



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

Our Ref: FOI/Req/19/106

Date: 27 March 2019

Dear Mr Murray,

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 correspondence between the minister and the UK's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland since 1 January 2018 regarding the ongoing lack of an NI government in place at the Stormont Assembly.

All correspondence between the minister and political parties in Northern Ireland regarding same since 1 January 2018.

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

I have identified 2 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to refuse to grant these records. These records are exempt from release under the following section of the Act:

- Section 33(1)(c), which refers to records which, if released, could reasonably be expected to adversely affect matters relating to Northern Ireland.

The absence of vital institutions of the Good Friday Agreement is a source of deep concern for the Government, as it is for the British Government. The Government will continue to do everything in its power, in accordance with its responsibilities as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to secure the effective operation of all of its institutions.

Over the past two years, the Tánaiste has been in ongoing contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the leaders of the political parties on how this can be pursued.

The British Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) met in July and November last year, and discussion items included getting all of the institutions of the Agreement functioning again.

Most recently, Secretary of State Bradley and the Tánaiste met with the leaders of the political parties at Stormont on 15 February.

The meeting sought the parties' views on a credible basis for a new talks process to start as soon as possible.

All parties provided views and it was agreed that the two Governments would engage further with them in the period immediately ahead to seek a way forward with a new political process that can secure an agreement.

Following these further consultations with the parties, the Government does not underestimate the way to go in achieving a resolution, but continues to believe that this can be achieved and that there is an increasingly urgent need for talks to begin.

The Government will continue to work with the British Government, to get the necessary political process commenced to secure an agreement for a functioning Executive and Assembly.

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,

Raymond Mullen
Ireland, UK and Americas Division,
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade