

FOREIGN SECRETARY-TÁNAISTE - CALL - 27 MAY

1. The Foreign Secretary phoned Irish Tánaiste Simon Coveney on 27 May to discuss COVID-19.

Response to COVID-19

2. The Foreign Secretary updated the Tánaiste on the situation in the UK: the R rate was below 1, critical care cases down, and the UK on the cusp of moving to the second step of our roadmap. The Tánaiste set out the situation in Ireland, which was similar. Monday 25th May was the first day without a recorded death, and there were currently approx. 300 patients in hospital compared with 1,000 two weeks ago, with low numbers of critical cases. The virus was now essentially limited to care homes and hospitals with community transmission virtually stopped. The Irish cabinet would discuss moving to phase 2 next week. The challenge in Ireland was now the impatience of business, and around international travel. Unemployment was at 28% last week, although some of this was enforced by the lockdown. There was a good chance that the Irish government could accelerate their roadmap as they were in a better place than they had expected.

3. The Foreign Secretary noted that the Tánaiste had had good contact with SOSNI and CDL throughout the crisis and asked if he wanted greater contact with other Cabinet colleagues, especially as East-West issues were just as important as we ease measures. The Tánaiste agreed he had a good relationship with SOSNI who had been a steady hand. The Northern Ireland Executive had been under real pressure at the beginning, but had played it well by not fixing specific dates and preserving their ability to 'ride two horses' rather than align with either the UK or Irish roadmaps.

Border health controls

4. The Tánaiste thought that the area of East-West cooperation currently most difficult was travel between the UK and Ireland, and border health controls. It was not that this was causing tension, but it was a difficult issue to get right. He set out the Irish regulations, which required anyone to self-isolate for 14 days when returning to Ireland from overseas, but not anyone travelling from Northern Ireland. Currently only around 600 people a day were arriving in Ireland so it was not a big issue. However, Coveney was concerned that it created a perverse incentive for people to fly to Belfast airport then travel down to Ireland to circumvent the rules. He was clear it did not breach the Common Travel Agreement arrangements as it applied equally to all citizens, including Irish.

5. The Foreign Secretary agreed it was important to get the messaging right and make the rules clear. The UK was bringing in restrictions but he had agreed the Common Travel Area exemption early. SOSNI would work through the details, but we wanted to support Ireland. We did not want to leave Ireland exposed epidemiologically or politically, nor for Northern

Ireland to become a way for the virus to move into Ireland. The UK would work with Ireland to ensure messaging was clear.

International coordination on COVID-19

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7. The Foreign Secretary set out his discussions with five eyes and other likeminded partners to reduce reliance on one source for PPE and medicines. There were three options: i) greater diversification; ii) building up sovereign capacity; and iii) sourcing cooperation with like-minded.

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ICC election

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Ireland UNSC bid

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UK-EU Future Relationship

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Middle East Peace Process

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