ANDREW MARR:
So, how will the Lib Dems fare in the local and European Elections on Thursday? The opinion polls don’t look great for them – the party languishes in fourth place, its ratings in single figures. Nick Clegg scores lowest of the main party leaders. He and his ministers have been sniping with Tory colleagues over everything from school dinners to the status of Cornwall, and once again there are questions about the survival of the Coalition. Being in government seems to have brought nothing but trouble for the Lib Dems in terms of popularity. So where now? I am joined by the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg. Good morning to you.

NICK CLEGG:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Has it been worth it? I mean your party is facing near oblivion in the polls at the moment. What is the single thing that you have achieved in government, which has allowed you to look in the mirror and say ‘yeah, but in the end it’s been worth it?”
NICK CLEGG:
Massive tax breaks for millions of people …

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* Single thing, I said. Single thing.

NICK CLEGG:
Okay, there you go. Fairer …

ANDREW MARR:
Massive tax …?

NICK CLEGG:
... biggest change in the personal income tax system in a generation, benefiting over 24 million people to the tune of £800. I can add to that list.

ANDREW MARR:
I know you could.

NICK CLEGG:
Better apprenticeships, better pensions, more money …

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* I know, well …

NICK CLEGG:
No, but you make a serious point – joking aside – which is of course this is has been tough, of course this has been tough, and going into Coalition by the way with either the Conservatives or the Labour Party in a system not used to coalitions was always going to be controversial. And added to that, of course, was we had to take all those difficult decisions to fulfil the central mission of this government, which was to repair and reform the British economy – the deeply damaged British economy. But when I look back on what we’ve done over the last four years, I think - and actually I think most Liberal Democrats feel this – I am immensely proud that our resilience, our
unity – despite endless breathless predictions, which we’re seeing again right now to the contrary – have actually delivered the stability necessary to deliver economic recovery and an economic recovery which is also delivering fairness to millions of people across the country. And that …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) At a devastating cost to your own party. I mean your polling record is terrible at the moment.

NICK CLEGG:
Well let’s see what happens. Let’s see what happens in the forthcoming elections. I’m not a pollster, I’m not a soothsayer …

ANDREW MARR:
No.

NICK CLEGG:
… so I can’t tell, neither can you, what will happen in the General Election. My own anecdotal evidence, having criss-crossed the country over the last several weeks, knocking on doors and campaigning, is in those areas where we are able to get our side of the story across – literally knocking on doors, explaining what we’ve done because no-one else is going to do it for us – actually I think we’re going to do better than people predict, but I accept in those areas where we’re not strong on the ground, it is very, very challenging. But it was always going to be difficult for us, of course, because we’re breaking the mould of traditional two-party politics, we’re taking a lot of difficult decisions to restore stability to the British economy, but we are delivering countless signature tune Liberal Democrat policies that we couldn’t possibly deliver from the opposition benches.

ANDREW MARR:
What would be a good result in the European Elections in terms of numbers of MPs, MEPs?
NICK CLEGG:
Look, I want as many MEPs returned as possible because I think Liberal Democrat MEPs are the guarantee in the European Parliament.

ANDREW MARR:
Some?

NICK CLEGG:
I’m simply not going to come up with numbers. As I said, I’m not a pollster or soothsayer. I’m a campaigning party leader who believes that we have shown in this European campaign the courage of our convictions. We’re the only party to actually say look, we’ve got to stand up to UKIP, to this nasty sort of view of the world wanting to turn the clock back, it’ll damage the future of Britain.

ANDREW MARR:
So why …

NICK CLEGG:
And if people disagree with us, fine, but I hope many people will actually accept and recognise that we’re the only party who’ve actually had the guts to say enough is enough, we’ve got to challenge this kind of thinking.

ANDREW MARR:
Well let’s look at the polling. You say people may disagree with us. The polling is absolutely clear, it’s not a question of one poll or another. Month after month, week after week, 7, 8 per cent. That is close to wipeout as a serious political force in this country. My question to you – they’re the polls, they’re not exactly inconsistent – what is going wrong for you? I mean you’ve got all these great policies, you’ve been going around trying to argue with Nigel Farage. He won those debates according to snap polls and so forth. Something about your message is simply not getting through.

NICK CLEGG:
As I say, I think what you’ll actually discover – and look we can talk about polls if you like – polls go up, polls go down. What goes up …
ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well in that case, they’re consistent.

NICK CLEGG:
Well no, no. Actually look, let’s see what happens next week.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

NICK CLEGG:
Let’s see what happens next year in the General Election. As I say, what I am finding and what Liberal Democrat fellow campaigners are finding up and down the country is where we get our message across, where we’re able to explain that if it wasn’t for us there wouldn’t be an economic recovery, let alone tax cuts, fairer pensions, more apprenticeships, more money into schools through the pupil premium for kids who need the most help – none of those things would happen. We wouldn’t … And I think exactly at the point where our big judgements – sure there might be individual decisions which people don’t like that this government’s had to take, the Liberal Democrats have had to take – but the big judgements of actually entering into coalition in the first place to provide stability at a time of great instability, and in order … and to deliver those big changes so that the economy is now looking much more optimistic than many people predicted, I think it would be highly self-defeating precisely at the point when our big judgements are being vindicated for us to lose our nerve and that’s why my party is not going to. And every time predictions are made that we’re going to somehow lose our nerve, we’ve shown again and again and again that we’re a much more resilient and united party than our critics suggest.

ANDREW MARR:
I mean one of the big judge… the biggest judgement was to go into coalition in the first place …

NICK CLEGG:
Yes.
ANDREW MARR:
… and what’s happened is when things are going badly, the Liberal Democrats get the blame; when things are going well, the Conservatives get the credit for it. I mean that appears to be the result of coalition.

NICK CLEGG:
But that’s why it’s so important that we shout from the rooftops what we have done because, to put it as politely as I can, there aren’t that many people around who actually want to promote our side of the story. And, as I say, I can see it in my own constituency in South West Sheffield. Where we’re out there on the streets where we’ve been campaigning you know for months and years people understand what we’ve done and they by and large will continue to support us. But I totally accept in those areas where we’re not strong on the ground, it is going to be much, much more challenging. By the way, I think next week, if you really must know, I think one of the things that the sort of Westminster based media haven’t picked up on at all, which will come out next week for instance, is the huge blow to traditional Labour support in their big Labour heartlands for instance in the Northern cities at the hands of UKIP.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So you think UKIP will do well?

NICK CLEGG:
I think UKIP is going to do ver… Well I think they’re going to do well, but I think they’re going to do very well at the hands of, particularly the cost of Labour in their traditional heartlands for instance in the North. That’s not something you pick up in the polls, but we’ll see next week whether my prediction or indeed yours comes true or not.

ANDREW MARR:
Well we’ve introduced the subject of Europe, so let’s carry on with that. The Prime Minister’s made it absolutely clear that he will not carry on as Prime Minister if he can’t deliver an In/Out Referendum by 2017. Would you allow that to happen if you were in coalition with him again, or would you stop that happening?
NICK CLEGG:
Look, I’m simply not going to start speculating about who will demand what in coalition negotiations after an election which is a year away and all the rest of it. What I will say is that I’ve got no problem with the referendum – far from it, I’ve been campaigning much more consistently than David Cameron for years on the same principle, which is that when powers are transferred from the British people, if you like pooled through new decision making arrangements in the European Union – then there should be an in or out referendum. That’s why I campaigned against the flip-flopping of the Conservative Party at the time of the Lisbon Treaty. There should have been a referendum then. We’ve guaranteed that in law. The problem with the Conservative position, they’re playing hokey-cokey with the British people. First they said they’re going to come up with some sweeping renegotiation of the terms of Britain’s membership of the European Union. Then it actually transpires they’ve got seven rather minor, insignificant little tweaks that they want. And now they’re saying – Michael Fallon said it yesterday – that if they don’t get those minor changes, they’re going to campaign to leave the European Union after all. So what you’ve got there, you’ve got UKIP who want to basically jeopardise the future of the country by pulling out of the world’s largest economy, the Conservatives playing hokey-cokey – you know hithering and thithering this way and that on Europe, you’ve got the Labour Party which is now a great big void on Europe – they’re completely silent on the issue. Only the Liberal Democrat …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well they’re saying what you’re saying.

NICK CLEGG:
No actually they’re not saying anything. Have you heard Ed Miliband say anything of any significance on Europe in …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I asked him about a referendum and he said exactly what you just said.

NICK CLEGG:
Well but hang, no but hang on, only the Liberal Democrats have actually said you’ve got to be committed to being in the European Union if you want to win the big arguments that affect our prosperity, our ability to deal with crime, our ability to deal with the environment. And we’re the only party now. Agree or disagree with us if you like. At least we have the courage of our convictions.

ANDREW MARR:
You’re the ‘in no matter what party’ and, you know, I watch those …

NICK CLEGG:
We are in for reform, but you cannot win an argument unless you’re in the argument. You cannot win the argument in Europe unless you’re in Europe. It’s as simple as that.

ANDREW MARR:
A lot of people would say you can’t win the argument unless you threaten them with something, which is what the Conservatives are going to do.

NICK CLEGG:
Well I think, I think it’s a sort of elevated form of petulance to say we’re going to stamp our little feet to get our little short shopping list of really rather minor changes by the way which they’re now advocating, and if we don’t get them we’ll quit. Guess what happens if you do that. People will say well suit yourself then. You know this idea that petulance …

ANDREW MARR: (over)
So you don’t think David Cameron can get even his what you regard as minor changes?

NICK CLEGG:
Oh I’m sure … And by the way many of those changes are motherhood and apple pie which most people agree with. So, for instance, I strongly agree with the idea that you should make sure that there are proper guarantees for the rights of the European Union member states that are outside the Eurozone as the Eurozone integrates further.
Of course you need to do that. But you don’t need to secure those changes by stamping your foot on the sideline saying and if we don’t get it, we’re going to throw our teddies out of the pram.

ANDREW MARR:
So you think it’s a phoney agenda from David Cameron?

NICK CLEGG:
Oh I think it’s worse than that from the Conservative point of view. It’s never going to satisfy large parts of the Conservative Party because large parts of the Conservative Party actually want to join Nigel Farage and leave. They don’t have the courage to say so, so what you’ve got is this phoney war if you like within the Conservative Party which is now being papered over, those cracks are being papered over, by this arbitrary timetable of holding a referendum in 2017. I have no problem with the referendum. I certainly have no problem with the reform.

ANDREW MARR:
Do you have a problem with 2017 as an arbitrary timetable?

NICK CLEGG:
I have a problem with the internal divisions of the Conservative Party being the determining factor of what should be a policy taken in the national interest. I care about what’s right for Britain in the long run, not what is right to manage the internal party divisions of the Conservative Party.

ANDREW MARR:
And since we’ve been talking about 2017, you’ve been involved in the European Union in one way or another for a very long time. What is the chance of a major renegotiation and a treaty happening by 2017?

NICK CLEGG:
Well I think it is much slimmer than David Cameron does. Not because there might be some people around who believe there should be a treaty change, but I think there are many other European governments – the French in particular – who because of
their previous experience of referendums are rather wary of an endless sort of naval
gazing exercise when what we should be doing is getting on and making sure that the
European Union is more competitive, that we create more jobs, that we enter into new
trade deals, that we complete the single market. Those are the kind of reforms that we
can get on with now rather than going on this great big sort of detour.

ANDREW MARR:
So you’ve been admirably clear, but from what you’ve been saying it seems to me
completely impossible that Clegg and Cameron could rule together after the next
election. Your views on Europe are so divergent and what you’ve said about them has
been so withering, I don’t see how they could possibly stick together …

NICK CLEGG:
No look, as I say, when the time comes, we’ll …

ANDREW MARR:
… you’ll change your views?

NICK CLEGG:
No, no, we’ll be clear about what our priorities are.

ANDREW MARR:
No.

NICK CLEGG:
We’ll be pri… No don’t sneer, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR
No, I’m not sneering. I’m …

NICK CLEGG:
It’s perfectly legitimate for me to say that if no-one wins a General Election after the
next election then what happens is compromise and negotiation. What I can tell you
…
ANDREW MARR:
(over) What I’ve been asking you again and again is whether you would compromise to allow David Cameron to be Prime Minister, and it’s clear from what you’re saying that that is absolutely fundamental to your view of Europe …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) No, what I …

ANDREW MARR:
… and therefore presumably it’s not up for grabs?

NICK CLEGG:
No it’s very, very simple. I state my view. He states his view. The British people state their view in the ballot box. And until they do that, I think it is quite, quite wrong for politicians to assume they know what the outcome of the next General Election is. I’ve been very clear, for instance, that actually where my priorities lie in leading my party …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But how can … Sorry …

NICK CLEGG:
… is much … I’m much, much more … I attach much greater significance, for instance particularly if we were to continue in coalition with the Conservatives, to continue to act as the guarantor of fairness – fairness for the millions of people on low and middle incomes for whom the Conservatives don’t instinctively look after those people. They constantly look after the people at the top. We have been the only guarantee for instance of fair tax cuts for millions of people in this government that wouldn’t have happened otherwise. That for me is a much more important role in the grander scheme of things. But since you ask me about the position on the referendum, I’m just repeating something that my party’s been saying for year after year after year, which is our view of the circumstances in which a referendum should be held.
ANDREW MARR:
I’m trying to work out, but again you say that the most important thing is to protect the people at the bottom of the heap, which suggests to me that you could trade the notion of when the referendum happened in favour of protecting people in a second Con-Lab [sic] … Now you might say I’m not going to talk about that, but I think it’s clear from the way you’re talking where your priorities are.

NICK CLEGG:
I just have this old-fashioned view that an election should be determined by the voters …

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

NICK CLEGG:
… and what we should do as politicians is not second guess them, but say here is what we believe and these are our values and we’ve been very clear in this European Election as the only party to actually have the guts to say what we believe in on Europe. Other parties can say what they wish and then people make up their mind and then we have to deal with the card dealt with us, dealt to us, by the British people.

ANDREW MARR:
Right. And you …

NICK CLEGG:
That’s what we did at the last General Election, and if it arises again at the next General Election, we’ll play a similar role.

ANDREW MARR:
Now we’ve been talking about the next coalition. Let’s talk about this coalition, which appears to be coming apart completely. Let me read to you – you may not have seen them – Dominic Cummings talking about you. He said, ‘He’s self-obsessed, sanctimonious, and so dishonest he doesn’t know what right and wrong are. He won’t do the hard work. He’s a revolting character. We thwarted Clegg as much as we
could.’ And that’s from one of your allies. Now what’s going on in the Coalition?

NICK CLEGG:
I think what happens in coalition is – I mean besides those rather silly remarks – is what you have is exactly what it says on the tin, which is two parties which are different. No-one should be surprised the two parties are different. I’m not a Conservative, never would be, Conservatives are not going to be Liberal democrats, but what you do is you resolve your differences in the national interest and by and large you resolve those differences successfully. And far from, by the way, that leading to paralysis, in fact I think many people now accept that we’ve been an extremely ambitious reforming government across a whole range of areas – welfare, pensions, education, tax and so on. But you know what, from time to time you get people, you know in temperate language, by sort of backroom advisers. I leave that to them. But what I believe in is that actually what this coalition has shown, particularly if you compare … At least we’re two parties in one government. In the last government, you had two governments within Whitehall – a Blair government and a Brown government. At least day in, day out, week in, week out, David Cameron and myself at the top of government make sure that we seek to resolve those differences. Most of the time we resolve them successfully, sometimes we don’t. And I think actually the history books will show that when it comes to the big things – reforming our economy, fixing our banks, delivering fairer taxes, a better education system, more apprenticeships, a more stable and sustainable pension system – we have delivered over and over again despite all the breathless predictions to the contrary.

ANDREW MARR:
And what is undermining the authority of the Government and that message coming through is this extreme intemperate language which is actually coming from both sides.

NICK CLEGG:
(over) Yeah, well.

ANDREW MARR:
I mean you know your people have described Gove as a “zealot” and a “swivel-eyed loon” and so forth.

**NICK CLEGG:**
Well look, to be fair I always try and express my opinions about other people by not indulging in sort of rather infantile personal language about them, being trenchant about the views where I disagree. We just talked about some of the differences between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives on tax, on fairness, on …

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) You should call off the Liberal Democrat dogs perhaps?

**NICK CLEGG:**
Well, look, of course I want this government to advertise and promote what I think has been our remarkable successes and I’ve lost count literally from the day that this government started of the predictions that it was going to end, that it was going to fall apart, and every time we’ve confounded those sceptics. And if you look at the big things that we’ve done – fixing the economy, delivering fairer taxes …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Okay.

**NICK CLEGG:**
… making sure that there’s a prosperous and optimistic future for people, I like to think people will look back on this government and say it’s an unprecedented government (because it’s a coalition government) doing unprecedented things.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Let’s turn again to Europe because that is the vote ahead of most people coming up now. Nigel Farage has said you can tell a Romanian next to you compared with a German. Do you think he’s indulging in racist language there?

**NICK CLEGG:**
I think the mask is starting to slip and I think what’s being revealed behind that sort of beer swilling bonhomie is a really nasty view of the world. I mean I think anyone who sort of singles out one community, one nationality and says you know I don’t want to live next door to them, I really think that is the politics of division and I think it really should have no place in modern Britain. But you know what, I would say to people if you don’t like that point of view, like me if you are … if you really are really put off by this very divisive, nasty approach to things, then please go out and vote. The more people don’t vote, the more likely it is that UKIP will get in.

ANDREW MARR:
And you would be perfectly happy to debate with him again on television in the run-up to an election?

NICK CLEGG:
Yeah, look I like to think, I like to think … Many people as ever sort of come up from the sidelines. I like to think that because I decided to take Nigel Farage on – because remember at that time everyone said oh no, the mainstream political consensus was ignore him and I said you can’t ignore these kind of … these nasty views; you’ve got to take them on. I like to think that’s one of the reasons why he’s now being subject to more scrutiny. That’s why you’re seeing the mask slip and it’s revealing an extremely nasty view of modern Britain that I think many decent British people don’t share. And that’s why I would ask them to go out and vote next week because that’s the only way that we can deliver a convincing answer of decency to that kind of nastiness.

ANDREW MARR:
The Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, has just said for the first time that he’s worried about the housing bubble. Is he right?

NICK CLEGG:
I think he’s certainly right to say that we shouldn’t repeat the terrible mistakes of the past where the overheated housing market caused huge problems for the economy as a whole.
Help to Buy …

NICK CLEGG:
I think if he says that we need to pare back on some of the government schemes like Help to Buy, then I think we should do so. And he’s certainly right when he says of course the big long-term problem is we simply don’t build enough homes in this country. We haven’t done so for years. We’re making progress now, but we need to do much more in the future.

ANDREW MARR:
One final question. I don’t know if you heard Nicola Sturgeon expressing great disbelief about the possibility of more devolution if there’s a No vote in the Scottish Independence Referendum. What’s your message as Leader of the Liberal Democrats to Scotland?

NICK CLEGG:
I think further devolution to Scotland in the event that Scotland remains part of the family of nations that makes up the United Kingdom is now inevitable. There’s an emerging and hardening consensus across all the mainstream parties. My party has always advocated home rule. We’ve set out an ambitious programme of devolution.

ANDREW MARR:
That would include tax powers and so forth?

NICK CLEGG:
Yes. Labour have now come up with their ideas. The Conservatives are about to publish their ideas, and I certainly want the Liberal Democrats to act as the guarantor in any future government of further devolution to Scotland because I think that is the right future for Scotland in the United Kingdom but with greater nationhood and devolution to Scotland within the UK.

INTERVIEW ENDS