Media release

The knowledge nation of Switzerland needs the EU research programmes

Zurich/Bern, 14.05.2025. **Switzerland, a knowledge nation, is dependent on the EU research programmes. This is confirmed by a broad-based study presented today in Bern. scienceindustries, the Business Association Chemistry Pharma Life Sciences, has commissioned the study to assess the specific impact of limited access to Horizon Europe for Switzerland – thus creating a sound basis for the political debate on re-association.**

“Switzerland is one of the most innovative countries in the world. However, innovation doesn't flourish on a national go-it-alone basis, but rather requires international exchange,” warns Dr Stephan Mumenthaler, Director of scienceindustries. The study, which was carried out on behalf of scienceindustries, examined the added value that the research programmes of the European Union (EU) create for Switzerland and the effects of Switzerland’s limited participation between 2021 and 2024. For the first time, the study brings together perspectives from universities, start-ups and industrial companies. It shows that the benefits of full association are cross-sectoral and in the national interest.

The added value of the EU programmes is clear
The study makes abstract risks tangible. The authors Dr Barbara Haering and Sandra Wirth interviewed numerous experts and evaluated international impact models. The result is clear: The EU research programmes bring tangible economic, scientific and social benefits for Switzerland. Although the transitional financing between 2021 and 2024 was able to cushion the short-term negative effects, it does not prevent the structural damage.

The RHOMOLO simulation, which is used in the EU to estimate the impact of policy measures, also shows that Horizon Europe can increase EU GDP by up to 0.17% (in 2020 terms), mainly through increased productivity thanks to higher investment in research and development. In doing so, it becomes clear that research investments have a stronger impact if they are pooled across borders rather than remain isolated nationally.

Limited participation weakens competitiveness
These macroeconomic simulations of the EU, the impact model on which the study is based and the estimates of Switzerland's State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (2019) emphasise that the negative effects of Switzerland’s limited participation in the EU programmes are impacting the competitiveness of the knowledge-based industry as a whole.

As a result of limited access, Switzerland not only lost individual projects, but also its strategic presence along the entire value chain – from research and innovation to market design and regulation. Its interests were less visible, less effective and less involved in the European sphere of science and innovation. And this at a time when global challenges such as climate change or security issues can no longer be solved in a national context. According to the study, young researchers, students and small and medium-sized enterprises in high-tech sectors were particularly handicapped. It is precisely these target groups of the EU programmes that are relevant for the future of Switzerland.

Dr Erich Rütsche, Business Development IBM Research, provided a practical perspective at the media conference. He used concrete examples to underline the importance of open collaboration in European programmes for research and development: "Many years of experience show that collaboration in research programs at both European and Swiss level brings concrete positive results for science, business and also society. IBM in Rüschlikon, for example, has produced critical security technologies in the field of quantum-safe encryption, which form the backbone of the IT of the future."

Securing connections with future technologies and digitalisation
There is still planning and legal uncertainty for researchers and companies regarding the options for participating in EU programmes. This has a particularly negative impact on project submissions from companies.

Switzerland's full association with the EU programmes is also relevant for Europe's competitiveness – especially in times of increasing bloc formation and fiercer competition between Europe, Asia and the USA. The exclusion of Switzerland from key high-tech areas such as digitalisation and future technologies such as quantum, semiconductors, space and cyber will ultimately hinder both sides.

What's needed now is political will
Fundamental innovations are based on long-term research and publicly funded developments. Research and innovation depend on stable framework conditions. The solution is on the table: An association with Horizon Europe is possible – and urgently needed. Switzerland must not miss this opportunity. This is not a technical detail, but a key decision for research, business and location policy. Time is of the essence. Dr Stephan Mumenthaler, Director of scienceindustries, draws a clear conclusion: "The study makes it clear that the knowledge nation of Switzerland is challenged. We need a long-term, stable and well-regulated relationship with the European Union. The Bilaterals III offer a unique opportunity for Switzerland."

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About scienceindustries:
scienceindustries, the Swiss Business Association Chemistry Pharma Life Sciences, works to ensure excellent international framework conditions for its around 250 member companies. The Chemistry Pharma Life Sciences industry employs some 80,000 people in Switzerland. As Switzerland's biggest export industry, it makes an important contribution to Swiss prosperity.