

The Limitation Initiative is harmful to education, research and innovation

The Swiss universities and organisations that support the promotion of research and innovation are opposed to the popular initiative “For moderate immigration”. The initiative jeopardises some of the basic parameters that favour Switzerland’s role as a centre for science and enterprise. Adopting the initiative would halt the free movement of persons and thus bring the research agreement with the EU to an end. In order to deliver outstanding performance, Switzerland’s education, research and innovation (ERI) sector relies on the free movement of persons and close cooperation with other countries.

Bern, 27 August 2020

The ETH Board, swissuniversities, the Swiss National Science Foundation, Innosuisse – the Swiss Innovation Agency, and the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences reject the Limitation Initiative. They have organised today’s joint press call in order to state their views on the Limitation Initiative and affirm the importance of research cooperation with Europe.

Switzerland’s position as a centre for education and research relies on the free movement of persons

The aim of the Limitation Initiative, on which a referendum will be held on 27 September 2020, is to cancel the agreement on the free movement of persons, thus terminating the well-established Bilateral Agreements with the EU. This would have a massive impact on education, research and innovation in Switzerland. The ERI sector is reliant on the free movement of people. If it is to retain its leading international status, it needs to attract the best researchers both from inside Switzerland and from abroad. These are the people who are busy developing vaccines for coronavirus, or inventing equipment to enable people with spinal injuries to climb stairs again. Without the free movement of persons, Switzerland would find it hugely more difficult to bring talented people and good ideas in from the EU.

Limitation Initiative jeopardises Swiss participation in EU research programmes

Adopting the Limitation Initiative would also invalidate the research agreement with the EU. This would have devastating consequences for Switzerland as a centre of research and innovation, and thus also for employment in our country. A great deal of expertise, an irreplaceable international network and the ability to compete with the best in the world would all be lost. Nowadays the majority of research – whether on climate change, cancer, energy or the current pandemic – is conducted internationally. Universities and research organisations in the EU are Switzerland's most important scientific partners, well ahead of the United States or Asia. In addition, the EU research programmes offer a unique opportunity for universities, industry and SMEs to cooperate internationally.

No repetition of what happened after the adoption of the initiative against mass immigration

The ERI sector already knows what the adoption of the Limitation Initiative would mean, having experienced something similar six years ago. Following the adoption of the initiative against mass immigration, Switzerland was barred from the EU research programmes, at first entirely and later partially. As a result, researchers from Switzerland participated in significantly fewer international projects and received less funding from the EU. Switzerland also became much less attractive internationally as a centre for science and knowledge. Great damage was done to Swiss science, and the repercussions are still being felt today. Such a situation must never be allowed to happen again. The ERI sector therefore says “no” to the Limitation Initiative.

Yves Flückiger, President of swissuniversities: "Switzerland's future is closely linked to the future of European science. In order to maintain the quality of our universities and training, and safeguard the welfare of the Swiss population, swissuniversities recommends that the initiative be rejected."

Michael Hengartner, President of the ETH Board: "The Limitation Initiative jeopardises access to the EU Framework Programmes for Research and the European talent pool. This would be disastrous for the ETH Domain."

Angelika Kalt, Director of the Swiss National Science Foundation: "Global challenges such as climate change can only be tackled if the best European research teams collaborate quickly and well."

Claudia Appenzeller, Secretary General of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences: "Collaborative projects require cooperation partners from universities, SMEs and/or industry who share a common goal. These differing perspectives cannot be fully covered within Switzerland alone. This is why the EU Framework Programmes for Research are such a boon."

André Kudelski, President of Innosuisse: "Cooperation programmes with Europe make an important contribution to the competitiveness of Swiss businesses. From the standpoint of encouraging innovation, it is clearly in Switzerland's interests to continue its full association."