ANDREW MARR SHOW
THERESA MAY

AM: Prime Minister, your first statement to the country outside Downing Street, you talked a lot about your - burning injustices in the country, you mentioned women being badly paid, black people not being treated properly by the justice system, and so on and so on. Are you going to be the kind of Prime Minister who uses the power of the state to correct these injustices?

02:13

TM: Well, I want to see a country that works for everyone, Andrew, and that's what's going to be the driving force of my government. And that’s looking at a society that works for everyone, an economy that works for everyone. So I’ll be looking across the board at issues like schools and hospitals and opportunities, to ensure that people can actually get on and take those opportunities regardless of their background. But it’s about their talents and their willingness to – to work.

AM: So in concrete terms, there’s a lot of people on your side of politics who would say that in terms of education, grammar schools are the way forward. That’s what got people – you went to a grammar school that then became a comprehensive, a lot of people like you got to the top by going to grammar schools. Are you prepared to allow more grammar schools to open and existing grammar schools to expand?

02:57

TM: Well, what I want to do in looking at schools is to build on the success of the six years of David Cameron’s premiership when we see – now see more children in good and outstanding schools. But there is still more to be done. There are still parents who feel that their children aren’t getting the opportunities they want them to have because of what happened to their local school. So I want to make sure that children have those opportunities, that all schools are offering a good education for children.
AM: That’s not quite an answer to my question about grammar schools.

03:25

TM: Well, Justine Greening was on your – your programme and said she’ll be looking at these issues, which she is doing, so we will look at the work that Justine is doing. But the abiding theme that I wanted to ensure is there is that of giving opportunity to young people, ensuring that whatever school anybody’s going to, wherever they are, in whatever part of the country, they’re actually able to ensure they get that good quality of education that gives them the opportunities to get on in life.

AM: Would you like to see, at the end of the first Theresa May administration, more grammar schools open than there are now?

03:58

TM: What I’d like to see, Andrew, is ensuring an education system, regardless of where people are, regardless of the school they’re going to, that is ensuring that they’re getting the quality of education that enables them to take on those opportunities. Because when I talk about a country that works for everyone, it’s about ensuring that whatever people’s talents are it’s about how far their talents can take them. But it’s also about obviously government ensuring that those jobs and opportunities are there for everybody, and I think that there are, sadly, some people in the country who do feel that actually benefits of what’s happened over the last few years have gone to other people and not to them. It’s ensuring that it is that government and country that works for everyone.

AM: So if you’re going to operate on the basis of people at the bottom of the heap, as it were, why did you water down the obesity strategy, for instance, where there was a very, very carefully worked out, complicated, thought-through strategy to
help the problem of obesity, which particularly affects poorer people, and it was dismantled at the last moment?

04:57

TM: Well, what we’ve come forward with is, I think, an obesity strategy which is going to work, an obesity strategy that will have an impact on people through the work that we’ll be doing in terms of reductions of sugar and so forth. But there’s a – there’s a – there is an issue here, I think, which is, first of all, you – you say we want to obviously help those who are at the – the bottom of the – of society, but I also want to help, as I said on the steps of Downing Street, those people who are perhaps in work, but for who life is still a struggle. And I think it’s often those people who feel that they’ve been particularly left behind.

AM: Are you talking about changing the tax structure to help them? And if not, what would help them?

05:39

TM: Well, I think it’s about looking across the board. It’s about making sure the economy’s working for everyone. So it’s about making sure that jobs and opportunities are available to everyone. We’ve got a challenge. Post-Brexit we – I want to ensure that we’ve got those trade opportunities around the world which enable us to continue to create jobs in this country. Over the last six years we’ve created a number of jobs have been created which ensures we’ve got the highest number of people in – in employment now, record levels of people in employment, but we need to ensure that the prosperity is actually being seen across the country - that’s why I’m introducing a new industrial strategy – and that those opportunities are there for everybody. So it’s about encouraging aspiration but ensuring those jobs and opportunities are there too.

AM: But if it’s not to be more than warm words you have to take on some of the big interests, and it did seem that you sided in the
end with the big food companies and the advertisers rather than
the medical people and the lobby on the obesity issue.
06:37

TM: No, I’ve been very clear that I’m not afraid to take on big
interests. When I spoke in Birmingham at the start of what was
going to be the – the national leadership campaign - of course
things turned out a little differently – I spoke about the
importance of actually dealing with irresponsible behaviour in
companies. So as you will have seen in my time as Home
Secretary, I’m not afraid to take on big interests when I think that
is the right thing to do.

AM: Now, you’ve already mentioned the B word, so let’s talk
about Brexit. ‘Brexit means Brexit,’ you said, but what does Brexit
mean?
07:09

TM: Well, it’s about coming out of the European Union, at its
simplest. It’s about listening to the British people. We’re the only
party now that is actually saying that we’re prepared to accept the
vote that – that people gave. And we’ve listened to people and we
will now make a success of that. Obviously there’s going to be a
period of negotiations, but what I’m very clear about particularly –
this is a message I’ll be taking to the G20 in China this weekend –
is that this is not about the United Kingdom suddenly wanting to
be inward-looking. Actually we will be – continue to be a bold,
outward-looking country. We want to forge new deals. We want
to be an independent Britain forging our own way in the world.

AM: At Chequers you made it clear that as far as you’re
concerned, part of what Brexit means is strict controls on
immigration. Will your successor as Home Secretary, if she’s in the
job, say in four or five years’ time, be able, if she chooses, to say,
no immigration at all, or only a dribble, from the EU?
08:05
TM: What the vote — what leaving the European Union does enable us to do is, yes, to say what I think the British people are very clear about, which is that they don’t want free movement to continue in the way that it has done in the past. They do want to see controls of movement of people coming in from the European Union. Now, obviously we’re looking at what — what those options are, what that might be. But that is very clear that that was a message from the British people. But people also want to see the job opportunities, to see the economic opportunities, and so getting a good deal in trade and service — in trading goods and services is also obviously important for us.

AM: And so this is the problem. As the Chancellor Philip Hammond has said, it’s very, very important to get access to European markets, particularly for the banking sector, the finance sector, but many others as well. And you may have to do trades in terms of the amount of people you allow in from the EU. It might not be quite an end to free movement of people if you want full access to those markets. Are you prepared to do those trades?

09:02

TM: Well, what I’m very clear about is that we need to take some time to prepare the position that we want to take as — as the United Kingdom. That’s why I’ve said that we won’t trigger this Article 50 that starts the formal negotiation process with the EU before the end of — before the end of this year. So we’re taking that time. David Davis, who I created this new department of exit — for exiting the European Union, David Davis is the secretary of state, he’ll be making a statement to parliament this week about the work that the government has been doing over the summer and obviously how we’re going to take that forward in shaping the sort of relationship we want with the EU.

AM: It’s a matter of huge moment to a lot of people exactly when that Article 50 moment is triggered, because that’s the start of the
process, the clock starts ticking and so forth. If we were talking this time next year, would Article 50 have been triggered by then?

09:52

TM: Well, I – what I’ve said from the very start of – on this issue, is I don’t think it should be triggered before the end of the year because I think we need to have a period of preparation. And I think it’s actually good for the rest of the European Union that they’re also to have – able to have that period of preparation so that when we start the process of negotiations the process, I think, will be smoother and we can ensure that there is as little disruption as possible. But I’m very clear also that the British people don’t want the issue of Article 50 being triggered just being kicked into the long grass because they want to know we’re getting on with the job of – of putting Brexit into place and making a success of it.

AM: In your view, should we have access to the single European market?

10:34

TM: Well, what I want to see is the best possible deal for the United Kingdom in trade in goods and services. I don’t want to adopt –

AM: Does that involve access to the market?

10:10:42

TM: Well, I don’t want to – I don’t want to adopt a particular model, and people use phrases about access to the market, about customs unions and so forth, I prefer to look at it and say let’s work out what the best deal for us will be in trade in goods and services, and then let’s be ambitious and go out there and find it.

AM: So coming to the timing of Brexit, you can’t say when next year Brexit will be triggered, Article 50 will be triggered?

11:05
TM: I’m not going to put a date on it. We’d have the – the period of preparations, I think that it’s right that we do that. And then obviously we look at what an appropriate time for triggering it will be.

AM: As you head off to the G20, everyone wants to hear more about Brexit and how it’s going and so forth, but you leave with economic figures that could hardly be better. Employment’s right up, consumer confidence is very, very strong indeed, and we’ve had some excellent manufacturing index figures. So that suggests that all those people who said that Brexit would put a bomb under the British economy – it would be a – a DIY recession, I think the former Chancellor of the Exchequer said – all of that was scaremongering?

11:42
TM: Well, we have had some good figures and better figures that some had predicted would – would be the case. But what is important for us now is that we maintain that policy of ensuring economic stability and a strong economy for the future. Part of that is going to be, as we come out of the European Union, ensuring we’ve got trade deals around the world. I want the United Kingdom to be a global leader in free trade. And one of the things I’ll be doing at the G20 is emphasising the role that we will be playing in the world, but also in a number of the discussions I’ll be having, with President Obama, for example, Prime Minister Modi, Prime Minister Turnbull –

AM: (overlap).. without you?

12:21
TM: Well, we’ll be talking about, I want to talk about how we can start to scope out what a trade deal and the negotiations on a trade deal would be like, so that when the time – time comes when we’re able to sign those deals we’re ready to do so.
AM: I suppose what I’m getting to is that all those warnings, as I say, about a bomb under the British economy, appear to be completely wrong at the moment. Or do you think it’s simply too early to tell and there are dangers ahead?

12:44

TM: Well, I’m not going to pretend that it’s all going to be plain sailing. I think we must be prepared for the fact that there may be some difficult times ahead. But what I am is optimistic, and indeed this is what – the message that came from the Cabinet when we were sitting around the table at Chequers this week and talking about these things, it’s the same message I’ve had from businesses, is of optimism about the future, about the opportunities that are now open to the United Kingdom. As I say, an independent Britain forging our own way in the world. And I think what we see following the referendum vote is a – is – is that British spirit which says we’ve had the decision, now let’s get on with it, let’s get on with putting it into practise, and let’s make sure that we take those opportunities and make a success of it.

AM: Now, you used the word British there, but you also said soon after you became Prime Minister that you wanted this to be an all-United Kingdom thing and that you wanted the Scots to be completely happy and satisfied with the way things were going, the way the negotiations were going to go, before you triggered Article 50. Is that still the case?

13:43

TM: What I’ve said to Nicola Sturgeon and the discussions I’ve had with the Scottish government is that I want them to be fully involved – involved, fully engaged in the discussions that we’re having about the position the United Kingdom’s going to take and – and the other devolved administrations as well. What - you know, the people of the United Kingdom took a decision to leave the European Union. What I want to do is make a success of it. What I would say to the people in Scotland is I want to ensure that that’s a success for people in Scotland.
AM: So I guess again what I’m trying to get to is that Scotland has very different views about some of these issues. For instance, there is much less worry about immigration among Scots, and certainly the Scottish government. Will they have a proper input into that process? Will Nicola Sturgeon be influential in the Brexit negotiations?

14:29

TM: I want the Scottish government and the other devolved administrations to be engaged with this as we determine the position of the United Kingdom is going to take. But the British people took a – a view, the United Kingdom took a view that we should be leaving the European Union, and we could try and turn our back on that, we could try and say let’s have a second vote, we could try and pretend –

AM: No second referendum?

14:50

TM: No second referendum. We could try and say, look, this is, you know, we – we wish that hadn’t happened so we’re going to try and somehow wish it away. What I’m saying, what the Conservative Party is saying, it’s the only party that are saying this, is we respect the wishes of the British people. The British people want us to leave the European Union and that’s what we will do.

AM: In Scotland there is still a feeling that we – we in Scotland voted to stay, we didn’t vote the same way as England, and that we would like to stay inside the EU. That in itself is triggering pressure for a second Scottish independence referendum. There’s been a lot of talk about it all summer. If that came about would you prevent that second referendum happening?

15:29

TM: I don’t think it’s a question of whether there could be a ref-second referendum, it’s whether there should be a second
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referendum. There was a vote of the Scottish people in 2014 that they wanted to stay part –

AM: There’s been a material change.
15:39
TM: - that they wanted to stay part of – of the United Kingdom. There’s been a vote of the United Kingdom that it wants to come out of the European Union. Scotland wasn’t the only part of the UK that voted – overall voted Remain rather than to leave. But the overall view of the United Kingdom and the public was to come out of the European Union. As I say, we could try and, you know, some people might say well, let’s try and row back on that, let’s try and find a way out of that.
AM: Yes.
TM: A vote was taken, a decision was taken, the job now is to get on with it, to ensure that when we leave the European Union we’re able to take the opportunities that open up to us and that we make a success of it.

AM: There’s a lot of people watching, and not only in Scotland, want to know whether, if there are proposals for a second Scottish independence referendum quite soon, Theresa May, as Prime Minister of the UK, would say, ‘no, I’m not going to let that happen.’
16:30
TM: I – as I say, I don’t think it’s a question of whether there could be, I think it’s a question of whether there should be. And I think if you look at some of the results that are now coming out of polling in Scotland, they suggest that the Scottish people don’t want there to be a second referendum.

AM: Let me move on, then, to the position of people born in the rest of the EU who are living and working and contributing to this economy at the moment. There’s millions of them, many of them are watching, and they are very, very worried about their own
personal futures. Some of them are already going home. People in top jobs, in universities and elsewhere are quitting them and returning to the continent because they have not heard any reassuring words, particularly from you. Can you give them some reassurance now?

17:09

TM: Well, first of all, as long as we’re still in the European Union, then the position of – of people who were born in other European Union countries and living in the UK doesn’t change. Their position remains, their status remains the same. I want to be able to guarantee their status in future. I expect to be able to guarantee their status in the future. But the only circumstances in which that wouldn’t be possible would be if the status of British citizens living in other European Union countries was not guaranteed.

AM: And do you fear that could happen?

17:39

A: I think it’s important that we’re very clear that I expect the status of British citizens in the other countries in the European Union to be guaranteed, as I expect to be able to guarantee the status of EU citizens living here.

AM: Now, we’ve talked about a possible Scottish referendum and we’ve talked about the timing of Article 50 and so on. Let me ask you about another election, which is the next general election. Because if you look at the polling - and a lot of people in your party are very excited about this – if you went to the country now you’d get a majority of something like 114 or 130. That seems a wonderful opportunity for you. Are you tempted in any way to all a snap election?

18:15

TM: I think what’s important, particularly having had the referendum vote, is that we have a period of stability. So there’s a – a challenge ahead in ma- in ensuring that we make a success of coming out of the European Union. I think it’s important that we
focus on that and the other reform agenda that I have for the
country as we go forward. And we’ll be continuing the manifesto
on which the Conservative government was elected in 2015, so I
don’t think there’s a – a need for an election. I think the next
election will be in 2020.

AM: Let me make this very clear, because again it’s very
important. Under current law the next election will be in 2020. No
ifs, no buts, no snap elections, no changing the law. Under you, is
that absolutely certain, that we’re not going to see an election
before 2020?
19:00
TM: I – I – I’m not going to be calling a snap election. I’ve been
very clear that I think we need that period of time, that stability to
be able to deal with the issues that the country is facing and have
that election in 2020.

AM: You’re off to the G20, where you’ll be meeting the Chinese.
Now, if you pulled the plug – the plug on Hinckley, then you
would cause enormous offence in China, it would be a personal
humiliation for the Chinese President. Are you going to do that?
19:26
TM: Okay. I’m looking at the Hinckley decision, but it’s – it’s about
how I actually approach these things, Andrew, which is I don’t
just come in and say, right, this the position I take. I look at the
evidence, I take the advice, I listen to that. That’s what I’m still
doing. I’ve said there’ll be a decision in September, so there will
be a decision later this month.

AM: One of your senior advisers, Nick Timothy, said that he was
very worried about the security implications of a Communist
country, as it were, having its hands on the windpipe of our
nuclear industry. That they could put in bugs into the system
which meant they could close down our electricity supply. Do you
share those worries about China having a really important strategic place at the centre of our nuclear industry?
20:05
TM: What I’m doing is looking at this decision, looking across the board at the various aspects of this decision –
AM: But do – do you share those worries?
TM: - and looking across the board at the various aspects of this decision, and then we’ll come to – come to a view as a result of the work that – that I’m doing. As I say, I’ll come to a view in – in September. As Home Secretary in the past, of course, and as Prime Minister, national security is a key issue for us. But in terms of that individual decision I’ll be looking at all aspects of it and come to a decision in September.

AM: But it would be quite something, wouldn’t it, to have a Communist country in control of our nuclear industry? Because they don’t just want Hinckley, they want to build their own station of Bradwell as well. So this is a big, big strategic decision, and yet if they are offended by the way we approach this we are cutting off our noses and spiting one of our really, really important partners in the future, post-Brexit. So it’s a really tough decision for you isn’t it?
20:59
TM: I think you’re trying to get me to sort of give an indication as to what my decision is going to be, Andrew. Which I’m not going to do, because as I say, the way that I – the way that I work is to assemble the evidence, to look carefully at the evidence and then come to a decision, and that’s the process I’m going through.

AM: Theresa May, thank you very much indeed for talking to us.
TM: Thank you.
(ends)