

way they interacted. The closing of pubs had been a response to public opinion. But they did not yet intend to go as far as France or Spain, and wanted people to be able to go to work to allow the virus to move through the population in a controlled way. He wondered how France would manage to maintain their current highly restricted approach.

6. Coveney noted that the pressure in the Northern Ireland Executive resulting from the divergence in approach between the UK and Ireland had lessened now that schools in the UK were closing. **Redacted - Relevant and sensitive**
- Redacted - Relevant and sensitive** They both agreed that it was important for the stability of the Northern Ireland Executive that the UK and Ireland were working together and giving public demonstrations of cooperation.
7. Coveney suggested that a good way to ensure the UK and Ireland were discussing critical issues such as transport links, and demonstrating visibly that we were joined up, could be to hold a British Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) meeting. This would allow discussion of key issues such as transport, shipping and aviation. The First Minister and Deputy First Minister could be invited to attend parts dealing with NI. The BIIGC would be preferable to a British Irish Council (BIC) conference as that would involve all devolved administrations and risked missing the point that there were East-West issues that needed to be addressed. The Foreign Secretary agreed a 'virtual' BIIGC, either chaired by himself or CDL, was a good idea (Action: FCO pursuing with NIO).
8. The Foreign Secretary noted that the UK would be stepping up cooperation between the G7 and G20 and hoped Ireland would support global efforts. Coveney welcomed this.

EU travel ban

9. Coveney noted that opinion diverged across EU member states. He asked what the UK position was on potentially implementing the Schengen zone travel ban. The Foreign Secretary said that the UK did not intend to follow the Schengen approach. Coveney understood and committed that, if the U.K. was not going to be part of the arrangement, Ireland would not be either. It would obviously not be acceptable given the Common Travel Area and the possible impact on the Northern Ireland border. Ireland would need to talk to France in that context to make sure they did not impose restrictions on Ireland. The Foreign Secretary noted that France were considering closing their borders to the UK (except for freight). They agreed this would also put Ireland in a difficult position given the reliance on the UK for the landbridge. Coveney thought that was manageable from an Irish perspective.

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