

Swisspeace and the University of Basel

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A second Basel institution in the field of global governance is swisspeace, the Swiss Peace Foundation. Founded in 1988 in Bern, it works on the prevention and transformation of violent conflicts through research, advice to governments and international organisations, training and the facilitation of dialogue processes. In the 2010s swisspeace moved its seat to Basel and became an associated institute of the University of Basel, where its staff teach in programmes of peace and conflict studies. Its fields of work include mediation support, dealing with the past, the business and human rights agenda in conflict-affected areas and the governance of natural resources.¹

The work of swisspeace touches finance at several points. Conflicts are financed through the exploitation of natural resources, through illicit trade and through the diversion of public funds. Companies investing in conflict-affected areas face legal and reputational risks that range from complicity in human rights violations to breaches of sanctions. The questions of business and human rights in such contexts, codified in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights of 2011, are relevant for banks that finance commodity trading, infrastructure or extractive industries. Swiss law has addressed some of these risks through the due diligence obligations on conflict minerals and child labour introduced in the Code of Obligations after the vote on the responsible business initiative in 2020.²

The University of Basel provides the academic environment in which these institutions work. Founded in 1460, it is the oldest university in Switzerland, with a Faculty of Law that has a long tradition in international and comparative law. In the field of international economic law, research and teaching cover trade law, investment law, European law and international financial regulation. The Europainstitut, an interdisciplinary institute of the University founded in the early 1990s, offers programmes

on European and global studies and has worked on questions of European integration, including the relations between Switzerland and the European Union. The University's chair of criminal law was long held by Mark Pieth, whose work linked academic criminal law with international anti-corruption and anti-money laundering policy.³

The presence of the BIS gives the University and its research institutes an unusual opportunity. Economists of the BIS appear as speakers at academic events in the city, while the BIS hosts researchers through its fellowship and visiting programmes. Part J, Chapter III will discuss the role of English as the working language of the BIS and of the pharmaceutical groups, which shapes the international academic life of Basel. A closer institutional link between the University and the standard-setting bodies has sometimes been suggested, for instance through joint teaching in financial regulation. Whether it could strengthen the city's position remains an open question.⁴

1 Notes

1. On swisspeace (Swiss Peace Foundation, founded 1988 in Bern), its move to Basel and its status as associated institute of the University of Basel, and its fields of work, see the annual reports of swisspeace and the website of the University of Basel. Year of the move to Basel to be verified. ↩
2. On the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (endorsed by the Human Rights Council in 2011), the Swiss counter-proposal to the responsible business initiative (vote of 29 November 2020) and the due diligence and transparency obligations regarding conflict minerals and child labour (Articles 964j–964l of the Code of Obligations and the related ordinance), see the Systematic Compilation of Federal Law. To be verified. ↩
3. On the University of Basel (founded 1460), its Faculty of Law, research and teaching in international economic law, and the Europainstitut der Universität Basel, see the websites and annual reports of the University. On the founding of the Europainstitut in the early 1990s, see its own publications. Dates to be verified. ↩

4. On the research fellowship and visiting programmes of the BIS and its contacts with academic institutions, see the BIS Annual Economic Report and the information on research at the BIS published on its website. To be verified. ↩

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