



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

27 June 2014

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUEST REF: 0298-14

Thank you for your request for information which we received on 14 March 2014. In your request you asked;

1. *For the period 16 October 2008 to present: Any documents, communications and correspondence, including emails, notes transcripts, memoranda, research and briefings in connection with or relating to:*
 - a) *The Armenian genocide; or*
 - b) *Her Majesty's Government policy on the recognition of the Armenian genocide.*
2. *Any documents, communications and correspondence, including emails, notes, transcripts, memoranda, research, and briefings in connection with or relating to or provided to David Lidington, of the Foreign Office, in connection with his response to the question "what his policy is on recognition of the deaths which took place in the Armenian genocide in 1919" by Robert Ffello MP in the House of Commons debate of 15 July 2010, c864W;*
3. *Any documents, communications and correspondence, including emails, notes, transcripts, memoranda, research, and briefings in connection with or relating to or provided to Lord Howell of Guildford, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in connection with his answer to the question "what is their timetable for recognising the Armenian genocide" by Baroness Flather in the House of Lords Debate of 16 June 2011, c773ff;*
4. *Any documents, communications and correspondence, including emails, notes, transcripts, memoranda, research, and briefings in connection with or relating to or provided to any peer for the House of Lords debates of 29 March 2010 c497-510GC relating to Armenia;*
5. *Any documents, communications and correspondence, including emails, notes, transcripts, memoranda, research, and briefings in connection with or relating to the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day Bill (Bill 43 2008-9);*

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does hold information falling within the terms of your request. In order to capture pieces of information which are relevant to your request, we have not confined our search terms to the 'Armenian Genocide' but have broadened our search terms to include, for example, the 'Armenian Massacres.' I am pleased to release the information that we are able to disclose.

Some of the information we hold which is relevant to your request is, in our view, already reasonably accessible to the applicant. Under Section 21 of the Act, we are not required to provide information in response to a request if it is already reasonably accessible to the applicant. I would particularly direct your attention to the following website addresses.

http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/199_turkey_and_armenia_opening_minds_opening_borders_2.pdf

<http://www.lragir.am/index/eng/0/politics/view/16488>

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/hres252/text/ih>

Some of the information within the scope of your request has been withheld as it is exempt under section 27 (1)(c). Section 27(1)(c) states that

(1) Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to prejudice –

(c) the interests of the United Kingdom abroad,

Section 27 is a qualified exemption and as such we have considered where the greater public interest lies.

Disclosure could meet the public interest in transparency and accountability. However, the effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments. If the UK does not maintain this trust and confidence, its ability to protect and promote UK interests through international relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of information setting out the thoughts of an official on our relationship with various states could potentially damage the relationship between the UK and those states. The relationships are on-going and comments - even dating back some time - could be taken into account by those states. This could reduce the UK Government's ability to protect and promote UK interests which would not be in the public interest. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

Some information has been withheld under Section 28 – relations within the UK.

The FCO has to strike a balance between being able to give free and frank advice to Ministers and senior officials in London, while maintaining a good working relationship with the Scottish Executive to promote their interests. Section 28(1)(2)(b) is a qualified exemption as such, we have considered where the greater public interest lies. Disclosure could meet the public interest in transparency and accountability. However, the effective conduct of internal UK relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between Governments. If the United Kingdom does not maintain this trust and confidence, its ability to protect and promote UK interests through internal relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of information could potentially damage the relationship between the UK and the Scottish Administration which is not in the public interest. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

Some information has been withheld under Section 35 - formulation of government policy. Section 35(1) (a) is a qualified exemption and its application requires us to consider the public interest test argument in favour of releasing and withholding the information. There is public interest in protecting policy-making processes and ensuring this process remains able to deliver effective government. This is considered against the public interest in making

publicly available information about policy-making processes. We consider that the balance of the public interest lies in favour of withholding certain information in relation to your request because it relates to ministerial correspondence and the operation of private offices, which are necessary to develop and deliver government policy.

Some information has been withheld under Section 41(1)(b), as it is information that was provided in confidence. It is our view that disclosure of this information would constitute an actionable breach of confidence and so disclosure would also be unlawful under the Act. In these circumstances, Section 41 of the Freedom of Information Act confers an absolute exemption on disclosure and there is no public interest test to apply.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the Freedom of Information Act, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless it is exempt. The information we have supplied to you may now be published on our website together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

The information supplied to you continues to be protected by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including any non-commercial research you are doing and for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder. Most documents supplied by the FCO will have been produced by government officials and will be protected by Crown Copyright. You can find details on the arrangement for re-using Crown Copyright information on the [TNA](#) website.

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You can also find out more about the FCO and freedom of information issues at our Access to Information website: www.fco.gov.uk/foi

Yours sincerely,

Eastern Europe and Central Asia Department



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