THE ANDREW MARR SHOW
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INTERVIEW WITH:
PRIME MINISTER, DAVID CAMERON

ANDREW MARR: Prime Minister, welcome.

DAVID CAMERON: Good morning.

ANDREW MARR: Can I start by asking about immigration. You were kind of quite severely criticised by Vince Cable on this programme, over the language on immigration, but I put it to you that the biggest problem we have, is that we have no idea of the numbers we’re taking about. You must have some notion of how many Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants are likely to come in over the next year, five years and so on. But until you give us that figure, we can’t really have a sensible conversation about it, can we.

DAVID CAMERON: Well, I don’t agree with that, I mean we’re not making a forecast because I think it’s unlikely we’d get that forecast right. Because remember, it’s not just Britain that’s had to lift its controls at the end of seven years of transitional controls, they’re also being lifted in France and in Germany and eight other European countries; so to try and make a forecast I think would be wrong. I think my job, what’s much more important is to put in place the measures that make sure that people who do come here are coming here to work and not to claim benefits. And that’s what I’ve done.

ANDREW MARR: I’d like to come on to the benefits thing but just on the forecasts, I mean it would be completely bonkers, given the effect on schools, on welfare bills, on the NHS, to have no idea of the numbers coming in. So you must have a number, you must have ... (interjection

DAVID CAMERON: I don’t have a number. (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: You’ve no idea how many ... (interjection

DAVID CAMERON: I haven’t made a forecast, because, as I say, you’d be trying to forecast how many people will come to Britain, rather than to the other eight European countries. The last forecast, that was made by the last Labour government at the time of Poland’s accession to the EU, where they put in no transitional controls, was a ludicrous forecast of 14,000 and it turned out that over a million people came. I don’t want to repeat that mistake. I believe in learning from that mistake, having transitional controls for as long as possible. Looking when future countries join the European
Union, having transitional controls that either go on much, much longer or actually having a test, so that if their wages are much lower, then perhaps you delay entry to our labour market for far, far longer, until that changes.

ANDREW MARR: Migration Watch, who did get it much righter last time round, this time say about 50,000 a year, they think – so a quarter of a million people over five years. Is that ludicrously too high, ludicrously too low?

DAVID CAMERON: I mean, you’re going to try and tempt me in to making a forecast – I’m not going to make a forecast. My job, I think, is to put in place proper controls, so people can’t come here to claim benefits. To put in proper controls so we investigate that people aren’t being paid less than the minimum wage, to make sure we deal with illegal immigrants, to make sure that if people can’t sustain themselves here, they are removed from our country – all those steps we’ll be taking.

ANDREW MARR: Is it acceptable therefore that Romanians or Bulgarians or anybody else working here, who have maybe four or five children back home, not in Britain, can claim child benefit in Britain and remit the money straight back to ... (overlaps)

DAVID CAMERON: Well, I don’t think that is right and that is something I want to change. It is something, it is a situation that I inherited. I think you can change it. I think it will take time because we either have to change it by getting agreement with other European countries and there are other European countries, who like me, think it’s wrong that someone from Poland, who comes here, who works hard and I am absolutely all in favour of that – but I don’t think they should be paying, we should be paying child benefit, to their family back at home in Poland. To change that you’ve either got to change it with other European countries at the moment or potentially change it through the Treaty change that I’ll be putting in place before the referendum that we’ll hold on Britain’s membership of the EU, by the end of 2017.

ANDREW MARR: What about the measure to charge people for emergency NHS treatment? That’s, as many people say, bureaucratically impossible and yet you’re committed to it I think.

DAVID CAMERON: No, we should do it. I think that you know ... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: Are you sure you can do it?

DAVID CAMERON: Yes, we can, we can. Look. People – our NHS is a national treasure. We can all be incredibly proud of it and it’s right that we all pay in to it and everyone here has access to it for free but people who come to our country, who don’t have the right to use it, should be charged for it and we’re putting that in place.

ANDREW MARR: The immigration cap, I think 75,000 - again, Vince Cable and others, plenty of others, including in your own party say, trouble is, it’s illegal, you wouldn’t be able to do it.
DAVID CAMERON: Well, first of all we have an immigration cap which is for non-EU migrants...

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DAVID CAMERON: ... well, just to explain to the viewers at home, migrants from outside the European Union, who are coming here for economic reasons, we have a cap on that which Labour opposed; they never put in place and we’ve put in place. But what, what we’re looking at for the future is as new countries join the EU, what sort of arrangements can we put in place for them and also, as we re-negotiate our position in Europe, can we have tougher measures on migration in ... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: So it’s not a current cap. It’s not a cap for Bulgarians and Romanian ... (interjection)

DAVID CAMERON: ... these are all what was being referred to, these are all options for the future, as we re-negotiate our position in the EU.

ANDREW MARR: Would you agree, that as you look at our relationship with the EU, the free movement of peoples inside the EU has become, possibly the key issue to discuss.

DAVID CAMERON: Well, I think that there are good parts to movement within the EU. There are many British people who take advantage of going to live and work elsewhere and Britain has benefited and will continue to benefit from people with skills, coming to Britain and contributing to our economy but I think what has got – I think two things have gone wrong. One is movement to claim benefits and we need to crack down on that. There is a problem there. I think secondly what’s gone wrong, and I don’t think the people who founded the EU, ever believed this was going to happen, is the scale of the movements have been so big. As I said, when Poland and the other eight countries... Hungary and others, Latvia and Lithuania, when they joined the European Union and Britain didn’t, under Labour put any controls on at all, one and a half million people initially came from those countries to Britain, that is a massive population move and I think we need proper and better controls. So I think it is an issue, it’s an issue I want to address in the re-negotiation that we take part in ... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: There must be different rules before the next group of countries accede ... (interjection)

DAVID CAMERON: On, on that, that is absolutely achievable because every time a new country joins the European Union, there is actually unanimity, there has to be unanimity around the council table, in Europe, about what the arrangements are. So Britain will be able to insists, for future countries joining, we’ll be able to insist on a tougher, a more robust regime.
ANDREW MARR: Broadly speaking, do you think immigration at the levels we’ve seen over the last ten years has been good for Britain or bad for Britain?

DAVID CAMERON: Well it’s been too high. Look, I’m in favour of managed migration. Migrants bring a benefit to Britain, they come here, they work hard, they contribute. Many of them become British citizens, but the fact is that over the last decade it’s been too high. We saw net migration, for the decade under Labour of 2.3 million people; that’s two cities the size of Birmingham, the scale was too big, the pace was too fast and it wasn’t properly managed and thought through. Peter Mandelson said, I think it might have been on this programme, Peter Mandelson said the last Labour government sent out search parties to look for migrants to come to Britain. But the real key here Andrew is actually not just our immigration policy, there’s a three-sided coin here. Immigration, welfare and education, if get our education system right, if we get our welfare system right, we’ll be able to get more British young people in to the jobs that have been made available and that will reduce the pull factor into the UK of people who want to come here to work.

ANDREW MARR: As you know, net immigration is actually going up at the moment. 186 thousand last year, up from the previous year.

DAVID CAMERON: Well it’s, it’s down almost a third since I became Prime Minister, so I said we wanted to get net migration down … (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: ... I said we want to get it to the tens of thousands, we’re not there yet, but it has to come down by just less than a third and we need to do more. We’ve done a lot. We’ve done things like closing down bogus colleges. When I became Prime Minister, there were a lot of bogus colleges that were attracting people in to Britain, claiming to be students, who were actually going to work. Now, I don’t blame those people, of course, if you haven’t got the money, you’re living on the other side of the world, of course you want to come to Britain, but it’s got to be managed.

ANDREW MARR: If I go to America, I get a slip of paper and have to tear off part of it and they know when I leave again.

DAVID CAMERON: Yeah.

ANDREW MARR: We don’t have that system. It’s very, very hard for us to measure who goes out and that’s a really big problem.

DAVID CAMERON: Again, absolutely right. We’re putting that in place, so as well as proper entry controls, you need proper exit controls, so you can see who’s gone and we are putting that in place… (interjection

ANDREW MARR: When will those be ....
DAVID CAMERON: That will be over the next couple of years, what is known as the e-borders scheme and linked to the e-borders scheme, these exit checks they will be put in place.

ANDREW MARR: Okay, let’s turn to Europe, which is of course a key part of this. You told me six months ago, when we spoke in Number 10, in the garden, that it was an urgent matter to get the list of demands for your re-negotiation from Europe. There’s still no sign of that at all.

DAVID CAMERON: I don’t really accept that. I mean first of all, even before starting this re-negotiation, we have actually won back powers from Brussels. You know, since becoming Prime Minister, I’ve got us out of the bail out for the Euro zone countries, so Britain is not at risk of having to bale out other countries. I vetoed a treaty, so other countries in Europe have gone ahead with a fiscal treaty, which Britain is not involved in. I’ve managed to cut the EU budget; the first government in history to cut the scale of the EU budget next year - it’s actually going down rather than up, which is good news for Britain. And I’ve also started to set out those things that need to change, as we’ve discussed this morning, we need change on claiming benefits, we need changes on free movement. I said we want to get Britain out of the idea that there’s an ever closer union in the European Union – we don’t want an ever closer union, we want to have trade and co-operation, not an ever closer union. So we’re making some progress, but I make no excuse of the fact that you know, we’ve got, I’ve set till 2017, for the referendum, to give us time to get this re-negotiation right.

ANDREW MARR: Because at the moment, half the British population, according to one of the polls in the papers, want to leave the EU completely and you’re committed to a referendum, which, as things stand, will allow them to do so. We don’t have any sign yet really of what the red lines are, what this negotiation is going to do. … You talk of all the things you’ve done in the past, but we’re still in a position where most people want to leave. (interjection)

DAVID CAMERON: (overlaps) … no, look, I think it is working because what most people in this country want, is actually a real choice. They don’t want a choice of should we stay in this organisation that isn’t working properly or should we leave? They want a chance to change it and then decide, should we stay in this reformed organisation, with a reformed British relationship with it or shall we leave and that is what they’ll get from me as Prime Minister and from a Conservative government.

ANDREW MARR: When, if ever, will we hear from you, this is what I want from the EU and these are going to be my red lines, without which, I will not go to the British people and say I want to stay in…, (interjection)

DAVID CAMERON: I’ve already said to you this morning some of things that we need to sort out. I could add to those. We need more flexibility, we need more competitiveness, we need less cost added, particularly to our small businesses. We need to fix all of those things. They will all be part of this renegotiation and I’ve given myself, I think rightly, till you know the referendum must be held by the end of 2017, but it will be. Let me repeat, on
air, so people can hear, if I am Prime Minister, there will be an ‘in’ ‘out’ referendum before the end of 2017.

ANDREW MARR: And if you don’t get what you want, you will encourage people to leave the EU.

DAVID CAMERON: Well, I believe I will get what I want. Look I’m launching this process because ‘a’, I think it is right for Britain, I don’t think the relationship works at the moment. I want it to work better. ‘b’ I think it is achievable. Because the rest of Europe – because you’ve got eighteen countries now, in a single currency, they need change, they need more common taxes, they need more common banking union, they need change and as they need change, we should be able to get change too. So this is doable, it is achievable and it’s good for Britain.

ANDREW MARR: It’s not doable or achievable if you are still linked to the Liberal Democrats who oppose this tooth and nail.

DAVID CAMERON: Well, the Liberal Democrats have their own views about Europe, but I’ve said … (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: (overlap) … opposed to … (interjection)

DAVID CAMERON: I’ve said very clearly that if er, I’m going in to the next election, with a very clear agenda on Europe, that I think people will back, and to put it beyond any doubt, that you know, if I am Prime Minister, there will be a referendum by the end of 2017.

ANDREW MARR: Right, which means, if – and we don’t know what’s going to happen in the next election. If there isn’t an overall majority, you prefer to run a minority government, committed to a referendum than a coalition which couldn’t deliver a referendum.

DAVID CAMERON: Let’s be clear. I am going all out for a Conservative victory at the next election. I think that is achievable. I think that you can see that we have a long-term economic plan that we are working to. The plan is working, we’ve got a million, over a million more people in work. We’ve got four hundred thousand new businesses operating in Britain. We’re one of the fastest growing countries now in the Western World, but we can’t be complacent, the job isn’t even half way done. This is a vital time. (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: … (both together) And Labour are nine points ahead.

DAVID CAMERON: Also, this is a vital time in our country’s history and the opposition are basically committed to undoing our good work. They want to borrow more, spend more, tax more, I mean for them… (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: And yet the public are in favour of that apparently if you look at the polls.
DAVID CAMERON: Well we’ve got, you know, sixteen months till the next election. This year for me is a year about governing, it’s about delivering. It’s about putting in place the elements of that long-term plan. I’m content that the public will judge me and the government I run and the party I run in 2015, but the public need to know that the opposition are committed to un-doing all that good work, it will be like handing back the keys to the people who crashed the car in the first place. They’ve learnt nothing about the absolute mess they made of the economy when they were in power.

ANDREW MARR: I have heard these messages before and yet they are nine points ahead. What is the Cameron problem here.

DAVID CAMERON: Well, I think, look, when you’re running a government, when you’re delivering a long-term economic plan, when you’re doing those things, reforming welfare, reforming education, making sure small businesses can hire people. Getting more people in to work, you have to make long-term, difficult decisions. You know, we made very difficult decisions about asking people to retire later. Lifting the pension age to 66. As a result, I can say today we’re going to have the pension plan for the future. These are difficult decisions but you know, we’re not fighting a General Election today or tomorrow or the next day. We’ll be fighting one in sixteen months time. What I want to do is do everything I can to turn this country round and give it a real chance of success in the 21st century. The public will judge … (interjection)

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ANDREW MARR: Let’s talk about pensions if we could.. (interjection)

DAVID CAMERON: … the public will judge at the election. I think perhaps politicians, media, all of us, we spend too much time on the sort of daily strategy political battle – who’s up and who’s down. I’m not really interested in that. I’ve got this incredible opportunity to put in place the long-term plan that gives this country a real chance of success. That is the work of the next sixteen months... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: (overlaps) Well we have nowhere to live but days, but let me turn to pensions, which is your announcement this weekend. There’s a triple lock in place, which will mean that pensioners until 2020 are guaranteed real terms increases, is that right.

DAVID CAMERON: That’s right. I mean what we put in place in this government is this triple lock so pensions go up by either 2.5% earnings or prices, which ever is highest. Now that’s been really important in this parliament because earnings haven’t been going up very quickly because we’ve been recovering from this appalling recession that we had under Labour. So what we’re saying, because we’ve taken these difficult decisions, because we’re asking people to retire later, moving the pension age first to 66 and then upwards, we’re able to make this long-term decision, which is that we’ll keep the triple lock in place, at least for the next parliament, so people know, hopefully wages will be growing and that is the forecast that they will be, but if
they didn’t, then your pension would be protected because you’ve got the 2.5%, or the rise in prices ... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: This is a huge commitment for the government at a time when you’re cutting in so many other areas. Cutting back on welfare and so on. Is it at all connected to the fact that 68% of pensioners vote, a much higher proportion than any other group.

DAVID CAMERON: No it’s a choice, based on values, based on my values which is that I want people, when they reach retirement, to know that they can have dignity and security in their old age. People who’ve worked hard, who’ve done the right thing, who provided for their families. They should then know they’re going to get a decent state pension and they don’t have to worry about it lagging behind prices or earnings and I think it’s the right choice for the country. Now we’ve also got to do more to help young people, which is why we’re abolishing the job’s tax for the very young. Why we’re investing in apprenticeships. But I think, you know, (interjection) politics is about choices and the choice I make is yes, we should be giving pensioners dignity and security in their old age.

ANDREW MARR: I can see that but you can’t prioritise everybody. You have chosen to prioritise pensions and I’m asking you, is that fair at a time when so many people are struggling so much, when you’re going to put a welfare cap in and all the rest of it.

DAVID CAMERON: Well I think it is fair because I think you know, you should be protecting pensions because of the dignity and security people deserve. In terms of working age welfare, which we have tried to reduce and control, we put in place a welfare cap, so that a family is never better off out of work than in work. I think that’s right and I think there’s more we can do in terms of reforming welfare. As I said, going back to the immigration argument, you know, we need a system why it pays to work in Britain and where people are keen to go and work rather than live on welfare. Now that job is not yet complete.

ANDREW MARR: As you’ve said, you’re going to put in an overall welfare cap. Can you tell us how that’s going to happen and when. Is it going to be a percentage of the total GDP, a percentage of total government spending, a cash figure or what and when will we know.

DAVID CAMERON: Well the Chancellor will be setting it out in more detail in the weeks to come but the basic principle is this. We control quite tightly the spending that departments do, the Home Office and the Agriculture Department and such like. We haven’t controlled in the past in this country, the welfare bill, which has tended to just go up and up and up. So the theory is you put in place a welfare cap, a cap on the overall budget. We exclude pensions from it because I think pensions are special for the arguments I’ve just made and then if you have to break that welfare cap, cos you’re not getting unemployment down, you’re not dealing with the problems of welfare, then you’d have to have an explicit vote in the House of Commons. It’s to
encourage the government and the House of Commons to control all of government spending, not just some of it.

ANDREW MARR: But this suggests a very, very tough squeeze on housing benefit, on child benefit in particular, because those are the big areas. Once you take out pensions, that’s what you’re really talking about.

DAVID CAMERON: Well I think housing benefit, has, you know, is a benefit that has frankly got far too high. We’re now spending as a country, something over £20 billion pounds a year on housing benefit. That is an enormous amount of money. Now, we’ve already made some big changes. When we came to power, there were some families that were getting £60,000 £70,000 £80,000 thousand pounds a year in housing benefit. We’ve stopped that, we’ve put a cap on housing benefit but I still think there’s more we can do to reform our benefit system. I mean, as I’ve said in my Party Conference speech and elsewhere, I want young people, as they leave school and university, to be given a choice of either earning or learning. The idea of signing on and getting housing benefit and living their lives on benefits – the Dutch don’t allow that. Other countries don’t allow it. We’ve got to move to a system where you’ve got a choice. You can earn or you can learn. But a life on benefits is not an option.

ANDREW MARR: While we’re talking about life on benefits what about wealthier pensioners being able to pick up benefits for free television licences, free travel, winter fuel and so forth. Is that going to carry on forever?

DAVID CAMERON: Well I made a very clear promise before the last election that if I became Prime Minister I would keep in this Parliament...

(Interjection)

ANDREW MARR: In this Parliament...

DAVID CAMERON: I made a very clear promise. We’ve kept that promise. Incidentally I think it’s important to keep these promises, you know I’ve made promises.

ANDREW MARR: ... (unintelligible) ... Will you make this promise again?

DAVID CAMERON: We will set our plans at the next election in our manifesto. But I think, it is you know, just to make the point, you know, I made promises like delivering on our aid promises. We kept that promise. I do think we make these very clear public promises, you should keep them.

ANDREW MARR: What about taxation, you’d like to bring the rate down from 45p to 40p would you?

DAVID CAMERON: Well I want taxes that mean the rich pay not just a fair share as it were in taxes, but I actually want the rich to pay more in taxes and so you want to set tax rates that encourage people to earn, to set up businesses, to make money and then to pay taxes and actually, what we’re finding with the 45p rate is that I think it’s going to bring in a better
percentage of money than the 50p rate did. So you should always look at how you set taxes in that way. But my priority if you like and the priority of this government and the Conservative Party, the priority is to target tax reductions on the poorest people in our country. That’s why we’ve raised to £10,000 the amount you can earn before you start paying taxes. That’s why we’ve frozen the council tax, that’s why we’ve cut petrol duty. We’re trying to help those hard working people.

ANDREW MARR: Do you want to cut the rate of income tax, the top rate of income tax, yes or no.

DAVID CAMERON: Well, look, I said we’ve set taxes to raise the revenue. That’s how you – you should set taxes to raise revenue, not to make a political point. But if I had some money in the coffers, I would target that money at the lowest paid, at those who work hard, who want to get on, those are the ones that need our help. But let’s be clear here. You can’t cut taxes unless you control spending and the opposition is not committed to controlling spending, we are. We know there are further spending reductions that have to be made and it’s only then that you can cut people’s taxes. We have cut taxes in this parliament but never by increasing borrowing.

ANDREW MARR: They can speak for themselves I’m sure but talking about spending commitments. Are local authorities struggling with the floods at the moment because the Environment Agency and their own budgets have been cut too fast too far.

DAVID CAMERON: Well, first of all on the Environment Agency and on flood defences. We are spending £2.3 billion pounds in this four year period on flood defences, which is more than the previous four year period. And we’ve also enabled them to access other sources of money, partnership funding, so I think we’re going to see record levels of spending on flood defences and we’ve guaranteed that right out in to 2020, so they can really plan for the future. Local Authorities have had to make difficult decisions. The Environment Agency, does have to make sure it controls its budgets carefully but we are making sure they invest in the front line, in fact we’ve increased the amount of money they get for.

ANDREW MARR: You’re happy – broadly, with the way things are going.

DAVID CAMERON: Well first of all, huge sympathy to anyone who’s had their house flooded. And anyone who’s had a house or office flooded knows it is absolutely dreadful and – community response has been incredible. I saw for myself how people come together and help and the emergency services have done an absolutely great job. There are always lessons to learn. I think we’re doing a lot more things better. I think flood warnings are better. I think the flood defences have protected tens of thousands of homes but there will always be lessons to learn and I’ll make sure they’re learnt.

ANDREW MARR: If this September the Scots vote to leave the UK, that would be an enormous body blow to the authority of your own government
and yet you still seem determined not to debate openly and directly with Alex Salmond, who is your effective opponent on this – why?

DAVID CAMERON: Well first of all, I very much hope the Scots will vote to stay in the United Kingdom. I think it was right to give them that choice, they voted for an SNP government in Scotland. I think if the UK government had said, no, no, we’re not listening, you can’t have a referendum, I think that would have been quite wrong, so we’ve done the mature, grown up, sensible thing of saying let’s have a fair and decisive and legal referendum. As with this issue of the debate, well I know why Alex Salmond is putting this argument, he’s losing the current argument and he wants to try and change the argument. But look, this is not a debate between me and him, it’s not a debate between the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the First Minister of Scotland ... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: Shouldn’t it be?

DAVID CAMERON: Well no, no, it shouldn’t. The debate should be between people in Scotland who want to stay and people in Scotland who want to go. So you should have the leader.... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: But it affects you it affects me, it affects everybody across these whole islands, not just the Scots.

DAVID CAMERON: Of course it does and we debate these things in parliament and we debate them in the media, but the key question, does Scotland stay in the United Kingdom or does Scotland leave the United Kingdom. That is for Scots to decide. I don’t have a vote. I wish I did. I know how I’d vote. I’d vote to keep our family of nations together but I don’t have a vote in this. It’s for the Scots to decide and that’s where the debate should take place.

ANDREW MARR: Prime Minister for now, thank very much indeed.

END OF INTERVIEW