ANDREW MARR:
The German Chancellor Angela Merkel is coming to London this week, and by all accounts will be getting a royal reception. She is now the Prime Minister’s key ally in his project to renegotiate the UK’s relationship with the rest of the EU. The Foreign Secretary William Hague joins us from Yorkshire to talk about that, but first about the extraordinary situation in the Ukraine. Good morning, Mr Hague.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
There is no government in the Ukraine at the moment and the opposition is deeply divided. Are you confident there will be a provisional government by the end of the weekend, or within a few days at least?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well I hope of course that very quickly there will be. There is a moment of opportunity now for the Ukraine after those terrible scenes, the horrific bloodshed of a few days ago, there is an opportunity, but there are still many dangers of course. As
you were discussing earlier on your programme, the political situation even among the opposition is very complex and it’s clearly been a very divided country; the position, whereabouts of Mr Yanukovych are not clear as we speak. So there are many dangers, but it’s urgent that they get on to form that inclusive government, a government of national unity in effect. It’s urgent that they agree the constitution, that they confirm their constitutional arrangements for elections coming up which they have declared for May, and it’s really urgent that they and we get on with improving their economic situation. While all this has been happening, the Ukrainian economy is in a desperately difficult situation and they need an economic programme that the rest of us through the International Monetary Fund and other institutions can support, so that they can stave off an even more serious economic situation. These things are all now very urgent …

ANDREW MARR:
Sure, sure.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… and we will be working with the Ukrainians and other European countries and the US and Russia on all of these things.

ANDREW MARR:
Are we talking to the Russians because the Ukraine could split?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
We are talking to the Russians. This is a very important question. It’s very important for us to continue to try to persuade Russia that this need not be a zero sum game. It’s in the interests of the people of Ukraine to be able to trade more freely with the European Union. It’s in the interests of the people of Russia for that to happen as well. The Prime Minister spoke to President Putin about this on Thursday. I will be talking to Foreign Minister Lavrov of Russia tomorrow. So we are in constant discussion with Russia and it’s very important we keep that up. Particularly if there is an economic package, it will be important that Russia doesn’t do anything to undermine that economic package and is working in cooperation and support of it. So a lot of work to do with Russia over the coming days.
ANDREW MARR:
Given that a lot of people in the east of the country are pro-Russian and worried about what’s happening in Kiev, do you think there is any prospect at all of the Russians sending the tanks in?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well we don’t know of course what Russia’s next reaction will be. We do know that Russia, as well as the United States, has said a few days ago that they would get behind the deal that had been made. That deal has now been overtaken by events and this is the importance of us continuing the dialogue with Russia. But it’s not (interference) behind the deal that had been made?? That deal has now been overtaken by events. This is the importance of us continuing them (interference) for the internal situation to get even worse.

ANDREW MARR:
So just …

WILLIAM HAGUE:
And any external duress - sorry, just to finish this point - any external duress on Ukraine, any more than we’ve seen in recent weeks would make any of those things more likely. So it’s not in the interests of Russia.

ANDREW MARR:
I’m slightly surprised, nonetheless, to hear you sound slightly equivocal. There could be a Russian intervention you appear to be suggesting?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
No, I’m not. You were suggesting that really in your question.

ANDREW MARR:
I was asking it.
WILLIAM HAGUE:
I am not suggesting that. I am really suggesting that it really would not be in the interests of Russia to do any such thing. That we have to keep up the communication with Russia, as we are doing, as you can gather, so that the people of Ukraine can choose their own way forward. I’m not suggesting that anybody is going to stop them, but there are many dangers and uncertainties and … (interference) so that the people of Ukraine can choose their own way forward. I’m not suggesting that anybody is going to stop them, but there are many dangers and uncertainties and …

ANDREW MARR:
Can I turn now to the future of our relationship with the EU and Angela Merkel’s arrival in the UK next week. It’s very interesting. Francois Hollande, the French President, got a pub supper; whereas Angela Merkel is getting a reception in Downing Street, she’s addressing both members … both Houses of Parliament. She’s being given the real royal red carpet treatment. Is this a suggestion that she's much, much more important to us now than the French are? She is, isn’t she?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
Well of course Germany and Germany’s Chancellor are very important partners in Europe. This is a different sort of visit from the French visit at the end of January.

ANDREW MARR:
An important one.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
That was a short summit to discuss our bilateral defence and security, cooperation. This is a more wide ranging visit from Angela Merkel. Germany of course is our most important partner on seeking reform in the European Union because it’s Germany that has such a strong position in the Eurozone, that has managed to maintain a dynamic economy itself, and Germany is in that key position in the European Union. So our relations with Germany are very important, our relations with Angela Merkel are very good, and we want together to make sure that Europe is more competitive, more flexible, more democratically accountable than it is today, and those are the sorts of ideas we’ll be discussing with Chancellor Merkel.
ANDREW MARR:  
But she is a deep, profound believer in the European Union and strengthening it as well. Realistically what can you get out of her in this kind of negotiation? Free movement of people?

WILLIAM HAGUE:  
She is a believer in those things, but she’s also a strong believer in Britain being a member of the European Union. And she knows and I believe she understands what our Prime Minister David Cameron has been putting forward - that this is the age, the 21st century is the age of flexibility, accountability, competitiveness, and the European Union cannot be immune from those things. In every nation state we are having to adapt to those pressures and it’s very important the EU does so as well. So we will be discussing the ideas that we have in common and, as you know, it’s our intention after the next General Election to improve Britain’s relationship with the European Union - to renegotiate the relationship between Britain and the EU and improve the EU on the lines I’ve spoken, so that we can give people a choice in a referendum by the end of 2017 about staying in or leaving the European Union.

ANDREW MARR:  
We keep being told that there’s a great renegotiation going on. I was astonished last week when President Barroso said there’s been no talks whatever. Is there any real negotiation going on or is this all just smoke and mirrors before the election?

WILLIAM HAGUE:  
Well the negotiation is of course for the future. There are important things that are happening all the time. We’ve succeeded in many negotiations - for instance in bringing down the European budget for the first time ever, reforming the disastrous common fisheries policy, protecting the rights of the countries that are outside the Eurozone during proposal … and the proposals for banking union. All of these things are negotiations in which Britain is succeeding. The negotiation of the changes that I’m talking about is for after the next General Election, but we are establishing the common ground with Germany, with the Netherlands for instance where their government has issued a report talking about Europe where necessary but national
wherever possible. Well that is a good guiding thought and it’s one on which we can work with the Dutch.

**ANDREW MARR:**
So returning to Angela Merkel, are we going to be talking to her, are you going to be talking to her about things like the free movement of people, about welfare payments inside the EU or not?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
Yes I’m sure these subjects will come up. Germany also has strict benefit rules. Germany doesn’t want its benefit system to be abused. We support the principle of the free movement of workers and many British people have rightly taken advantage of that in the rest of Europe. But we don’t support people moving from one country to another because of the incentives of different benefit systems And I think again with Germany we have a lot of common ground on that and there will be no problem discussing that.

**ANDREW MARR:**
William Hague in 2014 sounds to me like a completely committed Europhile who wants moderate changes but not too much, a mile away from the William Hague who led the Conservative Party back when. Fair point?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
No actually not at all. My views on Europe are exactly the same. My slogan then was in Europe, not run by Europe, and that remains my philosophy now. I do believe too much power has gone to the European Union, that it is essential for it to reform, that it is essential for it to show that power can come back to nation states and competences can be returned to nation states, and I want to see all that happen so that we can make a success of being in the European Union. That’s always been my position. I’m glad to say these days there aren’t really any people in Britain who say let’s give up the pound, let’s join the euro, which is what they were saying when I was Leader of the Conservative Party, and I was reacting against that and I’m very glad we kept the pound.
ANDREW MARR:
So if …

WILLIAM HAGUE:
But that debate is over. Now there is a new debate.

ANDREW MARR:
So if the Conservatives are re-elected, that referendum will be about keeping us in Europe, not getting us out of Europe - from your point of view? This will be a strengthening, an affirmation of our European-ness?

WILLIAM HAGUE:
It’s about giving people a choice. It’s giving this country a choice. It will be more than forty years since people had a choice. More … since before you or I had the right to vote. That’s the last time that people had a referendum in this country. It is right to give them a democratic choice. We want to be able to say, as David Cameron has said, we want to be able to recommend that in a reformed Europe and with a better British relationship with it - that we can stay in, that we can recommend to stay in. But people will have the choice and that negotiation will have to take place and the changes that we need to see are serious and very important for this country’s future …

ANDREW MARR:
And, and …

WILLIAM HAGUE:
… and Europe’s future.

ANDREW MARR:
Sorry.

WILLIAM HAGUE:
So don’t underestimate the scale of what we are proposing and seeking.

ANDREW MARR:
You mentioned the Dutch just now. Are they our new crucial allies in all of this, do you think?

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**
They’re very important allies in this because in the Netherlands, as in this country, there is a debate about these ideas, there is a government that is talking about these things, and that’s across Dutch politics and that’s true in their Labour Party as well as their more centre right parties. So yes, they are important allies, but they’re not the only ones. There are people in many of the Nordic countries who share these ideas, in Germany there is a strong overlap of ideas.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*over* A Northern league.

**WILLIAM HAGUE:**

So I think the time is coming in Europe to push these ideas of flexibility, accountability and competitiveness. Sorry, Andrew, there is a time delay.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Foreign Secretary, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**