



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Baile Átha Cliath 2

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Dublin 2

Ms Catherine Halloran

Irish Daily Star

Independent House

27 – 32 Talbot St

Dublin 1

29 October 2014

Our Ref: FOI/REQ/14080

Dear Ms Halloran

I refer to your recent request under the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003 for access to information held by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, amended as follows:

“A list of all commercial flights taken by former Foreign Affairs Minister Eamon Gilmore, current Minister Charlie Flanagan and their Junior Ministers from March 1st 2011 to date, the details to include destination, cost and class travelled.”

I am the deciding officer for your request. I have decided to grant you access to all information. Attached is a list of commercial flights taken by all Ministers at the Department from 1 March 2011 to date your request was received (1 Oct), including details of destination, cost and class travelled. Please note that the place of departure was not Dublin in all cases.

The core functions of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade include promoting Ireland’s economic and trade interests in Europe and internationally; negotiating international political and security policy; advancing reconciliation and cooperation on the island of Ireland and EU enlargement and external relations.

The overseas travel undertaken by Ministers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is in pursuit of these goals and is fully in the national interest.

For example, Ministers travel to New York to attend the UN General Assembly in September of each year to discuss issues of critical importance including the ongoing conflict in Syria and the Middle East peace process.

It is the firm belief of the Government that our relationship with the Member States of the European Union is an essential element of our foreign policy agenda, both in the realm of bilateral relations and in the context of the European Union. To this end Ministers undertake engagements in Member States with business communities, the Diaspora, the local media as well as with key political figures with the sole objective of advancing our interests and strengthening our relations across the full range of the Department's objectives. Furthermore, the Government clearly recognises the importance of the European Parliament in EU decision making and has committed to Ministerial attendance at as many Plenary Sessions as is practical.

The travel costs for the Department in 2013 included exceptional once-off costs associated with Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the first six months of 2013. In her capacity as then Minister for European Affairs during the Presidency, former Minister of State for EU Affairs Lucinda Creighton T.D. travelled almost 200,000km and visited 44 countries.

Trade promotion and economic messaging are key elements in all visits abroad undertaken by Ministers from the Department. In 2013, the then Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade undertook a political and trade mission to China (Beijing and Shanghai). The purpose of the visit was to strengthen the high-level political engagement necessary to deliver on the Strategic Partnership Agreement between Ireland and China. He also had a series of engagements focused on supporting Irish companies doing business in China, promoting Ireland as a tourist destination, and promoting Ireland as the best investment location for Chinese businesses looking to expand in Europe.

Whenever Ministers travel on official business overseas, every effort is made to ensure that appropriate opportunities are taken for a substantive economic and promotional dimension to the visit. In this regard, St. Patrick's Day offers a unique opportunity to promote Ireland's economic and political interests overseas. In March 2013, the then Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade travelled to the United States, Ireland's most important source of Foreign Direct Investment, our largest market for exports of merchandise and a vital tourism market. The purpose of his travel there was to return maximum economic benefit to Ireland as well as maintaining vital US support for the Northern Ireland peace process, and on bilateral issues including US immigration reform. Such Ministerial visits are also important to Irish communities abroad, and an occasion to engage with those of Irish descent, whose friendship and support is such an asset to us.

Ministers routinely fly economy class in order to minimise costs to the exchequer, except where a case can be made, such as on long-haul flights where their schedule demands that they immediately begin to work on arrival.

The central aims of the Department's travel policy, which is based on the travel policy for all Government Departments, are to minimise official travel costs and to achieve value for money for expenditure necessarily incurred, consistent with the effective discharge of official duties.

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. A fee applies for an appeal, with the exception of an appeal against the imposition of a fee; the level of this fee has been set at €75. Payment should be made by way of bank draft, money order, postal order or personal cheque made payable to the Secretary General, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

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



Julie O'Brien

FOI Officer