

Foreign Ministry archives services of the European Union MEMBER STATES

SWEDEN

1. Full title of Ministry and of archives service

Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Administrative Department
Archive Section

2. Contact details

Postal address:

SE-103 39 Stockholm

Tel. +46 8-405 10 00

Fax +46 8-723 11 76

E-mail registrator@foreign.ministry.se

3. Summary of historical background of the archive service

When the Swedish nation state developed a more established central administration in the mid-16th century, responsibility for foreign policy issues was assigned to the Chancery. In the early 17th century this body was transformed into the College of Chancery. In 1791 the department in the College of Chancery that was responsible for foreign policy was broken out to form the Cabinet for Foreign Correspondence. In practice this marked the formation of a “ministry for foreign affairs.” The civil service reform of 1840 led to the formal establishment of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, but its internal organisation largely retained the form it had been given at the end of the 18th century. In 1858, when the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was organised into divisions for the first time, the archive, which then included the library and other functions, became a separate division directly under the Ministry executive. This organisation remained until 1977 when the archive, library, etc became a department in the Administrative Division. From 1997 the archive has been a section of the Administrative Department.

4. Physical access

Sweden applies the principle of public access to official documents, which is laid down in one of the country’s fundamental laws (the Freedom of the Press Act). This principle means that, unless otherwise prescribed, everyone has the right of free access to the official documents held by a public authority, such as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. No one may ask for the name of a person who requests a document or the purpose of the

request. Information covered by the provisions of the Secrecy Act is exempt from public access. This Act contains i.a. a provision on “secrecy relating to foreign affairs.” Examples of other information protected by secrecy are defence, consular cases, personnel administration, codes and ciphers, surveillance procedures and the economic circumstances of private individuals.

No form of introductory letter or the like is required for access to documents in the archive of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The archive is open during office hours, i.e. 9.00 -16.00. The archive is closed on public holidays.

Older documents in the archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and its predecessors have been passed on to the National Archives. For the majority of these documents the time limit is 1952. But documents in legal, consular, protocol and administrative cases as far back as 1920 are still held in the Ministry archive. Archive documents of missions abroad for the period before 1920 and, in some cases, later documents from agencies that have ceased to exist have been passed on to the National Archives.

The opening hours of the National Archives are 9.00 - 17.00, Monday to Friday. Visitors' address: Fyrverkarbacken 13-17, Stockholm. Postal address: Box 125 41, SE-102 29 Stockholm, tel. +46 8-737 63 50, fax +46 8-737 64 74.

5. Practical facilities

The library of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has research desks, where visitors can use their own computer equipment. Photocopying facilities are available, and researchers are permitted to use the Ministry library.

6. Reproduction of documents

It is also possible to order copies from the Ministry archive. There is no charge for a small number of copies (up to nine). For a larger number of copies there is a fixed charge of SEK 50 and a charge of SEK 2 per page.

7. Access regulations

There are no fixed time limits for when documents held by public authorities in Sweden are made available for public inspection. The Secrecy Act mentioned under point 4 above specifies, for each area covered by the Act, a maximum period for which information can be kept secret. For secrecy relating to foreign affairs e.g. the maximum period is 40 years. Thereafter all documents with such content are public in their entirety. Every time someone requests access to documents the public authority shall consider whether secrecy applies to the specific material concerned. This means that secrecy can sometimes be removed after a few years or even after a few weeks. It depends on what assessment is made of the damage that would result from the release of the information.

8. Concise description of the principal record classes and collections

The old documents of the archives of the ministry's predecessors' archives can be structured according to three main periods:

- 1) 1809. The oldest documents in the area of foreign policy set aside in the work of the Chancery and the College of Chancery have mainly been placed in the subject-arranged "Diplomatica" series in the National Archives.
- 2) 1810-1901. The main contents of the archives are the major series of correspondence with each mission abroad, other agencies etc. Complementary to that collection a minor part of the documents are arranged in different generations of dossier-systems.
- 3) 1902. In 1902 a first general dossier-system for the major part of the documents of the ministry was introduced. It was succeeded by a new system in 1920, which is still in use. The archives of the missions abroad also follow the same structure as the dossier-system of 1920.

Alongside the stock of correspondence and dossiers there are from 1810 and onwards chronological series of Government and ministry minutes, registers and account documents in addition to the various kinds of publications issued by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Documents from international organisations are held in separate "document archives."

There is only limited disposal of documents from the Ministry's archive. However, the main part (some 90 per cent) of documents in the archives of missions abroad is removed on review.

The total archive stock in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs amounts to some 10 000 shelf metres. The stock grows by about 300 shelf metres per year.

9. Finding aids and computerisation

The series "Diplomatica" is presented in "The Diplomatica collection in the Swedish national Archives" (Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Riksarkivet 5). The main archives of the ministry and its predecessors 1681-1952 are listed in one archive inventory. There is a separate inventory for the dossier-system of 1902 and another one for the dossier-system of 1920. The Ministry's main register has been computerised since 1985.

10. Reference works and articles

The manual "Att forska i utrikesförvaltningens arkiv. En handledning" (How to do Research in the Archives of the Foreign Service. A Manual) by Berndt Fredriksson gives a general introduction to the structure, search means and an understanding of the contents of the archives of the MFA. The manual also includes a comprehensive overview of literature on the archives, on Swedish foreign policy and its participants.