

The canton's external relations

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For a city-state that borders two foreign countries along most of its boundary, foreign relations are a matter of daily administration. The canton of Basel-Stadt has organised its external relations in a unit within the Presidential Department, which is responsible for cooperation with the neighbouring regions, relations with the federal government and the other cantons, and the promotion of Basel as a business location.¹ The Federal Constitution permits the cantons to conclude treaties with foreign states within their areas of competence and to deal directly with subordinate foreign authorities, which allows Basel to negotiate with the Collectivité européenne d'Alsace, the Grand Est region and the German Land of Baden-Württemberg.²

Basel-Stadt also maintains a structured presence in Bern. Together with Basel-Landschaft and the other cantons of north-western Switzerland, it represents its interests towards the Federal Council and the federal parliament. It also participates in the Conference of Cantonal Governments, which coordinates the position of the cantons on European policy.³ For Basel, federal policy towards the European Union is a question of existential importance, because the free movement of persons, the mutual recognition of product approvals and research cooperation affect the pharmaceutical groups, the university and the frontier workers directly. The scenarios in Part K return to the relationship between Switzerland and the EU.

Relations with Paris and Strasbourg follow different logics. Paris is the seat of the French central government, which still decides many questions that matter for the border region: the taxation of frontier workers, the status of the EuroAirport and the funding of transport links. Basel works through the Swiss embassy in Paris and through regular contacts with French ministries. It supports joint initiatives with the Alsatian authorities whenever a question requires a decision by the French state.⁴ Strasbourg

plays a double role. As the seat of the Collectivité européenne d'Alsace and of the Grand Est region, it also hosts the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. The European Court of Human Rights, whose case law binds Switzerland under the European Convention on Human Rights, also sits there.⁵ The Upper Rhine Conference, whose joint secretariat is located in Kehl opposite Strasbourg, links the canton with the French and German authorities in a permanent framework. Next door, the Euro-Institut in Kehl trains civil servants from all three countries in the administrative law and culture of their neighbours.⁶

1 Notes

1. On the organisation of external relations and location marketing (Aussenbeziehungen und Standortmarketing) in the Presidential Department of the Canton of Basel-Stadt, see the website of the canton. Organisational details to be verified. ↩
2. Federal Constitution, Articles 55 and 56, on the participation of the cantons in foreign policy decisions and their power to conclude treaties with foreign states within their competences. To be verified. ↩
3. On the representation of cantonal interests in Bern, including the Conference of Cantonal Governments (KdK) and the joint interest representation of the north-western Swiss cantons, see the websites of the KdK and the Canton of Basel-Stadt. To be verified. ↩
4. On the cooperation of the Canton of Basel-Stadt with the Swiss embassy in Paris and the French central government on cross-border questions, see the reports of the Canton of Basel-Stadt on its external relations. To be verified. ↩
5. On the institutions seated in Strasbourg, including the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights and the European Parliament, and Switzerland's representation to the Council of Europe, see the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. To be verified. ↩
6. On the joint secretariat of the Upper Rhine Conference in Kehl and the Euro-Institut, see their websites and Part H, chapter II of this book. To be verified. ↩

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