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Summary of the seven agreements

BY PIERRE-ANDRÉ TSCHANZ

In two areas – freedom of personal movement and road transport – Switzerland has drawn up accompanying measures as a safeguard against possible negative internal effects.

THE AGREEMENT on free movement of people, as provided for in the European Economic Area (see also "Swiss Review" 3/1999), is extended to our country and envisages a gradual reciprocal opening of job markets in Switzerland and the EU. Freedom of movement is granted to employed and self-employed persons as well as those not in employment but with sufficient funds.

The right to move freely across borders will be granted to Swiss citizens only two years after the agreement comes into force, whereas for EU citizens a phased introduction is envisaged over a twelve-year period. In addition, after seven years the Swiss electorate will have the option of voting in a referendum on extension of the agreement. To prevent any abuse, the Federal Council and parliament have drawn up associated measures, in particular to facilitate the extension of collective employment agreements.

Road transport

The agreement on road transport ensures the progressive opening of the commercial goods and passenger transport markets on road and rail between Switzerland and the EU, based on a transition phase and a definitive regulation from 2005. Switzerland will raise the weight limit for trucks in two steps from 28 to 40 tonnes. At the same time the transit charges will be gradually raised from CHF 25 to CHF 325.

During a transition phase Switzerland

will permit an annual contingent of 300,000 transits initially, then 400,000 transits for European 40-tonne trucks. Moreover it guarantees a reduced transit tariff for 220,000 zero- or light-load trips per year. Our country has the option of allocating the same contingents to Swiss haulage contractors.

A full range of accompanying measures (from police checks to subsidies for combined transport) has been drawn up in order to achieve the main goal of Swiss transport policy, the shift of trans-alpine goods transport from road to rail.

The agreement on air traffic will gradually accord Swiss airlines the same rights as their European competitors. This will provide them with freedom in respect of tariffs, capacity and transport. Tariffs will no longer require approval and there will be no constraints on opening up new routes. Planes of any capacity will be allowed to fly to any destination.

Two years after the agreement comes into force, Swiss airlines will also be entitled to participate in cabotage transport (for example operation of a Paris-Geneva-Madrid route or even Paris-Madrid).

Research

The agreement on research entitles Swiss institutes, universities and companies to participate in all programmes and activities within the EU's fifth framework research programme. This will allow Swiss research scientists to initiate and manage projects autonomously. Such prospects are of major importance, particularly for Swiss research institutes, universities and SMEs.

The agreement on public procurement envisages extending World Trade Organisation regulations to cover invitations to tender by local communities, to the telecommunications and rail transport sectors, and to licensed private companies. These regulations are based on the principle of equality of treatment for all service providers (no discrimination), procedural transparency, and the establishment of mechanisms for claims against contract awards (above a certain financial value).

The agreement on technical trade barriers governs the mutual recognition of compliance procedures (tests, certificates, permits etc.) for most industrial products, so that in future a single procedure will be sufficient to approve a product for the Swiss and EU markets.

Agriculture

The reduction or even elimination of tariff barriers and the recognition of equality in respect of technical provisions in the fields of veterinary hygiene, plant protection, biological farming, quality standards for fruit and vegetables etc., will improve access to Swiss and EU markets for agricultural products from the respective regions.

The opening of the agricultural market governs areas in which Switzerland is particularly competitive, for instance cheese, fruit and vegetables. On the other hand, tariff reductions do not cover meat, grains and milk. Switzerland is to grant concessions for fruit and vegetables outside harvest time (winter season) and for products unrelated to Swiss agriculture (e.g. olive oil).

The main platform on which the agreement rests is full reciprocal liberalisation of the market for cheese following a five-year transition period.

Federal Referendum

21 May 2000

Federal decision on approval of the sectoral agreements between the Swiss Confederation and the European Community as well as, if necessary, its member states or the European Atomic Energy Community.

24 September 2000

Subjects not yet decided.

26 November 2000

Subjects not yet decided.