AM: Gisela Stuart, first of all, you saw the anger outside parliament this week. Who do you blame for the fact that we are not outside the EU today?

GS: I think once parliament had put a difficult decision to the people and then promised to implement it, I think we have to blame parliament. And the individuals, many of them are acting with the absolute best of intentions but collectively they've shown themselves incapable of delivering what they had promised to do. And I think that is the problem. And during the paper review you had that sort of very interesting Burkeian debate, you know, are MPs delegates, or, as Burke said, do you elect them before you judge them? But even Burke subsequently was de-selected by his constituency, so I think in our representative democracy, when we have no effective government, which is what we've got at the moment, we resolve those problems by general elections. Constituencies can vote for their candidates, parties decide who their candidates are, and we get a new set of people coming into parliament. And I simply cannot see any other way out of the current situation than a general election.

AM: Now, Dominic Cummings, who you worked with very closely during this campaign, blames in particular Tory Brexiteers in the ERG. He called them this week, ‘the narcissistic, delusional subset of the ERG. Useful idiots for Remain.’ Do you agree with him?

GS: I find that we've reached a point where name calling on either side really doesn't get us anywhere. And both sides are doing this and I would just say to them, 'stop it.' If you're a voter out there or if you're running a business you're trying to conduct your life and you've watched two and a half years of MPs being unwilling to make compromises, then I think you get pretty fed up. And we have seen the last vote for Theresa May's Withdrawal
Agreement, even people like me, who really did not – this was not the deal I really wanted then, but if I’d still been an MP I would have said, ‘look, this is as good as it’s going to get.’ And they’ve got to make a decision. They’re either going to start falling in behind her deal, manage getting the way out, or say we want different set of players.

AM: Vote Leave broke the law according to the Electoral Commission in a serious way. This week Vote Leave dropped its appeal against that decision. Why?

GS: I think what it shows is that we have been outspent at every stage of this process, whether it was before the referendum started and the government spend 9.4 million on a leaflet, during the campaign actually, if money was the question, collectively the Remain side spent more. And going to appeals costs money too.

Andrew, there’s one other point. If people now argue for a second referendum, if you had a campaign where we honestly always tried to be real compliant, we had a Compliance Committee, and every other organisation across the board has been found wanting in some stage. The legislation –

AM: You didn’t try very hard because you overspent to the tune of £675,000, a huge amount of money, which the Electoral Commission thought was a very, very serious electoral offence. You broke the law. It happened under your watch in this organisation. Will you apologise to people for that now?

GS: It was in relation of one particular donation where the Electoral Commission interpreted the rules as they’ve been acting in concert. Which we have got legal advice which said it wasn’t. So the key question is, Andrew, if anybody wants a second referendum, then the referendum legislation as it stands and the way the Electoral Commission and Information Commission interprets them, that law need rewriting. And that is something which both have to face.
AM: Nevertheless, the Electoral Commission is trusted by many people. At the time of their original judgement Vote Leave said it was, ‘wholly inaccurate and contains false accusations that do not stand up to scrutiny.’ Do you stand by that statement?

GS: I felt that we – our biggest problem in the end was that we destroyed all our data, and therefore some of the evidential basis which people are asking for. All I can tell you, Andrew, is that at every stage, in terms of the processes, we did our level best to be in compliance with the rules. If they were interpreted afterwards in a way which was different from the advice we got at that time, then so be it. The regulator always has the final word.

AM: You destroyed the data, the Electoral Commission were very upset that you did not cooperate more clearly with them at the time. Do you understand why many people in this country on the other side of the argument feel that this referendum in 2016 was corrupted and cannot be trusted because of the way Vote Leave behaved?

GS: Well, the Electoral Commission never saw any evidence from the people from the Vote Leave campaign. But let me say something else. After two and a half years –

AM: They say they did.

GS: Well, no they didn’t. We offered them more evidence. But Andrew, if this was based, which people are now saying, on a lie, that people didn’t know what they were voting for, that they somehow were unaware of what this vote was, well opinions would have changed. Opinions have not changed, opinions have hardened, and the one thing which we still haven’t done is actually look at what Remain in the context of the European Union would mean.

AM: I’m not asking about the lie or what people thought, but we both know that in elections and referendums the amount of money spent really matters. That affects the number of adverts people see, things that come through their door, and therefore
how they think and how they react. £675,000 is a huge amount of money to overspend, as it were, by accident. I ask you one more time, for all those people watching who are really upset by this, can you apologise to them for that either mistake or witting breaking of the law?

GS: What I say is that at every stage we were real compliant according to the legal advice we were given at that time. And if money was the question, Remain spent by far more money on the campaign than Leave did. The government spent more money on the campaign than we did. So do not say this was a question of money. This is why I say the rules should have been much clearer. We had a Compliance Committee, our legal advice was always that that was the right thing to do. If with hindsight the compliance – the regulators found otherwise, the regulator has the last word.

(ends)