ANDREW MARR:
Now there’s no doubt the Conservatives’ election victory is also a personal vindication for the Prime Minister. He led his party to its longed for majority – “the sweetest victory” as he called it. But that majority is still relatively slender and therefore vulnerable to natural attrition, as we call it, and perhaps internal dissent. David Davis is a senior backbencher. He lost out to Mr Cameron in the leadership election (it seems amazing but ten years ago) and is with me now. It doesn’t seem like ten years ago, does it?

DAVID DAVIS:
It seems like yesterday.

ANDREW MARR:
It seems like yesterday. Now, first of all, what do you think the No. 10 operation has to do in this new parliament that it wasn’t doing in the last parliament to sort of enjoy the next five years?

DAVID DAVIS:
Well it’s started actually already. They’ve already seen Graham Brady – he was called
in I think at the beginning of the weekend, Friday I think, to talk to him. And he’s very, very important in this.

ANDREW MARR:
Chairman of 1922.

DAVID DAVIS:
Head of the 22 Committee, the representative committee for the backbenchers. They must treat him with respect because he’s their bridge and you know they must actually use that to talk to the backbenchers.

ANDREW MARR:
Some people say that David Cameron is slightly too much … Whether it was a clique or not, there’s an impression it was a clique of mates and friends and it has to reach out much more to the Tory Party.

DAVID DAVIS:
There’s certainly that impression, but there’s also another problem. You know whenever they struck a deal with the Liberals on some issue, they were fixed; they couldn’t go out and then renegotiate their deal with their own backbenchers or the laws or whatever. So I think there were two aspects to it.

ANDREW MARR:
But that makes it harder for David Cameron in a sense because in the past he could say to critics on the right of the Conservative Party “I’m terribly sorry, I agree with you. Unfortunately that wretched Nick Clegg has stopped me doing it.” (Davis laughs) He can’t say that now, can he?

DAVID DAVIS:
No he can’t, but he’s also free to move … Look one of the things that’s interesting about David is when he thinks the circumstances have changed, he can change his mind. He’s done that publicly a number of times. Early on in this government, he got criticised for changing his mind on forests and you name it.
ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

DAVID DAVIS:
So I think he’s good at that. So from that point of view, he can actually manage it better.

ANDREW MARR:
Now of all the big issues, we both know that Europe is the most potentially toxic. I remember very, very well the John Major years where you were the enforcer and so forth for a long time.

DAVID DAVIS:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
Now what do you think he has to bring back essentially from the EU negotiations? He’s got the maximum power now; he has to strike while the iron is hot. So what does he need to get from them?

DAVID DAVIS:
Yeah. Before that, I don’t think we’ll repeat the Major years for three reasons. One: we’ve done it before, we know what it feels like. Two: people have got the option of talking to him more, I think, than before. And three: if they don’t like the outcome, they can actually campaign against it in a referendum. So I think there are reasons why it won’t happen. Now what does he need to bring back? I would put actually immigration (very important in the public mind) to one side. It’s not the big issue.

ANDREW MARR:
So the free movement of people is not …

DAVID DAVIS:
(over) Freedom’s important, it’s important, but it’s not the main one. The main one is very simple. The main one is that in the future we are able to say to the Europeans
look, this is too far for us, and opt out. Not a veto, an opt out. There is one already for France. There’s a thing called the Luxembourg Compromise. France has on a couple of occasions said this is going to damage our shipping industry, we don’t want it, and they’ve effectively brought it to an end.

ANDREW MARR:
So in a sense to restore some power to the building behind us.

DAVID DAVIS:
Exactly, it’s all about that. It’s all about restoring control of our destiny to the House of Commons.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright, now what about … But the free movement of people thing, which we talked about endlessly before the election, you say that’s not so important. Why not?

DAVID DAVIS:
Well I think it’s the secondary one. I mean it will be the one he’s measured by in the public eye and the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mail will look at it. But the trouble is at the moment the focus is on things like benefit tourism and so on. That’s not the issue - you know we haven’t got millions of people here on benefits, we’ve got millions of people here in jobs - and so that’s going to be quite hard to get right. But they need to try, but it’s going to be hard.

ANDREW MARR:
So if we got a kind of Luxembourg Compromise, a bit more veto power as it were for Britain …

DAVID DAVIS:
That’s the single most important thing.

ANDREW MARR:
If we got that, would you be in favour of staying in the EU?
DAVID DAVIS:
I think I would. That’s for me the acid test. It’s not the only one, I’ll grant you, but it is the central one.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay, that’s Europe. Tick. *(Davis laughs)* Let’s move onto the next big problem, which is Scotland …

DAVID DAVIS:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
… because we hear that it’s going to be a very more radical form of home rule, but is that enough? What about the money? What’s your view?

DAVID DAVIS:
Well you know, Andrew, from your previous incarnation at The Independent that I was in favour of fiscal autonomy as it were right back at the beginning of this – the 90s – and that’s what Nicola Sturgeon says she wants. But they want complete fiscal autonomy and there’s a real problem with that; and that is that the Scots essentially raise 3 per cent less tax per person than the rest of the UK and they spend 15 per cent more money, so actually if they had proper complete control of the money or virtually complete control of the money, they’d be in permanent deficit.

ANDREW MARR:
Isn’t that the sword that David Cameron is going to kind of dangle over Nicola Sturgeon’s head: okay fine, you can have freedom, you spend the money, you raise the money; Scottish taxpayers have to take the whole hit for any anti-austerity policies? Isn’t that as it were the Tory threat?

DAVID DAVIS:
Well I think that’s what responsible politics is about – is actually paying for what you do. But you know understand that we’ve had a grievance machine in place since the
Scotland Act, the first Scotland Act. Gordon Brown – I told him, I was Public Accounts Committee Chairman – I said what you’re doing is creating a permanent excuse for every Scotland Act to say it’s Westminster’s fault by having us pay the bills all the time. They should raise the money in Scotland and raise enough to pay for what they’ve got responsibility for, and then it’s their responsibility. They should want that. If they want independence, this is halfway house.

ANDREW MARR:
And you’re a great enthusiast I think for English votes for English laws …

DAVID DAVIS:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
… but does that not push us towards an entirely federal system where we have in effect that building becomes a kind of English Parliament?

DAVID DAVIS:
Or three days a week it does or two days a week, whatever it might be. Yes it does. I mean one of the reasons the British establishment has resisted English votes over time is they know eventually that means you’re going to have to have an English health minister, an English education minister, and I suspect one day an English first minister. And whoever’s the occupant of No. 10 would hate that because actually all the power would sit …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Unless it was the same person of course.

DAVID DAVIS:
Unless it’s the same person.

ANDREW MARR:
So actually our entire country’s changing before our eyes.
DAVID DAVIS:
Absolutely.

ANDREW MARR:
A federal Britain, a new kind of English Parliament, a new relationship with Europe.

DAVID DAVIS:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
This is a very, very big day.

DAVID DAVIS:
This is … I mean this is … One of my colleagues was thinking of standing down – a quite important ex-cabinet minister was thinking of standing down at this election and he said, “I can’t. Too many important things are going to happen in the next five years.”

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

DAVID DAVIS:
And he’s dead right. This is actually a turning point in history. We always say the current election is the most important one ever. Actually this time it might have been.

ANDREW MARR:
It really is. Now you took him on ten years ago.

DAVID DAVIS:
Yeah, yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
He’s done pretty well, hasn’t he?
DAVID DAVIS:
He has done pretty well. I mean the thing I’d say about this election, nobody’s said it but you know – and I said to you earlier I sort of called it in the middle of the night, a little earlier than some of the others but I was wrong as well – but the simple truth is they maintained a campaign against the run of conventional wisdom. So it was a brave campaign and in this occasion courage has been paid off.

ANDREW MARR:
David Davis, thank you very much indeed for that.

INTERVIEW ENDS