



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

**Northern and Central Europe Department**  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
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Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

9 January 2017

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0841-16**

Thank you for your email of 4 September 2016 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

*I am sending this request under the Freedom of Information Act to ask for the Telegram 129 from Moscow to the FCO dated January 1991 about the situation in Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.*

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request.

We are releasing the document you requested but with some redactions.

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, s.40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is, therefore, no public interest test to apply.

Some of the information has been withheld using section 27 – international relations. Section 27 is a qualified exemption and is subject to a public interest test.

Section 27(1)(a) of the FOIA recognises the need to protect information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the United Kingdom and other states if it was disclosed. In this case, the release of information relating to the Baltic States around this time would in our judgement damage the UK's relationship with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. While we recognise that the telegram you requested is from 25 years ago, many of the subjects in the telegram remain sensitive.

We acknowledge that releasing information on this issue would increase public knowledge about our relations with the Baltic States around that time. However, s.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 Latvian and Lithuanian Government could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and the Baltic States. This would reduce the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations with these countries 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.

Some of the information you requested is exempt under section 41 of the Act, as disclosure would be a breach of confidence. The successful working of British diplomacy depends upon sources being able to provide information in confidence without fear that this will be made public. While the document is from 25 years ago, it would harm the UK's ability to hold free and frank discussions with other governments if they feared information given to the UK in confidence would later be released into the public domain. Exemptions under Section 41 do not require the application of a public interest test.

Northern and Central Europe 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.