

UDC 341.7/35.071

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/TNU-2663-6468/2026.1/33>

Chechel A. O.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4307-5574>

Mariupol State University

Zelinska M. I.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9538-5913>

Mariupol State University

Chechel M. S.

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8219-1574>

The University of Edinburgh,

Mariupol State University

THE ROLE OF PROTOCOL IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The article examines the functions and role of state and diplomatic protocol and analyzes its theoretical foundations and practical application in international relations and public administration. The evolution of protocol from the court ceremonial of European monarchies to modern democratic state protocol based on the principle of sovereign equality of states is explored. It is demonstrated that protocol should be understood not merely as a set of etiquette rules but as a complex political and legal system that regulates official interaction, ensures predictability of diplomatic communication, and symbolically represents state authority in both international and domestic contexts.

Three fundamental functions of modern protocol are identified and analyzed: regulatory, symbolic, and communicative. The regulatory function lies in establishing clear procedures and algorithms for organizing official meetings, negotiations, ceremonies, and other forms of diplomatic interaction, which helps prevent conflicts and misunderstandings among participants. The symbolic function manifests itself in the visual representation of state sovereignty, dignity, and legitimacy through the use of national symbols as well as ceremonial practices such as official visits and inaugurations. The communicative function is interpreted as a specific form of non-verbal political communication through which states transmit signals of respect, support, partnership, or, conversely, dissatisfaction and distancing in the international arena.

Particular attention is paid to the transformation of modern protocol toward greater functionality and practical efficiency. Using the case of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the article analyzes the application of functional protocol in the sphere of public administration and international institutional cooperation. It is emphasized that functional protocol prioritizes efficiency, flexibility, and professional expertise over traditional ceremonial forms. The study concludes that under contemporary political challenges, particularly in conditions of wartime governance, functional protocol increasingly becomes the dominant form of organizing official interaction, enabling more effective coordination between institutions and ensuring the practical implementation of diplomatic and administrative objectives.

Keywords: protocol, diplomatic protocol, state protocol, functional protocol, functions of protocol, ceremonial, etiquette.

Problem Statement. On April 6, 2021, during a protocol photo opportunity in Ankara, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was not offered a chair. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and President of the European Council Charles Michel took seats opposite each other, while the head of the European Commission, who had

equal status in the negotiations, was forced to stand aside for some time, expressing surprise. Eventually, she was seated on a sofa opposite Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu [1].

These images quickly spread across social media and caused wide resonance in European media. Moreover, in response, the Millenia Foundation for



the protection of women's rights and gender equality launched a petition on April 8 demanding the resignation of Charles Michel. According to Deutsche Welle, as of April 12 more than 5.7 thousand people supported the document.

Therefore, to understand the scale of this scandal, dubbed "Sofagate", it is necessary to clearly distinguish between etiquette and the fundamental rules of official interaction covered by the concept of "protocol".

Protocol is a system of strict norms, rules and symbols that is obligatorily applied in official communication at the state, diplomatic and interstate levels. These norms and rules are observed during negotiations and preparation of agreements, giving them solemnity and greater respect for their particularly important provisions. Within the political and administrative structure, protocol assigns everyone their place, guarantees officials the opportunity to use its rules, reconciles disputed issues of precedence, as well as disagreements regarding privileges and immunities [2, c. 10].

In addition, diplomatic protocol embodies two fundamental political concepts.

The principle of state sovereignty is emphasized through norms such as the mandatory performance of the national anthem and the rendering of honors to the national flag. These actions symbolically recognize the independence and supremacy of state authority.

The principle of equality of states is ensured through adherence to alternation (the order of names of states and signatures in treaties), rotating precedence at official events, as well as orderly seating of diplomatic representatives. This guarantees that no state formally has an advantage over another.

As we can see, this is much more than simply etiquette. Protocol is a legal and political instrument that:

- regulates the procedure for organizing and conducting meetings, negotiations, ceremonies and signing documents;
- fixes the hierarchy of statuses and positions of participants;
- serves to ensure mutual respect, avoid misunderstandings and emphasize the sovereignty and equality of states.

Actual violation of protocol (as in the case of "Sofagate") is often perceived as an insult or political demarche with direct diplomatic consequences.

In the modern world, where informal communication dominates, protocol may seem archaic. Let us attempt to prove that it remains an important instrument of politics, communication and state-building.

Analysis of recent research and publications:

V. V. Vladyshevskaya and M. V. Hrushko consider protocol an important instrument for implementing the fundamental principles of a state's foreign policy, an integral component of diplomacy and its political tool. Accordingly, they identify as the most important function the promotion of international courtesy and peaceful coexistence [3]. V. M. Mishehlina associates protocol with the implementation of the internal and external functions of state symbols, emphasizing that protocol contributes to consolidating external manifestations of state authority both within the territory of the state and beyond it, especially in relations with foreign states and international organizations [4]. I. H. Maidan notes the importance of observing the ceremonial norms of other countries by all representatives, diplomats and politicians. In particular, this includes national features of diplomatic ceremonies and international etiquette formed according to the customs, traditions, political, social, ethnic, confessional and cultural conditions of these countries [5].

Purpose and Objectives of the Article. The purpose is to reveal the functions and role of protocol. The objectives are to analyze its theoretical foundations and then consider its practical application in two key areas: international relations and public administration.

Main Text. The development of protocol began with court ceremonial in European monarchies (especially in France and Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). At this stage, protocol had the following key features:

- 1) emphasis on the absolute power of the monarch, reflection of strict feudal hierarchy and rank of the nobility;
- 2) extraordinary complexity, splendor and closed nature of rules;
- 3) the order of seating, greetings and entry depended directly on class, title and proximity to the royal person rather than on the status of the state.

An important turning point was the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Before that time, diplomatic protocol was chaotic and often led to conflicts due to disputes over precedence among ambassadors. The Vienna Regulation established universal rules of precedence for diplomatic representatives based on the time of accreditation (that is, when the ambassador arrived in the country), rather than on the political weight of the country or the nobility of the envoy.

Thus, this was the first step toward separating personal status from state status and laying the foundation for formal equality of representatives.

Modern protocol acquired its form in the twentieth century, especially after the creation of the United Nations and the adoption of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations in 1961. The purpose of modern protocol is to regulate relations among sovereign states regardless of their political system or size. The fundamental principle is the principle of sovereign equality of states – each state, regardless of power, has equal rights and obligations with others. Protocol serves as an instrument to reflect this equality (for example through alternation in treaty signing, equal placement of flags and anthems) [2, c. 15].

Thus, protocol evolved from an instrument confirming the vertical hierarchy of the monarch to a system ensuring horizontal and formal equality of sovereign nations on the world stage.

Based on analysis of scholarly works, we will attempt to summarize the key functions of protocol.

Based on the analysis of scholarly works, we will attempt to further summarize the key functions of protocol.

Thus, the above theses, as well as a more detailed analysis of these works, allow us to speak of protocol as:

1. The creation of a clear, predictable and orderly algorithm for official interactions, which allows avoiding chaos, misunderstandings and conflicts regarding status and priority (organizational function).

2. A kind of “language without words,” which through protocol details (seating order, level of reception of a delegation, exchange of gifts) transmits signals of respect, disregard, interest or distancing (communicative function).

3. A visual embodiment of the state, its sovereignty, dignity and authority through the promotion of national symbols (symbolic function).

4. The fixation and transmission of national traditions, cultural features and values for the formation of national identity (normative function).

Let us further consider how these functions are implemented in international relations and in public administration.

At the international level, the code of rules of a particular country and its observance of the codes of other countries takes the form of diplomatic protocol. Diplomatic protocol is a set of rules, traditions and customs that are strictly observed by governments, ministries of foreign affairs and diplomatic missions during international communication [6, c. 35].

It is not simply a collection of etiquette rules, but an integrated organizational and political instrument of the diplomatic service that performs several key functions:

1. Determines the procedure for carrying out various diplomatic acts and the form of relations between state officials of different countries.;

2. Regulates international relations.

3. Contributes to the successful implementation of the goals and objectives of the foreign policy of any state [7].

The importance of these diplomatic efforts of protocol services is revealed in a number of well-known historical examples widely covered in academic literature on diplomatic protocol and history. These examples are connected with such diplomatic work as the presentation of credentials by an ambassador, diplomatic correspondence, and the organization of receptions and other events in embassies.

Thus, the protocol of presenting credentials determines whether the receiving state recognizes a foreign representative as equal. A classical example is the reception of European ambassadors in China during the Qing dynasty (seventeenth–eighteenth centuries). Envoys, in particular French and British, refused to perform the kowtow ritual (prostration), since this would symbolize that their monarch was a vassal of the Chinese emperor. Protocol disagreement often led to the failure of missions, since the issue was not etiquette but recognition of hierarchy in world politics [8].

The protocol of diplomatic correspondence and treaty signing ensures sovereign equality. Before 1815, states constantly argued over whose monarch and whose country should be mentioned first in the text of bilateral agreements. The solution was the Principle of Alternation: each party, when preparing a copy for itself, places its country and signature first. This rule allowed both states to save face and formally confirm equal status, avoiding disputes over precedence.

The protocol of seating and precedence at receptions is key to preventing conflicts. Before the Vienna Regulation of 1815, there were no unified rules of precedence among ambassadors, which constantly caused clashes. The most famous example is the bloody incident of 1661 in London between the escorts of the ambassadors of France and Spain, who fought for precedence in the procession. The Congress of Vienna resolved this by establishing that precedence is determined exclusively by the time of accreditation (date of arrival), not by the rank of the monarch. This depoliticized the issue, turning it into a simple administrative rule that ensured predictability [2, c. 33].

Protocol of high-level visits is of decisive importance for a state's foreign policy, since it is a visible

embodiment of international status, respect and sovereign equality of states. It performs not only ceremonial but also strategic functions, in particular:

- symbolization of sovereignty and respect: every detail – from the red carpet and military guard of honor to seating order – confirms recognition of the guest as an equal representative of a sovereign state. Any violation of protocol is considered a direct political insult;

- determination of status and importance: protocol clearly distinguishes the level of a visit (for example between a state visit – the highest level of honors – and a working visit), which directly reflects the depth and importance of planned negotiations;

- ensuring efficiency and security: protocol coordinates the work of all services (security, transport, protection), guaranteeing safe and logistically efficient movement of the delegation under conditions of an intensive schedule;

- creation of a political background: proper organization creates a favorable atmosphere for negotiations, emphasizing the strength of bilateral relations and shared values.

Thus, one of the most protocol-significant visits that had an important political and symbolic dimension was the visit of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the United Kingdom in February 2023 [9]. This visit, although classified as a working visit due to wartime conditions, contained elements that emphasized exceptional status and respect on the part of the United Kingdom. The President was delivered to London by a Royal Air Force aircraft, which is a rare honor reserved for the closest strategic allies. The protocol included an audience with King Charles III at Buckingham Palace. This is the highest level of honor, confirming support for Ukraine from the British monarchy. The culmination was the President's address in Westminster Hall before both Houses of Parliament. This privilege is granted only to key world leaders and symbolizes deep unity and shared democratic heritage. Thus, the elevated level of protocol honors during the visit became a powerful and unambiguous diplomatic signal to the world about the unwavering support of Ukraine by the United Kingdom.

In international practice, deliberate observance or violation of protocol is often a more powerful political gesture than an official statement. In the already mentioned protocol incident “Sofagate” (2021), the Turkish side (regardless of whether intentional or not) effectively lowered the status of the President of the European Commission to the level of a minister, questioning her equality with Charles Michel. This was a demonstration of disregard toward a European institution headed by a woman and a political “slap.”

Sometimes political leaders resort to using protocol as “soft power” to express support or create a favorable atmosphere for negotiations. Thus, during the first visits of foreign leaders to Ukraine at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, heads of states and international organizations ignored traditional protocol requirements regarding security and thorough preparation, traveling by train, walking through the streets of Kyiv, and so on. This was a demonstrative expression of solidarity, disregard for risks for the sake of an ally, and a powerful political signal of unwavering support for Ukraine under conditions of war.

As we can see, in international relations protocol functions as a system of codified gestures that formalizes hierarchy, prevents diplomatic crises and serves as a strategic instrument for achieving foreign policy goals.

The second practical sphere of application of protocol is domestic governance. Here as well several directions of protocol activity can be distinguished, connected with the hierarchical structure of state authority: the highest level – presidential and parliamentary protocol; the middle level – protocol in the activities of executive authorities; the micro level – regional and municipal protocol. Let us consider these levels in more detail.

The official code of rules for Ukrainian diplomatic and state practice is the Presidential Decree of Ukraine “On the State Protocol and Ceremonial of Ukraine” (the main current document is Decree No. 746/2002 with subsequent amendments) [10]. This is a fundamental regulatory legal act that governs official communication at the highest state level and:

- approves the Regulation on the State Protocol and Ceremonial of Ukraine, providing clear instructions for all state authorities;

- determines the procedure, rules and procedures for conducting all official events with the participation of the President of Ukraine, the Prime Minister, the Chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada, as well as during visits of foreign heads of state and government;

- regulates the ceremonial of welcoming and seeing off delegations, the procedure for signing international treaties, seating rules, the use of state symbols (flag, anthem), as well as the procedure for presenting credentials by ambassadors;

- formalizes the activities of the State Protocol and Ceremonial Service (currently within the Office of the President), which is responsible for the practical implementation of these norms.

The most significant procedure planned and organized by the State Protocol and Ceremonial Service is the ceremony of inauguration of the head of state and

the taking of the oath. The tasks of this service go far beyond logistics, ensuring legal legitimacy, state dignity and political signaling of the event. In particular, it is responsible for:

1. Developing the scenario of the entire ceremony and its timing;
2. Ensuring strict compliance with constitutional requirements during the oath, including the use of state symbols and attributes;
3. Observance of diplomatic protocol regarding foreign delegations;
4. Preparation and arrangement of the venue (for example, the session hall of the Verkhovna Rada) in accordance with requirements of state ceremonial;
5. Coordination of actions of military personnel (honor guard, military orchestra) to ensure a solemn and dignified background;
6. Cooperation with security services to guarantee safety of the head of state, delegates and guests.

In addition, during inauguration protocol performs not only a ceremonial function but also a function of legal legitimization of power, clearly distinguishing and at the same time uniting the three branches of government:

- legislative – the Chairperson of Parliament opens the ceremonial session and formally provides the platform for the act;
- judicial – the Chairperson of the Constitutional Court administers the oath and announces assumption of office;
- executive – the elected President takes the oath and assumes powers in accordance with the Constitution.

Protocol between branches of government is also a guarantor of institutional respect and effective interaction, as it prevents situations where protocol disputes may escalate into political conflicts. This includes:

1. Establishing hierarchy among officials of different branches at joint events;
2. Defining forms and style of official communication between branches (official correspondence, submissions and appointments);
3. Coordination of joint activities where branches represent the country (within delegations and at official receptions).

If the types of protocol described above in both international and state activity primarily represented classical (or traditional) ceremonial protocol, in state communication an equally important role is played by functional protocol. The principle of functionality of protocol is clearly revealed in the work of V. M. Repetskyi [11], who shows that functional

protocol places function above form, which is manifested in:

- priority of substance over form (minimizing time spent on lengthy ceremonies, allowing leaders and experts to focus on negotiations);
- flexibility (protocol easily adapts to different levels of interaction and conditions, such as visits to conflict zones or rapid working trips);
- delegation of representation to the most competent specialists, where expertise is more important than status;
- efficiency in ensuring clear coordination of logistics, security and schedules, allowing visits and events to be organized more productively and economically.

This case can be considered using the example of the activities of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman).

A vivid example of international protocol interaction of the Secretariat of the Commissioner, covered in Ukrainian media, is the round table on countering strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) [12], organized in September 2024 jointly with the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine.

This event illustrates the application of functional protocol in the field of human rights protection:

- joint organization – holding the event together with the Council of Europe Office emphasizes the international status of the issues discussed (protection of freedom of speech and media) and the need for equal cooperation;
- international representation – participation of high-level international experts, including an international consultant of the Council of Europe, the Deputy Head of the Civil Justice Unit of the European Commission, and representatives of the Council of Europe steering committee on media;
- level of participation of the Secretariat – the Deputy Head of Department and Chief Specialist of the Department for Monitoring Information Rights participated, indicating delegated working protocol where expertise and institutional interaction have priority over status;
- protocol result – discussions focused on integrating European standards (Council of Europe recommendations and EU Directive) into Ukrainian legislation, with protocol serving as a framework for harmonizing legal positions and implementing international norms.

This meeting is an example of functional protocol where formal procedures (invitations, hierarchy of representation) serve to achieve a practical political

goal – approximation of Ukrainian legislation to European standards in protecting journalists and activists [13].

Functional protocol, due to its practical orientation, is also used for internal regulated procedures of administrative bodies. This includes organization of citizen receptions – established procedures for receiving, registering and accompanying citizens reflect respect for applicants and transparency of public institutions. Likewise, organization of official correspondence and compliance with clear requirements for drafting requests, responses and submissions ensure legal validity of documents.

Thus, we see that in public administration all types of protocol are critically important for maintaining authority and legitimacy of state institutions.

Conclusions. State and diplomatic protocol, despite perceptions of its archaic nature, remains an integral and vital instrument of modern governance

and international communication. It is not merely a set of etiquette rules but a political and legal system performing fundamental functions:

- regulatory – creating a clear and predictable algorithm for official interactions, preventing chaos and conflicts;
- symbolic – visual embodiment of state sovereignty and dignity and legitimization of state acts;
- communicative – non-verbal transmission of political signals of respect, equality, support, or conversely disregard or dissatisfaction.

Both in international relations and in domestic governance, protocol serves a single purpose – strengthening authority, legitimacy and order.

Modern practice also demonstrates a transition toward functional protocol, which values pragmatism and efficiency above classical ceremonial, ensuring effectiveness even in complex conditions such as wartime.

Bibliography:

1. Zavhorodnia I., Mylnikov P. Von der Leyen will not allow a repeat of the chair scandal. *Deutsche Welle*. 2021. April 13. URL: <https://www.dw.com/uk/holova-yevrokomisii-ne-dopustyt-povtorennia-skandalu-iz-krislamy-zmi/a-57178132>
2. Sahaidak O. P. Diplomatic protocol and etiquette : textbook. 2nd ed., revised. Kyiv : Znannia, 2012. 262 p.
3. Vladyshevskaya V. V., Hrushko M. V. Diplomatic protocol and etiquette : educational and methodological guide. Odesa : Phoenix, 2023. 88 p. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32837/11300.2344>
4. Mishehlina V. M. Internal and external functions of state symbols. Legal life of modern Ukraine : proceedings of the international conference. Odesa : Helvetyka, 2020. Vol. 1. P. 123–127.
5. Maidan I. H. How I was the first ambassador of independent Ukraine to Iran. *Ukraine Diplomatic*. 2015. Issue 16. P. 546–554.
6. Hodgson J. Effective negotiation: rapid response tactics. Kyiv : Balance-Audit, 2012. 242 p.
7. Voronova O. The place of diplomatic protocol in the development of international economic relations. *Herald of Khmelnytskyi National University. Economic Sciences*. 2024. No. 330(3). P. 123–127. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31891/2307-5740-2024-330-18>
8. Rockhill W. Diplomatic missions to the court of China: the kowtow question I. *The American Historical Review*. 1897. Vol. 2. No. 3. P. 427–442.
9. Zelenskyy visits UK for first time since Russia's invasion... ABC News. 2023. February 8.
10. Decree of the President of Ukraine "On the State Protocol and Ceremonial of Ukraine". URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/746/2002>
11. Repetskyi V. M. Diplomatic and consular law : textbook. Kyiv : Znannia, 2006. 372 p.
12. Round table on countering SLAPPs. Council of Europe Office in Ukraine. URL: <https://www.coe.int/uk/web/kyiv/-/key-stakeholders-discuss-new-legal-measures-and-strategies-to-combat-slapps-in-ukraine>
13. Public Administration for Sustainable Development: Mechanisms and Strategies of State and Regional Administration in the Conditions of War and Reconstruction of Ukraine : Collective Monograph / gen. ed. A. Chechel, L. Zharova, M. Śleziak. – Kyiv ; Bielsko-Biala (Poland): University of Economics and Humanities, 2025. 285 p.

Чечель А. О., Зелінська М. І., Чечель М. С. РОЛЬ ПРОТОКОЛУ В МІЖНАРОДНИХ ВІДНОСИНАХ ТА ДЕРЖАВНОМУ УПРАВЛІННІ

У статті досліджено функції та роль державного і дипломатичного протоколу, проаналізовано його теоретичні засади та практичне застосування у міжнародних відносинах і державному управлінні. Розглянуто еволюцію протоколу від придворного церемоніалу європейських монархій до сучасного демократичного державного протоколу, що ґрунтується на принципі суверенної рівності держав та слугує інструментом упорядкування офіційної взаємодії між державними інституціями й міжнародними акторами. Показано, що протокол є не лише сукупністю правил етикету,

а комплексною політико-правовою системою, яка забезпечує передбачуваність, стабільність і символічне представлення державної влади у міжнародному та внутрішньодержавному середовищі. Виокремлено та проаналізовано три фундаментальні функції сучасного протоколу: регулятивну, символічну та комунікативну. Регулятивна функція полягає у створенні чітких процедур і алгоритмів організації офіційних заходів, що дозволяє уникати конфліктів і непорозумінь між учасниками дипломатичних і державних взаємодій. Символічна функція проявляється у візуальному представленні суверенітету, гідності та статусу держави через використання державної символіки, церемоніалу візитів, інавгурацій та інших офіційних подій. Комунікативна функція розглядається як особлива форма невербальної політичної комунікації, за допомогою якої держави передають сигнали поваги, підтримки або дистанціювання, що може мати важливі дипломатичні наслідки.

Окрему увагу приділено трансформації сучасного протоколу у напрямі підвищення його функціональності. На прикладі діяльності Секретаріату Уповноваженого Верховної Ради України з прав людини проаналізовано практичне застосування функціонального протоколу у сфері державного управління та міжнародної інституційної взаємодії. Підкреслено, що функціональний протокол орієнтований на досягнення конкретного результату, надає перевагу ефективності, гнучкості та експертності над традиційною церемоніальністю. Зроблено висновок, що в умовах сучасних політичних викликів, зокрема під час воєнного стану, саме функціональний протокол стає домінуючою формою організації офіційної комунікації, забезпечуючи оперативність прийняття рішень та ефективність міжінституційної взаємодії.

Ключові слова: протокол, дипломатичний протокол, державний протокол, функціональний протокол, функції протоколу, церемоніал, етикет.

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 26.02.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 23.03.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 04.05.2026