



March 2nd, 2023

Joint Statement

On the association of the United Kingdom and Switzerland to Horizon Europe

With this Joint Statement, we – the undersigned European university umbrella organisations – want to express our concerns on the lack of progress and clarity regarding the association of the United Kingdom and Switzerland to the Horizon Europe research framework programme. Two years have passed since the start of the programme without any progress and the delay is causing damage to existing research partnerships between EU, UK, and Swiss knowledge institutions.

As a result of the continuing uncertainty, a growing number of EU-research consortia are letting go of UK- and Switzerland-based teams for fear that their projects may become unmanageable or rejected in the first place. We are very concerned about these developments and anticipate that they will hinder Europe's preparedness and resilience in addressing global challenges.

In the past years we have dealt with a global pandemic from which the world is only now recovering. Europe has come through this pandemic better than many other parts of the world, due in no small part to the combined research efforts of EU, UK and Swiss knowledge institutions that have enabled us to better understand Covid-19 and develop effective vaccines against it. Likewise, to halt the progress of climate change and to mitigate its most devastating effects, will require us to combine our efforts in stable and well-coordinated research partnerships. The networks, relationships and infrastructures between the EU, UK and Switzerland needed to address these problems are already in place. Failing to associate both countries to Horizon Europe, however, will cause irreversible damage to these research infrastructures, undermining Europe's overall research and innovation potential and capacity to respond to global challenges.

We understand that the lack of progress was due to broader political issues, in particular with regard to the Northern Ireland Protocol and the single legal framework. Although unrelated to research, these issues are important and need to be addressed. We welcome the Windsor Framework as an important step towards resolving the Northern Ireland question. We welcome the exploratory talks on the future Swiss-EU relations that took place following the new proposal from the Federal Council in February 2022. We emphasise that these developments should be seen as a window of opportunity for taking the next steps towards an association agreement of the two countries with Horizon Europe.

Research can best help to preserve and advance Europe's prosperity, security and core values when having reliable structures for collaborating with like-minded partners in R&I that have an excellent academic track record and share the same core beliefs related to academic freedom, research ethics and democracy. In the current geopolitical climate and growing concerns around knowledge security, it is more important than ever to focus on what we have in common instead of what divides us.

We therefore plead to the European Commission and the governments of the United Kingdom and Switzerland to expedite association to the Horizon Europe research framework programme and to provide clarity to the European R&I sector.

