



## Protocol Regulations for the Swiss Confederation

Approved by the Federal Council on 29 September 2017

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*The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs  
decrees:*

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*English is not an official language of the Swiss Confederation. This translation is provided for information purposes only and has no legal force.*

## **Protocol Regulations**

### **Part 1:**

#### **Competent authority for protocol and ceremonial matters**

1. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is the competent authority to determine matters of protocol and ceremonial concerning the Federal Council and the President of the Swiss Confederation.
2. The Protocol service of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (hereafter Protocol) ensures coordination with the other Federal Departments and with the federal, cantonal and communal authorities.

### **Part 2: Protocol regulations**

#### **I Agrément of a new Head of Mission**

1. Agrément of a new Head of Mission shall be sought by the sending State either through its diplomatic mission in Switzerland or through the Swiss diplomatic mission in that State. A curriculum vitae must be enclosed with the request.
2. The procedure shall remain secret up to the moment when agrément is communicated to the authorities of the sending State through the same diplomatic channel used to submit the request.
3. The Swiss authorities do not ordinarily issue a press release when agrément is given.

#### **II Arrival of a new Head of Mission**

The arrival of a new Head of Mission shall be notified without delay to Protocol. If the new Head of Mission arrives in Switzerland by plane, the Swiss federal government shall cover the cost of VIP service at the airport. The visit paid by the new Head of Mission to the Head of Protocol should take place in the first few days following arrival.

#### **III Presentation of credentials/lettres de cabinet**

1. When visiting the Head of Protocol, new Heads of Mission present true copies of their credentials and predecessor's letter of recall. From that moment, the new Head of Mission can exercise fully their functions, with the exception of paying visits to members of the Federal Council, to the President of the National Council, to the President of the Council of States and to cantonal governments.

2. The Head of Protocol shall describe in broad terms how the Federal Administration and, in particular, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is organised. The Head of Protocol shall explain ceremonial for the presentation of credentials.
3. On the appointed day, as confirmed by note verbale, Protocol, accompanied by an usher in full dress, accompanies the new Head of Mission in an official car with police escort to the Federal Palace. A maximum of three members of diplomatic staff may accompany the Head of Mission. On arrival, the Head of Protocol welcomes the Head of Mission and conducts her or him to the Federal Council's Salon d'honneur where the Head of Mission is introduced and presents her or his credentials to the President of the Confederation. If prevented from attending, the President is normally represented by the Vice President of the Federal Council.
4. No speeches shall be made nor gifts exchanged at the time of presenting credentials so as to leave more time for informal discussion. Photos shall be taken during the ceremony by an official photographer. The audience shall not exceed 15 minutes. When the ceremony is over, the Head of Mission shall be escorted back to the residence.
5. Dress code for this ceremony: dark suit, national costume or uniform.
6. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs shall issue a press release following the presentation of credentials.
7. Chargés d'Affaires en pied are accompanied by Protocol in an official car to the Federal Palace. At the Federal Palace, the Chargé d'Affaires en pied is conducted to the Office of the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for the presentation of lettres de cabinet.

#### **IV Absences and recall of the Head of Mission**

1. Heads of Mission temporarily leaving Switzerland shall inform Protocol by note verbale and indicate the name of the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim. If this is not possible prior to the Head of Mission's departure, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the sending State must inform the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (Protocol) of the name of the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim. On their return, the Head of Mission shall notify Protocol of the resumption of their duties.
2. The Chargé d'Affaires ad interim shall ensure that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State in question notifies the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (Protocol) in advance of any temporary or permanent absence, or permanent departure from Switzerland, providing the name of the person designated to take over the duties of Chargé d'Affaires ad interim.
3. When a Head of Mission who has worked in Bern for three years or more is to leave permanently, a farewell luncheon shall be given on behalf of the Federal Council by the Secretary of State or a representative designated by the Secretary of State.
4. Farewell visits to members of the Federal Council are not required. However, Heads of Mission who wish to pay a farewell visit to the Head of the Federal De-

partment of Foreign Affairs or to other members of the Federal Council shall contact Protocol to organise such visits.

## **V Audiences**

Following the presentation of credentials, Protocol shall be at the disposal of Heads of Mission to arrange the date and time of an audience with the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs or other members of the Federal Council. Such audiences, which are to be requested by note verbale, are however not obligatory and should preferably take place in conjunction with a less formal diplomatic démarche.

## **VI Visits to the cantonal authorities**

1. Under the Swiss Federal Constitution, the federal government is responsible for foreign affairs.
2. Heads of Mission are not expected to pay the cantonal authorities official visits. Each canton is sovereign in this respect, however, and determines its own criteria for receiving guests.
3. Such visits should primarily be conducted in the cantons where the State in question has particular interests and with which it cultivates close relations. This applies in particular to cantons where the States maintain consular representations, where they have direct commercial interests, or where a significant number of their citizens reside.
4. The Head of Mission shall take care to limit the number of such visits per year, making each request by note verbale to Protocol, which ensures coordination with the cantons. Only visits to the Bern cantonal authorities shall be arranged directly by the interested mission.

## **VII Presentation of New Year's greetings**

1. The President of the Confederation receives, in the presence of the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, greetings for the New Year from the Diplomatic Corps.
2. The President of the Confederation returns the Dean's New Year greetings in a speech. The Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Presidents of the National Council and Council of States are present during the speeches.
3. As a general rule the ceremony takes place during the second week in January in the Swiss Parliament building. Each Head of Mission may be accompanied by a member of the diplomatic staff of their mission. The Heads of Mission may not be accompanied by their partner. Protocol shall establish the reception's programme for the Head of Mission.
4. Dress code for this ceremony: dark suit, national costume or uniform.

## **VIII Official events in honour of the diplomatic corps**

1. The Federal Council hosts an annual event for the diplomatic corps.
2. Heads of Mission and Chargés d'Affaires ad interim who have been officially notified to Protocol are invited together with their partners. Dress code shall be determined by Protocol.

## **IX Invitations from the Diplomatic Corps**

1. The members of the Federal Council and the Federal Chancellor do not in principle attend receptions given by Heads of Mission on their countries' national days.
2. The members of the Federal Council may, on the other hand, accept invitations to lunch or dinner, or any other reception given in their honour. Invitations shall be communicated via Protocol.

## **X Official visits**

### **1. State visit**

In Switzerland a state visit by a Head of State takes place at the invitation of the Federal Council. As a rule, one to two State visits take place annually.

The programme of the visit shall be prepared by Protocol and the diplomatic mission in Switzerland of the State concerned. The visiting Head of State is generally offered accommodation at a major hotel in Bern.

State visits usually last two days. On the first day, the Federal Council in corpore (including the Federal Chancellor) officially welcomes the visiting Head of State to Bern. In the evening, the Federal Council gives a banquet in honour of its guest. The second day of the visit is generally devoted to an excursion.

The visiting Head of State is in principle received in an official ceremony on Bern's *Bundesplatz* with military honours and the playing of the national anthems.

### **2. Official visit by a Head of State**

In Switzerland, an official visit by a Head of State takes place at the invitation of the Federal Council.

The programme of the visit shall be prepared by Protocol and the diplomatic mission in Switzerland of the State concerned. The visit is, in principle, devoted to official meetings with a Federal Council delegation and a luncheon or dinner in honour of the guest. An excursion may follow.

As a rule, the visiting Head of State stays at a major hotel in Bern.

The visiting Head of State is in principle received in an official ceremony with military honours and the playing of the national anthems at Lohn Manor in Kehrsatz.

### **3. Official visit by a Head of Government**

In Switzerland, an official visit by a Head of Government takes place at the invitation of the Federal Council.

The programme of the visit shall be prepared by Protocol and the diplomatic mission in Switzerland of the State concerned. The visit is, in principle, devoted to official meetings with a Federal Council delegation and a luncheon or dinner in honour of the guest. An excursion may follow.

As a rule, the visiting Head of Government stays at a major hotel in Bern.

The visiting Head of Government is in principle received in an official ceremony with military honours and the playing of the national anthems at Lohn Manor in Kehrsatz.

### **4. Official visit by a member of government**

An official visit by a member of a government takes place at the invitation of a Federal Councillor.

The programme of the visit shall be prepared by the relevant Federal Department and the diplomatic mission in Switzerland of the State concerned, if necessary with assistance from Protocol. The visit is devoted to official meetings and a luncheon or a dinner. An excursion may follow.

As a rule, the visiting member of government stays at a major hotel in Bern.

### **5. Official working visit**

An official working visit by a Head of State, Head of Government or member of government is less formal than an official visit. It is therefore subject to simplified protocol.

### **6. Courtesy visit**

While staying in Switzerland, a Head of State, Head of Government or member of government may also pay a courtesy visit to the President of the Confederation or to another member of the Federal Council. The relevant Federal Department shall organise such visits in collaboration with the diplomatic mission concerned.

Protocol shall organise courtesy visits paid to the President of the Confederation. Courtesy visits, which are normally brief, are subject to simplified protocol.

### **7. Partner programme**

As a rule, Protocol only organises a special programme for the partner of a Head of State on the occasion of a State visit.

## **XI Transit visit or private stay in Switzerland by a foreign dignitary**

There is no specific protocol for transit visits or private stays in Switzerland by a foreign Head of State or Sovereign, Head of Government or member of government. The diplomatic mission of the State concerned should officially notify Protocol of the stay in advance. This is to allow the competent Swiss authorities to make available the appropriate facilities on arrival and departure, taking account of the visitor's rank. The Swiss authorities will also take the security measures that they consider necessary provided that they are duly informed by note verbale by the diplomatic mission in Switzerland of the State concerned.

## **XII Deaths**

1. In the event of the death of a Head of State or Head of Government, the Head of Protocol shall go to the residence of the Head of Mission or to the chancery of the diplomatic mission in Switzerland of the State in mourning to present condolences on behalf of the Federal Council, and to sign the condolence book.

If the diplomatic mission of the State in mourning organises a funeral service, the Federal Council shall be appropriately represented at the service.

2. In the event of the death of a Head of Mission accredited to the Federal Council, the Head of Protocol shall visit members of the deceased's family in Bern.

During the funeral, a wreath shall be laid on behalf of the Federal Council. If the deceased was a Chargé d'Affaires en pied or Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, the wreath shall be laid on behalf of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

The Federal Council or the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs shall be represented in an appropriate manner at the funeral ceremony or service.

3. In the event of the death of a member of the diplomatic staff of a diplomatic mission in Switzerland, the Head of Protocol shall present condolences in a letter to the Head of Mission.

## **XIII Swiss flag**

The Swiss flag is flown above the Swiss Parliament building and federal government buildings in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Council instructions of 20 April 2016 on the flying of flags above federal buildings.

The Federal Palace and the city of Bern are decked with flags on the occasion of state visits.

## **XIV Decorations**

1. A number of laws<sup>1</sup> prohibit certain Swiss citizens from accepting titles or decorations conferred on them by a foreign government.
2. Diplomatic missions whose governments intend to confer a distinction or title on a Swiss citizen are requested to consult Protocol in advance by note verbale in each instance.

## **XV Wearing of foreign armed forces' uniforms in Switzerland**

1. Wearing the uniform of foreign armed forces is forbidden in Switzerland. In some very specific cases, special authorisation may be granted by the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport.
2. All requests shall be submitted to Military Protocol using the appropriate form.
3. As an exception to points 1 and 2 above, Defence Attachés accredited in Switzerland and those deputising for them are authorised to wear uniform while carrying out their duties, without having to submit a request for authorisation.

## **XVI Order of speeches**

As a general rule, the speaker with the highest rank speaks last.

## **XVII Precedence**

### **1. General remarks**

The order of precedence to be observed at official events is indicated in the following lists and tables. Protocol shall provide diplomatic missions in Switzerland with further information on request.

Where a number of persons have the same function, their respective precedence is, as a general rule, determined by their title, date of assumption of duty, seniority and age. Partners share the same rank.

<sup>1</sup> – ParlG, SR 171.10, Art. 12  
– FPA, SR 172.220.1, Art. 21 para. 4  
– GAOA, SR 172.010, Art. 60 para. 3  
– FSCA, SR 173.110, Art. 6 para. 3  
– ArmA, SR 510.10, Art. 40a

## **2. Precedence among members of the Diplomatic Corps**

1. Apostolic Nuncio
2. Ambassador
3. Chargé d'Affaires en pied
4. Chargé d'Affaires ad interim
5. Minister
6. Counsellor
7. Embassy Secretary
8. Attaché

Within each category, the order of precedence shall be determined by the date on which credentials were presented or on which the diplomat assumed their duties. This shall be indicated in the list of Diplomatic Corps members. The respective ranking of Chargés d'Affaires ad interim shall be determined by the date on which their assumption of duties was notified to Protocol.

## **3. Precedence among members of the Consular Corps**

1. Consuls General
2. Consuls
3. Vice Consuls
4. Consular agents

The Heads of Post shall take their rank in each category according to the date the exequatur was granted. Other consular agents shall take their rank according to the date they took up their duties, as indicated in the list of members of the Consular Corps.

## **4. Precedence among foreign Defence Attachés and their deputies**

The precedence of Defence Attachés and their deputies is determined on an individual basis, in accordance with the following indications of equivalence:

General = Ambassador

Colonel = Counsellor

Lieutenant Colonel and Major = First secretary

Defence Attachés shall take precedence over Deputy Defence Attachés.

Within the Corps of Defence Attachés, the order of precedence shall be determined by the date on which duties were taken up. The Defence Attaché with residence in Switzerland who assumed office earliest is the Dean of the Corps of Defence Attachés, regardless of military rank. The Defence Attaché with residence in Switzerland who follows the Dean in the list of precedence is Vice Dean. In the absence of the Dean, the Vice Dean shall perform the Dean's duties. The order of precedence for

Deputy Defence Attachés shall follow the same procedure as that applying to Defence Attachés, regardless of military rank.

Military Protocol shall provide authorities with the order of precedence on request.

Military Protocol shall act as the point of liaison between the Defence Attachés accredited in Switzerland and the civilian and military authorities, the armed forces' commands and Swiss military dignitaries.

## **5. Public ceremonies**

1. Federal Council in corpore
  - a) President of the Swiss Confederation
  - b) Vice President of the Federal Council
  - c) Federal Councillors in order of precedence determined by seniority of election by the Federal Assembly
2. President of the National Council
3. President of the Council of States
4. Federal Chancellor
5. President of the Federal Supreme Court
6. Former Federal Councillors
7. Presidents of the cantonal governments in the order listed in the Federal Constitution (Art. 1)
8. Apostolic Nuncio, followed by the ambassadors accredited in Bern
9. Members of the National Council
10. Members of the Council of States
11. State Secretaries
12. President of the Federal Criminal Court
13. President of the Federal Administrative Court
14. President of the Federal Patent Court
15. Attorney General of Switzerland
16. Swiss dignitaries and government officials, according to order of precedence in appendix
17. Chargés d'Affaires en pied
18. Chargés d'Affaires ad interim
19. Other guests

If the Vice President of the National Council or the Vice President of the Council of States is standing in for the President of the Council, the Vice President shall assume the position of the President of the Council in the order of precedence. The same shall apply to Vice Presidents of the Federal Supreme Court.

Further information can be obtained from Protocol, which shall provide assistance in determining the order of precedence among Swiss authorities not included in the appended list.

### **Part 3: International organisations**

1. The protocol regulations for official visits by Heads of Government shall also apply to official visits to Switzerland by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Secretary-General is not received with military honours.
2. As a general rule, it is the prerogative of the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs or of another Federal Department to settle questions relating to visits by director generals of international organisations. The programme for the visit shall be drawn up by the relevant Federal Department in cooperation with the United Nations and International Organisations Division and Protocol.

### **Part 4: Final provisions**

The Protocol Regulations of 9 December 2002 and the amendments approved by the Federal Council which came into force on 14 November 2012 shall be repealed.

These Regulations shall come into force on the date on which they are approved by the Federal Council.

21 September 2017

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs:  
Didier Burkhalter

## Order of precedence in Switzerland

### Protocol Regulations for the Swiss Confederation

	Governments, parliaments and courts, the Swiss federal government, cantons and communes	Diplomats	Armed forces	Federal Administration	Religious authorities and members of higher education institutions
1	Federal Council in corpore				
1a	President of the Confederation				
1b	Vice President of the Federal Council				
1c	Federal Councillors <sup>2</sup>		General of the Swiss Armed Forces		
2	President of the National Council				
3	President of the Council of States				
4	Federal Chancellor				
5	President of the Federal Supreme Court				
6	Former Federal Councillors <sup>2</sup>				
7	Presidents of the cantonal governments <sup>2</sup>				Cardinals; Council President of the Federation of Protestant Churches; the Chief Rabbi
8	Vice President of the National Council <sup>3</sup>				

	Governments, parliaments and courts, the Swiss federal government, cantons and communes	Diplomats	Armed forces	Federal Administration	Religious authorities and members of higher education institutions
9	Vice President of the Council of States <sup>3</sup>				
10	Vice President of the Federal Supreme Court <sup>3</sup>				
11	Members of the National Council <sup>1</sup>				
12	Members of the Council of States <sup>1</sup>				
13			Chief of the Swiss Armed Forces	State Secretaries	Bishops
14	Judges of the Federal Supreme Court <sup>1</sup>				
15	President of the Federal Criminal Court				
16	President of the Federal Administrative Court				
17	President of the Federal Patent Court				
18	Attorney General of Switzerland				
19		Heads of Swiss diplomatic missions <sup>4, 5</sup>	Lieutenant Generals <sup>4</sup>	Chairman of the Board of the Swiss National Bank (SNB); Chairman of the Board of Swiss Federal Railways; Chairman of the Board of Swiss Post	Chairman of the Board of the Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology

	Governments, parliaments and courts, the Swiss federal government, cantons and communes	Diplomats	Armed forces	Federal Administration	Religious authorities and members of higher education institutions
20	Vice Presidents of the cantonal governments <sup>2</sup>				
21	Vice President of the Federal Criminal Court				
22	Vice President of the Federal Administrative Court				
23	Vice President of the Federal Patent Court				
24	Members of the cantonal governments <sup>2</sup>				
25				Board members of the Swiss National Bank	
26		Ambassadors <sup>4, 5</sup>	Major-Generals <sup>4</sup>	Delegates of the Federal Council; Directors of Federal Offices; Secretary General of the Federal Assembly; Secretaries General of the Federal Departments; Secretary General of the Federal Supreme Court; Federal Vice Chancellors of the Confederation; and trade agreement delegates <sup>5</sup>	

	Governments, parliaments and courts, the Swiss federal government, cantons and communes	Diplomats	Armed forces	Federal Administration	Religious authorities and members of higher education institutions
27	Mayor of Bern				Rectors of universities and equivalent establishments
28	Presidents of cantonal legislatures <sup>2</sup>		Brigadier-Generals <sup>4</sup>	Deputy Directors <sup>5</sup>	
29					University deans and directors
30	Presidents of the cantonal courts <sup>2</sup>				Deans of religious authorities
31	Judges of the Federal Criminal Court <sup>1</sup>				Professors of universities and equivalent establishments
32	Judges of the Federal Administrative Court <sup>1</sup>				
33	Judges of the Federal Patent Court <sup>1</sup>				
34	Presidents of municipal executive authorities <sup>2</sup>				
35	Chancellors of cantons <sup>2</sup>	Ministers <sup>4, 5</sup>	Colonels <sup>4</sup>	Assistant Directors <sup>5</sup>	
36	Members of cantonal legislatures <sup>2</sup>				

	Governments, parliaments and courts, the Swiss federal government, cantons and communes	Diplomats	Armed forces	Federal Administration	Religious authorities and members of higher education institutions
37	Cantonal judges; cantonal public prosecutors; Presidents of municipal legislatures <sup>2</sup>		Lieutenant Colonels <sup>4</sup>		
38			Majors <sup>4</sup>	Heads of section <sup>4, 5</sup>	Priests and protestant ministers

- 1 Precedence shall be determined by the date when each member was elected. The General of the Swiss Armed Forces shall come after the Federal Councillors in the order of precedence.
- 2 The cantonal authorities shall come in the order set out in the Constitution (Art. 1 Cst.).
- 3 If the Vice President stands in for the President, the Vice President shall take the President's position in the order of precedence.
- 4 On occasions of a diplomatic nature, representatives of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs shall have precedence over the other departments; whereas on occasions of a military nature, representatives of the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport, and members of the armed forces shall have precedence.
- 5 This heading is not exhaustive, and does not reflect the order of precedence. Protocol is available to provide any further information and where necessary shall help to determine the order of precedence among members of the Federal Administration.

