ANDREW MARR:
The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, seems to be feeling quite satisfied with life at the end of 2012, a year in which he was re-elected for a second term and cheered by the Olympic crowds - in contrast to some of his senior Conservative colleagues. As the Prime Minister remarked, he even turned getting stuck on a zip wire into something of a PR triumph. Well when we talked a couple of days ago, I asked Boris Johnson if he could bottle the Olympic spirit and channel it into another great national product - if so, what would that be?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Aviation immediately. The Olympics showed what the public and the private sector can do when they work together, when they plan, when they’re brave, when they take a view about this country is a great country, a great … you know something that we can be proud of and that we can do extraordinary things. And I think we’ve got a looming crisis, actually a crisis that’s already upon us in our aviation capacity. We could sort it out with boldness and with vision.

ANDREW MARR:
I mean you’ve mentioned aviation, but what about some of the you know huge economic problems?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
We’ve somehow got to get the economy going again.

BORIS JOHNSON:
We’ve got to. Well I mean the single biggest thing you could do for Londoners at the moment is to build tens, if not hundreds of thousands, of new homes. Since I’ve been Mayor of London in the last four years, the city seems to have acquired another 600,000 people. I mean I’m not saying it’s all down to me …

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Down to you.

BORIS JOHNSON:
… but it is a stunning comment on the popularity of London - London as the motor of the UK economy.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) But they’ve got to live somewhere.

BORIS JOHNSON:
They’ve got to live somewhere and they’ve got to be able to get around the city smoothly and conveniently. This year has been wonderful for brand London. I mean when I went to India recently, it was noticeable that people thought hey, what a fantastic place, and you had software companies, IT companies, hotel businesses wanting to invest here, wanting to build their businesses.

ANDREW MARR:
Lower taxes, as you pointed out.
BORIS JOHNSON:
And that is one of the … certainly one of the ingredients. You know I’ve made a point about access for talented people to the London market. And we do have a problem with visas. I think some of the signals we’ve been sending out have been a bit negative. And yes of course we must crack down on illegal immigration and yes Labour was completely wrong to open the floodgates in 2004 and to fail to grip the problem and everybody understands that, but loads of the people I talk… the number one issue amongst Indian business people is you know are you hostile to us coming to London because of the visa problem.

ANDREW MARR:
So what do you make of the signals being sent by the government at the moment, Theresa May - this sense that the drawbridge is being cranked closed again?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Well, look, I mean you know this argument that immigration is responsible for an increase in house prices, I want to look at an aspect of that proposition. It is certainly true that if you look at the London market property values are very much driven by the confidence of inward investors in this city who come to buy houses here and …

ANDREW MARR:
All the French and the Italians and the Russians and the Chinese.

BORIS JOHNSON:
Voila! All the refugees from the terror of Monsieur Hollande.

ANDREW MARR:
Francois Hollande.

BORIS JOHNSON:
Yes, that’s right. All the people fleeing across the channel, they’re investing in London. I don’t think that it is sensible to say that property value … we should keep
people out or keep rich investors out of our domain in order to allow property values to decline. I think that that would lead to a fall in the equity of everybody in their property in the city and I for the life of me cannot see the economic logic.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s turn to the Eurozone and what you’ve been saying about an in-out referendum of some kind for the British people. As I understand it, what you want is a really serious renegotiation of our relationship with the rest of the EU …

BORIS JOHNSON:
Yuh.

ANDREW MARR:
… to give us a sort of single market style relationship …

BORIS JOHNSON:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
… and then to put that to a referendum?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Yes. What’s happening of course is that they’re laboriously keeping the cancer alive while the patient’s health deteriorates even further. You know the GDP of Greece has gone down 10 per cent since we were last here - 10 per cent, the GDP. Unemployment is soaring in Spain and Greece and other Mediterranean countries. It’s a tragedy. Now what we should say to them is, okay, you go on with that project, you keep going with your attempts to sustain the single currency, you create this fiscal union, this banking union - absolutely fine, you know we can’t stop you. We don’t approve, we don’t support it, but we can’t stop you.

ANDREW MARR:
And in fact you are quite critical of Cameron and Osborne …

BORIS JOHNSON:
Yuh.

**ANDREW MARR:**
… for sounding enthusiastic about it.

**BORIS JOHNSON:**
Well I think it’s unnecessary to be enthusiastic about it, in fact it’s wrong, because I don’t think it’s democratic, I don’t think it’s in the interests of the people of Europe to take away their right to vote for the people who set their taxes. Ultimately what they’re deciding to do is to create a single polity based more or less in Brussels that will decide …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* Which in your view stifles all the national or local democracy …

**BORIS JOHNSON:**
*(over)* Yes, I mean they’re being plunged back … they’re being kept on a gold standard over which they are going to have less and less democratic control. In my view, they are compounding the problem. Now what we should say to them is okay, fine, we’re good Europeans and so we’re going to let you get on and do that if that is really your wish, but what we would like in return for our consent to your using EU institutions on this project, which we think is misguided, we would like a new relationship. And it’s very simple - what most people in this country want is the single market, the common market.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Lots of people will understand the attraction of it, but you must admit that it is a gamble. They might say no and, therefore, it’s a negotiation you can only go into honestly if you are prepared to walk away at the end of it and say well if we can’t get the Europe we want on our terms …

**BORIS JOHNSON:**
*(over)* That’s correct.
ANDREW MARR:
... we’re prepared to leave.

BORIS JOHNSON:
That is correct, that’s absolutely correct. I happen to think, by the way, that the result ... I mean I don’t think that that is necessarily the end of the world. Don’t forget that fifteen years ago the entire CBI, British industry, the City, everybody was prophesying that there would be gigantic mutant rats with you know gooseberry eyes swarming out of the gutters in the sewer to gnaw the last emaciated faces of the remaining British bankers because we didn’t go into the euro. But I want to stress that is not my preferred option. My preferred option is for us to stay in there and ...

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And get renegotiation. For how long ... Sorry, for how long do you think the long, endlessly promised referendum can be postponed?

BORIS JOHNSON:
It can’t. I think to a certain extent this is now driven by the feeling that a lot of people have that it was 1975 when the people were first put a clear proposition about Europe and it’s an awful long time ago. Lots of other countries have had referendums on the succeeding treaties. Virtually everybody’s ...

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So how long, do you think?

BORIS JOHNSON:
... and we have never had a popular vote ...

ANDREW MARR:
No.

BORIS JOHNSON:
... since 75 on a European question. I would like to be able to campaign for the single market and a withdrawal from a lot of the nonsensical policies, and I think that would
be … I think most people would look at it …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I come back to my question how long … for how long can it be postponed, this?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Ah well, I can’t believe that government will do it this … I think it would be a good idea if they did it before 2015. It would be fantastic. I can’t see them doing it before 2015, but all is apparently going to be revealed in a speech that is forthcoming either you know …

ANDREW MARR:
Indeed. As the voice of the sort of …

BORIS JOHNSON:
(over) Reason.

ANDREW MARR:
… financial centre of this country, I was going to say - square mile and all of that - what’s your take on these huge companies - Google, Amazon, Starbucks and all the rest of it - who manage to avoid paying almost any corporation tax?

BORIS JOHNSON:
(over) It’s a very difficult one. It’s a very difficult one, but you cannot exactly blame the finance directors of these companies for doing their job, you know, or the tax lawyers of these companies. You know their salaries, their livelihoods depend on minimising the tax exposure and obligations of their companies. If there is some way of parking all their profits in Luxembourg or wherever and thereby minimising their tax exposure, then you know you can’t …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That’s what they’re going to do.
BORIS JOHNSON:
… you can’t blame them for doing it. You could try to change the arrangements. The government could try to change the arrangements. What I don’t think …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And should?

BORIS JOHNSON:
If possible, yes. What I certainly don’t think you can do is keep beating … Starbucks the other day decided to write a cheque for £20 million, you know, and everybody’s now sneering and saying you know £20 million doesn’t even begin to … My only feeling about that is that if companies are going to show corporate responsibility and they are going to contribute to wider society, then you shouldn’t sneer at them. I mean you either sort out the tax thing or you …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But that’s for politicians to do, not for the companies you’re saying?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay. You are the most popular Conservative politician in the country. What are you going to …

BORIS JOHNSON:
Well I don’t know about that.

ANDREW MARR:
You are. Well according to the polls anyway. What are you going to do to help your party …

BORIS JOHNSON:
I will campaign.

ANDREW MARR:
… between now and 2015?

BORIS JOHNSON:
I will campaign for a Conservative victory relentlessly in the coming years. And I think actually that they are going to … I think that we will win. I tell you why. Because I think that my old schoolmate Ed Miliband - he and I went to the same primary school - I think that they made a huge mistake in putting all their chips, all their political chips on the square marked economic gloom, failure, Britain going down … Do you know what I mean? Their entire pitch to the people is that things are going to get worse. And so the minute that there is a … I think there will be a recovery - I’m not as gloomy necessarily as some people about the UK. I think the UK has got a fantastic future. The minute that people’s confidence starts to return, they’ll say to Balls and to Miliband well you were the guys who crashed the car. We seem at last to have got out of the ditch. We’re back on the road again. Why on earth would we give the keys back to you?

ANDREW MARR:
And if there was any sugge… If there was a campaign to get you back into the House of Commons, if your sainted brother said “Listen, Boris, have my seat, have my seat.”

BORIS JOHNSON:
*(over)* Yeah, right. Joseph Johnson has got a fantastic … No, no, no, that’s not going to happen. I …

ANDREW MARR:
If the trumpet sounds, will you not respond?

BORIS JOHNSON:
No. I’ve got three and a half more years almost as Mayor of London. It’s the most wonderful, engrossing job.
ANDREW MARR:
And you’re absolutely going to stick to that under all circumstances?

BORIS JOHNSON:
(over) I’m going to stick to it. Yeah because I don’t want … I think we’ve got … we did a great Olympics, seriously it was a great year for the city, but there’s an awful lot more that now needs to be delivered and we need to show that we can get value from that £9.3 billion and we will. But the Olympic investments are going to be transformatory of huge chunks of East London and I want to be there to make sure that we get it right. I think we can and I think people will be piling into London for generations to come.

ANDREW MARR:
Boris Johnson, thank you very much.

BORIS JOHNSON:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS