



An Roinn Gnóthaí
Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of
Foreign Affairs and Trade

Our Ref: FOI/Req/2019/307

Date: 14th November 2019

Dear Ms. Ní Aodha

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, as follows:

“Correspondence between Department officials, the UK government, and Irish ministers about UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit to Dublin on 9 September. Sent from 2-12 September. Minutes and briefing notes of the meeting between Johnson and Varadkar during the visit. The cost of security preparations for the UK Prime Minister's visit (overtime, equipment, traffic management)”

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 6th November 2019.

I have identified 17 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant partial release of 1 record and I am refusing release of 16 records.

Where access has been refused, the records are exempt from release under Section 32 (1) (a) (iii) Law Enforcement and Public Safety, Section 33 (2) (b) (i) and (ii) Security, Defence and International Relations, and Section 37 (1) Personal Information.

Section 32 – Law Enforcement and Public Safety

While Section 32 (1) (a) (iii) is a mandatory exemption, I have considered whether the public interest would be better served by releasing the records in question. Some of the factors I have considered include the right of the public to have access to information; promoting public understanding of the work of the Department; whether the information would make a valuable contribution to public debate; the need for an open, transparent and accountable civil service; and the need for decision-making processes to be adequately scrutinised. However, I am satisfied that the public interest would not be best served by the release of records which might endanger the security of the Department and its staff, and substantially impair good working relationships between this country and another State, or harm the financial and economic interests of the State. I therefore believe that, on balance, the public interest is better served by refusing access to these records rather than releasing them.

Section 33 – Security, Defence and International Relations

While Section 33 (2) (b) (i) and (ii) Security, Defence and International Relations, is a mandatory exemption, I feel it is warranted that I give reasoning to why it has been used in so many of the records which I have refused release. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade operates in a complex and diverse international environment. A mutuality of confidence exists in the communication between this Department and our interlocutors. This is particularly the case in respect of diplomatic communications. I have considered the possibility and likelihood that the release of these records could result in negative consequences and prejudice the ability of this Department to effectively discharge its functions and engage with outside interlocutors and stakeholders. To do otherwise would risk compromising the State's capacity to engage with international partners through diplomatic and other channels.

Section 37 – Personal Information

While Section 37(1) Personal Information is a mandatory exemption, I am still obliged to consider whether the public interest would be best served by releasing the records in full. I have taken into account the benefit to the public to be given access to correspondence in a manner which demonstrates transparency and accountability of the Department. In the main, the information redacted relates to personal contact information and does not affect the substance of the record. I have particularly considered whether releasing the personal information would provide any additional benefit in this regard. I have weighed this against the right of individuals to have their personal information remain private and have found that there is a clear prerogative for this information to remain private.

Right of Appeal

Should you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so in writing to the Freedom of Information Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 76-78 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 or by email to foi@dfa.ie. A fee applies for an appeal for access to non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at foi@dfa.ie, or 01-4082857.

You should make your appeal within 4 weeks (20 working days) from the date of this notification. However, the making of a late appeal may be permitted in appropriate circumstances. The appeal will involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of the staff of this Department.

Yours sincerely,

Ciarán Doyle

British-Irish Relations Unit
Ireland, UK, and Americas Division
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
