

The Rhine port and the return of navigation

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As Part A described, the revival of Rhine navigation to Basel at the beginning of the twentieth century was the work of the engineer Rudolf Gelpke and his supporters. The first commercial tug with barges reached Basel from Strasbourg in 1904. The city built a first port at St. Johann, opened in 1911, and after the First World War the larger port of Kleinhüningen. Later ports were added at Birsfelden and Au in Basel-Landschaft.

Rhine navigation gave Switzerland a direct connection to the sea, which was of strategic importance in times of war and blockade. During the Second World War, the Rhine was closed to navigation for long periods, but in peacetime it allowed Switzerland to import coal, oil, grain and other bulk goods at low cost. The Swiss merchant fleet, founded during the Second World War to secure the country's supply, and the Rhine shipping companies based in Basel form part of the Swiss system of economic security of supply.¹

The Rhine ports also generated a financial business: the financing of ships, the insurance of cargoes, the trade in commodities shipped on the Rhine, and the services of forwarding and storage. Part H returns to the ports and to the legal questions of Rhine navigation in the modern trinational economy.

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1 Notes

1. On the Swiss maritime fleet (founded 1941 under emergency law) and the Swiss Rhine shipping companies, see HLS, articles "Hochseeschifffahrt" and "Rheinschifffahrt". To be verified. ↩

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