



Our Ref: FoI/Req/19281

25 October 2019

Dear Mr Foxe,

I refer to the request which you made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 on 20 September 2019 for access to records held by this Department as follows:

“copies of any records held relating or referring to the presence of the LÉ Samuel Beckett in New York next week. This request to cover the period 1 August 2019 to date of receipt of the request.”

Context of LÉ Samuel Beckett visit to New York

The LÉ Samuel Beckett visited New York and Boston from 24 September to 7 October as part of the Naval Service’s annual overseas programme in support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Government’s Global Ireland initiative, which aims to double Ireland’s impact globally by 2025. The vessel’s programme was coordinated by the Defence Forces and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, including the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations (UN), as well as the Consulates General of Ireland in New York and Boston.

This visit presented an important opportunity to facilitate messaging on Ireland’s humanitarian work, Ireland-US relations, EU-US relations, trade, Brexit and Diaspora engagement with a range of interlocutors. In terms of engagement with the Irish diaspora, open days advertised by the Consulates General in New York and Boston saw well in excess of 6,000 visitors to the vessel over four days and, in addition, youth groups from the Irish-American community in Philadelphia and New York participated in a public outreach event. Moreover, the vessel and its crew participated in events commemorating the Irish Famine both in Boston and New York.

There was a strong business focus to the programme: the vessel hosted a number of events that raised Ireland’s visibility and supported the work of the IDA and Enterprise Ireland in promoting Ireland’s important business and trade relationships in the United States. In New York, Enterprise Ireland hosted a panel discussion with over 70 guests as part of its Irish Innovation series, while in Boston several networking events targeted business, education and cultural contacts. The visit attracted a high level of interest both in the print media as well as on social media.

The programme also saw visits by political figures. In Boston, the EU Ambassador to the US met with a group of interlocutors on board the vessel, including an Irish trade delegation as well as local business and cultural contacts, and paid tribute to the role of the Irish Naval Service in EU-mandated humanitarian operations. US politicians also participated in a number of engagements: Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, citing the work of the crew of the LÉ Samuel Beckett, including its humanitarian efforts, proclaimed 6 October 'LÉ Samuel Beckett Day' in Boston. The New York element of the programme took place during a High Level Week of the UN General Assembly, and a reception organised by the respective Permanent Representatives of Ireland and Fiji on board the vessel highlighted both countries' valuable contribution to UN peacekeeping missions.

Finally, the voyage provided critical training and development opportunities to members of the LÉ Samuel Beckett crew and the Naval Service more widely.

Release of records - summary

I have identified 80 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant full access to 13 records, to partially grant access to 61 records and to refuse access to 6 records.

Where access has been partially granted or refused, exemptions apply pursuant to the following sections of the FOI Act:

Section 33(1)(d) – Security, defence and international relations

Section 37(1) – Personal Information

Section 33 (Security, defence and international relations)

Section 33(1)(d) stipulates that a head may refuse to grant an FOI request in relation to a record if, in the opinion of the head, access to it could reasonably be expected to adversely affect international relations. The text of a number of records has been redacted under this provision where it conveys the names of countries with which bilateral meetings took place in the context of a competitive campaign for election to the Security Council in June 2020. It should be noted that this information is not directly related to the substance of the FOI request. I have weighed carefully the public interest test in applying the exemption and, on balance, the adverse effect that releasing this information could have on international relations – in particular the prejudicial impact it could have on Ireland's efforts to be elected to the Security Council should our competitors know details of the countries with which we are targeting for engagement – outweighs the public interest in knowing the names of the countries with which Ireland carried out bilateral meetings.

In addition, a small number of records of diplomatic communications between Irish officials and the authorities of foreign governments have been refused under Section 33(2)(b)(i) on the basis that publication of these records could substantially impair good working relationships between Ireland and the States in question, thereby prejudicing the future supply of information required for the effective conduct of our foreign policy.

Section 37 (Personal Information)

While Section 37(1) provides for the mandatory exemption of records, I am still obliged to consider whether the public interest would be best served by releasing the records in full. Under Section 37(1) a head shall refuse to grant an FOI request if, in the opinion of the head, access to the record concerned would involve the disclosure of personal information.

The information redacted under this provision relates to personal contact information – viz. mobile telephone numbers and the personal email address of individual external contacts of the Department. Otherwise the records are complete. I have considered the public interest in releasing these records in full against the right of individuals to have their personal information remain private and I am satisfied that the public interest is better served by providing partial access to the records in question.

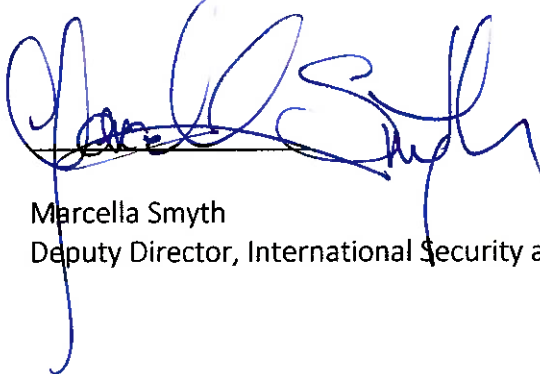
Right of Appeal

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.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for agreeing to an extension as regards the response date for your request.

Yours sincerely



Marcella Smyth
Deputy Director, International Security and Policy Section