

The EuroAirport: a treaty airport

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The EuroAirport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg is one of the most unusual airports in the world. It lies entirely on French territory, on land belonging to the communes of Saint-Louis, Hémingue and Blotzheim, a few kilometres north-west of the city of Basel. Yet it serves Switzerland, France and Germany and is operated jointly by France and Switzerland under an international convention.¹ The arrangement arose from necessity after the Second World War. Basel had operated an airport at Sternenfeld near Birsfelden since the 1920s, but its location made expansion impossible. The canton looked for a site in its hinterland and found it in Alsace, where the French authorities were willing to cooperate.

Construction began in 1946 under a provisional agreement, with the airport opening in the same year. The definitive legal basis followed with the Franco-Swiss Convention of 4 July 1949 on the construction and operation of the Basel-Mulhouse airport at Blotzheim.² Under the convention, France provided the land and Switzerland financed the construction. The airport is operated by a public establishment under French law with a binational character, governed by a board of directors with equal representation of France and Switzerland. Germany participates through advisory members, reflecting the role of southern Baden as part of the catchment area.³

The convention divides the airport into a French and a Swiss sector. The Swiss sector, which includes part of the terminal and adjoining areas, is connected to the city of Basel by a customs road. This road, about two kilometres long, is fenced on both sides and runs through French territory without customs control.⁴ Swiss customs law applies in the Swiss sector, so that passengers arriving there can enter Switzerland without passing French customs. French and Swiss border police work in the terminal, which has distinct exits for the two countries. Since the association of Switzerland with the Schengen area in 2008, passport controls for

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travellers within Schengen have been abolished, but the customs distinction remains.⁵

1 Notes

1. On the location of the EuroAirport on the territory of the communes of Saint-Louis, Héisingue and Blotzheim and on its trinational catchment area, see the publications of the EuroAirport. To be verified. ↩
2. Convention of 4 July 1949 between Switzerland and France concerning the construction and operation of the Basel-Mulhouse airport at Blotzheim (SR 0.748.131.934.91), with its annexed statutes. On the provisional agreement and the opening of the airport in 1946, see the HLS, article "EuroAirport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg". To be verified. ↩
3. On the board of directors of the EuroAirport, composed of eight French and eight Swiss members, with two German members in an advisory capacity, see the statutes annexed to the 1949 Convention and the publications of the airport. Composition to be verified. ↩
4. On the customs road (Zollfreistrasse) between Basel and the Swiss sector of the airport, provided for in the 1949 Convention, see the convention and the publications of the FOCBS. Length to be verified. ↩
5. On Swiss association with Schengen, applicable since 12 December 2008 for land borders and since 29 March 2009 for air borders, and on the continued customs separation in the Swiss sector of the EuroAirport, see the Agreement of 26 October 2004 on the association of Switzerland with Schengen (SR 0.362.31). To be verified. ↩

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