Coveney Newsnight interview 16 August

I think we welcome the publication of a detailed document we’ve been calling for quite some time for a detailed paper on their aspirations

There’s a lot of good stuff in it from our perspective

Very strong language in terms of protecting the good Friday agreement in full

Very strong language

There has been suggestions from some sources in the UK that we can solve this problem by technology cameras on the border

I’ve always been very sceptical of that and that’s why it’s very welcome to today that the British government is saying very clearly that there will be no infrastructure on the border.

If Britain decides to take an approach that applies different food safety standards to Britain and NI from the common market well then we have a real problem. There are two sides to this negotiation. The other happens to represent 27 countries. And so what we have today from Britain – which is welcome – is an approach to the negotiations much of which is supported by the Irish government but we will have to thrash through the issues, find compromises, make sure we protect the integrity of the European Union in these negotiations as well as try to facilitate British ambition

The idea that britian is going to be able to negotiate its own free trade agreements with countries all over the world and at the same time expect barrier-free access into the single market I don’t think that that in itself is realistic.

I’m not going to talk about what-ifs at this stage. We are part of the other side we are part of the EU negotiating team. Michel Barnier has been protective of Irish interests so far, he has been very clear that Irish interests are European interests'.

This is in many ways a test of the European Union and how it protects small member states. Which is exactly what it needs to do here in the context of the consequences of Brexit for Ireland.

I don’t think we will be in that place because the EU has already shown a willingness to show real flexibility, to try to accommodate what are very real vulnerabilities for Ireland. And Britain, also in the context of Northern Ireland.

We need to work this out and find political solutions that in my view effectively allows Northern Ireland to become an extension of the EU customs union, to create equivalence north and south of the border. To allow the free movement not only of people but also of goods we also need to find a solution for services. The British government talks about the need for a common energy market North and South because they are totally interrelated at the moment. So all of these things are part of the complexity of Brexit. Which of course is a consequence of leaving. Ireland is a country that had nothing to do with the decision for Britain to leave the EU but is very much now in the middle of the debate to try and ensure that we protect ourselves in that context.

And that is what I mean when I say Ireland will be fair and realistic but also stubborn”

If we believe that these negotiations are moving in the wrong direction, if we believe that the British government is being unreasonable we will say so

I believe that Ireland is actually Britain’s closest friend here. Friends need to talk to each other honestly. Some of the aspirations I've heard are not realistic in the context of the Brexit negotiations" and you know I need to be honest about that. But I think a lot of what we heard today in the Ireland/NI paper is really good.

And I think it’s important to welcome that.

"I think the Irish role in [#Brexit](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Brexit?src=hash) is to call things as they are, and not pretend things are easy to resolve"