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EU-Switzerland relations

European Parliament resolution of 4 October 2023 on EU-Switzerland relations (2023/2042(INI))

(C/2024/1183)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which establish the principles, objectives and competences of the EU, and which recognise the right of European states to apply for membership of the Union,
- having regard to the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA) ⁽¹⁾, which recognises the right of any Member State of the European Union or member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) to apply for membership of the EEA,
- having regard to the Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Swiss Confederation ⁽²⁾, signed on 22 July 1972,
- having regard to the Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Swiss Confederation on direct insurance other than life assurance ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to the Agreement between the European Community and the Swiss Confederation on the simplification of inspections and formalities in respect of the carriage of goods and on customs security measures ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to the negative outcome of the Swiss referendum rejecting membership of the EEA in 1992,
- having regard to the conclusion of several sectoral agreements between the EU and Switzerland, signed in 1999, known as 'Bilaterals I' ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to nine additional sectoral agreements between the EU and Switzerland, signed in 2004, known as 'Bilaterals II',
- having regard to the Agreement between the European Community and the Swiss Confederation on mutual recognition in relation to conformity assessment ⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to the Agreement between the European Community and the Swiss Confederation on trade in agricultural products ⁽⁷⁾,
- having regard to the Agreement between the European Community and the Swiss Confederation on certain aspects of government procurement ⁽⁸⁾,
- having regard to the Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Swiss Confederation, of the other, on the free movement of persons ⁽⁹⁾,
- having regard to the Agreement between the Swiss Confederation and the European Police Office, signed in 2004,
- having regard to the Agreement on the participation of Switzerland in the Schengen Area of 26 October 2004 ⁽¹⁰⁾, which allows the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU Member States, and which facilitates cooperation on matters of security and the fight against cross-border crime,
- having regard to the Agreement between Eurojust and Switzerland, signed on 27 November 2008,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 1, 3.1.1994, p. 3.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 300, 31.12.1972, p. 189.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 205, 27.7.1991, p. 3.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 199, 31.7.2009, p. 24.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 114, 30.4.2002, p. 6.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ L 114, 30.4.2002, p. 369.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 114, 30.4.2002, p. 132.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ L 114, 30.4.2002, p. 430.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ L 114, 30.4.2002, p. 6.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 308, 14.12.2004, p. 2.

- having regard to the Agreement between the European Union and the Swiss Confederation concerning cooperation on the application of their competition laws ⁽¹¹⁾ of 17 May 2013,
 - having regard to the Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Swiss Confederation, of the other, on the European Satellite Navigation Programmes ⁽¹²⁾,
 - having regard to the Arrangement between the European Union and the Swiss Confederation on the modalities of its participation in the European Asylum Support Office ⁽¹³⁾ signed on 10 June 2014,
 - having regard to the Agreement between the EU and Switzerland on the automatic exchange of financial account information, which entered into force on 1 January 2017,
 - having regard to the regulatory package presented by the Commission on 14 July 2021, which aims to reduce the EU's net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030 (COM(2021)0550),
 - having regard to the decisions of the Swiss Federal Council of 24 August 2022 and 21 December 2022 to adopt the EU's gas and electricity saving targets, which is part of a wider regulatory alignment of Swiss energy policy and network regulation,
 - having regard to the Agreement between the European Union and the Swiss Confederation on the linking of their greenhouse gas emissions trading systems, signed on 23 November 2017 ⁽¹⁴⁾,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 19 February 2019 on EU relations with the Swiss Confederation,
 - having regard to the decision by the Swiss Federal Council of 26 May 2021 to terminate the negotiations on an EU-Switzerland institutional framework,
 - having regard to the adoption by the Swiss Federal Council of a set of guidelines for its negotiating package with the EU on 23 February 2022,
 - having regard to the positive outcome of the Swiss referendum of 15 May 2022 to increase Switzerland's financial contribution to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex),
 - having regard to the joint statement by the Chairs of the Swiss Federal Assembly Delegation for relations with the European Parliament and of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Switzerland (DEEA Delegation), adopted at the 41st interparliamentary meeting between Switzerland and the EU on 7 October 2022 in Rapperswil-Jona, Switzerland,
 - having regard to its recommendation of 26 March 2019 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning the Institutional Framework Agreement between the European Union and the Swiss Confederation ⁽¹⁵⁾,
 - having regard to its recommendation of 18 June 2020 on the negotiations for a new partnership with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ⁽¹⁶⁾,
 - having regard to Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism ⁽¹⁷⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinions of the Committee on International Trade and the Committee on Culture and Education,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0248/2023),
- A. whereas the EU and Switzerland are politically and culturally close like-minded allies with shared values such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights, the protection of minorities, social equality and social and environmental sustainability; whereas the EU and Switzerland are key economic partners with an interest in common economic prosperity;

⁽¹¹⁾ OJ L 347, 3.12.2014, p. 3.

⁽¹²⁾ OJ L 15, 20.1.2014, p. 3.

⁽¹³⁾ OJ L 65, 11.3.2016, p. 22.

⁽¹⁴⁾ OJ L 322, 7.12.2017, p. 3.

⁽¹⁵⁾ OJ C 108, 26.3.2021, p. 133.

⁽¹⁶⁾ OJ C 362, 8.9.2021, p. 90.

⁽¹⁷⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 924.

- B. whereas the EU and Switzerland have a long-standing relationship founded on shared values and goals of peace, the commitment to upholding multilateralism and the rules-based international order, and actively leading global efforts to address challenges such as climate change, the environment, biodiversity loss, the depletion of resources, sustainable development, accelerating digitalisation, migration and international security, international criminal justice and international humanitarian law;
- C. whereas Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine has highlighted the necessity for the EU and Switzerland to deepen their cooperation in the areas of foreign policy, security and crisis response; whereas Switzerland cooperates on certain parts of the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and has participated in common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions; whereas Switzerland has aligned with the EU on sanctions against Russia and voted in favour of all UN resolutions concerning Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine;
- D. whereas Switzerland seeks new forms of cooperation in areas such as security, research, innovation and health; whereas Switzerland is prepared to expand its cooperation on security, focusing on areas such as cybersecurity, hybrid threats, resilience and disinformation; whereas Switzerland aims to strengthen interoperability within the framework of the European Defence Agency; whereas the 2021 Swiss security policy report and its 2022 supplement set out options for Switzerland to increase its cooperation with the EU;
- E. whereas Switzerland and the EU are key economic partners — the EU is Switzerland's main trading partner and Switzerland is the EU's fourth trading partner after China, the United States and the United Kingdom; whereas both the EU and Switzerland are among each other's top destinations for foreign investment and are key partners in trade in services;
- F. whereas the Swiss Federal Council approved the key parameters for a negotiation mandate with the EU on 21 June 2023;
- G. whereas Switzerland's economic and trade relations with the EU are mainly governed through a free trade agreement (FTA) and a series of bilateral agreements, including the agreement on the free movement of persons, according to which Switzerland has agreed to take over certain aspects of EU legislation in exchange for accessing part of the EU's single market;
- H. whereas Switzerland is deeply integrated into the EU single market; whereas to date, the EU and Switzerland have concluded numerous bilateral agreements; whereas many of them urgently need to be updated in order to maintain the functioning of the internal market, in this regard, between the EU and Switzerland and reflect evolving priorities;
- I. whereas the Swiss Federal Council decided to terminate the negotiations on the EU-Swiss institutional framework agreement in May 2021; whereas a solution for a future EU-Switzerland relationship is needed in order to consolidate bilateral relations and develop the EU-Swiss partnership to its full potential on key issues of mutual interest; whereas a series of exploratory talks have recently been held between the Commission and the Swiss Federal Council;
- J. whereas the visit of European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič to Switzerland in March 2023 generated a new impulse for discussions aimed at resolving institutional problems; whereas there is a demonstrated will on both sides to narrow the remaining gaps through the exploratory talks at both technical and political levels; whereas it is essential for both parties to maintain momentum, continue moving in the right direction and potentially accelerate their efforts to determine whether there is a solid foundation for full negotiations with the prospect of a swift, successful conclusion;
- K. whereas the preservation of a level playing field in the single market is necessary to ensure fair competition in the single market; whereas a well-functioning and effective single market is based on a highly competitive social market economy;
- L. whereas Swiss citizens have the same rights as EU citizens to move, enter and reside freely within the EU, in line with EU law; whereas in 2021, an average of around 351 000 cross-border commuters were working in Switzerland, while as of 31 December 2021, around 442 000 Swiss citizens were residing in the EU and around 1,4 million EU citizens were residing in Switzerland;
- M. whereas Switzerland currently has the status of a non-associated third country under the EU framework programme for research and innovation 'Horizon Europe' and other related programmes and initiatives, including the EU's Erasmus+ programme; whereas EU-Swiss cooperation on research and development would benefit both sides;

- N. whereas the European Defence Agency-Switzerland Framework for Cooperation, signed on 16 March 2012, enables the exchange of information and provides for joint activities in research and technology and armament projects and programmes;
- O. whereas Switzerland will hold general elections on 22 October 2023; whereas Parliament will hold elections in June 2024;

Foreign and security policy

1. Highlights 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; welcomes Switzerland's alignment with EU sanctions adopted in this context and its adoption of all EU sanction packages to date; recognises Switzerland's commitment to preserving the international rules-based order, including through common action with the EU in international organisations and multilateral forums;
2. Acknowledges Switzerland's long-standing foreign policy of promoting peace, mediation and peaceful conflict resolution; welcomes Switzerland's committed and strong role as a member of the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the UN and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in finding solutions to crises, including through the implementation of constitutional arrangements in high-tension environments, peacebuilding, dialogue-facilitation, the development of confidence-building measures and reconciliation;
3. Welcomes Switzerland's 2023-2024 term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council as an opportunity to strengthen international cooperation and promote common priorities at the multilateral level;
4. Welcomes Switzerland's close stance with the EU's CFSP, including on humanitarian aid, civil protection, counter-terrorism and climate change issues, and its participation in several CSDP missions, notably in EULEX Kosovo, EUFOR Althea and EUCAP Sahel; notes that Switzerland has made the most frequent contributions to CSDP missions in absolute terms; calls for further engagement within the remits of the CFSP and the CSDP;
5. Welcomes, further, Switzerland's announcement in November 2021 to participate in certain projects of the Permanent Structured Cooperation and that potential participation is currently being explored in two projects; notes that Switzerland has expressed interest in projects related to cyber defence and military mobility, and that this is a new approximation towards the EU in which Switzerland is considering defence cooperation with other countries for the first time in its history; welcomes Switzerland's intent to participate in the European air defence sky shield initiative;
6. Encourages further collaboration between Switzerland and the EU on social and humanitarian issues, in line with the EU's integrated approach, and on human rights and democracy, including through the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy and the global human rights sanctions regime; welcomes Switzerland's membership of the European crisis management system;
7. Welcomes the intensified pace of consultations on foreign policy matters and the fact that Switzerland is seeking closer cooperation with the EU and NATO; welcomes, in this regard, Switzerland's involvement in the Partnership for Peace programme; encourages Switzerland to deepen its cooperation with the EU on security and defence and to make full use of the administrative agreement with the European Defence Agency; underlines the importance of collaboration among the EU Member States and Switzerland concerning the country's security owing to its geographical location;
8. Notes that Switzerland's voluntary alignment with EU sanctions against Russia is on a case-by-case basis; encourages 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, as foreseen by the Commission for the EU Member States; encourages Switzerland to amend its legislation to allow for the confiscation of Russian assets; calls on Switzerland to join the Russian Elites, Proxies and Oligarchs task force; further encourages Switzerland to cooperate with the EU's 'Freeze and Seize' task force to coordinate and explore legal avenues to confiscate assets, including reserves of the Russian central bank being held in Switzerland, in line with international law, and to actively engage discussions in international forums about the use of frozen assets for the reconstruction of Ukraine;

9. Recognises that Switzerland has undertaken significant humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, offered protection status to Ukrainian refugees and provided significant financial support for the reconstruction of Ukraine, also through the 2022 Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano; encourages further cooperation between the EU and Switzerland in addressing the ongoing crisis;

10. Notes with regret that Switzerland is currently prohibiting the re-export of ammunition and war materials produced in Switzerland from EU Member States to Ukraine; welcomes the national-level motion and the launch of a political debate on this topic in the Council of States; calls on the Swiss Federal Council to approve the resupply of weapons to Ukraine;

11. Encourages Switzerland 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;

Society and geopolitics

12. Welcomes, further, Switzerland's participation in the summits of the European Political Community;

13. Recognises EU-Switzerland cooperation on international migration, including the management of flows and relocation of refugees; welcomes Switzerland's participation in Frontex; invites Switzerland to strengthen its exchanges with the EU Agency for Asylum and Frontex, which are directly involved in the better management of international migration into and out of Switzerland; reiterates that participation in the Schengen/Dublin system is crucial;

14. Regrets that, to date, Switzerland does not qualify to participate in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, as only EFTA countries, which are members of the EEA, and other European countries when agreements so provide, and EU acceding, candidate and potential candidate countries can join the mechanism; calls for a swift future partnership with Switzerland within this framework, through the opening of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism for EFTA member countries; urges the exploration of possibilities for Switzerland's involvement in disaster prevention, preparedness and response initiatives in order to strengthen the overall resilience of both the EU and Switzerland;

Economy, labour market and access to the EU internal market

15. Recalls the long-standing relationship between the EU and Switzerland founded on shared values and goals of peace, social justice, eco-responsibility and economic prosperity, as well as on their economic and social interdependence; encourages the exploration of further possibilities to enable Switzerland to join the European Labour Authority and the Internal Market Information System; underlines the common commitment to further strengthen the fight against abusive working conditions and to ensure the effective enforcement of social rights across Europe;

16. Underlines that safeguarding, strengthening and deepening strong, stable and sustainable trade relations with Switzerland, the EU's fourth largest trading partner, remains a high priority and is in the fundamental interest of both parties, particularly in the current turbulent international environment; considers 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 and guarantee the highest level of protection for consumers and the environment, fair competition, sustainable development and social security, progress and justice; stresses the importance of continuing joint efforts to reform the World Trade Organization (WTO), in particular its dispute settlement body, and to promote sustainable and green trade initiatives ahead of the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference;

17. Considers that Switzerland's significant degree of integration with the EU single market is a key factor for sustainable economic growth; underlines that strong EU-Swiss relations go beyond economic integration and that the extension of the single market contributes to stability and prosperity to the benefit of all citizens and businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); underlines the importance of ensuring the proper functioning of the single market in order to create a level playing field and generate quality jobs;

18. Regrets the fact that Switzerland remains the only EFTA member that has not joined the EEA; notes, however, that Swiss citizens have the same rights as EU citizens to move, enter and reside freely within the EU, in line with EU law; reiterates 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; notes that Switzerland would always be welcome to join the EEA or the EU should it express such a wish in the future; notes that, in the case that such a wish would be expressed to the extent of EU membership, this would enable Switzerland to fully participate in EU decisions and rules;

19. Emphasises the strong economic, social and cultural links of the border regions between Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, namely Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, Bozen-Südtirol, Grand Est, Fürstentum Liechtenstein and Vorarlberg, which share a long history; underlines the importance of stable and strong relations and frameworks between the EU and Switzerland for future cross-border cooperation;

20. Is 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; calls on Switzerland to strengthen the free movement of persons by introducing additional measures, in this regard, by aligning with Directive 2004/38/EC⁽¹⁸⁾; stresses the need for Switzerland to dynamically adopt EU law on mutual cooperation issues;

21. Notes the large number of cross-border commuters between the EU and Switzerland and the large number of EU citizens and Swiss nationals living and working in Switzerland or the EU respectively; recalls that the free movement of persons is a fundamental principle of the EU single market; stresses that settlement in another EU country is not without limits; regrets the Swiss Federal Council's decision to reintroduce restrictions on Swiss labour market access for Croatian workers in the form of quotas on permits, and calls on Switzerland to consider removing this safeguard clause;

22. Urges 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, and to adapt flanking measures that guarantee the protection of high social standards and the efficient and non-discriminatory protection of workers' rights, ensuring equal pay for equal work in the same place for mobile, posted and local workers, and permit EU economic operators to provide services in its territory on a non-discriminatory basis; notes Switzerland's concerns in this regard and points out that current EU Member States used to have similar concerns, which have not fully materialised; calls on Switzerland to ease bureaucratic hurdles in the area of the posting of workers; notes Switzerland's continued improvement of the functioning of flanking measures and welcomes its active and regular dialogue with its neighbouring states and other EU Member States on concrete issues in the framework of the cross-border provision of services;

23. Encourages the EU and Switzerland to share best practices and strengthen labour rights protections, particularly on anti-union dismissals, associated minimum compensation and collective bargaining to ensure a fair and equitable market for all workers; takes note of the ongoing independent mediation process in Switzerland aimed at finding a compromise solution on the protection of trade unionists against unfair dismissal; considers that, in order to ensure the good protection of workers, the Commission and the Swiss Federal Council, in a standing exchange with the Swiss social partners, could consider applying temporary, limited or safeguard measures, based on EU law, for a well-defined period of time;

24. Notes that, as long as there is no agreement on a package deal, a large number of bilateral agreements between the EU and Switzerland are at risk of erosion and need to be revisited in order to ensure that they remain relevant and efficient, and provide legal certainty, consolidation and further development of the EU-Swiss relationship and a forward-looking perspective, in particular those on enhanced and reciprocal access to the Swiss market for EU economic operators; is 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*; notes that the model based on individual bilateral agreements instead of a package agreement is outdated; recalls 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; is concerned about the absence of a solution regarding the institutional issues, which will lead to the further erosion of the application of the mutual recognition agreement;

⁽¹⁸⁾ Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States (OJ L 158, 30.4.2004, p. 77).

25. Notes that without any modernisation of the FTA, which was concluded 50 years ago and has not been adjusted to reflect developments in international trade rules since, and of the package of bilateral agreements (I and II), which was concluded almost 20 years ago, and without the proper transposition, implementation and enforcement of single market legislation, EU-Swiss relations will not bring full benefits to citizens and businesses and will inevitably erode over time; believes that the EU should strive for pragmatic solutions to resolve this issue between the EU and Switzerland; notes that outdated bilateral agreements need to be revisited in order to prevent their expiry and take into account developments in relevant EU legislation so as to preserve mutual market access, this being particularly true in the areas of reciprocal market access for industrial goods, customs facilitation, free movement of persons, technical barriers to trade and public procurement; calls on the Commission, therefore, to propose a mandate for modernising the FTA once negotiations have resumed;

26. Highlights that the 2002 mutual recognition agreement is becoming more and more outdated as it cannot be updated to take into account new EU legislation; notes that this has already created technical barriers and hampered trade in medical devices and will do so in the future for mechanical engineering, machinery, construction products and artificial intelligence in particular; believes that the EU should strive for pragmatic solutions to resolve this issue between EU and Switzerland;

27. Notes that investment protection is currently upheld through outdated bilateral agreements between Switzerland and only nine EU Member States; believes that a modern EU-Switzerland investment protection agreement would increase legal certainty for investors on both sides and would further strengthen bilateral trade relations; encourages the Commission, therefore, to propose a mandate for negotiating a modern EU-Switzerland investment protection agreement;

28. Notes that business and industry associations are currently only consulted through informal information channels; calls on the negotiators to agree to establish a bilateral *ex ante* and *ex post* consultation platform between the EU and Switzerland with a view to facilitating discussions and consultations in advance of any new measures or subsidies that could negatively affect trade or investment; takes the view that business and industry associations should be able to bring any new trade or investment irritants to the attention of the secretariat of this platform; believes that the platform should eventually be made an integral part of the governance framework for the modernised trade agreement and should entail setting up an SME helpdesk, which would help to reduce trade costs and administrative burdens while increasing SME participation in trade;

29. Underlines that negotiated deals should be designed with a structure that allows for horizontal consistency and transparency in order to facilitate the implementation of existing bilateral agreements, as well as new and updated ones, in an easily interpretable, practical manner that provides legal certainty and predictability, and guarantees that citizens, workers and businesses engaged in EU-Swiss trade can effectively exercise their rights;

30. Considers that the governance of a potential EU-Switzerland agreement, or of a modernised FTA, should involve a joint committee providing joint monitoring, structured dialogue and oversight by the European Parliament and the Swiss Parliament;

31. Calls for the EU and Switzerland to cooperate more closely in the fight against tax fraud, money laundering and tax evasion; stresses the importance of a level playing field on taxation, in particular on tax transparency and the automatic exchange of information;

32. Underlines that an effective dispute settlement mechanism, with a role for the Court of Justice of the EU, as the last instance on the interpretation of EU law, is fundamental, and that a solution for all institutional and structural matters is necessary, including a fair contribution to the EU's economic and social cohesion, uniform interpretation and application of agreements, dynamic alignment with the EU *acquis* and a level playing field, notably in relation to State aid; recalls the compromises already made by the Commission as regards a dispute settlement mechanism; stresses that access to the EU's internal market needs to be based on a fair balance of rights and obligations and that a common rulebook between the EU and Switzerland, in this context, is a prerequisite for a common market and Switzerland's participation in the internal market;

33. Welcomes the release of a second Swiss contribution to EU cohesion policy and stresses that future Swiss contributions to EU cohesion policy are essential and should become more regular and increased, following the example of other countries, such as Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein;

34. Notes the importance of a common framework for State aid; calls on the Commission and the Swiss Federal Council to find a solution in this regard;

Energy, climate and the environment

35. Welcomes the high degree of political alignment between Switzerland and the EU in the area of energy and climate policies; emphasises that the EU and Switzerland are striving for an environmentally friendly, competitive and secure energy supply and climate neutrality by 2050 and underlines the potential for a better alignment of legislation between the EU and Switzerland; calls 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; invites Switzerland to apply legislation on environmental protection under a future cooperation agreement, in particular the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and the overhaul of the Emissions Trading System;

36. Notes that the strategic autonomy sought by the EU on industrial products and critical raw materials also serves Switzerland's interests due to the intensity of mutual economic exchanges; is of the opinion that Switzerland and the EU could have a common interest in improved coordination of their industrial policies for better complementarity in strategic industrial areas;

37. Further welcomes Switzerland's engagement in promoting hydrogen with a particular focus on renewable hydrogen and stresses the enabling role that transit through Switzerland could play for a European market for hydrogen and renewable and decarbonised gases;

38. Notes with concern that Switzerland did not sufficiently support the EU's push to remove fossil fuel protections from the Energy Charter Treaty; invites Switzerland to consider withdrawing from this Treaty, following the example of several EU Member States;

39. Stresses that in the electricity sector, grid stability and the security of supply and transit depend on close cooperation between the EU and Switzerland; notes the interconnection of Swiss, German, Italian, Austrian and French power grids; remains concerned that excluding Switzerland's energy industry poses systemic risks for the synchronous grid of continental Europe; emphasises the importance of pursuing a sustainable and resilient energy transition and calls on Switzerland to actively participate in EU initiatives on renewable energy and grid integration, such as the clean energy package and the 'Fit for 55' package, with an effective dynamic alignment with EU law in the electricity sector;

40. Stresses 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, including through innovative solutions for cross-border electricity trade, such as a joint electricity market; stresses that any new agreement should include the relevant EU *acquis* in relation to the Green Deal and provisions for cooperation between EU and Swiss energy regulators; regrets the fact that, due to the termination of negotiations between the EU and Switzerland on an institutional framework agreement, the planned electricity agreement cannot be concluded in the short to medium term and emphasises the importance of starting negotiations on it as soon as possible; underlines that, until its conclusion, technical solutions at the level of transmission system operators and the inclusion of Switzerland in EU capacity calculations are necessary in order to reduce the greatest risks to regional grid stability and security of supply;

Research and innovation, development, education and culture

41. Underlines the importance of EU-Switzerland cooperation in research, innovation and development, fostering Europe's role as a strong player in this field of research and innovation, and strengthening the European education system; recalls that Switzerland spends almost CHF 23 billion a year on research and development; notes the importance of research and innovation in the energy sector and Switzerland's participation in EU research and innovation programmes to promote the development of clean and sustainable energy technologies; believes that the Erasmus+ programme contributes to bringing societies closer together;

42. Highlights the significance of joint EU-Swiss efforts in addressing global challenges, such as climate change, health and energy security, through research and development; encourages both parties to prioritise collaborative projects that contribute to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of the European Green Deal;

43. Notes Switzerland's relegation to the status of non-associated third country in Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe;

44. Reiterates the importance of EU-Switzerland cooperation in EU programmes, such as Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Euratom, ITER and Erasmus+, and praises the excellent record of cooperation to date; calls 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; invites both parties to conduct discussions on Switzerland's participation in EU programmes, namely Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Euratom, ITER and Erasmus+, as part of the negotiations on a broad package, so that Switzerland could quickly re-join upon the completion of the negotiations;

45. Remains convinced that a more stable, future-oriented partnership will benefit both sides and help Switzerland's association to Erasmus+ and other European programmes;

46. Calls on the Commission and the Swiss Federal Council to do their utmost to ensure Switzerland's transitional arrangements for Horizon Europe, as soon as a negotiation mandate is adopted, coupled with a Swiss commitment to regular and appropriate contributions to EU cohesion policy; regrets the fact that, due to Switzerland's non-association to Horizon Europe, it has recently been excluded from the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures; notes that under Horizon 2020, Switzerland received CHF 2,7 billion in funding and was thus in first place among associated countries;

47. Underlines the good cooperation between the EU and Switzerland in the space field, in particular with Switzerland's participation in European satellite navigation programmes, Galileo and EGNOS; calls for this cooperation to be deepened by including Switzerland in the Earth observation programme, Copernicus, and in the satellite telecommunications programme, IRIS; recalls that Switzerland already benefits from the open access data of Copernicus and that it could benefit further from access to the data and services of these programmes;

48. Recognises the importance of preserving and promoting cultural diversity, and calls for Switzerland and the EU to strengthen their cooperation in the areas of cultural exchange, education and sport, including the European Capitals of Culture initiative;

49. Stresses the importance of mutual understanding on both sides of the borders between the EU and Switzerland; regrets the roadblocks impeding transnational access to news and current affairs media between the EU and Switzerland, in particular for cross-border residents; encourages the EU and Switzerland to therefore support cross-border access to their news and current affairs media in order to promote a common culture;

50. Observes Switzerland's disassociation from the Erasmus+ programme since 2014, following its referendum on immigration; takes note of its unrestricted application of the 1999 agreement on the free movement of persons and the rejection of the result of the 2014 referendum in a new referendum on immigration in 2020; highlights that the free movement of persons is a precondition for participation in Erasmus+;

51. Welcomes the fact that the 2022 Erasmus+ call for proposals allowed associated partners from the European Higher Education Area to be involved in forming European Universities alliances, leading to Switzerland's participation;

52. Stresses the tie between Switzerland's participation in Erasmus+ and its full acceptance of the fundamental freedoms established by the EU Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, as Erasmus+ exchanges depend on the free movement of persons;

53. Acknowledges the fact that numerous education stakeholders in Europe are calling for Switzerland to be associated to Erasmus+ and that Swiss student and youth organisations are urging the Swiss Government to engage in constructive negotiations with the EU; underlines the educational and other benefits of such an association for Switzerland and the EU;

54. Underlines that all interested neighbouring and like-minded countries, including Switzerland, are welcome to be associated to the Erasmus+ programme, thus contributing to European education systems and to the strengthening of the European Education Area as a whole;

55. Stresses that learner mobility between the EU and Switzerland should eventually be inclusive and involve participants from all EU Member States, regions and social backgrounds, and that this could be achieved by extending the additional support that is offered to those facing social challenges, thus reinforcing the status of Erasmus+ as a truly inclusive European programme;

Institutional framework and cooperation

56. Regrets 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; notes that this agreement was essential for the conclusion of possible future agreements regarding Switzerland's further participation in the single market and the continuation of frictionless trade in several industry sectors and that the termination of negotiations affected Switzerland's participation in the Erasmus+ programme; regrets any narratives in the Swiss public and political spheres that the EU would work against Swiss interests; stresses 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; notes that the relationship between the EU and Switzerland is unbalanced and that citizens and businesses are being affected by the absence of a structural relationship; welcomes the Swiss Federal Council's approach of February 2022 for a broad negotiation package and calls on it to adopt a negotiating mandate on key structural issues as a political signal to the EU;

57. Stresses that it is in the fundamental interest of both sides to maintain and strengthen good, stable and mutually beneficial relations within the framework of a modernised relationship based on a package agreement that creates stability, trust, welfare, a level playing field, jobs, growth and a commitment to social security and justice;

58. Notes the Swiss Federal Council's decision to finalise exploratory talks with the EU in view of future negotiations and that it has approved key parameters for a negotiation mandate; notes with regret that the Swiss Federal Council will only decide whether to prepare for the adoption of a negotiating mandate by the end of 2023; recalls that there is a short window of opportunity given the Swiss federal elections in October 2023 and the EU elections in June 2024;

59. Welcomes 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; welcomes the fact that the cantons have noted that, in the absence of an acceptable alternative from the EU's point of view, there is no way around a dynamic adoption of EU law;

60. Expects 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; calls 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; calls on the Commission and the Swiss Federal Council to promptly finalise exploratory talks;

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61. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and to the President, Government and Parliament of the Swiss Confederation.