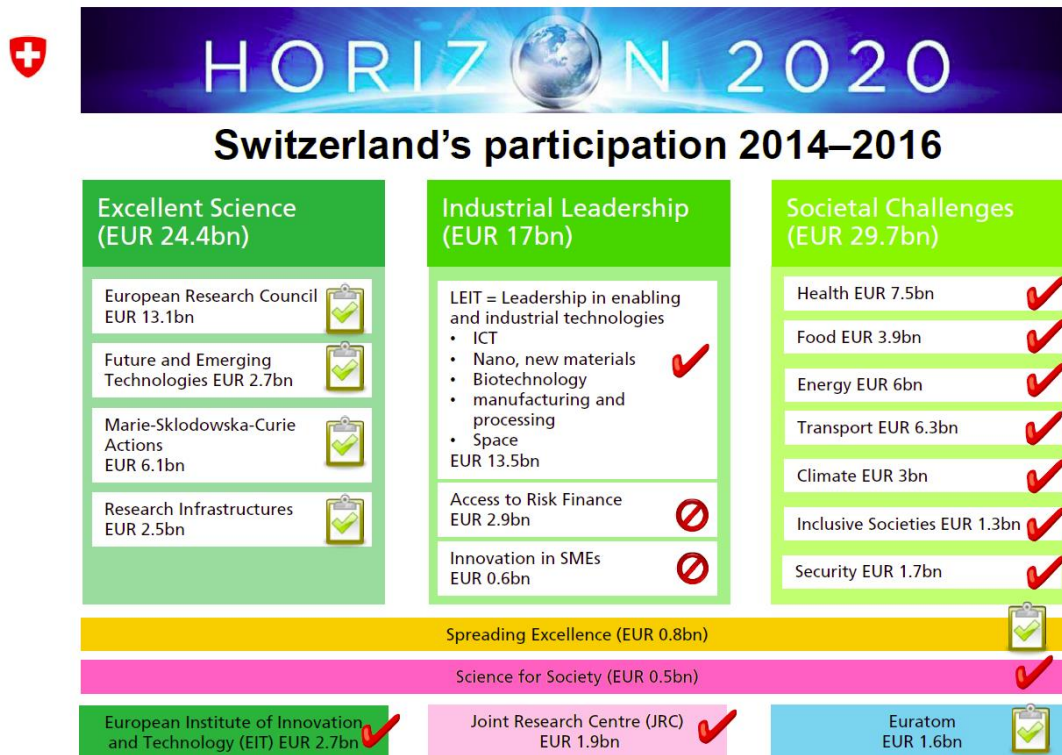
In reaction, the Swiss National Science Foundation created an ERC back-up scheme in 2014, which could compensate for the non-funded participation on EU level, but could not ensure the international competition and reputation of receiving an ERC grant.

Since September 15, 2014, Switzerland is partially back in Horizon 2020, but only until the end of 2016. Currently, Switzerland is associated to pillar 1 (plus Euratom/ITER and Spreading Excellence) of Horizon 2020, but not to pillars 2 and 3 (for details see graphic on page 2). The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI is funding successful Swiss participants in pillars 2 and 3 through direct payments in Swiss francs. This partial association also covers the participation in the ERC until the end of 2016.

After 2016 Switzerland will again be downgraded to a “Third country.” A new association agreement has to overcome two obstacles: Firstly, the European Commission insists on the ratification of the Croatia protocol for the free movement of persons by Switzerland. However, the Swiss Federal Council sees itself unable to sign the protocol after the vote of the 9 February 2014. Secondly, it will depend on how Switzerland implements the result of the vote on mass immigration. If a solution with the EU can be found until February 9, 2017, a full association to Horizon 2020 is possible as of January 1, 2017. If not, Switzerland will again be a “Third Country” participant and lose the possibility to be part of the ERC.

Switzerland is also involved in many European organisations and programmes such as CERN, COST, ESO, ESA, and EMBL (to mention a few) not touched by the current partial Agreement in H2020-Euratom/ITER.

Schematic overview Horizon 2020 and Switzerland's status until December 2016



Switzerland's participation in Horizon 2020 (As of: 15.09.2014)



CH Association (Sept. 2014 -Dec. 2016)



CH participation as third country



No CH participation

Education

The vote of February 9, 2014, also stopped the negotiation to associate Switzerland to the new European education programme Erasmus+ (2013-2020). Swiss universities have put in place an alternative by signing reciprocal agreements with European universities. The SERI funds are used to pay students leaving Switzerland and those coming to Switzerland.