



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

Our Ref: Fol/Req/16209
Ken Foxe

16 January 2017

Dear Ken,

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:

All records relating to plan to seek use of government jet for trip to Mongolia by Minister Charlie Flanagan.

Copies of any correspondence between the Department and the Dept. of the Taoiseach regarding the above.

Copies of the invoices/receipts associated with the ministerial costs of the above trip i.e. flight, hotel, entertainment, subsistence, gifts, etc.

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 22 December 2016.

I have identified nine records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant three of the records and refuse six of the records. Where access has been refused, the records are exempt from release under Section 15(1)(i)(i) where the records were already released to you under a previous request and under Section 15(1)(d) where records are already in the public domain.

When travelling overseas Ministers use commercial airlines for official travel whenever possible. Use of the Government jet is considered when commercial options would impact significantly on the Minister's ability to fulfil his commitments internationally and domestically. In this case, Minister Flanagan used scheduled, commercial flights for a Dublin-Istanbul-Bishkek-Ulaanbaatar and Ulaanbaatar-Beijing-Brussels round trip with a total travel time of some 34 hours. Due to an attempted coup in Turkey at the time of travel, flight arrangements from Ulan Bator to Brussels had to be changed over that weekend.

The core functions of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade are predominantly concerned with international political and security policy, advancing reconciliation and

cooperation on the island of Ireland, EU enlargement and external relations, and promoting Ireland's economic and trade interests in Europe and internationally. All overseas travel undertaken by the Ministers at this Department is in pursuit of these goals.

In this instance, Minister Flanagan travelled to Mongolia for the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit. The Summit is a biennial event which brings together Heads of State and Government from 51 ASEM partner countries in Europe and Asia, in addition to the EU and ASEAN. ASEM is an important forum for informal dialogue and cooperation between countries in these regions. 2016 marked a significant year for the ASEM as it celebrated its 20th anniversary. Participation in the ASEM Summit is an important part of Ireland's and the EU's engagement with Asia. Attendance also offers a valuable opportunity for bilateral meetings with Asian counterparts where distance limits the occasions on which political-level contact can take place. High level attendance is generally expected at the Summit, with most States represented at the level of President or Prime Minister. The Taoiseach was not in a position to attend in 2016 in light of commitments in Ireland, and requested that Minister Flanagan attend in his place.

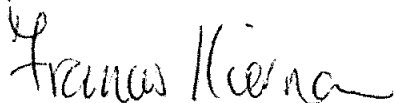
Minister Flanagan took the opportunity to highlight Irish bilateral and international foreign policy positions during the Summit and in his bilateral meetings and contacts with counterparts from a number of Asian and European countries. In light of the timing of the ASEM Summit, which took shortly after the United Kingdom's European Union membership referendum, the Minister's attendance provided a key opportunity to set out Ireland's position on Brexit to both European and Asian partners. In addition informal bilateral discussions re Brexit with Chancellor Merkel Minister Flanagan met with the Foreign Ministers of Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, Greece and Portugal. Bilateral meetings were also held with the Foreign Ministers of Singapore, New Zealand and Vietnam.

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@dfat.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@dfat.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



Frances Kiernan