Twitter Thread by Tony Connelly



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Here is the rough transcript and story of @realDonaldTrump's NI envoy, his meeting with @simoncoveney and the alleged threat of the EU using aviation as leverage over the UK if the Internal Market Bill led to a hard border on the island of Ireland.

2/ Mr Mulvaney was talking to the @iiea via video link.

Asked about the concerns in the US over the IMB, which breaches the NI Protocol, Mr Mulvaney said that in his meetings with all sides his worry was that the Bill could result in a border “by accident”.

3/ He told the presentation: “The best response I got on the matter was from Simon Coveney when I met with him in Dublin.

4/ “I said to him..., look, Simon, my fear is this: there’s a no deal Brexit. The IMB kicks in, the Brits don’t want to put up a border on the island, because they know what that means, the Irish don’t want to put up a border across the island because they know what that means.

5/ “The Europeans come in and say, well, if you’re not going to control the flow of goods from outside of the [European] Union [to] inside the Union, from Belfast to Dublin, for the sake of this discussion, we’re going to force you to ring the whole island of Ireland

6/...in order to protect the European market, that would put tremendous pressure on the Irish to do something.”

Mulvaney said that Mr Coveney had responded that he could see that scenario on paper.

7/ However, Mr Mulvaney said the Minister had added that “in reality there are much larger much more powerful levers the Europeans could pull under those circumstances than a border across the island of Ireland.

8/ “And the example he gave was commercial aviation. Which gets to the British in some place which is a little bit closer to home perhaps in a larger economic impact.”

9/ Asked to clarify the conversation, Mr Mulvaney said: “There may be an interconnection between [EU] state aid [rules] and commercial transportation. I don’t know. What I took away from the meeting was that British Airways continues to want to fly from London to the Continent...

10/ and if the Europeans got really, really upset they could make BA’s life very difficult.”

@rtenews understands that Mr Mulvaney was referring to a 90-minute breakfast with the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the end of September.

11/ It’s understood that Mr Coveney had listed a range of areas in which there would be continuing interdependencies between the EU and UK and these included aviation, as well as data sharing, security cooperation, education and other areas.

12/ A source has told RTE News that that was the only context in which aviation was mentioned and that there was no question of Mr Coveney mentioning any threat on the EU’s part in connection with the Internal Market Bill.

13/ The source said the Minister would have pointed to a period of protracted legal action between the EU and UK in the event of the clauses within the Internal Market Bill not being removed.

14/ The source added that Mr Coveney had pointed out to Mr Mulvaney that the Withdrawal Agreement and the Northern Ireland Protocol would be applying even if there was no free trade agreement between the EU and UK.

15/ A spokeman for the Dept Foreign Affairs said: "The Minister and envoy Mulvaney had a wide ranging and long discussion which included EU and UK interdependence on each other beyond and despite Brexit. It was in that context that aviation was discussed and not as a threat.

16/ "The Internal Market Bill was discussed as a move that had complicated ongoing talks on a new trade deal. The Minister made it clear that the Withdrawal Agreement was legally binding and prevents a hard border in all circumstances."