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THE ANDREW MARR SHOW
INTERVIEW:
JOSE MANUEL BARROSO
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN
COMMISSION
OCTOBER 19th 2014

ANDREW MARR:

Now after 10 years at the helm of the EU, Jose Manuel Barroso is about to step down as President of the European Commission. He leaves the Eurozone in deep economic trouble and one country, this country, looking increasingly like it wants to leave the EU entirely unless the whole basis of its membership is changed. Well President Barroso is here to share his reflections. Welcome.

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

Thank you.

ANDREW MARR:

Can I ask first, start talking about the Eurozone economy because we've seen in the markets last week around the world there was great, great worry that the Eurozone is about to return to recession. How do you feel about that?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

I don't think we are going to come back to recession. All the forecasts of the

European Commission, the IMF and the OECD, they show in fact recovery weaker than anticipated, but not recession. We are going to have positive growth. But of course, as I have been saying for many months, we should avoid any kind of complacency. We should now push for strict reforms to become, make our economies more attractive and also we should look at ways of promoting investment – public and private investment.

ANDREW MARR:

One of the ways of promoting investment is this new transatlantic trade and investment pact with the Americans. There's a lot of people here who fear that would allow multinational companies to sue the government if they can't get profits out of the NHS.

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

Look, I think there is nothing in the transatlantic trade and investment negotiations with the United States that goes against the National Health Service or any welfare system in the European Union. What that agreement with the United States could bring - together also with ones negotiated with Japan and investment trade ... investment agreement with China – is, we estimate, 2.2 per cent of growth of GDP.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) It's a lot.

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

(over) So it's a great way of supporting growth without asking taxpayers to put more money. So I think it's a great opportunity for the European economy and not only for the European economy.

ANDREW MARR:

It's not going to open the European economy too much to predatory companies from outside?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

No. By the way, this is ... About this clause – it's one of many issues, that it's not

certainly one of the most important points, and frankly I don't know what's going to happen in the final negotiations about that.

ANDREW MARR:

It may not be part of it? Is that what you're suggesting?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

I think there is now discussion in European ... between European countries this is not certainly ... This is certainly not the most important issue. The important issue is to have more trade and investment between us and the United States. This is the most important trade and investment relationship in the world and so the opportunities for growth are there. By the way, Britain has been very supportive of this trade opening that the commission has been pursuing.

ANDREW MARR:

Yes. Well let's turn to Britain if I may. Our new foreign secretary, Philip Hammond, said (I think yesterday) that by offering a UK in/out referendum, they were lighting a fire under the EU. Do you feel that you're being burned in your nether regions?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

I'm told that the foreign secretary was before minister of defence, and I think this reference to fires and weapons is more appropriate for defence than foreign secretary. I think it's very important ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) You don't like his tone?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

(over) ... to have a positive tone regarding these issues between Britain and European Union. I can tell you that there is willingness on the European Union side to discuss constructively with our British partners the conditions they are raising and I personally am on record saying very often if there are legitimate concerns from the UK, let's address them provided of course they do not put in question all the principles of the European Union. So the tone is very important.

ANDREW MARR:

Well and that is the real question because with the prime minister now suggesting that there should be quotas on EU citizens allowed to come into this country, possibly using national insurance to stop ... to police those quotas, would that be an acceptable derogation out of the free movement of people around ...

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

(over) So far the British government has not presented a proposal, a concrete proposal. There are ideas floating, there are rumours. I cannot comment on specific suggestions that have not yet been presented. What I can tell you is that any kind of arbitrary cap seems to me to be not in conformity with the European rules because for us it's very important the principle of non-discrimination. The freedom of movement is a very important principle in the internal market – movement of goods, of capital, of service and of people. By the way, I remember when Prime Minister Cameron called me to ask the commission to be tough ensuring the freedom of movement between Gibraltar and Spain – the citizens, the British citizens that have freedom of movement all over Europe. There are 700,000 living in Spain. So the principle of freedom of movement is essential, we have to keep it, and now we have to ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) And non-negotiable? Non-negotiable?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

No we have to address the abuse cases and we are doing it, by the way – the sham marriages and others. So I think it's very important to be determined to repress any kind of abuses because there are some kinds of abuse of benefits. That is a good point.

ANDREW MARR:

Absolutely, but to make it ab...

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

(over) But putting question of principle, I don't think it's good.

ANDREW MARR:

Okay. To make it absolutely clear, there are issues about the free movement of peoples, which are about benefit fraud and abuse of different kinds, and those can be negotiated. But we're talking about something different here. We're talking about whether Britain could have a total cap on the number of EU citizens coming in to work here every year and you say that's not possible?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

I have not yet seen the proposal. I cannot comment on it. What I say: that in principle arbitrary caps seem to me, seem – because I have to see the concrete proposal – in contradiction with the European Union rules. That's quite clear from my point of view. Having said that, full support to all ways of suppressing abuse of benefits because they are against in fact the spirit of our legislation.

ANDREW MARR:

So going back to what we think is the proposal – and I accept that it hasn't arrived on your desk yet – is that national insurance cards in this country would not go to people on a quota basis; that that would be used to allow a cap on the number of people coming from different parts of the EU and you don't think that's legal. The next question is it's not legal at the moment. Is that the kind of thing that David Cameron could renegotiate at the moment in terms of a new relationship with the EU?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

Prime Minister Cameron is free to propose whatever he wants with colleagues, to colleagues, because we need unanimity to change some basic rules in the European Union. And my advice ... You know I am now leaving, so I am becoming a free man.

ANDREW MARR:

Yeah.

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

My advice to all – all the members, including Britain – is to have a constructive dialogue, to have the proper tone; not speak about weapons or fire between partners. So I think many of these issues can be negotiated, but I cannot comment on a specific

proposal I don't know. *(laughs)*

ANDREW MARR:

No, I do understand that. Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, was saying to me recently we have this big problem which is that the British economy is going like that – it's rocketing ahead, particularly in the south. European economy is flat and for that specific reason we now do have a migration problem we wouldn't have had in the past and that, therefore, it is reasonable to open that up as a new thing to talk about.

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

Look, first of all the European economy - Ireland is growing better than the UK. And so a country that had a very difficult moment. And with the programme of support now Ireland, other countries are also growing. It's not only Britain. Let's put things in perspective. Now unemployment has been now one of the lowest in the last years in Britain, so in fact I don't think we can credibly say that there is a huge problem of migration. And we have to make a distinction between migration from outside European Union and ...

ANDREW MARR:

Sure.

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

... freedom of movement inside European Union. We estimate 1.4 million Britons, British citizens, living in the European Union country ... countries. By the way, according to our estimates, in winter it's more. It's 2 million. Two million British citizens are living in European countries and they are very much welcome. So at the same time ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) It's a two-way thing.

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

(over) ... Britain has to offer ... has to offer to the other European citizens the first

that European Union offers to British citizens. I think it's a matter also of fairness.

ANDREW MARR:

Do you understand that the political mood in this country, however, has changed dramatically since you became President and in fact over the last few years, and that there is now quite a strong possibility of an in/out referendum leading to Britain withdrawing from the European Union? Is that a possibility that the EU regards with equanimity or would that be a terrible thing for the EU? How would it affect the EU's own development?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

I think it would be negative for the European Union and for Britain, very honestly. Look Britain is a great country with a great history, but it's 60 million people. Do you believe that Britain alone can discuss on a equal footing with the United States or with a giant like China? Where if it does it in the European Union, yes we have much more influence. If you look at, for instance, devolution of Germany, Germany today is a very important power because it has real leverage in the European Union. So the prime minister of Britain, whoever he is, is much stronger globally if he has influence inside the European Union, so Britain is stronger in the European Union.

ANDREW MARR:

So that's us, but what about the effect on the EU of Britain leaving?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

Of course it's negative. That's why I'm telling you. I'm a great fan of Britain in the European Union, but generally speaking in the European Union there is a willingness to accommodate the concerns of Britain provided they are not incompatible to our overall agreed principles because I mean we cannot undo the European ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) And your sense is that the free movement of peoples inside the EU is incompatible, is non-negotiable?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

It's a fundamental ... it's a fundamental principle. Because, look, internal market – Britain has been one of the greatest supporters of the internal market. Internal market means freedom of movement – of goods, of service, of capital. So a company that goes from Britain to the other countries can of course go with its own citizens and the same the other way round. So my strong advice to Britain is not to put that in question, that principle. By the way, Britain has been one of the countries that has ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Don't put internal migration cap as part of your negotiating stance?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

With the European Union ...

ANDREW MARR:

With the European Union.

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

Because there is, I repeat, a difference between internal European rules, so freedom of movement and migration coming from third countries. That is for the British government to decide if they want to put caps or not on nationals from third countries or if they want more people from third countries.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) You see if that's correct – and I'm sure it is from your point of view – if that's correct then David Cameron can't get what he says he must have and, therefore, will have to come back - and (not only if he wins the election) have an in/out European Referendum; he will have to recommend us leaving the EU?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

I'm not going to anticipate what is the position afterwards. What I know from Prime Minister Cameron - I have a very frank and open and friendly dialogue with him – is that he wants Britain to remain in the European Union. He knows well that without the European Union, Britain will have less influence. Let me give an example. Just

this week Prime Minister Cameron wrote a letter to all the colleagues of the heads of state asking ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Do you think he's a natural pro-European?

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

Let me just conclude this point.

ANDREW MARR:

Okay.

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

He sent a letter ... he wrote a letter asking all of us to do more in terms of Ebola, against the Ebola virus. It's really a very serious problem. What would be the influence of Britain or the prime minister of Britain if he was not part of the European Union? His influence would be zero! So inside the European Union, you can get much more than outside the European Union. And so I think Prime Minister Cameron, who I know well, wants Britain to remain in the European Union, but of course he's now trying to get some of his objectives let's say fulfilled.

ANDREW MARR:

Yes. Alright, thank you very much indeed President Barroso. Very kind of you to join us.

JOSE MANUEL BARROSO:

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS