



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

Our Ref: FoI/Req/20/024

Dear Sir/Madam,

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:

- 1. All documents, to include all research papers, minutes of meetings, advisory papers and policy documents, in respect of planning for a referendum on Irish unity.*
- 2. All documents, to include all research papers, minutes of meetings, advisory papers and policy documents, in respect of planning for a United Ireland.*
- 3. All documents, to include all research papers, minutes of meetings, advisory papers and policy documents, in respect of all risk assessments conducted in respect of a referendum on Irish Unity.*
- 4. All documents, to include all research papers, minutes of meetings, advisory papers and policy documents, in respect of all risk assessments conducted in respect of planning for a United Ireland.*

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 28 January 2020.

I have identified 10 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant 4 records.

Where access has been refused, the records are exempt from release under the following sections of the Act:

- Section 15(1)(d), which refers to information already in the public domain.

Record 3, the Seanad Commencement Matter on ‘*why the issue of a referendum on unifying the people of Ireland is not part of his Department’s Risk Register*’ is available [here](#).

Record 4, the National Risk Assessment 2019 is available [here](#).

Records 5-8 are publically available Parliamentary Questions. I have attached a link to those records for ease of reference:

20190227 - Parliamentary Question [7341/19](#)
20190312 - Parliamentary Question [11717/19](#)
20190917 – Parliamentary Question [36419/19](#)
20191107 – Parliamentary Question [45860/19](#)

The full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements is a priority for the Government. The approach of the Government in relation to Irish unity is of course guided by Article 3 of the Constitution, as amended by the people in 1998.

Under the Good Friday Agreement, the Irish and British Governments “recognise the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status, whether they prefer to continue to support the Union with Britain or a sovereign united Ireland” and should such a choice be made in the future, it will be a binding obligation on both Governments to introduce and support in their respective Parliaments legislation to give effect to that wish.

The holding of a referendum in this jurisdiction is connected with the calling of a border poll, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, in Northern Ireland. Under the Good Friday Agreement, the Secretary of State shall exercise this power “if at any time it appears likely...that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland”.

In the event of a future referendum within the consent provisions of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government has confirmed that it would make all necessary preparations in accordance with the terms of the Constitution and the principles and procedures of the Agreement.

It is recognised that the course of Brexit in recent years has led to more civic discussion and engagement, North and South, about constitutional change as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement. These are extremely important issues which naturally require very careful and serious consideration. It will be necessary for Government to continue to engage and reflect on them, listening to the views of everyone on this island, whether nationalist, unionist or neither.

Over the last year, the Government has focused on securing ratification and implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement to allow for an ordered Brexit, including a smooth transition period; preparing for the next phase of Brexit negotiations dealing with the future EU-UK relationship; securing the return to effective operation of the power-sharing Executive and Assembly and the North South Ministerial Council; and, ensuring the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the achievements of the Peace Process, as the UK leaves the EU.

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,

Andrea Wickham Moriarty
Ireland, UK and Americas Division,
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade