ANDREW MARR:
You never expect a quiet life as Foreign Secretary, and there’s no doubt that William Hague has had plenty to occupy him recently. He’s just back from the United Nations’ latest United Nations conference on Syria; those negotiations on the future of the Eurozone drag on; and of course there is this small confusion about a British referendum to ponder. Add to that a senior role in the delegate coalition government and there can be not very much time for chillaxing. William Hague joins me now. Unchillaxed, but looking relaxed, I’m glad to say.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Good morning. Can we start with the slightly curious looking referendum situation, which is that after that Friday summit, David Cameron said, “In-out referendum, absolutely not, not the right thing to do” and there was a fair amount of dismay, including in the Conservative Party about that…this morning he’s saying, “Referendum and Europe, they can go together.” Now the question is really this: the Conservative Party endlessly talks about referendums and the people deciding and
you never actually do anything about it.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well actually we have done something about it already, of course, because in this parliament we’ve passed..I and my team took through parliament the Act of last year which says …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That’s a piece of legislation, it’s not a referendum.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Yeah, but that is doing something about it actually - passing a major Act of parliament that says that if we or any future government are to pass any more powers to Europe in a new treaty, then there has to be a referendum by law. So we have already done that. What the Prime Minister’s saying in his article today is expanding upon what he said on Friday. He put the argument on Friday - which I’ve often put - as to why we don’t want a referendum now on being in or out of Europe, why it wouldn’t be in our interests.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And are you also against any in or out referendum?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well he’s saying that he will set out in the autumn in more detail our approach to this, but he’s explained we’re not against referendums per se on Europe. We’ve often advocated them. We have introduced that act. I’ve often said there have been too few, not too many referendums …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But if you’re one of those people who say we’ve really had it with the EU the way it’s gone; we’ve had it; we want our voice; we want an in our out referendum - you’re saying vote UKIP?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
No, we are saying …
ANDREW MARR:
That seems to be the conclusion.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… we are saying what most people want in Britain actually in our judgement and what we want is a better relationship with Europe. That actually it wouldn’t help achieve that if you had a referendum on staying or leaving now because if people voted to leave, of course it would have all the great disadvantages of leaving the single market and all the other positive aspects of …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Would it be disastrous, would it be disastrous for Britain if we left?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well my view is that we should stay in the European Union. There are huge advantages to it. I see these all the time in foreign policy if it’s on Burma, Iran, Syria. Who’s setting the pace? Who is actually leading foreign policy across the whole of the European Union? Well Britain plays a leading role in that, and a single market is very important to jobs. Now but there are disadvantages about Europe …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well can I just, can I just …

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… and you know I’m one of the longest standing critics of the euro and arguing Britain shouldn’t join that. There is too much interference, too much bureaucracy, too many decisions made at the European level. That’s what we want to change, and what the Prime Minister is saying is that the time to decide in a referendum or a General Election about our relationship with Europe is when we know how Europe’s going to develop over the coming months and years with the Eurozone crisis and when we know whether we can get that better relationship.

ANDREW MARR:
Well let me put this to you then. The Prime Minister wants - you want - a much deeper federal Europe to save the euro for the Eurozone. Our relationship with that kind of Europe is obviously very different from our relationship today with the Europe we have at the moment, which is much more flexible and complicated. If we get that federal Europe, therefore, we must in this country have a referendum. Would you agree with that?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well that would be part of the … That’s our argument.

ANDREW MARR:
But would you agree with that?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
That if it changes in that way …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… if it changes in that way and if we know, once we know whether we can a better relationship with Europe, then that is the time to make the case for a referendum; or, if there is a clear division between the parties, to decide in a General Election. But that’s the time, not now. Not now.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay, I think we’re getting there. If we get a deeper Europe as a result of the negotiations going on between Angela Merkel and all the rest of it at the moment, if that happens - we get a banking union and so on - in your view that is the big change that would make the Conservatives’ longstanding promise about a referendum essential?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well that’s one of the factors, as I keep saying.
ANDREW MARR:
(over) But surely if …

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) That’s one of the factors - changes within Europe. The other is …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So not of itself?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… the other is that we need to know whether we can get that better relationship with Europe that we are looking for, so that then we can give people a real choice. That is the argument in the Prime Minister’s article. But of course the arguments you’re putting are very, very powerful. They would add greatly to the case for a referendum and for people being able to decide the cost to the situation and change.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Sure… Sorry, I want to ask you on this. Surely come what may, if Europe changed that radically - and it looks as if it will - then our relationship does have to be put back to the British people again?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
That is what there is a powerful case for. But it’s … what I, what I would like …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I’m not suggesting right now.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) No what I would like and what the Prime Minister’s explained in his article is that we also want the chance to find out whether we can have that better relationship with the European Union, with more powers returned to the national level, so that people know what they are deciding about.
ANDREW MARR:
Okay …

WILLIAM HAGUE:
But I’m not denying in any way the force of the argument that you are putting. Of course that is a very major factor. The immediate priority of course with that is to make sure that we don’t lose any of our national decision-making to those changes taking place in the Eurozone, and that is what we have successfully negotiated so far.

ANDREW MARR:
I’m interested that you’re still hedging on this. Surely it ought to be possible simply to say yes to the suggestion that if Europe goes completely federal, we will have a nego… we will have a referendum about our relationship without Europe? I mean why can’t you say yes to that?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
But you don’t know how it is going to develop. It is possible that the Eurozone could develop into a much more concentrated core, absolutely, and of course that …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Because you see if I’m a hardcore Eurosceptic, at this point I’m thinking it’s got to be UKIP. I mean these people are going to carry on talking about it; they’re going to have yet more negotiations; it will go on and on and on; the ball will bounce further and further into the long grass; they’ll keep talking about a referendum. I won’t get a chance to vote.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
No, I don’t think you would be saying that because of course the Prime Minister’s saying in the autumn he will set out our approach in more detail when of course things will be becoming clearer in any case. They will become clearer over the coming months and years …
ANDREW MARR:

(over) And you’re doing an audit, aren’t you?

WILLIAM HAGUE:

(over) … so you are asking, Andrew, a hypothetical question: you know if this happens.

ANDREW MARR:

That’s what they pay me for.

WILLIAM HAGUE:

Exactly. And I’m paid to make sure that I explain the full context of the answer to that, which is yes there are huge changes happening in Europe. We don’t know, nor does anybody else in Europe, where those are leading. There may be new treaties, there may be this more concentrated core of the Eurozone. Of course those things add powerfully to the case for the British people being able to decide on that relationship. Of course they do.

ANDREW MARR:

And you’ve talked about the autumn several times and you’ve mentioned several times, I’ve noticed, the General Election. Is this an issue that the Conservatives will take to the General Election with a much clearer, harder promise?

WILLIAM HAGUE:

Well we’ll set out our policy in the General Election clearly and before the General Election. I’m not going to do that now. Of course that will require a great deal of consultation, so I’m not going to do that now. But, yes, of course we will have a policy at the General Election and the European Elections on our approach to this. So the Prime Minister in his article is not changing our position, but he is pointing the way to how our thinking is developing and how policy should be guided in the future, how we should think about this choice about whether to have a referendum. Not an in or out decision now, but a determination to get a better position in the European Union for the United Kingdom.
ANDREW MARR:
Not trying to pin you to a kind of promise or anything, but in your guts, in your waters, do you believe the British people will have a referendum on Europe within the next five years?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(laughs) Well that’s just another way of asking the same question.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) No in your opinion, in your guts. What is your instinct, what’s your instinct?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) I’ve advocated referendums on a whole series of European treaties …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) What’s your instinct about this one?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) … and I believe that there have been too few, not too many referendums.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But you won’t take us towards another one?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
(over) I believe there are big changes taking place, you know but of course we will as the Conservative Party, we will set out our position together. So we don’t answer questions on the basis of our guts. But you can see very clearly I think from what the Prime Minister said, from what I’m saying, how our thinking is developing - why we are against an in or out, that binary choice referendum now; how we want people to have their say when there is a real choice in front of them. And so I don’t think I can be more specific than that now, but that is in itself being quite specific.

ANDREW MARR:
Quite, quite specific.
WILLIAM HAGUE:
Quite specific.

ANDREW MARR:
A bit specific. Let’s turn to Syria if we could. You’re just back from yet another conference on it. The talking goes on and the killing goes on. Isn’t the truth that actually there is nothing really that we can do about this?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well it is deeply frustrating. It’s not the case that there’s nothing we can do. Of course we are applying sanctions to the Syrian regime that are denying it revenue; we are helping to document the human rights abuses that are taking place; we’re helping to gather the international coalition that can work together on this. So it’s not the case there’s nothing we can do. But is it deeply frustrating that hundreds of people are dying every week while we talk? Of course it is. And I spent ten hours yesterday talking to the foreign ministers of Russia and China and other countries about what we can do. We made one step forward that’s worth having, which is that we agreed with Russia and China what a transitional government should look like; that there should be a transitional unity government in Syria, that that should be made up of people from the present government and the opposition and other groups on the basis of mutual consent, which would of course exclude President Assad from that. Now that is a step forward (from our point of view) in Russia’s position. Now we have to try to bring that about.

ANDREW MARR:
What about this notion of giving Assad sort of safe passage and a guarantee that he can live in kind of relatively safe ignominy somewhere far away from Syria to allow the transition to happen?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
We haven’t had any discussion about that. In my view, those responsible for terrible crimes should answer for those crimes. But Syria is not party to the International Criminal Court. We can only refer it to the International Criminal Court with the
agreement of Russia and China that is not forthcoming. So as things stand, that could happen. You know there could be an exit. There’s no sign of President Assad wanting to take such an exit at the moment. So I think we are some way from resolving this, but we are putting great energy into it and we will meet … probably a hundred nations will come together in Paris next Friday at the next meeting of the Friends of Syria to work out how we can increase the pressure on the regime to stop this killing.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Why are you so hardline on making, not allowing Iran to be part of this because it is a huge country, very powerful? Is it because you think that an Iranian influenced post-Assad Syria would actually be more dangerous than what we’ve got now?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
No, it’s because Iran I believe is taking an active part in helping the Assad regime with its killing and repression. And if it was difficult, as it was yesterday, to have those talks, to get anywhere, to make progress with ten other nations, including Russia and China, I think it would have been well nigh impossible with Iran in the same room blocking almost everything that we wanted to decide. So I think the presence of Iran would not help us to move forward, to reach any kind of international agreement. So it is a practical point. If we want to achieve anything, we’re not going to be able to have Iran in the same room.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Foreign Secretary, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Thank you.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**