



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

01 August 2017

EU-Eastern Mediterranean Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

Dear

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0268-17

Further to our letter of 16 May, I write in regards to your request for information, which we received on 15 March. In your request you asked for:

All documents regarding communication between London or Turkish-based FCO civil servants or ministers and BP company staff in which Turkey was mentioned, between January 2016 and today, 14 March 2017.

As previously stated, I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information falling within the terms of your request.

The information that we can release to you is enclosed as a digest. The remainder has been withheld under exemptions section 27 (International Relations), section 35 (Formulation of Government policy), section 40 (Personal Information) and section 43 (Commercial Interests).

The application of section 27 (1) (a) requires us to consider the public interest test arguments in favour of releasing and withholding the information. We acknowledge that releasing information on this issue would increase public knowledge about our relations with Turkey. However, section 27 (1) (a) recognises that the effective conduct of international 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 international relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of information detailing our relationship with the Turkish Government could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and Turkey. This would reduce the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations with Turkey, 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 disclosing it.

The information is specifically being withheld under section 35(1) (a) of the Act. In applying the required public interest test I recognised that there is public interest in transparency in the formulation and implementation of Government policy. However, I also recognise that Ministers and officials need to be able discuss and debate policy free from the pressures of public political debate. There is a strong public interest in ensuring high-quality policy-making and implementation. For Government to succeed in upholding the public interest, Ministers and officials need to be able to consider, debate and understand implications of the

policy and how it is presented. Their candour in doing so will be affected by their assessment of whether the content of such discussions will be disclosed in the near future.

Some of the information you have requested, is personal data relating to third parties, the disclosure of which would contravene one of the data protection principles. In such circumstances sections 40(2) and (3) of the Freedom of Information Act apply. In this case, our view is that disclosure would breach the first data protection principle. This states that personal data should be processed fairly and lawfully. It is the fairness aspect of this principle, which, in our view, would be breached by disclosure. In such circumstances, section 40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is, therefore, no public interest test to apply.

Finally, some of the information is also exempt under section 43 (2) of the Act, which relates to commercial interests. The use of this exemption was carefully considered. The factors in favour of disclosure of this information, including the general public interest and greater transparency and accountability, were carefully weighed against the need to allow business-people and commercial organisations the space to conduct their lawful business competitively and without fear of disclosure of sensitive commercial information. We consider that this transparency also poses risks to the protection of commercially confidential information. Failure to protect such commercially sensitive information would limit the sources of information and interlocutors available to the FCO and limit the FCO's ability to promote the British economy and lobby for the interests of British businesses overseas. In this case after such consideration we believe that the public interest in withholding the redacted information outweighs the public interest in its release.

Yours sincerely,

Eastern Mediterranean Department



We keep and use information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. We may release this personal information to other UK government departments and public authorities.