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## Kurzinformation

# The Joint Use of German Airports and Airbases by Civilian Companies and the Bundeswehr

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This briefing note provides both an overview of the civilian airports used by the German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) (para 1.) as well as an overview of the airbases and naval airbases used by civilian companies (para. 2). In addition, it outlines possible reasons for the respective joint use of these airports and military bases (par. 3).

### 1. Civil airports also utilised for military purposes

On the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany, there are **four airports** (including Berlin Tegel Airport where civil aviation ended in 2020) that were or are **operated by civilian companies** and that are (still) **used by air force units** of the Bundeswehr.

#### 1.1. Berlin Brandenburg Airport <sup>1</sup>

Berlin Brandenburg Airport “*Willy Brandt*” (IATA code: BER) is a major international commercial airport operated by *Flughafen Berlin Brandenburg GmbH* and owned fully publicly, namely 37 percent each by the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg and 26 percent by the Federal Republic of Germany.

**Terminal 5 of Berlin Brandenburg Airport** (located at the former Berlin Schönefeld Airport) is used by the German Foreign Office as a reception area for state visits and by the ***Executive Transport Wing of the German Federal Ministry of Defence (FMoD)*** as an air terminal for VIP flights of state, government and parliamentary leadership personnel.

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<sup>1</sup> *Berlin Brandenburg Airport*, available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin\\_Brandenburg\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Brandenburg_Airport) (last retrieved on 17 October 2023).

## 1.2. (Former) Berlin Tegel Airport <sup>2</sup>

Berlin Tegel Airport “*Otto Lilienthal*” was an international commercial airport in the Berlin district of Tegel until November 8, 2020, when it was taken out of service.

However, **three helicopters of the FMoD’s *Executive Transport Wing***<sup>3</sup> are still stationed at the northern part of former Berlin Tegel Airport. Berlin Tegel (North) is expected to remain in operation as a helicopter landing pad for the Executive Transport Wing until 2029.

## 1.3. Cologne Bonn Airport <sup>4</sup>

Cologne Bonn Airport “*Konrad Adenauer*” (IATA code: CGN) is an international commercial airport in Cologne **running 24 hours a day**. The distribution of ownership shares in the airport reflects the political will to involve all surrounding local authorities in the management and development of the site. *Cologne Bonn Airport GmbH*, as the operating company, is owned by the city of Cologne (31.12 percent), the Federal Republic of Germany (represented by the Federal Ministry of Digital Affairs and Transport), the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (both 30.94 percent), the city of Bonn (6.06 percent), the Rhine-Sieg district (0.59 percent) and the Rhenish-Berg district (0.35 percent).

The infrastructure of the military part of Cologne Bonn Airport is currently being used by the **FMoD’s *Executive Transport Wing*** that still has most of its aircraft stationed here <sup>5</sup> as well as by parts of **NATO’s *Multinational Multirole Tanker Transport Unit*** (MMU) <sup>6</sup>. Even after the Executive Transport Wing has fully relocated to Berlin Brandenburg Airport, the MMU, in accordance with current plans, will continue to use Cologne Bonn Airport as a forward operating base in the coming years. <sup>7</sup>

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2 *Berlin Tegel Airport*, available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin\\_Brandenburg\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Brandenburg_Airport) (last retrieved on 17 October 2023).

3 German Air Force (2023): *Flugbereitschaft des Bundesministeriums der Verteidigung*, available only in German language at: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/luftwaffe/organisation-/luftwaffentruppenkommando/flugbereitschaft-des-bundesministeriums-der-verteidigung> (last retrieved on 17 October 2023).

4 *Cologne Bonn Airport*, available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cologne\\_Bonn\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cologne_Bonn_Airport) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin\\_Brandenburg\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Brandenburg_Airport) (last retrieved on 17 October 2023).

5 German Air Force (2023): *Flugbereitschaft des Bundesministeriums der Verteidigung*, op.cit.

6 Air Force Command (2023): *Gemeinsame Flotte für Lufttransport, Luftbetankung und medizinische Evakuierung*, available only in German language at: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/luftwaffe/aktuelles/lufttransport-luftbetankung-und-medizinische-evakuierung-5601410> (last retrieved on 17 October 2023).

7 The main operating base of the *Multinational Multirole Tanker Transport Unit* (MMU) is Eindhoven in the Netherlands (see *ibid.*).

#### 1.4. Leipzig/Halle Airport<sup>8</sup>

Leipzig/Halle Airport (IATA code: LEJ), located in Saxony between the cities of Leipzig and Halle on Saale, was put into operation on April 18, 1927. Today, the airport has international importance, especially in the field of **air cargo traffic**. The airport which operates **around the clock** is home of the cargo airlines Aerologic and DHL Hub Leipzig including European Air Transport Leipzig. It is also the home airport of DHL Aviation, the umbrella organisation for DHL cargo airlines. Operating company of Leipzig/Halle Airport is *Mitteldeutsche Flughafen AG*.

As part of the **strategic airlift project SALIS** (initially: *Strategic Airlift Interim Solution*, today: *Strategic Airlift International Solution*), Leipzig/Halle Airport has been militarily used by several NATO member states since March 23, 2006, as the home base for two Antonov An-124 transport aircraft for the rapid transport of oversized cargo. The current SALIS contract was concluded on January 1, 2022, and runs until December 31, 2026. Partners of the current contract are the Ukrainian *Antonov Logistics SALIS GmbH* on the one side and Germany, France, the Czech Republic, Poland, Norway, Slovenia, Hungary and Belgium on the other.

Very soon after the Russian invasion, the Antonov Logistics SALIS GmbH decided to move operations from its home base at Hostomel Airport in Ukraine to Germany. In the run-up to possible destruction by Russian attacks, five AN-124 aircraft were flown out to Leipzig/Halle Airport just in time from where they are now operating. These aircraft currently make it mathematically possible to generate the number of flight hours that would be needed for national and alliance defence.

## 2. Airbases and naval airbases also utilised for civil purposes

In addition to the aforementioned joint-use airports, there are three airbases respectively naval airbases that are also used by civilian companies.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1. Ingolstadt Manching Airfield<sup>10</sup>

Ingolstadt Manching Airfield (IATA: IGS) is a military airbase with civil usage located in Manching near Ingolstadt, in Bavaria. Operator of the airfield is Ingolstadt Bundeswehr Service Center. The airbase is home to the **WTD 61**, the ***Bundeswehr Technical and Airworthiness Center*** for Aircraft. Its tasks are the testing and evaluating of military aircraft and aerial weapon

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8 *Leipzig/Halle Airport*, available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cologne\\_Bonn\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cologne_Bonn_Airport) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin\\_Brandenburg\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Brandenburg_Airport) (last retrieved on 17 October 2023).

9 *Liste der Fliegerhorste*, available only in German language at: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste\\_der\\_Fliegerhorste\\_in\\_Deutschland](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_Fliegerhorste_in_Deutschland) (last retrieved on 17 October 2023).

10 *Ingolstadt Manching Airport*, available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingolstadt\\_Manching\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingolstadt_Manching_Airport) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin\\_Brandenburg\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Brandenburg_Airport) (last retrieved on 17 October 2023).

systems. The centre is also responsible for certifications and inspections of modifications made on aircraft already in service with the German Armed Forces.

At **Airbus Defence and Space**, which runs its center of excellence for military air systems on the Manching airfield site, all European AWACS aircraft, the German Airbus A400M transport aircraft, the German Lockheed P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft, the German Panavia Tornado multi role combat aircraft, and Typhoon Eurofighter jets are overhauled. Additionally, Airbus builds the center fuselage section for all Eurofighter variants and completes the German Eurofighters here.

The civil part of Ingolstadt Manching Airfield is classified as a **commercial airport** and is operated by *Ingolstadt Airport IMA GmbH*. It is **mainly used for daily shuttle flights and plant traffic for Audi AG**.

## 2.2. Rostock-Laage Airport<sup>11</sup>

Rostock-Laage Airport (IATA code: RLG) is a military airbase with civil usage and is considered as a regional commercial airport. It is located in the federal state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in the Rostock district between the Laage suburbs of Krons Kamp and Weitendorf.

Rostock-Laage Airport is home to the **Tactical Air Wing 73 “Steinhoff”** as well as the **Air Force Weapons School**. Civil aviation at this airport began in 1992 when a joint use agreement was signed which stipulated that the airport, which had previously been used exclusively for military purposes, was also **released for civilian use**. Of the 1,000-hectare total area, approximately 60 hectares were earmarked for civilian use. This part of the airport is operated by *Flughafen Rostock-Laage-Güstrow GmbH*, which is owned by the *Berlin Zeitfracht Group* since 2022, and is used for **scheduled and charter flights as well as general aviation**. **Pilots are also trained at the airport, including by the Lufthansa flight school**.

## 2.3. Nordholz Naval Airbase<sup>12</sup>

Nordholz Naval Airbase (IATA code: NDZ), located near Nordholz in the municipality of Wurster Nordseeküste in the district of Cuxhaven in northern Lower Saxony, is home to the Naval Air Command and the two squadrons subordinate to it, in detail the **Naval Air Wing 3 “Graf Zeppelin”** with its Lockheed P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft and its Dornier Do-228 environmental patrol aircraft, and the **Naval Air Wing 5** with all naval helicopters.

As a civilian co-user, the *Airport Operating Company Cuxhaven/Nordholz* operates the Sea-Airport Cuxhaven/Nordholz (IATA code: FCN) at Nordholz Naval Airbase. Through a joint use

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11 *Rostock–Laage Airport*, available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rostock%E2%80%93Laage\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rostock%E2%80%93Laage_Airport) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin\\_Brandenburg\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Brandenburg_Airport) (last retrieved on 17 October 2023).

12 *Nordholz Naval Airbase*, available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rostock%E2%80%93Laage\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rostock%E2%80%93Laage_Airport) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin\\_Brandenburg\\_Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Brandenburg_Airport) (last retrieved on 17 October 2023).

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agreement concluded in 1995 between the Bundeswehr and the Airport Operating Company Cuxhaven/Nordholz, the Sea-Airport Cuxhaven/Nordholz opens up some of the airport infrastructure of the neighbouring Naval Air Wings to civilian clients. The aim is **to attract international air freight traffic and companies** willing to settle at Sea-Airport Cuxhaven/Nordholz. An **onshore base** is also envisaged to be established here **for the air-based supply of offshore wind farms in the North Sea**.

### **3. Reasons for the joint use of airport and airbase facilities by the Bundeswehr and civilian companies**

The respective decisions to share civilian airports with air force and naval aviation units of the Bundeswehr respectively to open up military (naval) airbase infrastructure to civilian companies are likely to have been made **mainly for logistical** (simplified logistical support) **and economic** (e.g. cost savings through dual use) **reasons**. When the decisions were taken to jointly use the aforementioned airports and airbases, **strategic defence considerations probably played only a very minor role**, if any at all. At least, the sources available to the Research Services of the German Bundestag give no indication of such considerations.

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