

Two half-cantons and their institutions

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

The separation produced two very different polities. Basel-Stadt was a small, urban, wealthy canton, governed until the 1870s by the old families and dominated by commerce, banking and the emerging chemical industry. Basel-Landschaft was a rural canton, governed by a liberal and radical elite that had led the revolt, with small towns and villages whose economy rested on agriculture and home weaving. Each half-canton developed its own constitution, administration, courts, schools and, eventually, its own cantonal bank.

The relationship between the two half-cantons has remained a subject of debate. Several attempts to reunite them have failed. In 1969, the voters of Basel-Landschaft rejected a reunification constitution that the voters of Basel-Stadt had accepted. In 2014, a proposal to start a new reunification process was again rejected in Basel-Landschaft, while a majority in Basel-Stadt supported it.¹ Despite the separation, the two half-cantons cooperate closely. They jointly sponsor the University of Basel, the Swiss Rhine Ports and several hospitals. Their economies are also intertwined: thousands of residents of Basel-Landschaft work in the city, while the chemical and pharmaceutical industry has major sites in both.

For the financial centre, the separation has practical consequences. Companies and individuals in the Basel region must deal with two tax systems, two commercial registers, two cantonal banks and two sets of authorities. The tax competition between the half-cantons, which Part G examines in connection with corporate taxation, is an expression of the sovereignty that each half-canton received in 1833. The region's economic unity and political division form one of the characteristic tensions of Basel.

1 Notes

1. On the failed reunification attempts of 1969 (rejection of the reunification constitution in Basel-Landschaft) and 2014 (rejection of the initiative to examine a merger in Basel-Landschaft), see HLS, article "Wiedervereinigung beider Basel"; the cantonal voting records. To be verified. ↩

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