



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

Our Ref: Fol/Req/2019/143

7 May 2019

Dear Mr. Flanagan

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:

"Minutes and agendas of any meetings held between department officials and the Chargé d'Affaires at the French Embassy in Ireland from the 1st November to 31st December 2013.

Any reports, memos, emails or briefing materials relating to any such meetings.

Searches of any relevant private email addresses and/or messaging services should be considered when processing this request."

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 18 April 2019.

I have identified 1 record that falls within the scope of your request. The record is listed in the schedule attached and relates to a meeting between the Chief of Protocol and the Chargé d'Affaires at the French Embassy. I have made a decision not to grant access to this document on the basis of Section 33(1)(d), Section 35(1)(a) and Section 37(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2014, as amended.

Section 33(1) (d) refers to records which, if released, could reasonably be expected to adversely affect matters relating to the international relations of the State. With regard to international relations, this Department is responsible for managing relations between Ireland and 178 countries, in a complex and diverse environment. Successful diplomatic relations depend upon the creation and maintenance of trust and confidence between governments. Based on the Department's direct knowledge and expertise in international relations, its strongly held position is that the mere granting of access to records will adversely affect the State's relations by introducing major doubts with regard to the security and confidentiality of our diplomatic communications. It is important to maintain that mutuality of trust to protect and promote Ireland's interests internationally. I have considered the potential impact that the release of this record could have in our capacity to conduct our international relations. On balance, I am satisfied that the balance favours refusal rather than release.

Section 35(1)(a) refers to records "containing information given to an FOI body, in confidence and on the understanding that it would be treated by it as confidential". The public interest arguments I have considered include the right of the public to access information. However, I have also considered whether releasing the records falling under this exemption would prejudice such giving of information in future, and in my opinion, releasing the records would have this effect. I am therefore obliged to refuse the request.

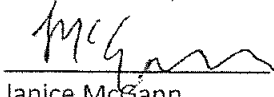
I have also decided not to grant access to the document under Section 37(1) of the 2014 Act. Under this section, access shall be refused if it would involve the disclosure of personal information. I consider that the public interest in upholding the right to privacy of the individual concerned outweighs any public interest in releasing their personal information.

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



Janice McGann