ANDREW MARR:
“The UKIP fox is in the Westminster hen-house.” Nigel Farage’s typically colourful response to the recent local and European Election is not, however, quite true because UKIP doesn’t yet have any Commons seats. But that is of course their aim with the General Election less than a year away, the by-elections in between. Mr Farage is with me now. Good morning to you.

NIGEL FARAGE:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s start with the position of the party generally. It’s your first interview since those elections. Are you confident that you can go on and claim a clutch of MPs in the House of Commons sufficient perhaps, given our fragmented politics, to have real influence?

NIGEL FARAGE:
Yes I am. I think the European Election results caught the news, but actually the more significant result for next year was that in the areas where we succeeded last year at
winning county council seats, where there were district council elections there as well, this year we’re seeing areas where we’re building up a really good representation of UKIP through local government and that changes the whole perception in a constituency. And this is exactly what your previous guest today (Paddy Ashdown) did in the 1990s. They built on local strength. So our strategy for the General Election next year is we will pick over the course of this summer our target seats and we’ll throw the kitchen sink at those seats.

ANDREW MARR:
And you’ve got some money and so forth. Do you have any idea how many of those kitchen sink seats there are going to be?

NIGEL FARAGE:
Not just yet, no, but you know it’ll be two dozen, three dozen – I mean something of that order – you know where we really think that we can say to the electorate look, you know we’ve topped the polls in the Europeans, we’re winning council seats, we’re on the up, you know we are the challenger here.

ANDREW MARR:
We’re in a very strange position at the moment in terms of the polls. You look at the Tories, you look at Labour and so forth, and it doesn’t yet seem that anyone is in the commanding position to have an overall majority at the next election, which in due course suggests that a party like yours - possibly with others, who knows – could have real influence.

NIGEL FARAGE:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
That means that we have to know much more, don’t we, about your policies that go beyond immigration and beyond …

NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) Well that’s fair enough.
ANDREW MARR:
(over) … and you’ve always said you’re going to come to them?

NIGEL FARAGE:
No, that’s fair enough. I mean I tried to fight the European Elections on European issues. Now I know that nobody else wanted to discuss any of this stuff and when we tried to talk about open door immigration all we got was abuse hurled at us rather than a proper engaged debate. But that’s over …

ANDREW MARR:
Exactly.

NIGEL FARAGE:
… that’s done and I accept that fully, and we are going to have our annual conference this year in Doncaster in Ed Miliband’s constituency, and that is where we will lay out our manifesto for the 2015 General Election.

ANDREW MARR:
But for those people wanting a sort of sense of where you are, you know you’ve always praised Margaret Thatcher hugely. Are you going to be essentially a new Thatcherite party? Is that where you’re trying to go?

NIGEL FARAGE:
No because that was of its time, you know. I mean Thatcherism was of its time forty years ago to deal with a specific set of problems. You know for half the country, it benefited them; for the other half of the country, it didn’t. But now the problem …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But it had enduring policies and policy ideas – lower tax, grammar schools and so forth.

NIGEL FARAGE:
Yeah - all of which have now gone, all of which have now gone.
ANDREW MARR:
So do you want to bring them back is my question?

NIGEL FARAGE:
I tell you what I want us to do. I want us to give millions of ordinary families and people in this country the opportunity to live a better life and to do better because at the moment we are seeing the gap between those who are wealthy enough to be privately educated and the rest getting wider, and we’re seeing the working population working longer and longer hours, having suffered huge wage compression over the course of the last ten years with their household bills going up. So what we want to do actually is to genuinely address the cost of living and to address social mobility in Britain.

ANDREW MARR:
You’ve been with UKIP since the beginning and one of its policies has been a flat rate of tax of 31 per cent. Is that still a policy?

NIGEL FARAGE:
No, we’re going to rethink the tax thing. You know I mean I think that …

ANDREW MARR:
Okay, well let’s just …

NIGEL FARAGE:
… I think that that was badly explained because people thought, gosh, they’re going to put tax up for the low paid. Well no, the idea was to abolish national insurance. What I can tell you for certain is that our biggest tax objective in that next manifesto will be no tax on the minimum wage. We’ve got to incentivise people to get off benefit and to get back to work. Now that obviously will cost money.

ANDREW MARR:
That will cost money.
NIGEL FARAGE:
That will cost money.

ANDREW MARR:
Does that mean that you can’t promise tax cuts to the better off, for instance?

NIGEL FARAGE:
I think a top rate of tax in this country of around about 40 per cent is the one that will bring the most revenue into the Exchequer, and I think through the 80s and 90s we saw that.

ANDREW MARR:
So 40 per cent top rate of tax?

NIGEL FARAGE:
I think that’s what we will conclude, yes. Anything over 40 and you start to see people going overseas. But really what we’ve got to worry about actually are the millions of people there on low pay, you know, and frankly without sufficient incentives to be in work.

ANDREW MARR:
A grammar school in every town?

NIGEL FARAGE:
Absolutely, absolutely. I think, as I’ve said already in this interview, the lack of social mobility in Britain frankly is quite shaming and I think that selective education is one of the ways to give bright kids from poor backgrounds a real opportunity.

ANDREW MARR:
The welfare state is too big. You’ve said that in the past.

NIGEL FARAGE:
Yeah.
Getting it smaller is a very difficult prospect for the Conservative Government, for any government really. What are your ideas about that?

NIGEL FARAGE:
Well I mean you know since 1997 there has been an absolute boom in the public sector in this country for middle managers and above - you know vast numbers of people throughout local government and throughout the health service and elsewhere earning six-figure money on two-thirds final salary. And there’s no question, the Labour Party increased our spending on public services, but we finished up actually without better delivery and we finished up with a whole new layer, a whole new class of public servants who’ve done incredibly well.

ANDREW MARR:
So you’re going to take a chainsaw through the middle … middle management of the civil service?

NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) I think that’s exactly what we need, yes. I mean just recently my mother was in hospital for a month, in a London hospital. And I looked at the nurses …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

NIGEL FARAGE:
... and doctors working on those wards and thought actually they’re being given way too much to do. Something is going wrong here.

ANDREW MARR:
But you have said, haven’t you, that you’re going to put a ring-fence around the NHS … you’re going to remove the ring-fence around the NHS and therefore spend less on the NHS? You can’t promise better services.

NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) Not necessarily. I mean what we’ve got to do clearly is re-prioritise what the NHS does. As I say, personal experience you know of a parent being sick in hospital
and seeing a nursing staff who are frankly seriously undermanned whilst at the same
time vast sums of money being paid back on PFI deals and this over 40 per cent
growth in middle management.

ANDREW MARR:
You see the Conservatives say that you’re offering something for nothing; you’re
offering lower taxes, milk and honey, better public services – it just doesn’t add up
and that you haven’t been put under proper scrutiny …

NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) Well one thing for certain is the Conservatives’ public finances don’t add up
because here we are nearing the end of this Parliament when they said the budget
deficit would be back to even-steven and actually we’re still borrowing £100 billion
more a year than we’re earning.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Yeah, we’re not here to talk about their policies …

NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) So I don’t think criticism from them is particularly good.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

NIGEL FARAGE:
But what we have to do, Andrew, is we have to outline where savings can be made.
There’s no question about that.

ANDREW MARR:
What about all of those people who might be watching this and thinking yes I agree
with that, but I’m gay or I’ve got a brown skin and I don’t feel comfortable with these
people? In the end, I’ve had too many hints and wolf whistles from UKIP candidates
and I just don’t feel comfortable about gay rights and about the liberal attitude of the
…
NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) Well I think … You know, I mean come on, you know we posed a big threat to three established parties and they clubbed together and did everything they could to throw mud at us and to abuse us in the last three weeks of that European election campaign.

ANDREW MARR:
You gave them a lot of mud to throw.

NIGEL FARAGE:
Well I don’t think we really did, to be honest with you. You know I mean when you think that during that campaign there were seventeen Liberal, Labour and Conservative councillors who were actually arrested during the campaign and yet that made no news at all. I did … On 7th May, in London, we had a rally, and I invited the black and ethnic minority candidates who were standing for UKIP in the local elections and in the European elections to come and join me on the stage. And there was the most incredible atmosphere and feeling of togetherness and a feeling that here is …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) What about gay people?

NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) … and that here is a party that represents the commonwealth and believes in the commonwealth. And you know we’ve got more black and ethnic minority voters now than the Conservative Party and yet that message did not get out.

ANDREW MARR:
What about gay people? Are they welcome in UKIP?

NIGEL FARAGE:
Well we’ve just had a gay person elected as one of our MEPs. I think that … you
know that answers the question. You know this attempt to try and paint UKIP out to be a bunch of old men, deeply intolerant of the world, frankly does not bare the truth.

ANDREW MARR:
You now have to go into Europe and your MEPs are going to have to behave, if I may say so, a bit differently than MEPs in the last European Parliament.

NIGEL FARAGE:
I couldn’t agree more. (laughs)

ANDREW MARR
But not many votes, including from yourself actually. Are you going to be acting as a group actually trying to change things in the European Parliament – turning up for those votes and not dropping out of the party at regular intervals?

NIGEL FARAGE:
Yeah, I mean of course we’re going to be there and taking part in votes and we will have some members very actively involved in committees. But we’re not going to delude ourselves or try and deceive the British public that anything can be changed. You know I was back there on Tuesday. I went to a meeting on Tuesday - the conference of presidents of the European Parliament. Mr Schultz in the chair, one of the runners and riders to be commissioned President, and the leaders of the Christian Democrats, the leaders of the Socialists, the Greens – all the big political families in Europe represented in that room – and it’s perfectly clear to me that whatever results we saw, it is business as usual.

ANDREW MARR:
Why are you not going into alliance with the French National Front?

NIGEL FARAGE:
Well I don’t want to. They come from a different political family. And whilst I think Marine Le Pen has taken a very different position to her father, I think that party, it still has Jean-Marie Le Pen in it. And you might have seen just a few days before the European Elections, he made a comment about the Ebola virus, and we just want
nothing to do with that party at all.

**ANDREW MARR:**
But you are going to, you hope, ally with parties from Italy and elsewhere?

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
Yeah. I mean I met Beppe Grillo last week – former comedian, well he’s still a comedian.

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* Two of you.

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
Thank you – I’ll take that as a compliment.

**ANDREW MARR:**
That photograph with the empty beer glass on your head the Times used on the front page, you’ve got to stop doing that kind of stuff.

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
No you’re right, I must stop smiling, stop laughing. I must stop having opinions. I must become like the rest of the professional political class. No chance! It isn’t going to happen. *(laughs)*

**ANDREW MARR:**
Your wife says she’s worried about your smoking and your drinking and your lack of sleep.

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
What wife in this country doesn’t complain about their husband’s behaviour in some way? I think that’s all perfectly normal.
Alright.

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
Back to the point. Mr Grillo comes from left of centre. I’m hoping we can do a deal with him and our group will sit bang in the middle politically of that Parliament with a strong Eurosceptic agenda.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Now we’ve always assumed that you yourself would stand in Kent when you stand, but there’s been a wicked, malicious suggestion that you might stand in Sheffield against Nick Clegg. Any chance of that?

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
*(laughs)* Well anything’s possible. No I’m not going to stand in Sheffield. You know I’m going to stand in the South East of England because that’s where I’m from. And I think one of the things voters don’t like about the big parties is the way candidates are parachuted in all over the country …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* Thanet South, can I just …?

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
Well it’s a distinct possibility.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Alright. And that’s the most we’re going to get from you today?

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
As far as I’m going this morning.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Alright. For now, thank you very much indeed Nigel Farage.
INTERVIEW ENDS