

What is at stake for Basel

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The interests of Basel in the relationship with the Union can be summarised under five headings. The first is labour. As Part H, Chapter II has shown, Basel-Stadt and its neighbouring cantons depend on cross-border commuters from Germany and France more than almost any other Swiss region, and the pharmaceutical groups, the hospitals and the retail sector could not operate without them.¹ The free movement agreement, the coordination of social security and the telework arrangements form the legal infrastructure of this labour market.

The second heading is pharmaceuticals and medical technology. Roche and Novartis export a large share of their production from Switzerland to the Union, where the mutual recognition of good manufacturing practice inspections and batch certification saves them duplicate testing. The medical devices episode of 2021 showed what happens when an agreement is not updated.² Part G and Chapter II of this Part have shown that the industry faces geopolitical pressures from the United States and China. A stable relationship with the Union, its largest neighbouring market, reduces at least one source of uncertainty.

The third heading is research. The University of Basel, the Biozentrum, the Friedrich Miescher Institute, the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute and the ETH department in Basel compete for talent in a European market. Association with Horizon Europe and its successor programme, which the Union is preparing for the period from 2028, determines whether their researchers can lead European consortia and hold grants of the European Research Council.³ The fourth heading is energy and infrastructure, including the electricity agreement, the Rhine ports and the EuroAirport. The fifth is the financial centre itself, whose access to the Union remains outside the package but whose stability depends on the general climate of the relationship.

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The Rhine deserves a brief note, since it illustrates that not every cross-border regime depends on the bilateral agreements. Navigation on the Rhine is governed by the Revised Convention for Rhine Navigation of 1868, the Mannheim Act, and administered by the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine in Strasbourg, of which Switzerland is a founding member alongside Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands.⁴ The freedom of navigation that the Basel ports enjoy therefore rests on an older international regime that would survive even a deterioration of bilateral relations, although customs, veterinary controls and labour law for crews would be affected.

1 Notes

1. On the number of cross-border commuters working in Basel-Stadt and north-western Switzerland, see the statistics of the Federal Statistical Office (cross-border commuter statistics) and Part H, Chapter II. Cross-reference; figures to be verified. ↩
2. On the economic significance of the MRA for the pharmaceutical industry (mutual recognition of GMP inspections and batch release) and the cost estimates for its absence, see the publications of Interpharma and scienceindustries. Figures to be verified. ↩
3. On the proposal for the next EU framework programme for research and innovation for 2028–2034 (successor to Horizon Europe) and the conditions for association of third countries, see the Commission's proposals of 2025. Status to be verified. ↩
4. Revised Convention for Rhine Navigation of 17 October 1868 (Mannheim Act, SR 0.747.224.101) and the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR), Strasbourg; see Part H, Chapter I. Cross-reference; to be verified. ↩

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