

## Regio Basiliensis and the beginnings of institutional cooperation

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The modern institutions of cross-border cooperation began with a private initiative. In 1963 a group of Basel businessmen, academics and politicians founded the association *Regio Basiliensis* in order to promote the development of the Upper Rhine region across national borders. The founders included figures from the chemical industry, the university and the cantonal administration, who shared the view that Basel could only develop if it overcame the constraints imposed by its border position.<sup>1</sup> The association served as a think tank and a meeting point long before the governments of the three states created formal structures. Supported later by public funding from the two Basel cantons, it became the coordinating office for the cross-border activities of the Swiss cantons of north-western Switzerland.

The intergovernmental level followed in the 1970s. An exchange of notes signed in Bonn in 1975 between Germany, France and Switzerland established a tripartite intergovernmental commission for regional questions in the border area, with regional committees for the northern and southern parts of the Upper Rhine. Out of the southern committee grew the Oberrheinkonferenz, the Upper Rhine Conference, which received its present form in 1991 and brings together the cantons of north-western Switzerland, the Land of Baden-Württemberg, the Land of Rhineland-Palatinate and the French state and regional authorities in Alsace.<sup>2</sup> The conference works through expert groups on transport, environment, economy, health, education and spatial planning, whose recommendations are implemented by the participating authorities in accordance with their own law.

The legal capacity of local authorities to cooperate across the border was clarified by the Karlsruhe Agreement of 23 January 1996 between Germany, France, Luxembourg and Switzerland. The agreement allows

communes, districts and cantons to conclude cooperation agreements and to create cross-border bodies, including local groupings with legal personality.<sup>3</sup> It rests on the framework of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, signed under the auspices of the Council of Europe in Madrid in 1980, which Switzerland had ratified.<sup>4</sup> For the Basel region the Karlsruhe Agreement provided the legal basis on which the trilateral bodies of the following decades were built.

## 1 Notes

1. On the foundation of the Regio Basiliensis in 1963 and its founders, see the Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS), article "Regio Basiliensis", and the publications of the association itself. Date and details to be verified. ↩
2. Exchange of notes of 22 October 1975 between the Swiss Confederation, the Federal Republic of Germany and the French Republic concerning the creation of an intergovernmental commission for the study and solution of neighbourhood questions (SR 0.181.113.49 or similar). On the Oberrheinkonferenz and its constitution in 1991, see its publications and website. References to be verified. ↩
3. Agreement of 23 January 1996 between the Swiss Federal Council, acting on behalf of the cantons of Solothurn, Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft, Aargau and Jura, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Government of the French Republic and the Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg on cross-border cooperation between territorial authorities and local public bodies (Karlsruhe Agreement, SR 0.131.1). To be verified. ↩
4. European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities of 21 May 1980 (Madrid Convention, ETS No. 106; SR 0.131.1 or a neighbouring number). To be verified. ↩

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