

THE PRESIDENTS OF THE REGIONS
AUVERGNE-RHÔNE-ALPES, BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG, BAYERN, BOURGOGNE-FRANCHE-COMTÈ,
BOZEN-SÜDTIROL, GRAND-EST, TIROL, VALLE D'AOSTA, VORARLBERG



02.09.2019

His Excellency

Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker

President of the European Commission

Dear President Juncker,

As border regions, we have always been closely connected with Switzerland, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Aosta-Valley, Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, Bolzano-South Tyrol, Grand-Est, Tyrol, and Vorarlberg have long-standing friendships with the country. Switzerland is one of our most important trading and cooperation partners. That is why we welcome the fact that the EU and Switzerland agreed at the end of 2018 on a common text for an institutional agreement. In view of the pending signing of the agreement by the Swiss Federal Council, we want to emphasize once again the importance of the successful cooperation of the European Union with Switzerland for many years for our regions.

Particularly noteworthy are the cooperations in business and research. Research institutes, universities and companies from our regions and throughout the EU work together with their Swiss counterparts on solutions to global, societal challenges. These cooperations make a significant contribution to maintaining competitiveness in our regions. Together with Switzerland, our regions are one of the most dynamic economic and high-tech areas on our continent.

Cross-border relations also shape our regions. A large number of cross-border workers benefit from Switzerland's membership in the Schengen area. Many of our educational institutions and medium-sized companies as well as large parts of our civil society work closely together in numerous cross-border projects with partners in Switzerland. We cooperate in almost all areas of life, including projects and cooperations in mobility, environmental issues, health issues or culture. In line with European unification, this cooperation has contributed to the fact that the common border between our regions and Switzerland has become a connecting element over the years.

However, it is not just our regions that benefit from the close, economic integration with Switzerland. Switzerland was the third largest exporter of consumer goods in the EU in 2017, accounting for 8%. Switzerland's trade with the EU is far greater in volume than trade with Japan and South Korea. Switzerland is the EU's third most important trading partner behind the US and China. Moreover, with respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities, Switzerland fully shares the values on which the Union is founded.

Due to the exchanges in business and research, there is free access to markets and skilled workers, as well as, as far as internal EU market regulations are concerned, the most homogeneous legal framework of important general conditions possible. There is a strategic economic interest, both on the part of our regions and on the part of Switzerland, that hurdles and trade barriers be further reduced, that Switzerland apply the internal market regulations of the EU as fully as possible, and that they be interpreted uniformly, and equivalent legal guarantees exist. That is why we support the efforts of the European Commission to set these framework conditions on a long-term and sustainable basis with the institutional agreements negotiated at the end of 2018. The outcome of the negotiations has provided a fair and balanced solution. The present text improves mutual market access, provides a viable compromise on flanking measures, and creates robust rules for the dynamic adoption of the EU acquis by Switzerland. Nevertheless, recent developments in the European Union's relations with Switzerland are a great source of concern. Of course, we too urge our neighbor and partner Switzerland to comply with commitments once made; this also applies, in particular, to the spirit of the negotiated text of the institutional agreement with Switzerland.

However, with the expiry of the decision on the equivalence of the legal and supervisory framework applicable to stock exchanges in Switzerland, no dynamism should break the path that continues to divide Switzerland and the European Union. The bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU are the central basis of the cross-border exchange that we maintain with Switzerland and, in our view, must be maintained in the interest of the European Union. The rejection of the framework agreement in a referendum in Switzerland would undermine bilateral treaties. This would also have consequences for the economic dynamism in our regions. Moreover, we fear that rejecting the institutional agreement could destroy the decades-long work of bringing Switzerland closer to the EU. As a direct democracy in political decision-making, Switzerland is challenged in a special way to involve all social groups. The first round of consultations in Switzerland has already cleared many reservations about the institutional agreement. For example, the debate surrounding the "foreign judges" has largely taken a back seat. This shows that the decision of the European Commission to allow Switzerland sufficient time for intensive consultations was fundamentally correct.

Throughout its long history, the European Union has repeatedly responded with great understanding and lenience to the domestic concerns of its Member States. In view of the many years of close partnership with Switzerland, it is also important to react with discretion and prudence and to give Switzerland sufficient time to involve all social groups.

It is important that the European Commission and we, as surrounding regions, also work together to win over the Swiss population for further rapprochement with the European Union. It is necessary to focus on dialogue with Switzerland and its social groups in order to credibly promote the benefits of an EU partnership with Switzerland. It is essential that the people of Switzerland see the European Union as a partner who respects the characteristics of the country as well as the characteristics of the other regions and Member States of the Union. We are convinced that Switzerland can be persuaded by a broad dialogue that the institutional framework agreement is of mutual benefit.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Antonio FOSSON
Presidente della Regione
autonoma Valle d'Aosta

Laurent WAUQUIEZ
Président de la Région
Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes

Winfried KRETSCHMANN
Ministerpräsident des Landes
Baden-Württemberg

Dr. Markus SÖDER
Ministerpräsident des
Freistaates Bayern

Arno KOMPATSCHER
Landeshauptmann der
Autonomen Provinz Bozen-Südtirol

Marie-Guite DUFAY
Présidente de la Région
Bourgogne-Franche-Comté

Jean ROTTNER
Président de la Région
Grand-Est

Günther PLATTER
Landeshauptmann des
Bundeslandes Tirol

Mag. Markus WALLNER
Landeshauptmann des
Bundeslandes Vorarlberg

cc: Frederica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission

Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission

Ignazio Cassis, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Switzerland