

The Upper Rhine Trinational Metropolitan Region

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

A broader structure was created in December 2010, when representatives of the political, economic, scientific and civil-society actors of the Upper Rhine signed a declaration establishing the Trinationale Metropolregion Oberrhein, the Upper Rhine Trinational Metropolitan Region.¹ The metropolitan region covers an area that stretches from the Basel cantons in the south to the Palatinate in the north, with a population of about six million people. It is organised in four pillars, devoted to politics, the economy, science and civil society, which aim to present the Upper Rhine as a coherent metropolitan area in competition with other European regions.

The idea of a metropolitan region reflects a concept of European spatial policy. After Germany had designated a number of *Metropolregionen* during the 1990s and 2000s, the actors of the Upper Rhine sought a comparable status for an area whose largest city, Strasbourg, is the seat of European institutions, while its economic centre of gravity lies partly in Basel and partly in Karlsruhe and Freiburg.² For Basel the metropolitan region serves mainly as a frame for joint marketing and lobbying. Its practical value appears in projects such as the trinational science offensive, the network of universities known as Eucor – The European Campus, which unites the universities of Basel, Freiburg, Strasbourg, Haute-Alsace and the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, and the cross-border labour market observatories.³

The multiplication of bodies has been criticised as institutional layering. A practitioner who seeks to understand who decides a question of cross-border transport will encounter the cantons, the TEB, the Oberrheinkonferenz, the TMO, national ministries, the European Union through Interreg and in some cases the bilateral commissions provided for by treaties. Each body has a role, although the actual decision usually rests with a national or cantonal authority acting under its own law.⁴ The bodies

of the trinational region therefore operate within the law of the three states and prepare its coordinated application.

1 Notes

1. On the foundation of the Trinationale Metropolregion Oberrhein (TMO) by the declaration of Offenburg of 9 December 2010, see the founding declaration and the publications of the TMO and of the Oberrheinkonferenz. Date to be verified. ↩
2. On the concept of European metropolitan regions in German spatial planning, see the resolutions of the Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung (MKRO) of 1995 and 2005. To be verified. ↩
3. On Eucor – The European Campus, constituted as a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) in 2015, see the publications of Eucor and of the University of Basel. Date to be verified. ↩
4. On the governance of cross-border cooperation on the Upper Rhine and the criticism of institutional complexity, see the literature on European territorial cooperation, for example the publications of the Euro-Institut in Kehl and of the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT). To be verified. ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/basel-the-upper-rhine-trinational-metropolitan-region