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«To shape the future, you must first know the past»

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Since the 1970s the Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland (Dodis) research centre has been methodically charting the history of Swiss foreign policy. Its work has been likened to «a rigorous process of distillation» (in the Swiss daily newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*). Every year, the Dodis research group sifts through thousands of archival boxes containing around two million files. From this treasure trove of historical sources, it compiles a 2,000-strong short list of the most relevant documentation. These records cover a broad range of Swiss foreign policy and foreign trade matters, and also detail the history of the FDFA.

The online Dodis database contains metadata on Federal Council decisions, minutes, memos, directives, telegrams and correspondence with Swiss representations abroad. Visitors to the Dodis website can view [digital facsimiles](#), and in some cases annotated transcripts, of these documents free of charge. Dodis also publishes selected records in its [Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland \(DDS\)](#) print edition. To date, the DDS series, which is the centrepiece of the basic research conducted by Dodis, has covered the period beginning with the establishment of the Swiss Confederation in 1848 right through to 1975. A new series of historical documents from the period up to 1978 will be published this year.

Visite amicale du chef du DFAE, Ignazio Cassis

In October 2018, Dodis welcomed a high-ranking guest, Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis. During his courtesy visit to the independent centre of expertise on the history of Swiss international relations, Mr Cassis showed a keen interest in its work, which documents the activities of his predecessors at the FDFA based on historical source material.



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Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis

Dodis director Sacha Zala shows Federal Councillor Cassis historical records. © Dodis

On viewing the documents, Mr Cassis remarked, «To shape the future, you must first know the past.»

League of Nations, 1968 and German reunification



Researchers at Dodis work through documents from the Cold War in chronological order. In 2021 they will launch a new series exploring Swiss foreign policy in the 1990s. Every year Dodis will publish records for which the statutory 30-year safeguard period has expired. In doing so, it will shine a spotlight on Switzerland's near-contemporary history of international relations. An upcoming [Quaderni di Dodis](#) publication will feature a collection of source material documenting how the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 was perceived around the world. It is a collaborative effort between Dodis and sister projects in other countries.

Each publication in the 'Quaderni di Dodis' series contains research papers and collections of source material on a particular subject. For example, the issue shown above explores the landmark year of 1968. © Dodis

The Quaderni di Dodis publication series and ongoing research are just two ways in which Dodis helps to impart knowledge about the history of Swiss foreign policy. In 2018, a major focus was 1968, a pivotal year in modern history. This included a [publication](#) in the Quaderni di Dodis series devoted to records of these 50-year-old events. It featured reports from Swiss embassies in 22 countries, as well as a contemporaneous study by trainee diplomats in Bern on the [«Revolte der Jungen»](#) (The Youth Revolt). In 2019, work will concentrate on the anniversary of the founding of the League of Nations, which has its headquarters in Geneva. Thanks to cooperation with the FDFA History Unit, a special edition of Quaderno di Dodis will be published, featuring [documents on the history of Switzerland and the League of Nations](#).