Andrew Marr:
If it is crucial to David Cameron’s strategy to remove the rights to tax credits from foreign workers coming into the EU, in your understanding does that require treaty change and is it a goer?

Jose Manuel Barroso:
I don’t know exactly what is going to be the proposal of Prime Minister Cameron. There are some possibilities to make changes in the regime for, let’s say, benefits for people from other parts of the Union. But without change in the treaty certainly it’s much more difficult to make any important change. So it depends on the concrete nature, from a legal point of view, of the proposal that the British government wants to make and I cannot comment on that because I have not yet seen that proposal.

Andrew Marr:
As I understand it, the crucial issue is people who are in work and in Britain get quite generous tax breaks and whether they could be treated differently because they come from outside Britain to workers in Britain. That would be discriminatory, I think, in the EU’s current legal framework and therefore would require a big change?
Jose Manuel Barroso:
Yes. In principle, freedom of movement is against any kind of discrimination. So this is a principle that is in the treaties and of course it cannot be accepted now a change on that principle by the other countries or by the European institutions. This is a very clear principle in our treaties – the principle of freedom of movement and the principle of non-discrimination.

Andrew Marr:
So that’s very...

Jose Manuel Barroso:
Having said that, if there are abuses, for instance in the social benefits system, it’s certainly possible to accept changes and indeed we have started some time ago to fight against those abuses of the social systems that there exists in some countries. And they are, of course, against the general philosophy of our, let’s say, system that is a system of freedom of movement and non-discrimination among European Union citizens.

Andrew Marr:
Now some of the other things we know David Cameron would like to achieve is to get Britain out of the “ever closer union” phrase, and also there is a lot of talk in Britain about national parliaments getting stronger, as it were, “red-card” powers if they don’t like EU legislation. What do you think of those two proposals? Are they plausible things to win from these negotiations?

Jose Manuel Barroso:
These are more sensitive issues in terms of the treaty because the “ever closer union” reference – it’s a kind of a political statement really, very general – is in the treaty. So, to put it out will require change to the treaty if you require unanimity. This treaty, as you know, was approved, ratified, by all the countries including Britain. So, if now Britain wants to change it, it is going to be more complex because it requires all the other countries that also have their own parliaments and their own sensitivities, to change that part of the treaty, that article in the treaty.

Andrew Marr:
So, we have a...

Jose Manuel Barroso:
Concerning the role of the national parliaments, already the Lisbon Treaty, the current treaty, has accepted the stronger role for the national parliaments, and so this is certainly a welcome thing, provided of course it is done in accordance with the rules that were approved by all the countries in the European Union.

Andrew Marr:
So, we have a real problem here which is a lot of the things, the key things that David Cameron wants clearly need treaty change and we’ve heard from Paris, for instance, that the French are very against another treaty in the timescale that we’re talking about. Therefore, given that you are a great Anglophile, you want Britain to stay inside the EU, what would you be suggesting as a way for David Cameron to gain enough face, gain enough support, for him to be able to win a referendum next year, sorry in 2017?

Jose Manuel Barroso:
I think that it is important to see what the other countries also are ready to do, and indeed there are two possibilities. It is possible to have a treaty change also because some countries are in favour of deepening the Euro area. So that could be a kind of a trade-off. Britain could opt out of some areas –
why not if it’s important for Britain, for Britain to stay in the European Union – but at the same time there will be a deepening of the Euro area that is certainly important to have a common currency. But that’s a more complex system. That requires treaty change, that requires negotiation, approval and ratification by all the countries in Europe. Now, it’s also possible to make a more minimal, let’s say, change through so-called secondary legislation. That would be certainly easier to get the approval of the other countries and will be quicker.

Andrew Marr:
Now, I know you’re a great football fan. What would you like to see from Uefa next week?

Jose Manuel Barroso:
I hope that Mr Blatter understands that even if there are no specific evidence against him, he has some kind of overall responsibility for the situation in his organisation. This is certainly very damaging for the image of Fifa, what has been happening. And so I think it would be wise for him to give, let’s say, the opportunity for reform in his organisation.

Andrew Marr:
Alright, and finally, very quickly if I may, Greece may be even closer this week to the exit door, would you like to see the EU offer a separate deal to help Greece stay inside the Euro, as distinct from the IMF loan?

Jose Manuel Barroso:
Sometimes I get the impression that people are waiting for an accident so that they can really focus to avoid a bigger disaster. It’s too long, this time that it has been taking to find a solution. I really believe it is important now to find a solution. It will certainly be negative for Greece and for the Euro area if there is a default or if there is a Grexit. And I believe it still can be found, that solution can still be found.

INTERVIEW ENDS