

Drivers and uncertainties

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Scenario planning distinguishes between predetermined elements, which can be anticipated with some confidence, and critical uncertainties, whose resolution will shape the future in different directions.¹ For the relationship between Switzerland and the Union up to 2035, several elements appear predetermined. Geography will not change: Basel will remain a border city in the middle of the Union's internal market. The Union will continue to insist on institutional mechanisms as a condition for internal market participation. Its regulation of financial services will remain comprehensive and will continue to restrict cross-border access from third countries, as Article 21c CRD shows.

The critical uncertainties are four. The first is the outcome of the domestic approval process, which includes the parliamentary decision on the type of referendum and the vote itself. The second is the political durability of the free movement of persons, which will be tested again by population growth, housing shortages and future popular initiatives. The third is the evolution of the Union itself, including its enlargement to Ukraine, Moldova and the western Balkans, its internal reforms and its willingness to treat Switzerland flexibly. The fourth is the global environment, in particular trade conflicts with the United States, competition with China and the security situation in Europe, which may push Switzerland and the Union closer together or expose their differences.²

These uncertainties are not independent of each other. A deterioration of the geopolitical environment could make the Swiss electorate more willing to secure its relations with its neighbours, while a period of economic strength could reinforce the belief that Switzerland can prosper on its own. The four scenarios below combine the uncertainties into coherent stories. They are deliberately contrasting so that the reader can test strategies against each of them, in the spirit of Wack's observation that the purpose of scenarios is to change the mental models of decision-makers.³

1 Notes

1. On the distinction between predetermined elements and critical uncertainties in scenario construction, see Wack (1985) and Schwartz (1991), cited above, and van der Heijden (1996). To be verified. ↩
2. On the drivers of Swiss European policy (domestic politics, EU enlargement and reform, US trade policy, European security), see the reports of the Federal Council on foreign policy strategy 2024–2027 and the analyses of think tanks such as Avenir Suisse and foraus. To be verified. ↩
3. Wack (1985), cited above, on scenarios as a means of changing the "mental maps" of managers. To be verified. ↩

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