ANDREW MARR:
And there are just 6 months to go until the referendum on Scotland’s future. The arguments are hotting up, as you’d expect, and the currency seems to be the big one: would an independent Scotland be able to keep the pound? But there are many other important questions too. World class companies are talking about leaving Scotland. Will the Scots need passports when they travel down south? One thing both sides agree on – there is a huge amount at stake in this vote. And I am joined now from Aberdeen by the First Minister Alex Salmond. Welcome Mr Salmond. Since the unionist onslaught, you haven’t done too badly in the polls, but if you look at the polling of your own supporters, as well as people who are going to vote no in the referendum, everyone wants to know what your Plan B is if you can’t keep the pound. Are you going to enlighten us this morning?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well “not doing too badly” is a euphemism, Andrew. I mean the polls moved I think from 38 per cent yes in November to 42 per cent the average for February. The most recent ones, 45 per cent, so the Yes Campaign seems to have the momentum. And I think one of the reasons for that is people can see through scaremongering when they hear it. And an example of that of course is the bluff and bluster of people like Ed
Balls and George Osborne on sterling because it’s quite clear that not having … not sharing a currency would cost the rest of the UK more than it would cost Scotland both in terms of transaction costs (about £500 million) but also if you claim ownership of all of the assets of the United Kingdom like the Bank of England and the currency, then you end up with all the liabilities and that includes up to a hundred thousand million pounds which would otherwise be Scotland’s share of the national debt. That’s why it’s bluff and bluster. That’s why people are seeing through it.

ANDREW MARR:
Well it could well be that they are going to take this decision because they are so hostile to the idea of Scottish independence, it’s not bluff and bluster; they’re just determined to spike your guns. You’ve always said that, with good will on both sides, there can be a shared currency. There isn’t good will on both sides.

ALEX SALMOND:
Well I think that’s a good way of putting it, Andrew, because if you look at the Fiscal Commission Working Group – that’s the group of Nobel Prize winning economic laureates that were assembled by the Scottish Government – it was their recommendation. They also set out a range of other viable options for an independent Scotland. There wasn’t just Plan B. There was Plan B, C, D, E and F. But we should argue for what’s best for Scotland and best for the rest of the United Kingdom. But why it’s a particularly interesting aspect, I mean this week we’ve seen a huge number of people – the President of the United States, the Secretary of State John Kerry, the Prime Minister – claiming moral superiority (rightly) in terms of the Scottish referendum as an agreed consensual process, as opposed to the snap referendum in the Crimea arranged by the Russian Government and Crimea. But of course you lose all of that moral superiority in the democratic process if you then say of course Scots have the right under this consensual process to vote for independence but then will set about flinging them out of the EU, refusing to share sterling. The whole argument dissolves.

ANDREW MARR:
I’d like …
ALEX SALMOND:
We have a democratic process in Scotland consensually agreed, and it requires people on this side of the border and in London to express commonsense good will that the people want to see.

ANDREW MARR:
I’d like to come back to the EU later, but just once more on the currency. No-one can know what’s going to happen after a referendum and a Yes vote if that’s what happens and, therefore, Scots are going to be left in the situation where they don’t know what currency they will be using afterwards. Isn’t it sensible to have a Plan B? And if Scotland’s going to be so successful and is so rich, what would be wrong if having a pound Scots or a groat (or whatever it would be called) a Scottish currency, what’s the argument against that?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well I thought I addressed that in the last question, Andrew. I mean what I pointed out was the Fiscal Commission Working Group set out not just a Plan B, as you put it, but B, C, D, E and F – a range of viable currency options for an independent Scotland. But clearly we should argue for Plan A - that is to say the thing that’s best, in the best interests of Scotland and indeed the rest of the United Kingdom. And I’m also suggesting that the attitude of Ed Balls and George Osborne shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, not only undermines the Labour Party in Scotland, incidentally, but also is the wrong attitude for politicians in London to have. That’s the bullying attitude which is increasing support for the Yes Campaign at the present moment and we should respect the right of the Scottish people to express their view on independence and we should follow the Edinburgh Agreement that said after the result that politicians in London and Edinburgh should act in the best interests of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. That’s what we are doing and I don’t think it’s too much to ask London politicians to do the same thing.

ANDREW MARR:
So why not a Scottish currency?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well again the Fiscal Commission Working Group set out a range of monetary and policy options …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* Yeah but I’m asking … I’m asking you in your own words to tell us.

**ALEX SALMOND:**
*(over)* They also said … Well the range of options is there within the working group’s proposals, which were published, Andrew. That the best option that they identified was to share sterling, to share the pound, which is as much our currency as it is … well certainly more our currency than it is George Osborne’s, but it’s a shared currency. We’re as entitled to share it as people in London are. And, therefore, if you claim ownership over that currency like Ed Balls and George Osborne are doing, then unfortunately you claim ownership of all the debts of the United Kingdom. And no serious politician in London is actually going to argue that process. That’s why people in Scotland are seeing through the bluff and the bluster.

**ANDREW MARR:**
When Mr Barroso came into the studio a few weeks ago, I was quite surprised by how incredibly steely and sure he was that Scotland would not be able to re-enter the EU. He was absolutely adamant in private and in public on the sofa that it would not happen and he said he was speaking for many other big European heads. I wonder why you just regard this as yet more unionist bluster? He’s got no particular dog in this fight.

**ALEX SALMOND:**
Oh well I think perhaps he has, but let’s come to that in a second. Of course Mr Barroso’s comments since have been attacked by former director generals of the European Union, former secretary generals, people in the Court of Justice like Sir David Edwards, for example …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* Former, former …
ALEX SALMOND:
(over) … who’s actually united opinion against …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Yeah if I may say so former people …

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) Yes indeed and President Barroso’s … President Barroso …

ANDREW MARR:
Go ahead.

ALEX SALMOND:
Sorry. Well Mr … President Barroso will soon be a former person as well. But I was quite interested in the remarks in the French National Assembly, and indeed in the French Senate this week, where French senators were pointing out that they believe that President Barroso was being influenced by his potential future candidacy for Secretary General of NATO and was sucking up to London in order to advance that process. Now I’ve got no idea if that’s the case, but what I do know is that serious people – secretary generals, former presidents or former courts … well former judges in the Court of Justice like David Edwards have pointed out why you cannot exclude from the European Union citizens in Scotland who’ve been part of it for over forty years and why it would be totally ridiculous for the European Union not to accept the democratic wishes of the Scottish people. Again of course it comes back to this question of the process that we’re having in Scotland – a consensual referendum agreed by both parties – and that means of course not just that Scots have the right to express their opinion, but there’s an obligation on others, including in London and indeed President Barroso, to accept the verdict of the Scottish people. Otherwise …

ANDREW MARR:
Alright.

ALEX SALMOND:
… the whole argument that’s been placed about the superiority of this process
compared to what’s going on in Crimea dissolves in a puff of dust.

ANDREW MARR:
I think it would be quite hard to get back in, I have to say. But let’s move on to the other big question we’ve had this week – Theresa May saying that because …

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) Well that’s the An… That’s the … Sorry, wait a minute, can I just, can I just …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Yes of course.

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) … examine that for a second, Andrew? This, what, is the Andrew Marr analysis as opposed to, sort of, David Edwards …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Having talked to Mr Barroso, which I think you haven’t.

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) … as opposed to former secretary generals of the European Commission. As opposed … Well as opposed, Andrew, to the weight of evidence that’s being presented to the Scottish Parliament’s committees at the present moment. I don’t know, is that an individual expression? Is that the expression of the BBC?

ANDREW MARR:
(over) No it’s not. I’ve got no … I’ve got no views on this. Nor does the BBC.

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) I think …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I’ve got no views on this. Nor does the BBC. I was simply reflecting on what Mr Barroso told us.
ALEX SALMOND:
(over) Well you just said what your opinion was!

ANDREW MARR:
I said I think it will be quite difficult having talked to Mr Barroso.

ALEX SALMOND:
(laughs) Well I’m sorry, I thought …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Who is after all the President … And he may be a former person …

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) Oh I see, I see. You’ve just …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) We will all be former people. You will be a former person. I’ll be a former …
But he is currently the President of the European Commission, which is not a small job.

ALEX SALMOND:
(over) Yeah, Andrew, sorry … Andrew, I thought you were asking questions. But anyway, look …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I was answering that one.

ALEX SALMOND:
I mistook you there. I thought you were giving your opinion as opposed to President Barroso’s opinion. If we’re still giving President Barroso’s opinion, then I’d put the weight of other opinion – of people who say, look, people who are citizens of the European Union, have been so for forty years, have acquired certain rights. And of
course the democratic imperative of people in Scotland, in London, even lo unto Brussels to accept a democratic verdict of the Scottish people, which is clearly in the best interests not just of Scotland but of the wider continent of Europe, would strike me as providing an imperative even more important than the individual views of President Barroso or, for that matter, any views that may or may not be held in the BBC.

ANDREW MARR:
The Tor… Or may not be held. The Tories down here want a much tougher immigration policy. An independent Scotland would want more liberal immigration. You want more immigrants and, therefore, Theresa May says there would have to be controls on the border between the two countries. You have always said that’s not going to happen. Why is she wrong?

ALEX SALMOND:
Well because we’ve had a common travel area in these islands since the 1920s, which has encompassed recently not just the Republic of Ireland but the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, which are not incidentally in the European Union. There are differences between Irish immigration policy and immigration policy in the rest of the UK, but that hasn’t stopped a common travel area working, and the sort of proposals that we are putting forward - for example allowing international students (if they so choose) to work and contribute to the Scottish economy – are proposals which are perfectly compatible with having a common travel area. And I think Theresa May scaremongering in this just adds to the long litany of scaremongering attempts of the UK Government; and again like the other things – like on the European Union, like on the currency – people in Scotland seem to be seeing right through it.

ANDREW MARR:
Alex Salmond, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

INTERVIEW ENDS