



Media relations
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Media Release

regarding judgment A-171/2023, A-170/2023 of 9 October 2026

Geneva International Airport: operation in compliance with the law

The Federal Administrative Court dismisses the appeals against the new operating regulations of Geneva International Airport to the extent they were admissible. The measures approved by DETEC do not violate noise limit, air quality and climate protection regulations.

The Federal Administrative Court (FAC) has dismissed, to the extent they were admissible, the appeals against the decision of the Federal Department of Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC) of 17 November 2022. This decision approved two amendments to the operating regulations of Geneva International Airport (AIG), as well as plans for the construction of a new rapid exit taxiway. It also lifted restrictions on the use of aircraft parking positions.

The Court notes that – already since previous proceedings – the environmental noise immission limit values exceed the applicable standards. These exceedances occur particularly at night-time as a result of operational delays of flights scheduled before 22:00 but departing after 22:00. Complete noise abatement would have required a reduction in traffic of approximately 90%, which is incompatible with airport operations. Consequently, it was necessary to establish permitted noise level values combined with derogations, while also considering other measures.

Noise contingent system and three long-haul flights per week after 22:00

The incorporation of a noise contingent system into the operating regulations is designed to cap delayed departures after 22:00. The FAC rejects the complaints against this measure.

The derogation to the general ban on scheduling flights after 22:00 is also upheld: the three weekly long-haul flights approved by DETEC are compatible with the system of noise contingents allocated to airlines provided they are factored into the total noise contingent allocations.

In this context, the judgment confirms the accuracy of the noise forecasts underlying the establishment of permitted noise levels and derogations. Considering the circumstances, no other measures were required and the challenged decision must be upheld. The public interest of the international airport for the country and region was deemed predominant.

New rapid exit taxiway

Furthermore, with the approval of the new rapid exit taxiway, aircraft should be able to leave the runway more quickly so as to avoid situations of ground congestion. This measure is designed to improve airport traffic flow without increasing overall capacity.

The SAIP is appropriate

These measures are part of the Sectoral Aviation Infrastructure Plan (SAIP). The SAIP fact sheet for Geneva Airport was adopted by the Federal Council on 14 November 2018. This fact sheet is the result of a compromise between federal and cantonal authorities and contains two distinct territorial zones: the first at the 2019 horizon, which defines an area affected by noise in such a way as to prevent any increase, and the second at the 2030 horizon, which presents a reduced area and thus requires a reduction in noise nuisance. The FAC examined the appellants' complaints against the SAIP on a preliminary basis, and dismissed them to the extent they were admissible. The SAIP contains no calculation errors or deficiencies that would render it unsuitable to serve as the framework for amending the operating regulations or approving scheduling.

No violation of climate protection standards

The appellants also raised objections relating to climate protection. With respect to climate-related arguments, the Court finds that current standards governing climate protection do not permit restrictions to be imposed on specific projects. The federal and international regimes (at global and European levels) in this field provide other mechanisms for limiting greenhouse gas emissions, in particular the technical certification of aircraft, the international carbon offsetting and reduction scheme, and standards on sustainable aviation fuels. The FAC accordingly dismisses these objections as well.

The challenged decision constitutes a proportionate response to the issue of night-time noise and must be upheld. This judgment may be appealed to the Federal Supreme Court.

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About the Federal Administrative Court

Located in St. Gallen, the Federal Administrative Court (FAC) was established in 2007. With its staff of 395 employees (334 FTE) and its 79 judges (70 FTE) it is the largest federal court in Switzerland. The Federal Administrative Court has jurisdiction to hear appeals against decisions rendered by Swiss federal administrative authorities. In specific matters, the FAC may grant review on decisions rendered by cantonal authorities. Recourse actions are also reviewed by the Court. The FAC is composed of six divisions. It renders an average of 7,000 judgments every year.