ANDREW MARR:
Now Poland’s urbane and Anglophile Foreign Minister, Radek Sikorski, has been visiting Britain. He’s a contemporary of Boris Johnson and David Cameron at Oxford University and a one-time hard Eurosceptic, but he’s changed his mind and is not a supporter of Mr Cameron’s bid to stop the federalist Jean-Claude Juncker from becoming President of the European Commission, and Mr Sikorski told me why.

RADEK SIKORSKI:
The main parties in the European Parliament announced in advance who their candidates would be. And Mr Juncker is the candidate of the party that won the parliamentary election, so he is having the first chance to form a winning team and a winning coalition. That seems to me to be a more democratic procedure and it’s just unfortunate that Britain doesn’t have a representation in Europe’s ruling party.

ANDREW MARR:
You see Mr Cameron would argue that Mr Juncker doesn’t have what it takes to drive the reform in Europe that is urgently necessary, certainly from the British perspective.
RADEK SIKORSKI:
Well I would say that if the Tories were part of the European People’s Party, he could have made that argument at the Dublin Summit of EPP when EPP chose its candidate and he may well have prevailed. But EPP made its choice. It won the election. Here it is.

ANDREW MARR:
So it was at least a mistake not to be in the EPP from your point of view?

RADEK SIKORSKI:
I wouldn’t dream of commenting, but the rules of democracy are that the largest party gets the top job.

ANDREW MARR:
Does this mean that Mr Cameron’s quest for much greater reforms to the European Union is doomed, do you think?

RADEK SIKORSKI:
Oh no, I think Britain can gain a lot of support and allies on the continent for sensible British proposals to allow nation state the decision making power – we call it in the Brussels jargon the “subsidiarity principle” …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

RADEK SIKORSKI:
… to leave what is possible at the level of the member states and then do together those things where we all gain by working together – say on energy and, I would argue, on defence.

ANDREW MARR:
I want to come back to defence in a second. But just on the question of reform, I guess the biggest question at the moment is about the free movement of peoples and the payment of welfare subsidies and so forth to people who come into a country. Now
the great first movement of peoples into this country were of course Poles. You can’t go down a British high street without people shopping at Polish shops, sitting outside drinking Polish beer, smoking Polish cigarettes. We’ve gone very Polish. Do you understand the fear that free movement of peoples across Europe has engendered in many people in Britain and in other countries too, of course, including France?

RADEK SIKORSKI:
I understand that Polish is now the second language of the British Isles and that up to 10 per cent of children at British schools are Polish. Well let me put it like this. As you mentioned, I was an immigrant into this country a while ago. I went back.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

RADEK SIKORSKI:
We are hoping that Polish people will also you know gain experience, learn English, gain some capital – both cultural and financial – and return home, and we’re in fact encouraging them to return.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) To come back.

RADEK SIKORSKI:
But coming back to your earlier point, you know we have nothing … no problem with Britain making its social security system less generous. And for example on the continent, in particular in Poland, if you came to Poland we wouldn’t pay you benefits or housing benefit from day one. You would have to earn that right; it would take you some months. And so you’re changing your social security system to be more continental …

ANDREW MARR:
And a bit tougher.
RADEK SIKORSKI:
… and the European Union is not interfering in that. And as long as you make it non-discriminatory, we will not criticise you.

ANDREW MARR:
So one of the statistics that was thrown at me before this interview was that in terms of remittances back of welfare payments, Poles send more back to Poland than every other group put together. That’s a huge amount of money. Do you understand why British taxpayers may think this is a strange way to spend their welfare bills?

RADEK SIKORSKI:
Well no, they actually pay in taxes something like 35 per cent more than they receive in benefits, but it’s true that recent immigrants tend to keep strong links with mother country and send remittances abroad but this is their earned, taxed income, not benefits. Welfare tourism is a figment of some politicians’ imagination.

ANDREW MARR:
Now you mentioned defence because the old days when Europe looked to America for help and financing and defending itself, you think should go now, do you? Europe needs to defend herself much more vigorously?

RADEK SIKORSKI:
We have the largest economy on earth and we just cannot count on the generosity of the United States and of the US taxpayer to fix our security problems for us. We have to draw lessons from the debacle of the Balkan Wars in the 1990s and we now have a whole arc of instability around us - Central African Republic, Mali, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Caucasus and Ukraine.

ANDREW MARR:
One thing the British have done a lot of over the past few decades and before that is fight. Do you see a European army with a big British component looking ahead?

RADEK SIKORSKI:
Well we’ve been told in no uncertain terms that Britain will never fight under the EU
flag, but there will be conflicts on which the United States takes a pass because of involvements in the Far East or Greater Middle East and then sometimes we’ll need to act as Europeans and we should be capable of doing so. The concept of EU battle groups was a British concept and I think it should be deployed.

ANDREW MARR:
Poland shares a border with Russia and the Ukraine. You were in Kiev at the time of the original revolution. To many people, it seems as if there is now a civil war opening in the Ukraine. How seriously do you regard what’s going on there and what’s the mood inside Poland, so close to it all?

RADEK SIKORSKI:
There is subversion with elements of regional separatism, but it’s very much fed from outside. There’s heavy weaponry, there are multiple rocket launches, tanks, APCs, anti-aircraft missiles that you …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Coming across the border from Russia?

RADEK SIKORSKI:
Coming across the border that you cannot buy in a shop either in Ukraine or in Russia.

ANDREW MARR:
What do you think Mr Putin’s up to?

RADEK SIKORSKI:
Mr Putin is creating his Euro-Asiatic union and he would like Ukraine in it; and if he can’t get all of Ukraine in it, he is trying to get parts of Ukraine in it. But Ukraine is a sovereign state.

ANDREW MARR:
If Russia is pushing back towards the old USSR boundaries, do you fear for other parts of what was the Soviet bloc? Do you fear for the Baltic states, for instance, and
even for parts of Poland in this process?

RADEK SIKORSKI:
Well they fear for it and they are members of NATO and we should make sure that the security guarantees that have been extended are for real, are credible, because if they failed once NATO itself would be … its credibility would be endangered. So I think it’s high time to correct the last fifteen years’ negligence. We all thought that history was at an end, that Russia was a partner – which we still wish for – but if Russia defines herself as a competitor, we have to draw the conclusions. And the Eastern flank got neglected in the past. It just needs to be amended.

ANDREW MARR:
Mr Sikorski, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

RADEK SIKORSKI:
Thanks.

INTERVIEW ENDS