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Federal Department of Finance FDF

Federal Office for Customs and Border Security (FOCBS)
Central Switzerland Customs

CUSTOMS PRIVILEGES FOR DIPLOMATS

Factsheet on customs formalities for embassies, consulates
and diplomatic staff

Central Switzerland Customs

diplomaten@bazg.admin.ch

+41 (0)58 462 68 69

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1. General

The granting of customs privileges is conditional on various requirements and regulations that must be observed and met. In order to make it easier to understand the regulations, the most important points are summarised in this factsheet.

This factsheet is purely informative in nature. The relevant legal basis is always authoritative.

- **Legal basis**

The customs privileges and immunities of diplomatic staff members and individuals treated as such are governed by the Ordinance of 23 August 1989 on the Customs Privileges of Diplomatic Missions in Bern and Consular Posts in Switzerland (hereinafter "Ordinance"; [SR 631.144.0](#)). The Ordinance on the Customs Privileges of the International Organisations applies to international organisations, of states in their relations with such organisations and of the special missions of foreign states; [SR 631.145.0](#).

The beneficiary is obliged to respect the Ordinance in accordance with Article 41 of the Vienna Convention (Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 18 April 1961; [SR 0.191.01](#)).

- **FOCBS' remit**

Central Switzerland Customs is the competent authority for customs matters relating to consulates in Switzerland, the embassies and international organisations based in Bern, and their staff.¹

Central Switzerland Customs
Bogenschützenstrasse 9b
3001 Bern

Counter opening hours: 9.00am – 10.30am (Monday – Friday)
Email: diplomaten@bazg.admin.ch
Telephone: +41 (0)58 462 68 69

1.1 Explanations

1.1.1 Official use

Official use means the use of goods for an embassy or consulate, subject to the following conditions:

- The goods imported tax and duty free are used for carrying out the business of the embassy on the premises of the embassy or consulate (e.g. office supplies, IT equipment, building materials and equipment).
- The goods (food and beverages) are intended for use at an official event of the embassy/consulate. A guest list and a copy of the invitation letter are enclosed with the application.

In particular, **tobacco products** and **goods** for gift purposes or for free distribution are **excluded** from official use.

Goods which are imported **only under the patronage** of the embassy in Switzerland are also excluded from official use, in particular:

- wine and other foodstuffs for public tastings
- (school) books
- printed advertising material

¹ [List of competent customs offices \(Directorate General of Customs: 15.12.2017\)](#); available at: www.focbs.admin.ch → Information companies → Exemptions, reliefs and preferential tariffs → Importation into Switzerland → Duty-free movement of goods → Customs privileges for diplomats

If there is any doubt, the matter must be submitted in advance to Central Switzerland Customs, which is entitled to request further documentation.

1.1.2 Goods for personal use

Goods for personal use are those used by the entitled diplomatic staff and their family members (provided they are in possession of a legitimation card and live in the same household as the main individual).

1.1.3 Entitled diplomats

Only diplomats who have the appropriate diplomatic status and are in possession of a valid legitimation card are entitled to import goods tax and duty free.

- Identity card/legitimation card B = heads of diplomatic missions
- Identity card/legitimation card C = diplomatic personnel
- Identity card/legitimation card KC/K = heads of consular posts/permanent consular officials

1.1.4 Restrictions on spirits and cigarettes

Tax- and duty-free imports of cigarettes and spirits may not exceed the following quantities per quarter and household:

- 7,000 cigarettes (35 cartons containing 200 cigarettes each)
- 50 litres of spirits with more than 25% alcohol by volume

The goods are admitted tax and duty free solely for personal use and may not be passed on or sold.

1.1.5 Foodstuffs

Foodstuffs may be imported tax and duty free for consumption by entitled individuals. (Foodstuffs for consumption at an official reception, see section 1.1.1)

Note: The importation of animal products (meat, honey, etc.) from third countries (outside the European Union) is subject to strict conditions (non-customs legislative instruments – section 1.1.10).

- The foodstuffs must be itemised on form 14.60, listing the type, quantity and weight, and they must also be clearly visible in the accompanying documents. In the case of unusual quantities, Central Switzerland Customs may request further documentation from the embassy.
- If an application is made using form 14.60 for authorisation to import foodstuffs in retail trade or on the market, it may be the case that the exact details of the quantities are not known in advance and no accompanying documents are available. In such cases, a detailed list of the expected maximum quantities must be submitted together with the application. These maximum quantities may not be exceeded upon importation (example: max. 10kg meat, max. 20kg fresh vegetables, purchased in retail trade).

1.1.6 Restriction on construction materials

Only goods destined for embassies and consulates may be imported tax and duty free using form 14.60. Construction materials intended for use by diplomatic staff (legitimation card B, C) must be declared in accordance with the customs tariff (www.tares.ch).

Construction materials are defined as not only the materials necessary for the construction of a building (masonry, roofing articles, paint, patio tiles, etc.), but also all equipment that is normally permanently installed for use (e.g. kitchens, fixed household appliances, bathtubs, washbasins and parquet flooring).

1.1.7 Items for initial furnishing

Entitled diplomats who transfer their residence to Switzerland are entitled to import their household effects for initial furnishing (new or used) tax and duty free.

This relief can only be granted once and must be effected within one year of taking up the post. Any subsequent consignments of furniture must be declared at the time of first entry and must follow within one year of the relevant importation.

1.1.8 Overview table of customs privileges for diplomatic staff

	Household effects: initial furnishing	Other items (excluding construction materials)	Construction materials	Passenger cars (assuming reciprocal rights)	Fuel (assuming reciprocal rights)	Heating oil
Official use mission/consulate		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Heads of mission and members of their family belonging to their household with a B permit	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Diplomatic staff members and the members of their family belonging to their household with a C permit	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Foreign permanent consular officials and members of their family belonging to their household with a K permit	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Administrative and technical staff with a D permit	✓	✗	✗	✗ ²	✗	✗
Other staff members of international organisations (E, F permit)	✗	✗	✗	✗ ³	✗	✗
Swiss nationals	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

² Entitlement to purchase/import a tax- and duty-free vehicle within one year of taking up post ([SR 631.144.0](#))

³ Entitlement to purchase/import a tax- and duty-free vehicle within five years of taking up post ([SR 631.145.0](#))

1.1.9 Retroactive claims

If it is subsequently established that the conditions for tax- and duty-free importation were not fulfilled, the taxes and duties concerned will be claimed retroactively.

1.1.10 Non-customs legislative instruments

While goods imported tax and duty free for entitled diplomats are exempt from fiscal and economic restrictions, they remain subject to other national regulations that are not part of customs legislation. These relate in particular to public health measures, plant and animal protection legislation, species protection, and weapons and ammunition legislation.

In the following, we present some non-customs legislative instruments which are frequently encountered when importing goods. The list is not exhaustive. More detailed information can be obtained from the relevant federal offices.⁴

CITES goods⁵

CITES goods are prohibited or require a permit for importation (example: caviar, ivory, tortoiseshell, reptile leather, clothing made of shahtoosh wool, etc.). The CITES inspection office in Bern (tel. +41 (0)58 462 25 41, email cites@blv.admin.ch) must be contacted by the carrier of the goods subject to customs declaration prior to importation.

Meat and animal products

Animal products imported from outside the European Union (EU) are subject to border veterinary checks (e.g. caviar, honey and meat products). Checks are normally carried out upon first entry into the Common Veterinary Area between the European Union and Switzerland, and can therefore be carried out at EU border control posts as well. The Common Veterinary Entry Document (CVED), which releases a consignment into free circulation and must always accompany it to the destination specified in the CVED, serves as proof that the checks have been carried out successfully. Border veterinary checks are subject to a fee. Further information can be obtained from the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO), Schwarzenburgstrasse 155, 3003 Bern, tel. +41 (0)58 463 30 33.

Plants

Goods that pose a phytosanitary risk (live plants, certain plant parts and seeds, as well conifer wood from certain EU countries) are prohibited for importation into Switzerland, or require a plant passport. Plants from third countries (non-EU countries) require a phytosanitary certificate, which is issued by the phytosanitary service of the exporting country. Further information can be obtained from the Federal Plant Protection Service (FPPS), Mattenhofstrasse 5, 3003 Bern, tel. +41 (0)58 462 25 50.

Weapons

Consignments of weapons and weapon parts require a permit. The Federal Office of Police, Central Weapons Office (tel. +41 (0)58 464 54 00) must be notified prior to any importation.

2 Importing goods using form 14.60

Form 14.60 "Déclaration pour importation en franchise de marchandises pour bénéficiaires de privilèges diplomatiques" can be obtained from the federal publications shop at the following address: www.bundespublikationen.admin.ch (search term: 14.60 or art. 606.000.14.60F). The form is available only in French.

The form may be used only for import clearance in the following cases:

- goods purchased by the embassy/consulate abroad for official use

⁴ See also [Remarks](#) in Tares. www.tares.ch and the relevant contact details on the last page of this factsheet

⁵ Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

- items purchased abroad by diplomatic staff which are intended for personal use (including for family members living in the same household)
- importation of new or second-hand goods for the initial furnishing of a dwelling for diplomatic staff
- purchases of heating oil for embassy/consulate buildings and their diplomatic personnel

Goods which are imported tax and duty free are intended for official or personal use and may not be passed on or sold without prior authorisation from Central Switzerland Customs.

2.1 Prior authorisation for the importation of initial furnishing items

No prior authorisation is required for the clearance of goods which are presented to Central Switzerland Customs (with a transit document). If the goods are imported via another customs office, prior authorisation for tax- and duty-free importation (form 14.60) must be obtained from Central Switzerland Customs for customs clearance.

The person concerned can optionally apply for tax- and duty-free importation via the embassy. Persons claiming tax- and duty-free importation for initial furnishing items must submit the following documents to Central Switzerland Customs prior to importation:

- **Application using form 14.60**, signed (in the original) by the entitled individual, signed by the mission head or their authorised representative, bearing the official stamp of the embassy.
- **Detailed inventory list**, in English, French, German or Italian.
- **Photocopy (front and back) of the legitimisation card** issued by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The legitimisation card must bear the signature of the entitled individual.
- **Stamped addressed reply envelope.**

Once the authorisation for tax- and duty-free importation has been granted, form 14.60 is returned using the prepaid envelope enclosed.

Form 14.60 can also be submitted to Central Switzerland Customs at the counter, during opening hours. If the conditions for tax- and duty-free importation are fulfilled, it will be promptly approved and returned.

2.2 Importation via Central Switzerland Customs

If the goods for assessment are imported via Central Switzerland Customs, a forwarding agent or a customs clearance agency must issue a transit document indicating the office of destination as Central Switzerland Customs. The goods must be delivered, together with a completed form 14.60, to an authorised consignee (ACee)⁶ within the transit period. If the goods are transported directly to the consignee, the transit document and a completed form 14.60 must be sent by email to Central Switzerland Customs before the goods are unloaded: diplomaten@bazg.admin.ch.

The goods cannot be unloaded and made available until authorisation has been received from Central Switzerland Customs by email.

2.3 Importation via another customs region

If goods are to be cleared at another customs region, prior authorisation (using form 14.60) from Central Switzerland Customs is required. Tax- and duty-free clearance is only possible with prior authorisation (with the exception of courier traffic; see section 2.4 below).

⁶ www.bazg.admin.ch -> Documentation → Publications of authorised consignees and consignor

Retroactive authorisation for tax and duty exemption is not possible. In accordance with Article 33 of the Ordinance, import taxes and duties paid upon importation are not refunded. This is the case even if the Ordinance would have allowed for tax and duty exemption.

2.3.1 Approved form 14.60 from Central Switzerland Customs exists

Consignments for diplomatic staff must be addressed to the entitled person (with details of their diplomatic function). The following documents must be presented to Central Switzerland Customs at the time of importation:

- Form 14.60 approved in advance by Central Switzerland Customs
- Accompanying documents (orders, invoices, delivery notes)
- Any transport and transit documents

2.3.2 Approved form 14.60 does not exist

If clearance is made at another customs region and form 14.60 is missing or has not been previously approved in section 13, provisional clearance (with guarantee or deposit) must be carried out. It is always possible for the declarant to declare the goods for normal clearance. In such cases, customs duties and VAT, among other levies, become due.

2.4 Importation of consignments in postal and courier traffic

If consignments are addressed personally to privileged recipients and enter Switzerland by parcel post or courier, there is no requirement to complete form 14.60 under the following conditions:

- the value of the consignment does not exceed CHF 1,000 and
- the surname, first name, diplomatic status and mission are clearly indicated in the address or on the accompanying documents

Excluded from this are alcohol, cigarettes and goods requiring a certificate or permit (e.g. protected species goods such as caviar; animal products from third countries).

Further information on this can be found in the [factsheet](#) "Consignments to privileged recipients in postal and courier traffic"⁷.

⁷ www.focbs.admin.ch → Information companies → Exemptions, reliefs and preferential tariffs → Importation into Switzerland → Duty-free movement of goods → Customs privileges for diplomats → Further information

2.5 Formal requirements; form 14.60

The form must be completed in English, French, German or Italian. Authorisation can be granted only if **the form is filled in completely and correctly**.

<u>Section</u>	<u>Remark</u>
<u>1</u> <u>Exporter/supplier</u>	<u>Name and full address of the exporter</u>
<u>2</u> <u>Consignee</u>	<u>Name and full address of the consignee</u>
<u>3</u> <u>Legitimation card number</u>	<u>This number can be found on the back of the legitimation card (e.g. B-0123456)</u>
<u>4</u> <u>Customs</u>	<u>If known, indicate here the customs office where the goods will be cleared</u>
<u>5</u> <u>Preliminary document</u>	If the consignment is accompanied by a transport document (e.g. transit document, air waybill), this must be inserted here with the number, the date of issue and the place of departure
<u>6</u> <u>Accompanying documents</u>	All accompanying documents such as invoices, purchase orders, delivery notes, air waybills, etc., are to be listed here with the number, date and name of the issuer
<u>7</u> <u>Labels and number</u>	If the consignments are labelled, the labels are to be indicated here
<u>8</u> <u>Number of parcels</u>	Indicate the total number of packages
<u>9-10</u> <u>Description of goods/quantities</u>	Detailed description of the goods to be imported, indicating the quantity or weight. <i>Foodstuffs, tobacco and alcohol must always be listed separately in detail.</i> In the case of large consignments, a separate, detailed list may be provided.
<u>11</u> <u>Use</u>	Tick the appropriate box as indicated on the form. Box 11 must not contradict box 2.
<u>12</u> <u>Signature</u>	Original signature of the head of mission (ambassador) or the authorised representative + official stamp of the embassy/organisation
<u>13</u> <u>Authorisation</u>	To be completed by Central Switzerland Customs and authorised with a customs stamp if the importation is to be made at a different customs region
<u>14</u> <u>Application</u>	Company stamp or name + address of the declarant with original signature, including place and date

3 Motor vehicles

Diplomatic missions in Bern and consular posts in Switzerland headed by a permanent consular official are entitled to import motor vehicles intended for their official use tax and duty free.

Diplomats (in accordance with section 1.1.3) are entitled to import a passenger car every three years or to purchase one in Switzerland tax and duty free.⁸

Motor vehicles for embassies/consulates and passenger cars for authorised diplomatic staff members can only be cleared tax and duty free via Central Switzerland Customs, by means of an undertaking using form 15.52.⁹ Motorbikes, small motorbikes and motor-assisted bicycles are exempt from this requirement and can be imported tax and duty free using form 14.60.

The exact conditions (duration of an undertaking, number of permitted vehicles, etc.) depend on the reciprocal rights in place. Central Switzerland Customs provides detailed information on the timeframes and permitted quantities.

3.1 Explanations

3.1.1 Undertaking using form 15.52

An undertaking means that the vehicle may be neither sold in Switzerland nor passed onto third parties without customs privileges for a certain period of time (usually three years – depending on the reciprocal rights) without import taxes and duties first being paid. Once the period of the undertaking has expired (normally three years, as previously mentioned) or the import taxes and duties have been paid, the vehicle is then in free circulation according to customs legislation. This means that the vehicle can be made freely available. It can therefore be resold from this point onwards.

3.1.2 Import taxes and duties

If there is no entitlement to tax- and duty-free importation or if the vehicle is sold in Switzerland during the period of an undertaking, import taxes and duties (→ www.tares.ch) are levied.¹⁰ The import taxes and duties for passenger cars are calculated as follows:

- **Customs duties**
The customs duty rates are identical for new and used vehicles. For passenger cars, they range between CHF 12 and CHF 15 per 100kg gross weight (depending on the engine capacity and unit weight of the roadworthy vehicle). Vehicles of EU or EFTA origin are admitted tax and duty free, provided that a formally valid proof of origin is presented (e.g. a EUR.1 movement certificate).
- **Automobile duty**
The importation of passenger cars is subject to automobile duty. The duty rate is 4% of the vehicle value (plus all costs incurred up to the first destination in Switzerland, including customs duties, but excluding VAT) at the time of importation.
- **Value added tax (VAT)**
Value added tax on passenger cars is 7.7% of the vehicle value (plus all costs up to the first destination in Switzerland, including customs duties and automobile tax).

⁸ Passenger cars are defined as vehicles which do not exceed a total weight of 3,500kg and which are designed to transport a maximum of 9 occupants (including the driver). This excludes, in particular, delivery vans, coaches, lorries and plant vehicles.

⁹ If the conditions for household effects are met, the vehicles can also be cleared at another customs office using form 18.44 (see also www.focbs.admin.ch → Information individuals → Personal property, students, holiday homes, getting married and inheritance → >Importation into Switzerland → Moving (household effects))

¹⁰ Reduction of import taxes and duties possible under Article 27 ([SR 631.144.0](http://www.fedex.admin.ch/Content/6311440)) and Article 24 ([SR 631.145.0](http://www.fedex.admin.ch/Content/6311450))

3.1.3 Transfer of vehicles (cession)

A vehicle which is under a current (temporary or permanent) undertaking may be taken over by a person or by an organisation which also benefits from customs privileges without payment of import taxes and duties. In this case, the new vehicle owner must assume the undertaking (form 15.52) of the previous vehicle owner. This means that the undertaking is transferred to the new owner less the period already elapsed.¹¹ For this purpose, the new owner must complete a new form 15.52. When registering the assumption of the undertaking (form 15.52) on the [website](#) of the Federal Office for Customs and Border Security (diplomat database), you must select the heading "Cession" and enter the existing registration number as per the vehicle registration document.

3.1.4 Retroactive claims for taxes and duties

If Central Switzerland Customs establishes that a vehicle has been unlawfully imported or transferred tax and duty free, the applicable import taxes and duties will be claimed retroactively.

3.2 Transit

Vehicles must be brought to Central Switzerland Customs with a transit document (NCTS or form 15.25). NCTS international transit documents are issued by forwarding agents or customs agencies. If the vehicle itself is brought into the Swiss customs territory by the diplomat or their driver, an advance notification document (form 15.25) can be applied for directly at the border for transit to Central Switzerland Customs. In general, the vehicles may be transited directly to the destination (consignee) and only have to be presented to Central Switzerland Customs on request.

3.3 Declaration

Vehicles can be declared during counter opening hours or by post. The following documents must be submitted to Central Switzerland Customs within the transit period:

- **Note verbale or accompanying letter**
Including the application for tax- and duty-free importation, details of use (private or official vehicle, name and function of the individual), chassis no., vehicle make, model and intended number plate of the vehicle.
- **Transit document (form 15.25 or NCTS)**
- **Undertaking form 15.52**
The details of the vehicle and the individual must be entered directly on the [website](#)¹² of the Federal Office for Customs and Border Security (FOCBS). The undertaking form is then generated as a PDF document (undertaking 15.52) and must be printed out. The original of sections A+B must be signed by the applicant **and the head of mission** (ambassador), and the form must bear the official stamp of the embassy.
- **Photocopy of the legitimization card (front and back)** issued by the FDFA.
The card must bear the signature of the cardholder.

¹¹Undertakings can be taken over by all diplomats entitled to customs privileges. It is also possible to transfer an existing undertaking to AT staff (as a permanent undertaking), provided that this is done within one year of taking up office.

¹² <https://www.diplo.bazg.admin.ch>

3.4 Customs clearance

When all documents have been submitted to Central Switzerland Customs, they will issue the assessment report (form 13.20 A) and assign the registration number.

3.5 End of the undertaking

Once beneficiaries have fulfilled the period of the undertaking for the vehicle or if the import taxes and duties have been paid in full, they are released from their customs obligations.

If the vehicle is permanently taken abroad, the undertaking 15.52 must be submitted to border customs upon exportation. This is considered proof of regular exportation and is subsequently forwarded to Central Switzerland Customs. It is also possible to be released from the undertaking after the exportation has already taken place if the appropriate evidence is presented. Central Switzerland Customs will then permanently release the vehicle owner from the undertaking.

If the vehicle is sold in Switzerland within the period of the undertaking, Central Switzerland Customs must be notified in advance so that the undertaking can be duly ended and any import taxes and duties can be levied.

4 Tax- and duty-free fuel

In general, the following are entitled to tax and duty-free fuel for official or service vehicles and for private vehicles (depending on reciprocal rights):

- diplomatic missions in Bern
- heads of mission and members of the diplomatic staff of missions
- consular posts in Switzerland headed by a permanent consular official
- permanent consular officials

The entitled parties must make an undertaking (form 15.54) to this effect vis-à-vis the Federal Office for Customs and Border Security. The fuel may be used **only for the vehicle specified in the undertaking**. The undertaking form 15.54 can be applied for here: <https://www.diplo.bazg.admin.ch>.

4.1 Registration

Fuel cards can be applied for during counter opening hours or by post. The following documents must be submitted to Central Switzerland Customs:

- **Note verbale or accompanying letter** with the application for a fuel card
- **Form 15.54** (In duplicate, signed and bearing the official stamp)
- **Photocopy of the vehicle registration document**
- **Photocopy of the legitimization card (front and back)** issued by the FDFA. The card must bear the signature of the cardholder.

Central Switzerland Customs orders the fuel card and sends it to the embassy. The PIN code for the fuel card is sent in a separate letter. If the applicant wishes to collect the fuel card during counter opening hours, this can be indicated at the time of registration.

4.2 Lost card/PIN code

If the fuel card is lost or damaged, Central Switzerland Customs must be informed immediately. A replacement card and a new PIN code can be ordered by email (diplomaten@bazg.admin.ch). If the card has been lost, a new form 15.54 must be completed.

4.3 End of the undertaking

If the conditions for obtaining tax- and duty-free fuel are no longer met (e.g. change of vehicle or staff member), the fuel card must be returned to Central Switzerland Customs immediately.

4.4 Retroactive claims for taxes and duties

If Central Switzerland Customs discovers irregularities in the refuelling of diplomatic vehicles (use for a vehicle other than that shown on the fuel card, purchase of diesel and petrol with the same fuel card, etc.), the relevant taxes and duties will be claimed retroactively.

5 Addresses

Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office FSVO

Schwarzenburgstrasse 155

3003 Bern

Tel. +41 (0)58 463 30 33

www.blw.admin.ch

Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG

Schwarzenburgstrasse 165

3003 Bern

Tel. +41 (0)58 462 25 11

Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG

Federal Plant Protection Service (FPPS)

Mattenhofstrasse 5

3003 Bern

Tel. +41 (0)58 462 25 50

Fax +41 (0)58 462 26 34

www.blw.admin.ch → Sustainable Production → Plant Protection → Federal Plant Protection Service (FPPS) – Plant Health

Federal Office of Police

Central Office for Weapons (COW)

3003 Bern

Tel. +41 (0)58 464 54 00

www.focbs.admin.ch → Information companies → Bans, restrictions and conditions → Security → Arms and ammunition

Information on bans, restrictions and conditions:

www.focbs.admin.ch → Information companies → Bans, restrictions and conditions

General information on the Federal Office for Customs and Border Security FOCBS:

www.focbs.admin.ch

