



PROTOCOL GUIDE

Republic of Bulgaria
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
State Protocol Directorate

Sofia, 2017

INTRODUCTION

Dear colleagues,

I would like to welcome you to Bulgaria.

I hope that your stay in this country will be pleasant and fruitful and it will contribute to the development of the relations existing between our countries.

I would like to reassure you that the Protocol Service of the Republic of Bulgaria as represented by the State Protocol Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will make every effort, to ensure that necessary conditions are provided to the members of the Diplomatic Corps for their smooth and successful work.

Yours faithfully,

Svetlan Stoev

Director, State Protocol

GUIDE OBJECTIVES

This Guide is intended to provide information to diplomatic missions, consular posts and representations of international organizations, accredited to Bulgaria, on the local Protocol Service, the way it functions, the protocol practices and requirements, as well as the related legislature and the scope of facilities, privileges and immunities granted by the Republic of Bulgaria.

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STATE PROTOCOL (STRUCTURE)

Regulations on protocol activities in the Republic of Bulgaria are set out in [the Diplomatic State Protocol Act](#) and [the Implementation Rules and Regulations of the State Protocol Act](#).

Protocol activities include:

- ✚ organization of protocol activities and governmental bodies which implement state protocol;
- ✚ diplomatic ceremonial;
- ✚ diplomatic protocol services;
- ✚ organizing official visits to and official meetings in the Republic of Bulgaria by Heads of State, Presidents or Speakers of Parliaments, Heads of Government and Ministers of Foreign Affairs and visits abroad by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs;
- ✚ organizing official ceremonies attended by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, the President of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister.

The State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for conducting protocol activities. The Directorate coordinates and assists protocol activities of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, the National Assembly and the Council of Ministers, as well as international protocol activities of other governmental executive branches.

The State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides information on protocol-related issues to foreign diplomatic missions, consular posts and representations of international organizations accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria.

The State Protocol Directorate consists of two units: *State Ceremonial* and *Diplomatic Protocol*.

• **STATE CEREMONIAL**

The State Ceremonial is responsible for:

- official visits to and official meetings in the Republic of Bulgaria by Heads of State, Presidents or Speakers of Parliaments, Heads of Government and Ministers of Foreign Affairs;
- official visits abroad by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs;
- official ceremonies attended by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, the President of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister;
- diplomatic ceremonies – reception of foreign ambassadors upon their first arrival to the country to take up their post and farewell upon their final departure at the end of their tour of duty; presentation of credentials by ambassadors-designate and other heads of diplomatic missions; signing of official documents and official receptions attended by the diplomatic corps.

• **DIPLOMATIC PROTOCOL**

The Diplomatic protocol handles the official diplomatic correspondence of the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The official diplomatic correspondence includes the preparation and dispatch of protocol-related documents, such as:

- congratulatory messages on national days, inaugurations and appointments of foreign high-ranking officials;
- official messages and letters on various occasions and letters of condolences;
- thank-you letters and messages

- diplomatic notes addressed to diplomatic missions, consular posts and representations of international organizations, accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria.

The diplomatic protocol ensures that diplomatic privileges and immunities are duly observed and serves as the official channel for diplomatic communications between the Bulgarian Government and a foreign government.

• **PROTOCOL SERVICES IN OTHER GOVERNMENTAL DEPARTMENTS/AGENCIES**

Protocol Offices within the President's Office, the National Assembly and the Council of Ministers liaise with the State Protocol Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by:

- notifying the State Protocol Directorate of the programmes of the official meetings, visits and ceremonies attended by the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister, or of any events to which the diplomatic corps is invited, as well as communicating any changes thereof in a timely manner;
- seeking the assistance of the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as and when necessary.

The State Protocol Directorate is responsible for the overall coordination of protocol activities of central and local government authorities.

BEFORE ARRIVAL TO THE COUNTRY

• **REQUESTS FOR AGRÉMENT**

In accordance with Article 4 of the [Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 \(VCDR\)](#), the Sending State must obtain the *agrément* of the Receiving State in respect of the person it proposes to appoint as ambassador to the Republic of Bulgaria.

Requests for *agrément* are made to the Ministry by a diplomatic Note either from the diplomatic mission accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria in the Sending State or from the Foreign Ministry of the Sending State.

A curriculum vitae setting out the educational and professional career of the nominee in chronological order should be attached.

The Sending State will be notified through diplomatic channel of the *agreement of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria*

• **CHARGÉS D'AFFAIRES (EN TITRE)**

In the case of a *Chargé d'Affaires en titre* request for appointment to call on the Deputy Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to hand his/her letter of appointment has to be made.

• **CHARGÉS D'AFFAIRES (AD INTERIM)**

The absence of a Head of Mission should be notified to the Ministry by diplomatic Note. The designation of a *Chargé d'Affaires ad interim* should be made as provided for in Article 19 of the [VCDR](#).

The person designated as *chargé d'affaires (ad interim)* may not notify another member of the staff of the mission as *chargé d'affaires (ad interim)*. It is only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the sending State which reassigns the *chargé d'affaires (ad interim)*.

- **ADMISSION OF HEADS OF CONSULAR POSTS**

In accordance with Article 12 of the [Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963 \(VCCR\)](#) the prior consent of the Republic of Bulgaria is required for the appointment of a Head of a Consular Post.

Once the consent of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria has been communicated to the Sending State, the latter will issue a Letter of Commission in favour of the appointee. On receipt of the Letter of Commission, the Ministry will arrange for the issue of an Exequatur, which will authorise the appointee to exercise his/her functions in the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria. According to Article 12 (3) of the [VCCR](#) the Head of a Consular Post shall not enter upon his/her duties until he/she has received an *exequatur*.

Curriculum vitae of a newly appointed Head of a Consular Post should be attached to the Note of the diplomatic mission of the Sending State.

The Republic of Bulgaria gives an authorization and admits the head of a consular post to the exercise of his or her functions with an *exequatur* issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The sending State is notified of the authorization through the diplomatic or other appropriate channel (*vide supra*).

The Republic of Bulgaria may admit heads of consular posts on a provisional basis to exercise their functions pending the delivery of the *exequatur*.

With regard to the appointment of an acting head of a consular post, the exercise of his or her functions and the granting of the relevant privileges and immunities, the Republic of Bulgaria applies Article 15 of the [Vienna Convention on Consular Relations](#).

- **APPOINTMENT OF HONORARY (NON-CAREER) CONSULAR OFFICERS**

Honorary consular officers of to the Republic of Bulgaria should be either Bulgarian nationals or nationals of the State they represent. They are admitted with **the express consent** of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria. The consent for their appointment may be withdrawn at any time.

As per Article 4 of the [VCCR](#), diplomatic missions are required to seek permission, by way of a diplomatic Note to the Ministry, to establish a Consular post headed by an honorary consular officer.

The request for appointment is made to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria by a diplomatic Note through the diplomatic or consular representation of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Sending State or, through the diplomatic or consular representation of the Sending State to the Republic of Bulgaria, or through other appropriate diplomatic channels. The request should be accompanied by the *curriculum vitae* of the appointee/nominee.

The Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria approves the appointment or discharge of honorary consular officers.

The Sending State is notified about the approval of the appointment through the diplomatic channels.

The Sending State provides the appointee with a Letter of Commission or similar instrument.

Upon receipt of the Letter of Commission the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issues a consular *exequatur*.

Foreign Honorary Consular Officers are admitted to exercise their functions within the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria in accordance with the provisions of Articles 10 - 14 of [VCCR](#).

- **MILITARY, NAVAL, AIR AND POLICE ATTACHÉS (LIAISON OFFICERS)**

In accordance with Article 7 of the [VCCR](#), Bulgaria requires the names and *curricula vitae* of all military and deputy military attaches to be submitted for approval. It is assumed that the designate military attaché enters the Receiving State only after having been given the approval.

The request is made by a Note accompanied by detailed *curriculum vitae* of the nominee addresses to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through diplomatic channels. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs requests that it be notified subsequently of the actual date of arrival and recall of the attaché.

The approval process normally takes four to six weeks to complete following which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will send a Note to the diplomatic mission of the Sending State. Incomplete applications from diplomatic missions will delay processing.

Foreign Police attachés are accredited in the same manner.

- **NOTIFICATION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC, ADMINISTRATIVE AND TECHNICAL AND SERVICE STAFF**

In accordance with the provisions of Articles 10 and 24 of the [VCDR](#) diplomatic missions and career consular posts have to notify the Foreign Ministry by Note of the beginning and end of the tour of duty of all members of the mission enjoying privileges and immunities. The Note shall contain: **the staff member's full name, his/her function and diplomatic rank, the date of appointment or arrival, the term of office and, if applicable, the full name of the person who is being replaced.**

With regard to members of diplomatic missions who are taking up newly created positions and thus have no predecessor, it is requested that the diplomatic mission concerned transmit a Note containing a brief outline of their envisaged functions.

Arrival and departure of family members of members of a diplomatic mission or career consular post are also notified to the Foreign Ministry.

- **VISAS**

Prior to their arrival to Bulgaria, the members of the diplomatic, administrative and technical and service staff of foreign missions, for whom visas are required, should obtain a long-term visa, type D, from the diplomatic and consular missions of the Republic of Bulgaria abroad.

Information on visa application procedures is available on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

<http://www.mfa.bg/bg/pages/124/index.html>

or

[http://www.mfa.bg/uploads/files/VISA-D_BG\(2\).pdf](http://www.mfa.bg/uploads/files/VISA-D_BG(2).pdf)

or

<https://www.mfa.bg/en/pages/109/index.html>

Lists of countries whose citizens or nationals are required to hold a visa for the Republic of Bulgaria and further details on the visa regime can be found at:

<http://www.mfa.bg/bg/pages/124/index.html>

or

<https://www.mfa.bg/en/pages/109/index.html>

Visa application forms are accessible at:

<http://www.mfa.bg/bg/pages/156/index.html>

or

<https://www.mfa.bg/en/pages/109/index.html>

- **TRANSIT TRAVEL**

In the event of transit travel through the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, members of diplomatic and consular missions and their family members enjoy the privileges and immunities under Article 40 of the [Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations \(VCDR\)](#) or Article 54 of the [Vienna Convention on Consular Relations \(VCCR\)](#).

- **DIPLOMATIC CORPS**

The State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs compiles and maintains a directory of the diplomatic corps in the Republic of Bulgaria with the following contents:

- + Precedence among the heads of missions;
- + Diplomatic and Consular missions (both resident and non-resident), their addresses and contact details;
- + Members of diplomatic staff of missions – names and diplomatic ranks;
- + Honorary consular posts headed by honorary consular officers, their addresses and contact details
- + Representations of international organizations, their addresses and contact details;
- + Other useful information.

Diplomatic and consular missions and the Representations of International Organizations accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria are requested to provide updated information on their staff before the thirtieth day of January of the current calendar year. Any changes that have occurred meanwhile should be duly notified to the State Protocol Directorate.

AFTER ARRIVAL TO THE COUNTRY

STATE CEREMONIAL

- **ARRIVAL OF A NEWLY APPOINTED HEAD OF A DIPLOMATIC MISSION**

The State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs **should be notified** by diplomatic Note of the arrival of a newly appointed head of a diplomatic mission not later than **a week** prior to the planned date of arrival.

Upon first arrival in the Republic of Bulgaria, a newly appointed Head of a Diplomatic Mission will be met at Sofia international airport by the head of the Diplomatic Protocol Unit or, in his/her absence, by another official from the Directorate of State Protocol.

The Head of Mission and the accompanying members of his or her family are entitled to use the VIP State Lounge.

Where the newly appointed Head of Mission arrives by car, the head of the Diplomatic Protocol Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or another official from the Directorate pays a courtesy call

at his/her residence on the first working day following his or her arrival.

• **PRESENTATION OF CREDENTIALS (LETTERS OF CREDENCE)/CREDENTIAL CEREMONY**

The State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*MFA*) makes arrangements for the ceremony for the presentation of the credentials in coordination with the President's Office/Presidency as follows:

- ✚ Prior to the day of the presentation of credentials, the ambassador-designate calls on the Chief of Protocol;
- ✚ After the protocol meeting with the Chief of Protocol, the ambassador-designate delivers copies of his/her Credentials and the Letter of Recall of his/her predecessor, if applicable, to a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs;
- ✚ On the day of the ceremony, a protocol officer escorts/accompanies the ambassador-designate from his or her residence or the hotel where he or she stays to the Presidency in an official car provided by the Ministry;
- ✚ On arrival at the Presidency, the Chief of Protocol at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomes the ambassador in front of the Presidential Office Building, introduces him or her to the President. The ambassador-designate is being accompanied by MFA Chief of Protocol throughout the ceremony.
- ✚ At the ceremony the ambassador may be accompanied by the ambassador's spouse and two diplomats from the embassy.

During the ceremony the National Guard of Honour greets the ambassador.

Following the ceremony at the President's Office, the newly accredited ambassador lays flowers at the Monument of the Unknown Warrior.

Detailed instructions and a plan of the ceremony are given in the Annexes to this Guide.

• **OFFICIAL CEREMONIES ATTENDED BY MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS**

Official ceremonies are held on the following occasions:

- ✚ on the National Day of the Republic of Bulgaria – 3 March;
- ✚ on other public holidays and celebrations of historical events and historical figures;
- ✚ at the initiative of government authorities.

During official ceremonies, heads of foreign diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria have special area allocated to them which is separate from that of the President of the Republic and Bulgarian official guests.

Special seats/areas are shown by State Protocol staff or Protocol Officers of other Government Department Protocol Services, depending on the character of the public event.

• **VISITS**

The State Protocol Directorate arranges visits at the level of foreign Ministers of Foreign Affairs to the Republic of Bulgaria, coordinates and assists with visits at the level of Heads of Government and, if necessary, with visits at the level of Presidents of Parliament and Heads of State.

The State Protocol Directorate plans and organizes the visits abroad of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, coordinates and assists, if necessary, with the visits abroad of the Prime Minister, the President of Parliament and the President of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Further details on welcome and farewell ceremonies and protocol and commemoration events are available in the enclosed Annexes.

- **PROTOCOL AND OTHER OFFICIAL AND WORKING MEETINGS, TALKS AND EVENTS**

The State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assists in arranging **protocol meetings** of Heads of Diplomatic and Consular Missions, Representations of International Organizations and other foreign missions accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria with the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Requests for meetings are made through the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Protocol meetings of Heads of Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representations of International Organizations with officials of other Government Departments (ministries) and Government Agencies, with local government officials and judicial authority officials are arranged by the diplomatic or consular mission or representations of international organizations on their own **without having to go through** the State Protocol Directorate.

The State Protocol Directorate informs in due time the respective Bulgarian officials of the requests made and subsequently communicates the answer to the originator of the request.

- **INTERNATIONAL FORUMS**

The State Protocol Directorate organizes, coordinates and assists with, as needed, the execution of protocol and ceremonial activities related to international forums in Bulgaria.

- **SIGNING CEREMONIES**

The signing ceremony includes the following steps:

- + announcement in Bulgarian with translation in the appropriate language of the documents to be signed;
- + the act of signing;
- + exchange of documents between the signatories;
- + opening remarks and congratulatory speeches.

At signing ceremonies table-top flags are placed next to the signatory parties. In the case of two signing parties, the guest is seated to the right of the host. In the case of more than two signing parties, seating arrangement follows the protocol precedence (depends on the type of event).

DIPLOMATIC PROTOCOL

- **DIPLOMATIC IDENTITY DOCUMENTS (CARDS)**

Identity **cards** are issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to members of the staff of missions accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria and the members of their families/dependents residing with them, as well as personnel of representations of international organizations accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria holding diplomatic rank based on bilateral agreements on privileges and immunities.

All members of the staff of Missions and the members of their families/dependents residing with them, as well as personnel of Representations of International Organizations accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria have to register at the State Protocol Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before issuance of the cards. The registration is executed by submission of a Card Application form. ([Annex No.1](#)).

• CATEGORIES OF CARDS

Identity cards are issued in the following categories:

- ✚ a card of a member of the diplomatic staff of a Diplomatic Mission or a Representation of an International Organisation accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria (**diplomatic card**);
- ✚ a card of a career consular officer at a Consular Post (**consular card**);
- ✚ a card of a member of the administrative and technical staff of a Diplomatic or Consular mission or a Representation of an International Organization accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria (**administrative and technical staff card**);
- ✚ a card of a member of the service staff of a Diplomatic or Consular mission or a Representation of an International Organization accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria (**service staff card**).

Family members who reside with members of the staff of Diplomatic and Consular missions and representations of International Organisations accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria are equally subject to registration and they receive **cards of the same category as the card issued to a member of the staff** of the mission or representation.

Family members shall be construed, unless otherwise agreed in writing between the sending State and the receiving State or in a multilateral agreement as the persons who are residing with the principal member of the staff and sharing the same household. The following persons shall qualify as family members:

1. **Spouse** or registered common-law partner cohabiting with the principal member of the staff;
2. **Descendants**, including only those of the person under paragraph 1, who are below the age of 21, single and not being gainfully employed;
3. **Descendants** between the ages of 21 and 26, including only those of the person under paragraph 1, who are registered as full-time students at a Bulgarian higher educational establishment. *Note:* Identity cards are issued to this category of persons after the establishment of higher education provides a proof of full-time admission in a course or program of study and maintain full-time status during the academic year concerned;
4. **Descendants** above the age of 21, including only those of the person under paragraph 1, who do not have an independent income and who are not in a position to be gainfully employed for objective reasons, whereby a severe health condition makes it necessary for the member of the staff to take care of them personally. *Note:* Cards are issued to this category of persons upon presentation of a medical certificate;
5. **Dependent** parents of the principal member of the staff or of the person under paragraph 1 whose severe health condition requires the principal member of the staff to take care of them personally, on a reciprocal basis.

Note:

As of 1 January 2017, children under the age of 14 receive identity cards in the same category as to the principal card holder.

Permits of stay already issued to children under the age of 14 by way of a visa sticker in their own passport or in the passport of their parent, if they do not possess an own passport, will remain valid until the expiration of their validity. In cases like that, it is not necessary to apply for an identity card!

For children born in Bulgaria to principal members of the staff of diplomatic or consular missions or representations of International Organisations, general registration and identity card issuance procedures for principal card holders apply and they are not required to hold a long-term residence **visa**, nor should they meet the requirements under Article 24 (2) of the [Foreign Nationals Act](#). For newborn children a **certificate of birth** and a national identity document (**passport**) need to be submitted.

Registration requests and application for identity cards are to be made by Missions or representations of International Organisations to the Protocol Directorate by way of a **Diplomatic Note** containing the following information:

- full name of applicant;
- diplomatic rank, if any; function/title of the member of the staff;
- date of arrival;
- end of term of duty;
- full name of predecessor, if applicable, except for newly created positions with a brief outline of envisaged functions;
- full names and kinship of accompanying family members.

The Note should be accompanied by the following documents:

- an application **form** in two original copies for each applicant. *Note:* The application form for children under the age of 14 needs to be signed by the principal foreign mission member (parent). (see [*Annex No 1 to the Guide*](#));
- two passport-sized **photographs** as per requirements set out in the form;
- a **national identification document** (passport, passport substitute, national identity card).
- For children with no travel document of their own, copies of their parent's passport pages where children are included;
- a copy of the **certificate of birth** (for newborn children in Bulgaria to members of the staff);
- copies of the **certificates of birth of second- or higher degree relatives in the descending line** (grandchildren, etc.) and the biological parent, proving family relationship with the principal staff member, if applicable.

Identity Cards are issued to the staff of diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations having their seat in the Republic of Bulgaria and to their family members for the duration of their assignment, but not more than five years., They **certify the immunities and privileges granted to them under international law, as well as the right to multiple entry and stay within Bulgaria**, unless otherwise agreed through an international treaty or agreement in force for the Republic of Bulgaria or unless provided for on a reciprocal basis.

Applications for Identity Cards are processed within **fifteen working days** as of the date of receipt of application. Identity Cards may be renewed in which case a new application needs to be filed. Missions are encouraged to indicate the card validity requested.

Note:

In case of extension of tour of duty of staff members or members of their families for **up to three months**, no new Identity Card shall be issued with current practice remaining unchanged, i.e. the right to stay in the country shall be certified through stamp and seal in the passport of the person concerned.

This renewal procedure shall be applied only **once** as far as one and the same person is concerned!

In cases like this, Missions should specify in the Diplomatic Note the period of extension of length of tour of duty and the date of final departure. The original passport of the person concerned needs to be attached to the Note for stamp and seal purposes.

Identity Cards have to be returned to the Protocol upon completion of assignment, upon the death of the card holder, or in case the person concerned has been declared *persona non grata*.

Deregistration of Identity Cards is done through a Diplomatic Note with an Identity Card Return Form duly filled in. The return form is included in the Annexes to this Guide (see [Annex No.2](#) to this Guide).

Missions are asked to return Identity Cards prior to the final departure of the members of the diplomatic, administrative and technical and service staff of missions.

The Directorate retains its right not to issue Identity Cards to newly arrived members of the staff of the diplomatic and consular missions and representations of International Organizations based in the Republic of Bulgaria should the Identity Cards of their predecessors who have already finally left the country have not been returned or the diplomatic rank and/or function have not been indicated.

- **OTHER REGISTRATIONS**

The State Protocol Directorate registers and issues identity **cards to honorary (non-career) consular officers**. An application form with a recent photograph has to be submitted. ([Annex No. 3](#)).

Temporary substitutes of members of the staff of Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representations of International Organisations based in Bulgaria and temporary duty officers (up to three months) are registered but not entitled to Identity Card. For registration purposes, the Mission should send a Note along with original passport, two application forms and two photographs.

Guests to members of the staff of Missions and Representations are not registered.

- **REGISTRATION FORMS**

Please use the attached Identity Card forms (*Annexes Nos. [1](#), [2](#) and [3](#)*).

PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES

Facilities, privileges and immunities are granted to all Diplomatic and Consular Missions accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria, and to the Representations of International (intergovernmental) Organisations in accordance with the provisions of the [VCDR](#) and [VCCR](#) and the bilateral agreements where any.

- **VALUE ADDED TAX (VAT) AND EXCISE DUTIES REFUND**

The conditions and procedures for value added tax (VAT) refund are determined in the N-14 Ordinance which regulates the refund of value added tax and excise duties to diplomatic missions, consular posts, representations of intergovernmental organizations and the members of their staff.

The following entities and persons are eligible for value added tax refunds:

1. Permanent foreign **Diplomatic Missions** and Diplomatic Missions of the Republic of Bulgaria, established in accordance with Article 2 of the [Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations \(VCDR\)](#);
2. Foreign **Consular Posts** of and Consular Posts of the Republic of Bulgaria, established in accordance with Article 2 of the [Vienna Convention on Consular Relations \(VCCR\)](#);
3. **Representations/offices of Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs)** stationed in the Republic of Bulgaria by an international treaty or agreement between the Republic of Bulgaria and the respective IGO, or the Permanent Representations of the Republic of Bulgaria to International Organisations;
4. **Members of the diplomatic staff** as defined in Article 1 (d) of the [Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations \(VCDR\)](#);
5. **Consular officers** as defined in Article 1 (d) of the [Vienna Convention on Consular Relations \(VCCR\)](#);
6. **Members of the staff of the offices** of IGOs under item 3 above having diplomatic rank (see item 4 above);
7. **Members of the administrative and technical staff** as defined in Article 1 (f) of the [Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations \(VCDR\)](#); and Article 1 (e) of the [Vienna Convention on Consular Relations \(VCCR\)](#) where refund is applied for goods and services specified below, on the basis of reciprocity.

The conditions for refund of VAT and excise duties **do not apply** to staff members under items 4, 5, 6 and 7 who are:

- Bulgarian citizens;
- permanent residents in the Republic of Bulgaria;
- persons holding dual citizenship, one of which is Bulgarian citizenship;
- honorary consular officers.

Diplomatic Missions, Consular Posts and Offices of Intergovernmental Organisations are entitled to VAT and excise duties refund for goods and services for official use as follows

1. motor vehicles and motor cycles (except for repair works and spare parts thereof); the number of motor vehicles may not exceed the overall number of the members of the diplomatic staff, which is subject to change on the basis of reciprocity at the discretion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria;
2. furniture and household equipment, sanitary protection products;
3. household electrical appliances: refrigeration and heating equipment, kitchen cookers, washing machines and dishwashers, kitchen exhaust hoods, coffee machines, water coolers, vacuum cleaners and air conditioning equipment;
4. building and construction materials and services needed for the construction and maintenance of the buildings and adjacent land (gardens) or the renting of these buildings and land of the Mission or Representation, the residence of the Head of Mission (*HoM*) or Representation, as well as for the purchase of buildings and adjacent land (gardens) for Mission/ Representation or HoM residential purposes;
5. audio- and visual equipment, office equipment, security equipment and security services, consumables and stationery, telephone and telecommunication equipment, repair and maintenance of the equipment;
6. telephone services, electricity and heating, water, local heating fuels, subscriptions for Bulgarian periodicals and internet services;
7. hotel services for temporary accommodation of newly arrived diplomats but not more than 20 nights;
8. liquid fuels: up to 300 litres of gasoline or 250 l litres of diesel fuel per calendar month per official vehicle under item 1 above bearing a “C” or “CC” registration plate.

Members of the diplomatic staff, consular officers, members of the staff of IGOs having diplomatic status and members of the administrative and technical staff of missions and representation offices are entitled to VAT refunds and reimbursement of excise duties charged for goods and services for personal use as follows:

1. motor vehicles/cars and motor cycles, except for repair, tuning equipment and spare parts – **one vehicle** for personal use for **single persons** and **two vehicles/cars** for **married couples**;
2. furniture for one-time furnishing of a house or apartment purchased within 12 months as of taking up assignment;
3. household electrical appliances such as a refrigerator, a kitchen cooker, a deep freezer, a washing machine and a dishwasher, a kitchen exhaust hood, audio and visual equipment, air conditioning equipment and computer configurations for household needs;
4. telephone services, electricity, heating and water;
5. **repair of a house or an apartment** in case of change of occupant(s) or once **in three years**;
6. liquid fuels: only for the first registered motor vehicle for personal use - up to 200 l of gasoline or 150 l of diesel fuel per calendar month per motor vehicle bearing C or CC licence plates;
7. telephone and telecommunication equipment and related repair and maintenance works but not more than two pieces of equipment for single persons and four pieces of equipment for married couples.

Diplomatic Missions, Consular Posts and Representations of Intergovernmental Organizations or members of their staff as specified above are not entitled to tax refund for the goods under items 1, 2 and

3, if **such goods have been imported duty- free and tax-free until 36 (thirty six) months have expired following the date of import.**

Equally, no tax is refunded for the goods specified in items 1 and 3 above, purchased in Bulgaria for the purpose of **replacing goods of the same type before expiry of the 36-month period of the date of refund.**

Value added tax and excise duties paid by Diplomatic Missions, Consular Posts and Representations of intergovernmental Organizations (for **official use**) are refunded based on an application duly certified by **the Head** of Mission, Consular post or OGO Office using the respective claim form ([Annex 4](#)) approved with the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Value added tax and excise duties paid by members of the staff of Diplomatic Missions, Consular Posts and Representations of intergovernmental Organizations (for **personal use**) are refunded based on an application duly certified by (**the Head** of the diplomatic mission, consular post or representation of the international organization using the respective claim form. ([Annex No.5](#)).

The following documents are to be attached to the refund claims:

- tax invoices (originals or certified copies thereof) describing purchase items; where refund of excise duties is claimed, certified copies of tax invoices describing purchase items need to be attached
- a copy of Contract for services rendered along with invoices for construction and/or repair works performed needs to be attached for purchase of building and construction materials and services rendered for the construction and maintenance of buildings and adjacent land (gardens), or rental of such buildings and land of the Mission or consular post or the residence of the Head of Mission or representation, as well as for purchase of buildings and adjacent land (gardens) for Mission or Representation purposes, or for a residence of Head of Mission and/or Representation, or for repair works performed of a house or an apartment in case of change of occupant(s) or once in three years,;
- for motor vehicles purchased, a copy of the vehicle **registration certificate** needs to be attached to the purchase invoice.

Refund claims along with documents under item 3 above, are submitted to the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The following conditions and procedures shall apply:

- for purchases made between 1 November and 31 January – within 1 – 28 February;
- for purchases made between 1 February and 30 April – within 1 - 31May;
- for purchases made between 1 May and 31 July – within 1 - 31 August;
- for purchases made between 1 August and 30 October – within 1 – 30 November.

If the applicant is **not eligible** for a tax or excise duty refund, or claims refund for goods and services other than those described above, the State Protocol Directorate will duly inform the applicant thereof and **return** documents submitted.

No value added tax shall be refunded in any of the following cases:

- invoice tax **is not specified on a separate line**;
- the invoice has been issued by a person or an entity **not registered** under the Value Added Tax Act;
- goods or services worth **below BGN 50** (fifty) per invoice (except for the following services: telephone services, electricity and heating, water, local heating fuels, subscriptions to Bulgarian periodicals and internet services used by diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations and the members of their staff).

No excise duty shall be refunded if excise invoice **is not specified on a separate line.**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) forwards refund **claims** to the competent revenue authority (branch office director of the Sofia Revenue Directorate or a revenue authority authorised by the director) **within 30 (thirty) days following expiry of quarterly periods specified above.**

The competent revenue authority makes sure that the claim is well-founded and refunds **the tax** within 30 (thirty) days as of receipt of application. The approval refund form is sent back to the Mission/post/representation and, in the case of non-approval, to the MFA State Protocol Directorate as well.

Refundable amounts are transferred to **the bank account** specified in the application form.

Where **excise duties** refund is also claimed, the MFA forwards eligible claims to the competent **customs authority** (the head of the Sofia Customs Office or a customs authority authorised by the head of the Sofia Customs Office) with expiry of quarterly periods specified above.

The competent customs authority has to verify, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the claimed excise duties have been duly paid.

Within 30 days as of the receipt date of excise duties refund claim, the competent customs authority makes a well-founded decision to honour or reject completely or partly, the refund claim.

Where the refund claim is honoured completely or partly, the competent customs authority decision shall be construed to mean that refund of excise duties is due to applicant.

Refundable excise duties are remitted by payment order to the bank account specified in the claim **within 14 (fourteen) days of the effective date of decision to refund the excise duties.**

Missions/posts/IGO's Offices are notified of the decision to refund excise duties and where refund is declined, to the MFA State Protocol Directorate as well.

Note:

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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foreign diplomatic missions, consular posts and representations of intergovernmental organizations are entitled to VAT refunds of the value added tax for goods and services paid for on Bulgaria by grants originating from the sending State, provided they are used for free-of-charge supplies of goods and services to recipients under Article 8(1) of N-14 Ordinance on VAT and Excise Duty Refund to diplomatic missions, consular posts, representations of intergovernmental organizations and the members of their staff (Annex No.6). Said Ordinance applies also to VAT and excise duty refund to consular posts headed by honorary consular officers only in cases this is provided for by a bilateral international agreement in effect between the sending State and the Republic of Bulgaria duly ratified and promulgated. |
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The Ordinance and refund forms are available in *Annexes Nos. [4](#), [5](#) and [6](#)*

- ***CERTIFICATE ON THE EXEMPTION OF TRANSACTIONS WITH PLACE OF SUPPLY IN ANOTHER MEMBER STATE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR THE PERSONS UNDER ARTICLE 109(1) AND (2) OF THE IMPLEMENTING RULES OF THE VALUE ADDED TAX ACT OR TRANSACTIONS WITH PLACE OF SUPPLY WITHIN THE TERRITORY OF THE COUNTRY, IN WHICH THE RECIPIENTS ARE INSTITUTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION HOSTED BY THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA***

Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representations of International Organizations may opt for the system of VAT exemption (as eligible institutions/persons) in accordance with Article 151 of Council Directive 2006/112/EC of 28 November 2006 on the common system of value added tax.

For this purpose, it is necessary to fill in and certify the **form as per Appendix 21** to Article 110(1) of the VAT Rules and Regulations Act. This form is in itself a certificate (for the supplier of goods or services) of VAT exemption with the origin of supply being another EU Member State for the persons under Article 109(1) and (2) of the Act referred above, or for supplies within the territory of the country and

recipients are EU institutions with the Republic of Bulgaria being the host country. Said form is sent by a *Note Verbale* to the State Protocol Directorate which forwards it to the National Revenue Agency.

In accordance with Article 151(1) of Council Directive 2006/112/EC of 28 November 2006 on the common system of value added tax, **the exemptions are subject to the limitations imposed by the host Member State**, i.e. the limitations as set out in [N-14 Ordinance on VAT and Excise Duty Refund to diplomatic missions, consular posts, representations of intergovernmental organizations and the members of their staff](#).

The form as per Appendix 21 is available in [Annex No.7](#).

- **PROTOCOL ON THE PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Being a Member State of the European Union, the Republic of Bulgaria grants the privileges, immunities and facilities provided for in [the Protocol on the privileges and immunities of the European Union \(Protocol \(No7\)\)](#). (It applies only to **the European Community, the European Atomic Energy Community, the European Central Bank, the European Investment Bank or the bodies established by the Communities** in accordance with the limitations and conditions laid down in the Protocol and the Agreements on its implementation or the Headquarters Agreements and, more specifically, provided that competition rules and regulations are not broken).

The text of [Protocol No. 7](#) is available in the Annexes.

- **CUSTOMS CLEARANCE**

The terms and conditions for the customs clearance of goods are set out in [Ordinance No 14 of 15 September 1999 on the customs clearance of goods which are imported or exported by diplomatic missions, consular posts, representations of international organizations and the members of their staff](#).

GENERAL PROVISIONS

The provisions of said Ordinance shall apply to the **importation/import and exportation/export** of goods for:

1. official use by the following persons established within the customs territory of the Republic of Bulgaria by virtue of international treaties or agreements as concluded by the Republic of Bulgaria:

(a) Diplomatic missions;

(b) Consular posts;

(c) Representations of International Organizations and Permanent foreign delegations to international organizations;

2. personal and private use by the following members of the staff of the persons under subparagraph 1 and the members of their families who are registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs such as:

(a) diplomatic agents (heads of missions and members of the diplomatic staff);

(b) consuls (heads of consular posts and career consular officers);

(c) staff/personnel of international organizations and permanent foreign delegations whose status is equivalent to that of the heads of diplomatic missions or members of the diplomatic staff in accordance with the respective international treaty or agreement;

(d) members of the administrative and technical staff of diplomatic missions;

(e) consular staff;

(f) staff/personnel of international organizations and permanent foreign delegations whose status is equivalent to that of the administrative and technical staff of diplomatic missions in accordance with the respective international treaty or agreement.

Note:

The provisions of the Ordinance referred above **apply** also to consular posts headed by **honorary consular officers** only in special cases as laid down therein, or in cases of effective international agreement or treaty between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Sending State duly ratified and promulgated.

The provisions of the Ordinance **do not apply** to the persons under **item 2 above** who are:

- Bulgarian citizens;
- permanent alien residents in the Republic of Bulgaria;
- persons holding dual Bulgarian and foreign citizenship;
- honorary (non-career) consular officers.

The provisions of the Ordinance **do not apply** to **foreign representations** established within the customs territory of the Republic of Bulgaria for the purpose of carrying **out administrative, commercial or cultural activities**, such as travel offices, cultural centres, transportation country offices, market research centres, as well as to the members of their staff and the members of their families, where their status is not equivalent to that of the persons under **item 2 above**. In the latter case, the general provisions of the domestic customs legislation shall apply.

Exemptions from customs duties, value added tax, excise duties and fees, with the exception of fees for services actually rendered, **are allowed** only in the case of import of goods by the persons under the subparagraph above as provided for in international treaties or agreements to which the Republic of Bulgaria is a party and which have been duly ratified and promulgated.

The goods which are imported or exported by the persons under **items 1(a), (b) and (c) and items 2(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f)** are not subject to the clearance arrangements applicable in terms of trade policy measures but are subject to **ban and limitation** as per the legislation and rules of the Republic of Bulgaria as a host/receiving State.

The personal baggage of diplomatic agents, the staff/personnel of international organizations and permanent foreign delegations enjoying status equivalent to that of heads of diplomatic missions and members of the diplomatic staff, as well as the members of their families, is exempted from customs inspection, unless there are serious grounds to believe that it contains objects other than those for personal and private use, or furniture, or objects subject to ban or limitation as per the laws, rules and regulations of the Republic of Bulgaria as a host/receiving State.

The customs inspection is carried out only in the presence of the persons above or their authorized representative, as and when necessary.

Same rule shall apply also to the personal baggage of heads of consular posts, career consular officers and members of their families travelling with them.

Free-of-charge goods which have been imported in terms of customs duties, value added tax and excise duty and free or without payment of customs duties may not be subject to **lending, pawning, leasing or ownership transfer** against payment or on a free of charge basis in favour of third parties, except for the persons under **items 1(a), (b) and (c) and items 2(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) for a three-year period as of the date of receipt of the import customs declaration**. Such action shall be undertaken only upon customs authority authorisation based on written confirmation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the persons involved in the transaction have the status of the persons under **items 1(a), (b) and (c) and items 2(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) above**.

Where the goods which have been imported free of charge in terms of customs duties, value added tax, excise duties taxes are lent, pawned, leased or transferred to third parties against payment or free of charge, except for the persons under **items 1(a), (b) and (c)** and **items 2(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f)** before the expiration of the three-year period mentioned above, such goods shall be subject to import **customs duties as well as other state-collected charges**.

Import customs duties are determined based on the **customs duty rates** valid on the date of the customs authorisation for lent, pledge, lease or ownership transfer of the goods, or as at the date on which those transactions were carried out without customs authorisation, depending on the type of goods and on the basis of their customs value as established or recognized by the customs authorities as at that date.

EXEMPTION FROM CUSTOMS DUTIES, TAXES, EXCISE DUTIES AND FEES

Cases of exemption from all state charges

The goods imported in reasonable quantities for official use by the persons under **items 1(a), (b) and (c)** above shall be exempted from customs duties, VAT, excise duties and fees, except for the fees charged for actual provision of services.

Foodstuffs, soft drinks, beer, wines, spirits and tobacco products imported in reasonable quantities by the persons under items 1(a), (b) and (c) above for National Day official reception purposes or official visits by Head of State, Head of Government, President of Parliament or Minister of Foreign Affairs shall be exempted from customs duties, VAT, excise duties and fees, except for the fees charged for actual provision of services.

The goods for personal and private use imported by the persons under items 2(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) above for initial house furnishing purposes on taking up assignment shall be exempted customs duties, VAT, excise duties and fees, except for the fees charged for actual provision of services. Such exemption shall be applied for goods imported as unaccompanied baggage **within six months** of initial arrival to post.

In cases other than those under the paragraph above, the persons under **items 2(a), (b) and (c) above** shall be allowed to import goods **for personal and private use**, free of charge in terms of customs duties, VAT, excise duties and fees, except for the fees charged for actual provision of services, **during their tour of duty as well**, regardless of whether the time period specified above has expired.

In cases of exemption from any and all state-collected charges, the exemption shall be authorised by the Head of the respective clearing customs authority in accordance with the following **procedure**:

- for documents, printed matter, books, publications, any type of recorded or unrecorded information carriers, flags, signboards, stamps, coats of arms and other similar items – upon submission of **forms 1 and 3 of the Request Declaration** (*Annex No.8*) signed by the Head of Mission, Representation of International Organization or (Permanent) delegation, or an authorized representative;
- for goods other than those under the paragraph above – upon submission to the respective clearing customs authority of forms **1** and **3** of the request declaration (*Annex No.8*) signed by the Head of Mission, Representation of IO or (Permanent) delegation, or a person designated by the Head, whose **specimen signature has been notified** to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; forms **1**, **2** and **3** of the request declaration are first submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, after their verification, the Ministry retains form **2** and returns forms **1** and **3** to the applicant. The sample Request Declaration form follows the customs legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Provided that the requirements above are met, the following items/articles for official use only by a Consular Post headed by an honorary consular officer shall be exempted from customs duties, VAT, excise duties and fees, except for the fees charged for actual provision of services,,: coats of arms, flags, signboards, official printed matter, office furniture, office equipment and other similar articles supplied by or at the instance of the sending State to the Consular Post.

Note:

The forms of the Request Declaration (Annex No. 8) are printed on self-copying carbonless paper and they are provided by the clearing customs authority.

Annex No. 8 to this Guide is for reference purposes only!

Specific cases of exemption

Motor vehicles and motor cycles, including spare parts, are exempted from customs duties, VAT, excise duties and fees, except for the fees charged for actual provision of services, when imported by the persons listed in **items 1(a), (b) and (c)** above under the following **conditions**:

- the maximum number of tax-free motor vehicles and motor cycles for official use may not exceed the number of the members of the diplomatic staff of the Diplomatic Mission, Consular post, International Organization or Delegation. The number of tax-free motor vehicles may be changed on the basis of reciprocity at the discretion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- the maximum number of motor vehicles and motor cycles for the persons under **items 2(a), (b) and (c)** shall be subject to the following quantitative restrictions:
- two motor vehicles per person living with members of their families;
- one motor vehicle per single person;
- the persons under **items 2(d), (e) and (f)** above shall be entitled to a maximum of one motor vehicle, regardless of their marital status.

Quantitative restrictions as specified above include motor vehicles and motor cycles purchased by the persons under **items 2(a), (b) and (c)** within the customs territory of the Republic of Bulgaria **for which VAT has been refunded.**

The following procedures shall apply for tax-exemption purposes under the paragraph above:

- submission to the clearing customs authority of **forms 1 and 3** of the Request Declaration (*Annex No.8*) signed by the Head of Mission, Organization or (Permanent) Delegation, or a person designated by the Head, whose specimen signature has been notified to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, duly approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; forms [1](#), [2](#) and [3](#) of the Request Declaration are first submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, after their verification, the Ministry retains form [2](#) of the declaration and returns forms [1](#) and [3](#) to the applicant;
- the Request Declaration set out in *Annex 8* serves as a **customs clearance import document** for the purposes of Article 9(4) of [I-181 Ordinance No of 2002 of the Minister of the Interior on the Registration and Record of motor vehicles owned by alien physical and juridical persons](#).

Tobacco products, beer, wines and spirits imported by the persons under **items 1(a), (b) and (c)** above for representational purposes are exempted from customs duties, VAT, excise duties and fees, except for the fees charged for actual provision of services. Same products shall be within the **annual limits** set out in [Annex No.10](#), and determined/fixed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance.

The goods mentioned above shall be tax exempted upon submission to the clearing customs authority of forms 1 and 3 of the declaration ([Annex 9](#)) signed by the Head of Mission, Organization or Delegation, or a person designated by the Head, whose specimen signature has been notified to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, fully approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the customs declaration (Uniform Administrative Document – UAD). Forms 1, 2 and 3 of the Declaration are first submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which, after their verification, retains form 2 and returns forms 1 and 3 to the applicant.

The import of **tobacco products, wines, beer and spirits** by the persons under **items 2(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f)** above is exempted from **customs duties** in accordance with Articles 692 and 695 of the Implementing Rules of the Customs Act, from **value added tax** in accordance with Article 59(9) of the Value Added Tax Act and from **excise duties** in accordance with Article 21(1)(4) of the Excise Duties and Tax Warehouses Act **within quantitative limits for duty-free imports** laid down in Appendix 64 to Articles 692 and 695 of the Implementing Rules.

Note:

The forms of the declaration (*Annexes Nos. 8 and 9*) are printed on self-copying carbonless paper and they are provided by clearing customs authorities.

Annexes Nos.8 and 9 are for reference purposes only!

The text of [Ordinance No 14 of 15 September 1999 on the customs clearance of goods which are imported or exported by Diplomatic Missions, Consular Posts, Offices of International Organisations and the members of their staff/personnel](#) can be found in the Annexes to this Guide.

- **EUROPEAN COMMUNITY CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION FROM PAYMENT OF EXCISE DUTY (COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 2008/118/EC – ARTICLE 12(1) – APPENDIX 1 TO ARTICLE 4A OF THE IMPLEMENTING RULES OF THE EXCISE DUTIES AND TAX WAREHOUSES ACT**

Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Offices of International Organizations are entitled to opt for (as eligible organizations/persons) **exemption excise duty for shipments intended for use by eligible organisations/persons** as set out in Article 12(1) of Council Directive 2008/118/EC of 16 December 2008 concerning the general arrangements for excise duty and repeal of Directive 92/12/EEC.

In this case, it is necessary to fill in and certify **the form set out in Appendix 1 to Article 4a** of the Implementation Rules on the Excise Duties and Tax/Bonded Warehouses Act. Said form serves as a **certificate** (of the licensed warehouse holder) of exemption from payment of excise duty for shipments intended for use by eligible organizations/persons set out in Article 12(1) of Council Directive 2008/118/EC ([Annex No.11](#)).

This form has to be submitted by a *Note Verbale* to the State Protocol Directorate which forwards it to the Customs Agency.

- **DIPLOMATIC BAG**

The terms and conditions for the export and import of the **diplomatic bag** are laid down in Chapter III of [Ordinance No 14 of 15 September 1999 on the customs clearance of goods which are imported or exported by diplomatic missions, consular posts, representations of international organizations and the members of their staff](#).

Diplomatic bag is an official correspondence sent to or received by Diplomatic Missions or Consular Posts relating to their official functions and cleared in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.

The diplomatic bag may be delivered by means of:

- + diplomatic courier;
- + diplomatic cargo; or
- + captain of a commercial aircraft.

The number and type of diplomatic pouches **may be restricted on the basis of reciprocity**.

The diplomatic **courier bag** is accompanied by a diplomatic courier. The diplomatic courier needs a **diplomatic passport** issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the relevant State and an **official courier letter** indicating the courier's powers and status and the numbers and quantity of packages which the courier accompanies, as well as the full address to which the bag has to be dispatched.

Said letter is submitted to the customs authorities and it should be signed and officially stamped by the sending Embassy, Consular post or Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The diplomatic bag may also be entrusted to **the captain of a commercial aircraft**. The captain of the aircraft is provided with **an official pouch authorisation letter/courier letter** indicating his or her powers, the external marks and number of packages, and the address of final destination of consignee. The captain of the commercial aircraft carrying a diplomatic bag shall not be considered as a diplomatic courier.

The diplomatic bag is delivered by or entrusted to the captain of the aircraft to a diplomatic staff **member** in accordance with established procedures.

The diplomatic bag may be transported as a **postal, railway, aircraft or another shipment without being accompanied by a diplomatic courier or being accompanied by a courier travelling in transit through the Republic of Bulgaria**. The diplomatic bag shall not be detained by the customs authorities upon the submission of a notification in fully signed and sealed. Said notification shall be certified by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria and it serves *in lieu* of the declaration under *Annex No.8 to this Guide*.

In the case of transit dispatch of a diplomatic bag, the official courier document is not required to be certified by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria or by the diplomatic (consular) mission of the Republic of Bulgaria abroad.

The diplomatic bag **is not subject to** detention and customs inspection.

All packages constituting the diplomatic bag must bear **visible external marks** of their character ("diplomatic bag" labels, package numbers corresponding to the numbers in the official pouch authorisation letter, full address of final destination, and wax seals or lead seals) and **may contain only diplomatic documents and articles intended for official use**.

Customs authorities shall allow immediate customs entry for both inbound and outbound diplomatic bag, **with priority and without a physical inspection** provided that above requirements have been met.

The customs authorities may require a customs inspection in cases of **serious grounds** to believe that the diplomatic bag contains items other than diplomatic documents and articles intended for official use.

The customs authorities may ask for the diplomatic bag to be **opened** in their presence by an authorized individual designated by the sending State. If the authorities of the sending State refuse to comply with this request, the diplomatic bag **shall be returned**, without being opened, to the destination of origin.

The diplomatic bag **shall be imported or exported without payment of customs duties, taxes, excise duties or fees**, except for the fees charged for actual provision of services, provided that the requirements set out in [Ordinance No 14 of 15 September 1999 on the customs clearance of goods imported or](#)

[exported by diplomatic missions, consular posts, representations of international organizations and the members of their staff](#) are met/satisfied.

If the rules and regulations as set out in the Ordinance above are not observed, the diplomatic bag shall be considered as **regular mail and general procedures for the clearance of shipments shall be applied**. In cases like that, upon the request of the diplomatic courier or the sending State entity, the diplomatic bag may remain under customs control pending the decision on customs clearance mode.

• **REGISTRATION OF MOTOR VEHICLES**

Foreign Diplomatic Missions, Consular Posts and Representations of International Organizations accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria are entitled to register their own motor vehicles and the motor vehicles of their staff in special series in accordance with the procedures laid down in [Ordinance No I-181 of 3 December 2002 on the registration and reporting of motor vehicles owned by foreign natural persons and legal entities](#) (promulgated, The State Gazette, No 116 of 2002; amended, Nos. 93 of 2006 and 30 of 15 April 2016).

Missions are entitled to register in special series of registration plates **office motor vehicles**, the number of which may not exceed the number of the diplomatic staff, the career (full-time) consular officers or representatives of an international organization with diplomatic status.

The number of vehicles may be changed on the basis of the principle of reciprocity at the discretion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Each Head of a Diplomatic Mission, member of the diplomatic staff, career consular officer or representative of an international organization with diplomatic status, as well as member of the administrative and technical staff of the relevant mission is entitled to register in the relevant special series **one own motor vehicle for private use**.

In case the Head of a Diplomatic Mission, member of the diplomatic staff, career consular officer or representative of an international organization with diplomatic status resides permanently with a family member registered with the State Protocol Directorate, **an additional own motor vehicle may be registered for private use**.

The full text of the **Ordinance** and the registration **form** are included in the Annexes ([Annex No.12](#)).

The owner of the motor vehicle makes available the following for the **registration** purposes:

- the motor vehicle for identification;
- a written application for registration (*Note Verbale*);
- a letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicating the ownership, brand and model of the motor vehicle, the numbers of the chassis and the engine, the type and marks on the registration plates and the registration term (form – [Annex No.12](#));
- a customs importation document or an ownership document in the country (a sales contract);
- a vehicle third party liability insurance document;
- a copy of the card issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*in accordance with the procedure set out in the Identity Documents (Status) Section of this Guide*) – for the registration of a private motor vehicle;
- the plates with the Bulgarian registration number, if any.

Motor vehicles owned by foreign natural persons or legal entities are registered with the Traffic Police Units at the Regional Directorates of the Ministry of the Interior designated by the National Police Chief Directorate **within 14 days of the issuance of the customs importation document or the acquisition of ownership in the country**.

Motor vehicles are registered by their identification number (VIN), type, brand, model and other details indicated in the compliance certificate (on the type approval) or by the manufacturer **after an initial technical inspection** if they meet the requirements laid down in the [Road Traffic Act](#) and the Bulgarian State Standard.

The inspection is carried out in accordance with Chapter IV of Ordinance [No I-45 of 2000 on the registration, reporting, commissioning and decommissioning of motor vehicles and trailers thereof](#). It is intended to check the completeness and fitness of the equipment, installations and mechanisms relating to road safety, the emissions of harmful exhaust gases from motor vehicles and the fitness of their noise control devices.

Motor vehicles are registered for the shorter period specified in the registration letter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The owner of the registered motor vehicle is issued a **registration document** in accordance with [Article 141](#) of the [Road Traffic Act](#) and **registration plates**. The registration document (Registration Certificate – Parts I and II) specifies the details of the motor vehicle and its owners, as well as its validity term.

Where the registration term is renewed, the **change of registration** is carried out within 14 days and the owner makes available the following:

- the motor vehicle for identification;
- a written application for registration (*Note Verbale*);
- a letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicating the ownership, brand and model of the motor vehicle, the numbers of the chassis and the engine, the type and marks on the registration plates and the registration term (form –([Annex No.12](#));
- the Registration Certificate – Parts I and II;
- a vehicle third party liability insurance document;
- a copy of the card issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*in accordance with the procedure set out in the Identity Documents (Status) Section of this Guide*) – for the registration of a private motor vehicle;
- the plates with the registration number.

Changes of the vehicle registration are also made when the details of the motor vehicle are changed or the ownership is transferred within 14 days of the event, as well as upon expiration of the validity of the registration plates.

No change of registration is required when the owner changes his or her address.

The procedure in the event of transfer of ownership of a motor vehicle registered in accordance with [Ordinance No I-181 of 2002 on the registration and reporting of motor vehicles, owned by foreign natural persons and legal entities](#), is the same as the initial registration procedure.

Motor vehicles registered in accordance with [Ordinance No I-181 of 3 December 2002 on the registration and reporting of motor vehicles owned by foreign natural persons and legal entities](#) are provided with registration plates with the following marks:

- **marks with the identifying letters C, CC or CT in white letters and digits on a red background**; a white strip is placed in the upper right-hand corner of the registration plates of motor vehicles used by Heads of Diplomatic Missions;
- **marks with the identifying letters XX in white letters and digits on a blue background.**

Depending on the letter identification marks, registration plates are provided as follows:

1. C – for motor vehicles of Diplomatic Missions and international representations and their officers who have diplomatic status and hold a diplomatic identity card issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

2. CC – for motor vehicles of Consular Posts and members of their staff who have the status of consular career officers, holders of consular card issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, except for honorary consular officers;
3. CT – for motor vehicles of members of the administrative and technical staff of Diplomatic Missions and consular posts, who hold a consular identity card issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
4. XX – for motor vehicles owned by Consular Posts headed by honorary consular officers who are foreign nationals in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Registration plates are provided for use to the owners who **pay their value** and the relevant fees. Registration plates are attached to the vehicle at the places designated by the manufacturer in a way which prevents their unlawful removal.

Where **registration plates are lost or stolen**, they are declared for search and the number is not used for registration purposes until the end of the year in which the validity expires as indicated on the plate. The motor vehicle is registered with a new registration number in accordance with the established procedure.

Where **plates are damaged**, it is possible to make new plates with the same registration number.

Lost or stolen registration documents are replaced by a **duplicate** after the owner files an application in writing in the established format and a declaration.

The documents containing details of the registration, the changes of the registration, and the decommissioning and other details of the motor vehicle are stored by registration numbers in the records of the relevant road traffic police until a financial audit is carried out but no less than ten years after the relevant registration or change of the registration. After this time limit expires, the documents are scrapped and destroyed at the proposal of the head of the relevant traffic police unit.

The detailed rules on deregistration, reporting of motor vehicles, return of registration plates, provision of transit registration plates, validity of plates and others are set out in [Ordinance No I-181 of 3 December 2002 on the registration and reporting of motor vehicles owned by foreign natural and legal persons](#) which is attached to this Guide. The form for the decommissioning of motor vehicles is also included in the Annexes ([Annex No.15](#)).

• **RECOGNITION AND REPLACEMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLE DRIVING LICENCES**

The recognition in the Republic of Bulgaria of motor vehicle driving licences issued by other States and their replacement with Bulgarian driving licences in the cases prescribed by the law or the issuance of Bulgarian driving licences are regulated in the following legislation: [the Road Traffic Act](#), [the Bulgarian Identity Documents Act](#), [the Rules on the issuance of Bulgarian identity documents](#), [Ordinance No I-157/2002 on the terms and conditions for the issuance of motor vehicle driving licences, the reporting of motorists and their discipline](#) and other provisions of secondary legislation.

In accordance with **Article 161 of the Road Traffic Act**, a motor vehicle driving licence issued in another State **is valid** within the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria for the vehicle categories for which it was issued in the following cases:

1. the State in which it was issued is a Contracting Party to the **Convention on Road Traffic** and the licence meets the requirements for a domestic driving permit laid down in Annex 6 to the Convention;
2. the State in which it was issued is a Contracting Party to **the Agreement between the Parties to the North Atlantic Treaty regarding the Status of their Forces** under the conditions of Article IV (a);
3. a legalized **translation** into the Bulgarian language is attached to the licence;
4. the licence **is international** and meets the requirements for an international driving permit laid down in Annex 7 to the Convention on Road Traffic;

5. the licence was **issued by a Member State of the European Union or another State Party to the Agreement on the European Economic Area, or the Swiss Confederation.**

In accordance with Article 162 of the [Road Traffic Act](#):

- foreign nationals who are long-term residents in the Republic of Bulgaria, including the members of the staff of diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria and the members of their families, may drive motor vehicles within the territory of the country with a **licence which was not issued** by a Member State of the European Union or another State Party to the Agreement on the European Economic Area, or the Swiss Confederation for up to a **year** after the date of issuance of the residence document or the registration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the provision of a card of the relevant type issued by the Ministry;
- the requirement under the foregoing subparagraph does not apply to the cases under Article 161(2) above;
- **a foreign domestic driving permit or licence** issued to a Bulgarian national or a foreign national, including the members of the staff of diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria and the members of their families, by a **State which is not a Member State** of the European Union or another State Party to the Agreement on the European Economic Area, or the Swiss Confederation, **is replaced by a Bulgarian driving licence without sitting for an exam** provided that the State in which it was issued is a Contracting Party to the **Convention on Road Traffic** and the permit or licence meets the requirements for a domestic driving permit laid down in Annex 6 to the Convention;
- where **the foreign domestic permit or licence does not meet** the requirements under the foregoing subparagraph, **a Bulgarian motor vehicle driving licence is issued** upon a successful pass at the **exam**.

A driving licence under Article 161(5) of a person who is habitually resident in the Republic of Bulgaria, including the members of the staff of diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria and the members of their families, **may be replaced, at his or her request, with an equivalent Bulgarian licence without sitting for an exam.**

The replacement by a Bulgarian driving licence is carried out after the foreign domestic licence is made available. **The replaced licence is returned to the issuing State, indicating the reasons for the replacement.**

In the case of a lost or stolen driving licence under Article 161(5) of a person who is habitually resident in the Republic of Bulgaria, including the members of the staff of diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria and the members of their families, a Bulgarian driving licence is issued on the basis of **evidence provided by the competent authorities of the issuing State of the lost or stolen licence that the person was a licence holder**. The issuing State of the lost or stolen licence is informed of the circumstances in which the Bulgarian driving licence was issued.

Note:

General rules:

- Any person may hold only one motor vehicle driving licence issued by a Member State of the European Union;
- A motor vehicle driving licence is replaced upon the expiration of its validity, in case of introduction of a new format of licences, or changed personal details of the motorist;
- Duplicates are issued for damaged, destroyed, lost or stolen driving licences.

The issuance of a Bulgarian driving licence is within the competence of the Ministry of the Interior and its relevant structures which are designated to perform such functions.

For the purpose of issuing a Bulgarian driving licence on the basis of a foreign driving licence which has been made available and meets the requirements set out above, **an application in the approved format** is submitted to the Traffic Police Units at the Regional Directorates of the Ministry of the Interior at the address of the applicant.

The rules on the applications for issuance or replacement of driving licences, the application formats and the required documents to be attached to the applications are laid down in Chapter Four Terms and Conditions for Issuing Motor Vehicle Driving Licences (Articles 33 to 39) of [the Rules on the issuance of Bulgarian identity documents](#) and [Ordinance No I-157/2002 on the terms and conditions for the issuance of motor vehicle driving licences, the reporting of motorists and their discipline](#) (Articles 12-13 and Article 17).

The full texts of [the Rules on the issuance of Bulgarian identity documents](#) and [Ordinance No I-157/2002 on the terms and conditions for the issuance of motor vehicle driving licences, the reporting of motorists and their discipline](#) are included in the Annexes to this Guide.

The time limits for the issuance of driving licences are set out in [the Rules on the issuance of Bulgarian identity documents](#) and [Ordinance No I-157/2002 on the terms and conditions for the issuance of motor vehicle driving licences, the reporting of motorists and their discipline](#), whereas the fees are established in Rate No 4 of the fees charged within the system of the Ministry of the Interior in accordance with the State Fees Act as follows:

- regular service – up to 30 days; fee – BGN 25 for a person aged 58 or below;
- fast service – up to 10 days; the fee is doubled.

A fee of BGN 2 is charged for the issuance or replacement of the point system card.

The State Protocol Directorate would kindly remind the honourable diplomatic missions in the Republic of Bulgaria that the motor vehicles of the missions and of the members of their staff or the members of their families respectively, which are registered with the special serial numbers, are not exempted from liability for driving offences and they are subject to penalties for such violations of the road traffic rules (**fin**es).

The Directorate has no powers to intervene before the competent police authorities for recovery of the fines paid or for repealing of penalty statements of driving offences.

We also kindly ask the honourable diplomatic missions to note that they and the members of their staff or the members of their families respectively are not exempted from payment of vignette fees for driving on the national road network of the Republic of Bulgaria, which are considered to be **toll fees charged for the service provided to motorists using the road**. Vignette fees are payable by purchasing a sticker at any petrol station in this country.

The details of the road traffic rules in the Republic of Bulgaria, the requirements to motorists and to vehicles are laid down in [the Road Traffic Act](#) which is attached to this Guide.

The State Protocol Directorate kindly appeals to the members of the diplomatic corps to respect the road traffic rules in accordance with Article 41 of [the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations](#) and Article 55(1) of [the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations](#).

• **PARKING**

The **free parking** arrangements for vehicles serving Diplomatic Missions are set out in **the Ordinance on the organization of traffic in the Capital City Municipality (the Sofia Traffic Ordinance)**.

Articles 112 and 113 of the Sofia Traffic Ordinance set out the terms and conditions for the designation and use of parking places of vehicles serving diplomatic missions in streets, boulevards, squares and municipally-owned parking lots. We kindly ask you to note that, in accordance with Article 112 of the Sofia Traffic Ordinance, the right to free parking of automobiles serving diplomatic missions is granted only to “diplomatic vehicles”. The **rules** are the following:

The free parking of diplomatic vehicles in streets, boulevards, squares and municipally-owned parking lots during or in relation to the servicing of diplomatic missions is allowed at places which are specially designated for this purpose with road signage and within the following limits:

- ✚ in front of embassy buildings – **up to six places** for perpendicular parking and **up to three places** for parallel (curbside) parking;
- ✚ in front of consular posts - **up to three places** for perpendicular parking and **up to two places** for parallel (curbside) parking. Honorary consular officers may use the parking places in front of consular premises in accordance with Article 63 of the Sofia Traffic Ordinance;
- ✚ in front of the buildings of residences, cultural institutes and commercial departments - **up to two places** for perpendicular parking and **up to one place** for parallel (curbside) parking

The terms and conditions for the designation and use of parking places for vehicles serving diplomatic missions are set out in an **order of the Mayor** of Sofia. Any parking places in excess of the limits are paid in the form of **office subscription**.

Following the established protocol practice, Diplomatic and Consular Missions which are entitled to use free parking arrangements in accordance with the Sofia Traffic Ordinance express their willingness to do so in a *note verbale* sent to the **State Protocol Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**. The request of the mission is examined at a session of the Municipal Standing Committee for transport and traffic organization and safety.

Where the Committee gives its **approval**, the Diplomatic or Consular Mission receives through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs **the plan on which the eligible parking places are designated**. In accordance with Order No RD-09-1274 of 28 July 2005 of the Mayor of Sofia, the actual marking of parking places for diplomatic vehicles with road signage is carried out **at the expense** of the diplomatic mission.

In the event of a parking violation within the scope of the prohibitory sign in front of a diplomatic or consular mission, alerts may be reported as follows: **telephone number of the Urban Mobility Centre**: 02 983 67 47; **Fax**: 02/831 90 71; postal address: 84 Maria Louisa Blvd., Sofia; e-mail: office@sofiatraffic.bg

The State Protocol Directorate kindly appeals to the members of the diplomatic corps to respect the parking rules in all cases and to pay the fines due in accordance with Article 41 of [the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations](#) and Article 55(1) of [the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations](#).

• **ACCESS TO AIRPORTS**

The terms and conditions for the access of staff of diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria to the security restricted areas of commercial airports are set out in the Civil Aviation Administration (CAA) at the Ministry of Transport, Information Technologies and Communications.

The application for access is sent with a *note verbale* to the State Protocol Directorate together with the form in the approved format ([Annex No.13](#)). The form is filled in individually for each person for whom access is requested. After the verification of the status of the person for whom access is requested, the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sends the application *ex officio* to the CAA for the issuance of a **pass** for access to security restricted areas of airports.

After the permission is granted, the members of diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations are informed by the CAA and they should come in person to obtain the pass from the CAA laboratory which is situated at Terminal 1 of Sofia Airport. The fee charged for the issuance of the pass is paid to the bank account specified by the CAA.

The number of passes depends on the number of diplomatic staff of diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations having their seat in the country.

The minimum time limit for the issuance of a pass is **thirty (30) working days** as from the receipt of the documents by the CAA.

The State Protocol Directorate kindly reminds that the access passes are registered individually. They are personal and may not be ceded to other persons. Passes have to be returned to the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs upon the expiration of their validity term and in the cases of final departure of the members of the diplomatic staff to whom they were issued or damage of the pass. The CAA is informed without delay of any stolen or lost pass in the same way.

The State Protocol Directorate would also like to note the need for cooperation with the members of security services in the legitimation and establishment of the identity of pass holders.

The application form is included in the Annexes ([Annex No.13](#)).

• **VIP LOUNGES**

Sofia Airport has two VIP lounges.

VIP-A – Government Lounge of Sofia Airport is available to ambassadors and the members of their families accompanying them for their initial arrival to the Republic of Bulgaria and their final departure from the country, as well as for the welcome and departure of official delegations. For this purpose, the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is notified in advance with a *note verbale* containing the following details:

- the names and positions of the guests to the VIP lounge;
- the date and hour of arrival or departure of the delegation;
- the number of the flight with which the delegation travels;
- the names of the members of the welcoming party;
- the details of the automobiles driving to the territory of the airport – model, brand and registration number, names of the drivers.

The **VIP-B** lounge of Sofia Airport is available to passengers during their private travel or unofficial delegations, for which the relevant fee is to be paid by the diplomatic mission. In these cases, embassies send requests for the use of the VIP B lounge to the airport authorities to telephone number +359 2 937 2192 or fax number +359 2 937 2190.

The airports in the cities of Plovdiv, Varna and Burgas have VIP lounges which embassies can use by sending a prior request to the relevant airport authorities.

The *Note Verbale* with the request for the use of VIP lounges at commercial airports should be sent at least **seven (7) days** prior to the date of use. Where this time limit is not observed, the relevant airport authorities will make a decision on the availability and priority of use.

The State Protocol Directorate kindly reminds that when the VIP-A lounge is used to welcome delegations, all members of the welcoming party from the Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representations of International Organizations should have personal access cards to be granted access to the arrival gates or to the aircraft.

In relation to the reorganization of the security measures at Sofia Airport, the State Protocol Directorate kindly asks the honourable Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representations of International Organizations accredited to the Republic of Bulgaria to take into consideration the following information:

- ✚ VIP-A building – the Government Lounge and the space in front of it are designated as a critical part of the security restricted area of Sofia Airport at the time when the VIP-A lounge serves passengers of commercial airlines. The status of the VIP-A area is changed from a critical part of the security restricted area to a demarcated area when the National Security service performs official functions and the passengers use a government aircraft.
- ✚ This change is intended to ensure the security measures in civil aviation and the compliance with the security standards in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 300/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2008 on common rules in the field of civil aviation and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/1998 of 5 November 2015 laying down detailed measures for the implementation of the common basic standards on aviation security.
- ✚ While the VIP-A lounge is within the critical part of the security restricted area, the entry of departing passengers carrying only hand luggage is allowed through Entrance 37 **after screening**. The entry of departing groups of passengers and luggage takes place through Entrance 31 in the basement of the building **after screening**.
- ✚ The categories of passengers who, in accordance with the National Civil Aviation Security Programme, are **exempted from screening** and the Heads of State and Government as follows: **the President and the Vice President of the Republic of Bulgaria, the President of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as foreign guests with an equivalent rank.**

● **SECURITY AND PROTECTION MEASURES**

The protection of foreign Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representations of International Organizations (hereinafter referred to as “diplomatic missions”) within the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria is ensured by means of:

- regular day and night automobile patrolling by the relevant police unit of the Sofia City Directorate of the Interior and/or the Gendarmerie Directorate at the National Police Chief Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior;
- a stationary sentry box of the Gendarmerie Directorate.

The principle of reciprocity and the degree of threat to the relevant mission are taken into account in the selection of the method of protection.

The patrolling mobile police group in charge of the protection of foreign missions makes regular stops to survey the area of the mission.

The Ministry of the Interior introduces additional protection measures when there are specific alerts and indications of threats, protests, demonstrations and other similar events aimed against the security of diplomatic missions and their staff.

The competent authorities providing protection to missions are the relevant structures of the Ministry of the Interior.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR OF THE METHOD OF PROTECTION OF DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

In the event of change of address or request for change of the method of protection, the diplomatic mission should promptly notify the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a *Note Verbale*. The State Protocol Directorate sends the information or request to the competent authority which makes a decision on the measures to be undertaken to ensure the protection of the mission.

SECURITY MEASURES IN PROTOCOL EVENTS

When receptions are organized or there are other events related to the gathering of a large number of people, diplomatic missions should notify the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a *Note Verbale* at least **a week before the event** in view of informing the competent authority to take security measures. The note should specify the date, time and venue of the event, as well as the measures requested to ensure the security of the event and the participants.

SECURITY MEASURES ON ELECTION DAYS

The Republic of Bulgaria has established the following practice when **elections are held and polling stations are opened** by foreign States within their territory.

The application for consent with holding elections and opening of polling stations is made through a *note verbale* by the diplomatic/consular mission of the relevant State to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs not later than **thirty days** prior to the election date. The note should specify the date, the opening and the end of the Election Day, any additional dates (if elections take place in more than one round), the address of the polling station and the expected number of voters.

The Republic of Bulgaria gives consent with the holding of elections in polling stations only **within the territory of the diplomatic and consular missions** of the relevant requesting foreign State. By way of **exception and under the conditions of reciprocity**, consent may be given to open polling stations outside the buildings of the diplomatic or consular missions, while observing the requirements set out above.

The State Protocol Directorate notifies the competent authorities to take the necessary measures to ensure **the security of the polling stations and the protection of public order on the election day(s)**.

• *VESSEL AND AIRCRAFT CLEARANCE*

Requests for entry and anchorage of ships and other vessels of foreign States in Bulgarian ports and for entry into the airspace and landing within the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria of foreign aircraft are submitted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the relevant foreign State or through its diplomatic or consular missions with a *Note Verbale to the Consular Relations Directorate* at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria. ***ACCESS TO AIRPORTS***

• *WEAPONS PERMITS/LICENCES*

Operations with firearms are regulated in [the Weapons, Ammunition, Explosives and Pyrotechnical Products Act \(the Weapons Act\)](#) (promulgated, The State Gazette, No 73 of 17 September 2010, effective as from 17 September 2010; latest amendments, The State Gazette, No 103 of 27 December 2016).

In accordance with Article 78(3) of [the Weapons Act](#), members of the staff of foreign diplomatic missions who are citizens of the sending State may acquire and/or carry and use short barrel firearms and ammunition thereof **for office purposes**, while observing the principle of reciprocity after they obtain a permit from the Director of the National Police Chief Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior or an official designated by the Director.

The permit under paragraph 3 is granted upon the submission of the following documents:

1. A *Note Verbale* from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the sending State to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, requesting the issuance of individual permits to the relevant members of the staff;
2. A copy and a translation into the Bulgarian language of the document issued by the competent authority of the sending State certifying the rights of the diplomatic agent under paragraph 3 to possess and carry the relevant type of firearms and ammunition thereof, which is verified by a Bulgarian diplomatic mission;
3. A document issued by a Bulgarian diplomatic mission to the diplomatic agent under paragraph 3, certifying the upcoming **importation or transportation** within the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria of firearms and ammunition thereof in the possession of the diplomatic agent.

Where these requirements are met, the mission should submit to the National Police Chief Directorate **an application for individual permits** to possess and use firearms together with the fee payment receipt. The validity of the permit is up to five years. The documents attached to the application should specify the details of the person as stated in the **identity document** and the details of the **weapon** assigned to that person. **Two photographs** 2x2.5 cm should also be attached to the documents.

The application form can be obtained from the service centre of the National Police Chief Directorate or the website of the Ministry of the Interior – www.mvr.bg Useful Information/Forms and Documents (Appendices) to [the Weapons, Ammunition, Explosives and Pyrotechnical Products Act/Appendix 10](http://www.mvr.bg/Polezno_e_da_znaete/obrazci_zobvypi.htm) (http://www.mvr.bg/Polezno_e_da_znaete/obrazci_zobvypi.htm). The application form is included also in the Annexes to this Guide (*Annex No.14*).

Fees are to be paid to the bank account of the National Police Chief Directorate, IBAN: BG69BNBG96613100154401 and BIC of the Bulgarian National Bank: BNBGBGSD.

OTHER ISSUES:

- **LOCALLY EMPLOYED STAFF**

The Bulgarian labour legislation does not contain any specific provisions concerning the staff working at Diplomatic Missions of foreign States in the Republic of Bulgaria. The applicable arrangements are laid down in the general provisions of **the Labour Code and the related secondary legislation**.

In accordance with Article 96 of the International Private Law Code, employment contracts are governed by the law chosen by the parties. The choice of applicable law must not deprive the worker or employee from the protection granted with the imperative provisions of the law which would have applied in the absence of choice of applicable law (i.e. **the Bulgarian law**). Where **no choice of applicable law is made, the employment contract is governed by the law of the State in which the worker or employee habitually works (i.e. the labour laws of the Republic of Bulgaria)** even in cases of temporary secondment to another State.

The social security arrangements for private household workers are in line with **Article 33 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations** or **Article 48 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations** respectively. Where the provisions of the Conventions are not applicable, the employer has to **insure** the worker or employee for **all social security risks** laid down in the **Social Security Code** and to provide **health insurance** in the amounts set out in the **Health Insurance Act**.

The taxation of persons employed as service staff at diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria is carried out in accordance with the provisions of **Article 37 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations** or **Article 49 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations** respectively. If they are not applicable, the provisions of the Bulgarian tax laws will apply.

In accordance with the amendments to the Natural Persons' Income Tax Act which entered into force on 1 January 2016, **a diplomatic mission of a foreign State, which has chosen to determine, deduct and pay in taxes on the income from employment relationships concluded with local natural persons** relating to its functions performed in the Republic of Bulgaria is considered to be an **employer** within the meaning of this Act (§ 1(27) of the Additional Provisions). The mission may exercise this option by notifying the competent territorial subdivision of the National Revenue Agency before 31 December of the preceding year that it is willing to deduct and pay in the income tax for the local staff in accordance with this Act. The option may apply to an indefinite number of successive tax years and may be terminated provided that the diplomatic mission notifies the competent territorial subdivision of the National Revenue Agency thereof before 30 November of the preceding year.

Within the meaning of the Natural Persons' Income Tax Act, **employment relationships** are those defined in § 1(26) of the Additional Provisions.

The main piece of legislation in the field of labour relationships is **the Labour Code**. The procedure for labour relationships to emerge is laid down in Articles 61 to 76 of the Labour Code. The employment contract is executed in writing and contains some specific mandatory elements. It may be bound by a fixed term or it may be signed for an indefinite period of time. The main obligations of the parties to the contract are laid down in Articles 124 to 129 of the Labour Code. Article 247 fixes the main parameter of the remuneration. All issues relating to social security in the Republic of Bulgaria are regulated in the Social Security Code.

The grounds for termination of employment relationships are enumerated in detail in Articles 325 to 340 of the Labour Code. They include the general legal grounds for termination, the cases of termination of the contract by the worker or employee by serving a notice, and termination by the employer (with or without serving a notice).

As well as the Labour Code, other legislative acts regulate in detail some **specific aspects of labour law**, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act, the Act on the Judicial Procedure for Establishing Length of Service and Social Security Entitlement, Ordinance No 4 of 11 May 1993 on the documents needed for the conclusion of employment contracts, Ordinance No 5 of 29 December 2002 on the contents and procedure of serving the notice under Article 62(5) of the Labour Code, the Ordinance on the structure and organization of remuneration, the Ordinance on working time, rest periods and leaves, and others which are generally applicable also to the employment relationships with local persons hired to work at foreign diplomatic missions in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The local persons hired to work at foreign diplomatic and consular missions and representations of international organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria **are not issued staff cards** as members of the staff of missions provided that they:

- are citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria;
- have valid permanent residence permits of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The honourable Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representations of International Organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria are kindly requested to submit **a list of the local staff they hire** to the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before 30 January each year.

• **ACCOMMODATION**

The real estate market is well developed in the Republic of Bulgaria and the members of the diplomatic corps can rent accommodation on the free market. There are many real estate companies in the capital city and the other cities in the country. The rental price depends on the location, the term of the contract, any additional services, etc.

The members of the diplomatic corps are also welcome to use the services of ADIS real estate company, the principal of which is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

For further information please see: <http://www.adis.bg>

AT THE END OF TOUR OF DUTY

• NOTIFICATION

Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representations of International Organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria should notify the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a *Note Verbale* of the **termination of the appointment/term and of the termination of the functions and the final departure of members of the diplomatic, administrative and technical and service staff in advance**, if possible.

The same procedure applies to the final departure of **members of the family/household** of members of the diplomatic, administrative and technical and service staff or to the cases when they cease to be members of the family/household.

In these cases, all documents issued to members of the diplomatic, administrative and technical and service staff of the missions and the members of their family/household in that capacity **are subject to return** to the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representations of International Organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria should notify the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a *Note Verbale* of the **temporary absence of the head of the diplomatic or consular mission or the representation of an international organization** in the Republic of Bulgaria, specifying the date of departure and the date of return to the host State, as well as details of the staff member to act as substitute of the head of the mission or representation during his or her absence.

The embassy of the sending State notifies the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a *Note Verbale* of the final departure of **the ambassador** from the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The notification is carried out through the State Protocol Directorate not later than a month before the expected date of departure.

• SEEING OFF AT AIRPORT

On the date of the final departure, the head of the Diplomatic Protocol Department of the State Protocol Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or his or her deputy bids farewell to the ambassador. The ambassador and the accompanying members of his or her family are entitled to use the Government Lounge at Sofia Airport for their final departure.

• FAREWELL CALLS

The State Protocol Directorate makes arrangements for the protocol farewell calls of the departing head of the diplomatic mission on the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Ministers and the Minister of Foreign Affairs at their choice and at the mutual consent of the parties.

The State Protocol Directorate organizes a farewell luncheon or dinner hosted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs or his or her deputy on the occasion of the final departure of a head of a diplomatic mission.

• DECORATIONS/AWARDS AND HONOURS

The protocol practice and the existing legislation provide the opportunity for the ambassador to be conferred a state decoration for contribution to the development of the bilateral relations at the end of his or her term.

The State Protocol Directorate organizes the ceremony, in coordination with the Protocol Directorate at the President's Office, or delivers the decoration through diplomatic channels.

ANNEXES:

[VIENNA CONVENTION ON DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS](#)

[VIENNA CONVENTION ON CONSULAR RELATIONS](#)

[PROTOCOL ON THE PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION](#)

[STATE PROTOCOL ACT](#)

[IMPLEMENTING RULES OF THE STATE PROTOCOL ACT](#)

[FOREIGN NATIONALS ACT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA](#)

[BULGARIAN IDENTITY DOCUMENTS ACT](#)

[RULES ON THE ISSUANCE OF BULGARIAN IDENTITY DOCUMENTS](#)

[ROAD TRAFFIC ACT](#)

[WEAPONS, AMMUNITION, EXPLOSIVES AND PYROTECHNICAL PRODUCTS ACT](#)

[ORDINANCE NO N-14 ON THE REFUNDING OF THE VALUE ADDED TAX AND EXCISE DUTIES TO DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS, CONSULAR POSTS, REPRESENTATIONS OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE MEMBERS OF THEIR STAFF](#)

[ORDINANCE NO 14 OF 15 SEPTEMBER 1999 ON THE CUSTOMS CLEARANCE OF GOODS WHICH ARE IMPORTED OR EXPORTED BY DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS, CONSULAR POSTS, REPRESENTATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE MEMBERS OF THEIR STAFF](#)

[ORDINANCE NO I-181 OF 3 DECEMBER 2002 ON THE REGISTRATION AND REPORTING OF MOTOR VEHICLES OWNED BY FOREIGN NATURAL AND LEGAL PERSONS](#)

[ORDINANCE NO I-157/2002 ON THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR THE ISSUANCE OF MOTOR VEHICLE DRIVING LICENCES, THE REPORTING OF MOTORISTS AND THEIR DISCIPLINE](#)

[ORDINANCE NO I-45 OF 2000 ON THE REGISTRATION, REPORTING, COMMISSIONING AND DECOMMISSIONING OF MOTOR VEHICLES AND TRAILERS THEREOF](#)

[ORDINANCE ON THE PROCEDURE OF APPOINTMENT AND ACCEPTANCE OF HONORARY \(NON-CAREER\) CONSULAR OFFICERS](#)

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NOTE: FORMS 1, 2 AND 3 OF THE DECLARATION ON THE IMPORTATION OF GOODS IS FILLED IN **ONLY ON A PAPER COPY** AND THEY ARE OBTAINED FROM THE CLEARING CUSTOMS AUTHORITY!

[ANNEX 9](#) – APPLICATION FOR IMPORTATION AND PURCHASE, FORMS 1, 2 AND 3

NOTE: FORMS 1, 2 AND 3 OF THE DECLARATION ON THE IMPORTATION OF GOODS IS FILLED IN **ONLY ON A PAPER COPY** AND THEY ARE OBTAINED FROM THE CLEARING CUSTOMS AUTHORITY!

[ANNEX 10](#) – ANNUAL LIMITS FOR ALCOHOL AND CIGARETTES

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NOTE: ALL FORMS ARE FILLED IN AND SUBMITTED IN THE BULGARIAN LANGUAGE!

THE FORMS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARE ATTACHED FOR REFERENCE PURPOSES ONLY!

WE APOLOGIZE FOR ANY INCONVENIENCE IN THE SUBMISSION OF FORMS.

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THEY CAN BE DOWNLOADED FROM THE SITE AND BE USED FOR THEIR PURPOSES!

CIRCULAR NOTES

SEATING PLANS

CEREMONY OF PRESENTING CREDENTIALS (LETTERS OF CREDENCE)

PLAN
OF THE WELCOME CEREMONY IN FRONT OF THE BUILDING OF THE OFFICE OF THE
PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA FOR PRESENTATION OF THE LETTERS OF CREDENCE OF
AMBASSADORS EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY

