



Extract from the report to the
Public Accounts Committee on
travel undertaken by ministers
and commission members

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I. Introduction and conclusion

1. This report is about the guidelines and practice governing travel undertaken by Danish ministers and commission members. The examination was launched at the request of the Public Accounts Committee in June 2010.

In the summer 2010, the media raised criticism of the travel activities of the Defence Commission and successive foreign ministers. The criticism centred on the frequent chartering of private aircraft when scheduled flights may have been appropriate.

2. The examination covers travel undertaken by ministers in the period 2005-2010. The practice of the ministries with respect to chartering aircraft for travel undertaken by their ministers has been examined for the period 1995-2010.

3. Two guidelines concern travel undertaken by ministers. In June 2008, the Prime Minister's Office issued guidelines regarding expenses incurred by the minister, including expenses relating to the minister's official travels. A political agreement entered by a majority of the political parties in the Danish Folketing (parliament) led to the introduction of a transparency scheme in June 2009. According to the transparency scheme, the ministries are required to release public data on the expenses and activities of the ministers, including also expenses relating to travel undertaken by ministers.

4. The examination also covers travel undertaken by four commissions that were established in the period 2005-2010. The selected commissions are: the Defence Commission, the Africa Commission, the Greenland-Danish Self-Government Commission and the Danish Commission on Climate Change Policy.

5. Based on the questions asked by the Public Accounts Committee, Rigsrevisionen has examined the following:

- Are the guidelines for travel undertaken by ministers adequate and clear, and do the ministries comply with the rules of the guidelines?
- How often are aircraft chartered for the ministers, and has practice changed?
- Which guidelines and practice are applying to travel undertaken by commission members?

Definition of travel

In the report travel is defined as official travels involving expenses for either accommodation or transport by air. The travel may also involve expenses for meals, entertainment and other official expenses.

MAIN CONCLUSION

The guidelines for travel undertaken by ministers are adequate and clear and take into consideration the special functions that ministers are required to perform. The ministries are complying with the guidelines. Rigsrevisionen points out that in some areas the guidelines could be further clarified. The Prime Minister's Office agrees with this recommendation and will adjust the guidelines accordingly.

Expenses relating to chartered aircraft account for the bulk of the total expenses for travel undertaken by ministers. Chartered aircraft are primarily used by the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence. According to the ministries the practice governing chartering of aircraft has not changed significantly in the period 1995-2010.

Generally, the ministries do not document the reasons for their decision to charter aircraft. According to the guidelines for travel undertaken by ministers, special considerations should be taken into account in particular regarding the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that in the future, the ministries should document the reasons for their decision to charter aircraft. The Prime Minister's Office should, however, be exempted from doing so, because the Prime Minister's schedule calls for flexibility and opportunity to prepare for meetings effectively and confidentially, and the Prime Minister is therefore generally using an aircraft provided by the Danish Defence to reach destinations in Europe.

The ministries are complying with current guidelines for official travels undertaken by commission members. Rigsrevisionen has, however, established that the ministries are following different practices for travel undertaken by commission members like, for instance, experts. Expenses relating to travel undertaken by the commissions are documented by the ministries.

The main conclusion is based on the following findings:

Guidelines and practice governing travel undertaken by ministers

The guidelines for travel undertaken by ministers are adequate and clear as they address all aspects of travel undertaken by ministers and clearly specify the nature of the reimbursable expenses. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the guidelines can in some areas be clarified. The Prime Minister's Office agrees with this recommendation and will adjust the guidelines accordingly. Rigsrevisionen finds this satisfactory.

- Two general guidelines are addressing travel undertaken by ministers: the guidelines for travel expenses from 2008 that is governing the incurrence of expenses in relation to ministers' official travel and the transparency scheme from 2009 concerning public data on ministers' expenses and activities. Before 2008 travel undertaken by ministers was not covered by any specific guidelines.

Guidelines for expenses

- The guidelines governing expenses relating to travel undertaken by ministers are adequate, as they are addressing all aspects relating to travel undertaken by ministers like, for instance, transport, accommodation, meals, etc. The guidelines are clear because they specify reimbursable expenses.
- The ministries can document that expenses incurred in connection with travel undertaken by the ministers are of an official nature and should be reimbursed by the ministries. The ministries can also document the travel expenses of the ministers.
- The ministries are complying with the regulations of the expense guidelines for travel undertaken by ministers. New guidelines for entertainment expenses were introduced when the transparency scheme was implemented in 2008. The ministries have in a few cases followed the former practice for entertainment expenses according to which the presence of non-government officials as guests at a function was not required to classify the expenses as entertainment expenses. The Prime Minister's Office has stated that the ministry intends to clarify the guidelines for entertainment expenses to the ministries. Rigsrevisionen finds this satisfactory.
- In accordance with the guidelines, the ministers are flying business class. Rigsrevisionen's study shows that the ministers are primarily flying economy or economy flex class when they travel by scheduled flights in Europe. For travels outside Europe, the ministers are primarily flying business class. Flight tickets and services provided by travel agencies are booked through government procurement agreements.

The transparency scheme

- The guidelines of the transparency scheme on travel undertaken by ministers are adequate and clear. The ministries are complying with the requirements of the scheme concerning publication of data on travel undertaken by the ministers. Rigsrevisionen finds that the scheme has increased the level of transparency relating to expenses incurred in connection with travel undertaken by ministers.

Rigsrevisionen points out that the Prime Minister's Office could clarify the nature of the travel expenses that the ministries are required to account for under the various expense items published at their respective websites, as the practice of the ministries in this respect varies. The Prime Minister's Office agrees with this recommendation and will adjust the guidelines accordingly.

Chartering aircraft

Expenses relating to chartered aircraft account for the bulk of the total expenses for travel undertaken by ministers. According to the ministries the practice governing chartering of aircraft has not changed significantly in the period 1995-2010.

The number of aircraft being chartered has decreased significantly in 2010 mainly because travel has decreased. Generally, the ministries do not document the reasons for their decision to charter aircraft. Rigsrevisionen is aware that according to the guidelines, special considerations should be taken into account in particular regarding the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. However, expenses relating to the chartering of aircraft are considerable and due to the exceptional nature of these expenses, Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that all ministries should document the reasons for their decision to charter aircraft, including their financial considerations. The Prime Minister's office should, however, be exempted from doing so, because the Prime Minister's schedule calls for flexibility and opportunity to prepare for meetings effectively and confidentially, and the Prime Minister is therefore generally using a flight provided by the Danish Defence to reach destinations in Europe.

- The Prime Minister uses chartered aircraft for most of his travels, whereas slightly more than half of the travel undertaken by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence is by chartered aircraft. To reach destinations in Europe, the Prime Minister generally use an aircraft provided by the Danish Royal Air Force. The ministers from the other ministries occasionally travel by chartered aircraft.
- The Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence have all stated that various factors are being considered before an aircraft is chartered, like for instance the possibilities to prepare for meetings efficiently and in confidentiality, flexibility and security. The Prime Minister's Office has stated that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in accordance with the guidelines for expenses, may charter aircraft at discretion. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that this should appear clearly from the expense guidelines and the Prime Minister's Office should therefore clarify the guideline in this respect. The Prime Minister's Office agrees with this recommendation.
- The Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence have stated that the practice governing chartering of aircraft has not changed significantly in the past 15 years. Rigsrevisionen's study supports this statement. In the period 2005-2010, the ministries have on average chartered 57 aircraft annually. In 2010, the number of aircraft chartered dropped significantly. The Prime Minister's Office has stated that the drop in number of chartered aircraft is related to a decrease travel undertaken by the Prime Minister.

- The Ministry of Defence is not, as stipulated by the regulations of the transparency scheme, publishing data on expenses for transport by air incurred by the Minister of Defence when he is using aircraft provided by the Danish Defence. Rigsrevisionen recommends that the ministry should calculate and publish data on these expenses in the future in order to increase the level of transparency relating to the expenses incurred when the Minister of Defence use an aircraft provided by the Danish Defence. The Ministry of Defence has stated that the total expenses connected to the minister's use of aircraft provided by the Danish Defence will be calculated in future. Rigsrevisionen finds this satisfactory.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is primarily chartering private aircraft, is obtaining several quotations before an aircraft is chartered. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also chartering aircraft for the Minister of Foreign Affairs for flights to destinations that can be reached by many scheduled flights daily. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs states as the reason for this practice that meetings may drag on beyond the allotted time and the minister should be able to prepare for meetings in confidentiality.
- To charter an aircraft is more expensive than travelling by scheduled flight, but generally the ministries do not document the reasons for their decision to charter an aircraft and not book a scheduled flight. Rigsrevisionen is aware that the ministries need to take many factors into consideration when they decide on the form of travel for, in particular, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the ministries, with the exception of the Prime Minister's Office, should document the reasons for their decision to charter aircraft, including their financial considerations.

Travel undertaken by commissions

The ministries are complying with current guidelines for official travels undertaken by commission members, but the ministries are following different practices for travel undertaken by commission members like, for instance, experts. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the status of commission members, be they ministers or government officials, should determine which guidelines the ministry should apply. In some instances, however, the ministry may have to deviate from this practice and instead on an individual basis decide which guidelines to follow. Expenses relating to travel undertaken by commissions are documented by the ministry.

- The members of the four commissions travel in accordance with different guidelines depending on, for instance the composition of the commission members, i.e. experts, members of parliament or ministers. However, commission members of equal status like, for instance, experts do not travel in accordance with the same guidelines. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that the members of commissions should travel in accordance with their status, meaning that government officials and experts should travel in accordance with the guidelines governing travel undertaken by government employees, and ministers should travel in accordance with the guidelines governing travel undertaken by ministers. In some instances, however, the ministry may have to deviate from this practice and decide on an individual basis which guidelines to apply.

- The ministries are complying with current guidelines for official travels when they purchase flight tickets.
- The ministries are documenting expenses for flights and accommodation in connection with travel undertaken by commission members.