

From the free trade agreement of 1972 to the vote of 1992

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

The modern relationship begins with the Free Trade Agreement of 22 July 1972 between Switzerland and the European Economic Community. Negotiated together with the agreements of the other EFTA states after the accession of the United Kingdom and Denmark to the Community, it abolished customs duties on industrial products and remains in force today. The agreement was approved in a popular vote on 3 December 1972 by a large majority of the people and all cantons, an early sign that economic integration with the neighbouring market enjoyed broad support when it did not touch sovereignty.¹ For the Basel chemical industry, which exported most of its products to the Community, the agreement secured tariff-free access to its most important market.

The next decisive step failed. In 1989 Jacques Delors offered the EFTA states a closer partnership, which led to the Agreement on the European Economic Area signed in Porto on 2 May 1992. The Federal Council, which had submitted an application for accession to the Community in May 1992, regarded the EEA as an intermediate stage. On 6 December 1992, with a turnout of about 78 per cent, the Swiss people rejected the EEA Agreement by a narrow majority of about 50.3 per cent, while a clear majority of the cantons voted against it.² The vote divided the country along linguistic and urban–rural lines. All the French-speaking cantons voted in favour, as did the two Basel half-cantons, Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft, which were the only German-speaking cantons to accept the agreement.³

The Basel vote of 1992 is a durable feature of the city's political identity. A city that lives from cross-border labour, exports and research saw the European market as its natural hinterland, and that perception has persisted through later votes on European questions. When Part J, Chapter II described Basel's orientation towards Alsace and the Upper Rhine, it described the same disposition. The application for membership, frozen

after the EEA vote, was formally withdrawn in 2016 after a parliamentary motion, which closed a chapter that had in practice ended long before.⁴

1 Notes

1. Agreement of 22 July 1972 between the Swiss Confederation and the European Economic Community (SR 0.632.401), in force since 1 January 1973; approved in the popular vote of 3 December 1972 with about 72 per cent of votes in favour. Figures to be verified. ↩
2. Popular vote of 6 December 1992 on the federal decree on the European Economic Area: rejected by about 50.3 per cent of voters and a majority of the cantons, turnout about 78.7 per cent; see the official results published by the Federal Chancellery (BBl 1993 I 167). Figures to be verified. ↩
3. On the cantonal results of 6 December 1992, in which the French-speaking cantons and the half-cantons of Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft accepted the EEA, see the official results of the Federal Chancellery and the statistical yearbook of the canton of Basel-Stadt. Cantonal percentages to be verified. ↩
4. On the withdrawal of the Swiss application for accession of 1992, communicated to the EU in July 2016 following the adoption of motion 14.3219 (Lukas Reimann) by both chambers, see the communications of the FDFA. To be verified. ↩

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