

Interview with European Commission President José Manuel Barroso on BBC Sunday AM

HUW EDWARDS: Good morning to you.

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: Good morning.

HUW EDWARDS: It's nice to see you.

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: It's a pleasure.

HUW EDWARDS: I know you're seeing Mr Blair tomorrow and ..

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: Yes.

HUW EDWARDS: .. and you're giving the Hugo Young lecture tomorrow night which is all about Britain's relationship with the European Union. Let's start with this process of expansion because it's been big news here as you know. It's seen as a good news project in Brussels, expansion is good. Whereas in this country very often it's seen as a problem and a threat. How do you explain the difference of perspective?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: I believe it has been a great achievement for the European Union and for Britain. And by the way Britain has been living in this expansion. It was very important the support of Britain, to put an end to Communism and to put an end to that divided Europe.

And it has been very good from economic point of view. If you look at the figures, since nineteen ninety two there was an increase in merchandise trade of Britain with new members of that it was three hundred ninety two per cent growth. It is ten times faster than the trade of Britain with the rest of the world. So globally speaking it has been very good also for Britain from an economic point of view because it is making Europe more competitive.

Yesterday I was in Warsaw, I just came from Warsaw, from Poland. It's amazing what's going on. The dynamism, the economic dynamism. Hard working people. Growth of the economy. So I really believe we are all benefiting from it. In fact the figures of the Treasury, the British Treasury show that at least ten to fifteen per cent of the growth trend of the economy here in Britain is explained by this enlargement of the European Union.

HUW EDWARDS: Well you mentioned Warsaw because of course as you know ministers here were kind of thinking that there may be twenty or thirty thousand Poles who'd come to Britain after the last expansion. In fact it's turned out to be hundreds of thousands of them.

And there is a sense among lots of people here that they were misled about that, that that level of immigration, that level of movement is something that Britain can't quite cope with. Now do you at least acknowledge that the figures were underplayed significantly when it happened?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: This is a question to put to the British authorities.

HUW EDWARDS: From your point of view?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: What I think is that, and all the evidence we have, is that most of the workers that came to Britain are doing some tasks, some work that the working resident force was not able or not ready to do any more.

And so that globally speaking this is a very hard working people that are giving a very good contribution to the growth of this economy. And in fact to all our economy in Europe. Now we have the best figure since eight years. And to a large extent we believe this is driven by the expansion of the European Union.

HUW EDWARDS: What would your message to Mr Blair be, tomorrow or whenever, if you find out that the British government actually wants to take measures which will limit the amount of people who can come in from Romania or Bulgaria? What will your message be?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: Our position is to recommend member states not use transitional period, that is what we recommend ..

HUW EDWARDS: No measures?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: But, but the British government can do it. There is a seven year period of transition to apply or not to Romania and Bulgaria. That's up to the British authorities. They can do it. That's their right.

HUW EDWARDS: And what happens after that, after the seven years?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: No after, after that ..

HUW EDWARDS: No measures at all?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: .. there's freedom of circulation of workers ...

HUW EDWARDS: So anyone can come?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: Anyone from European Union yes, but British also can ..

HUW EDWARDS: Course.

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: ... The British can ..

HUW EDWARDS: ...

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: .. be established all over Europe. And so, and this is important.

HUW EDWARDS: I mean I think the perception here of course is that there'll be far more Romanians and Bulgarians wanting to come here maybe than there are Britons who want to settle in Romania.

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: Look, but not necessarily no? If ..

HUW EDWARDS: Not necessarily?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: .. you look at - no, no. If you look at the past in fact there was, there was a fear that for instance Spanish workers could be flooding Europe. You know what happened?

Exactly the opposite. We have many more people going to Spain and to establishing in Spain than Spanish workers. I can tell that Poland can be a new Spain in some years. So you, we should think dynamically.

The growth of those countries is really impressive and it will be impressive in the future. So what we can see that from the past those fears that did not get confirmation afterwards.

HUW EDWARDS: We mentioned Turkey. And you've mentioned a seven year transition in terms of the countries now joining. For Turkey, surely, for lots of different sensitive reasons the transition period would have to be far longer wouldn't it?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: No, Turkey's a long term problem. It's a long term issue. We cannot expect Turkey to become a member let's say in less than fifteen, twenty years.

HUW EDWARDS: Right.

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: And so it's a completely different question. In fact we are concerned about Turkey because they, the pace of reforms is rather slow from our point of view.

So I believe it will be great to have Turkey if Turkey respects all the economic and political criteria. This is not yet the case.

HUW EDWARDS: Why is that? Why do you think they're slow to reform in the way that you want them to reform?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: I believe it's a country that comes from a different tradition. There are efforts in the right direction. But nowadays there are in fact news that are not encouraging in terms of them coming closer to us.

HUW EDWARDS: It prompts the question doesn't it that if a country has that much to do and if it's that different, maybe it doesn't belong in the European Union anyway?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: All the member states including Britain they have supported the beginning of negotiations with Turkey. And that's what we are doing on behalf of all the countries of the European Union.

But next month, eight, eight of November we are coming with a report, very objective, very serious, about the progress or lack of progress that Turkey is making in its way to the European Union.

HUW EDWARDS: Lots of interest in what you have to say about big events in the world including the nuclear issue and in North Korea and in Iran. Do you fully back the sanctions that the United Nations has now finally come up with?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: Of course we fully back. They are really important for the credibility of the international community. Because what's happening in North Korea is not only very bad and very dangerous for the region but for the world.

Because it raises the question of proliferation of nuclear technology, for and you know the possibility of North Korea selling that technology to terrorist groups. So it is very important that we stand firm and we're supporting the United Nations sanction.

HUW EDWARDS: I mean is there any difference at all in your approach to that of the Americans on this? Would you, would you like to see even firmer treatment if North Korea does not respond?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: We believe that we have to keep the international community as united as possible. We are ... defending a tough line. We are very happy for instance with the tough position taken by China. That was good. Because this is also important for Iran. Iran, we are trying to follow the diplomatic route.

We would like very much to have diplomatic solution. In fact it's three European countries - Britain, France and Germany - that are leading but with the support of the United States, China and Russia. So the signal that we give now with North Korea can be also important for the Iran issue.

HUW EDWARDS: I know you're meeting President Putin of Russia later this week and so I don't want to let you go without asking you one thing about Russia. There are lots of concerns at the moment about what's happening with human rights in Russia. Not, not least to the shooting of that high profile journalist. How comfortable are you about dealing so closely with President Putin right now?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: We have an interest in having good relations with Russia but I believe Russia also has an instinct having good relations with the European Union, that after this enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania will be half a billion people, the biggest trade block in the world.

That's why, let me tell you this size matters. Dimension of Europe matters. In this globalised world the question is no longer to be for or against Europe. The question is how to make Europe work better. Now about Russia, we are going to be frank on this discussion as we have always been.

HUW EDWARDS: You're going to tell President Putin?

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: Yes. We want those who have assassinated Mrs Politkovskaya great fighter for freedom of expression, we want them to be brought to justice. And it's a question of credibility of the, of the Russian government and the Russian authorities to show that they are able to bring to justice those who make those hideous crimes.

HUW EDWARDS: Mr Barroso good to talk to you.

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO: Thank you.

HUW EDWARDS: Enjoy your visit. Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS

NB: this transcript was typed from a recording and not copied from an original script.