

Interview with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on the Kossuth Radio programme “Good Morning Hungary”

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Katalin Nagy: this week the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly is being held in New York, and observers say that we are more or less where we were at the 72nd session, as the UN continues to work on legalising migration – and in this it has found cooperative partners in the European Commission and the European Parliament. I welcome Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to the studio. How do you see the situation? Has there really been no progress in this area?

Viktor Orbán: Good morning. September is such a month: the world’s foreign ministers – and sometimes its prime ministers also – gather in New York. In a certain respect this is also a moment of truth, because one must say something there, and meanwhile – in parallel with the General Assembly – they hold what one could call specialist conferences. In Hungary we don’t normally pay enough attention to this; but that is not the case elsewhere in the world. At this time the world usually turns its attention to the United States: to New York and the UN. And in truth I rather send the Foreign Minister there, because we are hard-working by nature – meaning that one goes somewhere if one thinks one has something specific to deal with; but if someone has to go and represent something, at the end of the day that’s what ministers are for. We tend to think that one has more important things to attend to at home.

So even if important things don’t happen there, the UN General Assembly isn’t pointless.

But the truth is that perhaps we’re not entirely right about this. We, too, should attach more importance to the UN General Assembly and the contributions made at the accompanying events – particularly nowadays, as things are being said there which grab even my attention. Unlike earlier times, some things said in the UN General Assembly usually materialise in world politics in the following year. I’ve paid close attention to two speeches, analysing them and discussing them with my colleagues: one of these was the speech by the European Union’s Commissioner for Migration, who is a Greek man; the other one was the speech by the President of the USA. These two speeches can be seen as determining the year ahead. In fact they were more than speeches: they were essentially declarations of intent. On the issue

of migration the UN is not a favourable arena for Hungary, because worldwide the countries of origin for migrants are in the majority, and this ratio is clearly reflected in the UN. And, as a matter of course, we indigenous Europeans are in the minority. It is not comfortable to speak and to represent a position in opposition to a large majority, although after a while one gets used to it – and it's also part of the job. But I know of very few African countries – although there are some – which regard migration as a disaster for them also, because in the process they lose some of their most active, courageous, enterprising and least risk-averse young people. There are some countries which see this as a loss, rather than a relief. And there are other countries which in this way seek to rid themselves of their excess population. Indeed, they hope that if these people find jobs here in Europe – or even if they can't find jobs, if they receive social welfare benefits, because in Western Europe such benefits are given to migrants – they will send some of their money back home. This also benefits those who stay at home, and their country. So in the UN it's not easy to staunchly, openly and honestly represent the Hungarian position. Luckily our Foreign Minister has no difficulty in doing this: even when faced with large numbers of opponents he is able to fight his corner, and fight for justice for Hungarians. Well now, as regards the address of this Greek man – the EU commissioner – at the UN, I am no longer outraged by things like this: one tends to gradually become desensitised – although one should indeed be indignant. At the end of the day, this fine fellow, who is a commissioner, is our employee, he is paid by us: and so as a member of the European Commission his job is to represent us. If, however, he is unable to represent every Member State, he should refrain from voicing opinions in the name of the EU, because this raises a major problem for democracy. This fine fellow went there and said that migration is good, migration must continue, a migrant resettlement programme must be implemented, Europe is working on this and that the EU unreservedly wants to take part in the UN's migration compact, which supports the relocation of people from one part of the world to another: in other words, migration. He has received no authorisation from anyone to say any of this. This is a matter of dispute in the European Union today: this is opposed not only by the Hungarians, not only by most Central Europeans, and not only by the V4; but it is also opposed by the Italians, and indeed by the Austrians and the Bavarians. Under these circumstances, for an official paid by us to go to New York and to represent a position which is diametrically opposed to the position of some Member States – some Member States of the European Union – raises a problem for democracy. It is therefore no wonder that there are many of us on this continent who look forward to the European Parliament elections next May, so that we can finally send people like him packing.

But isn't he doing what Mrs. Mogherini did this spring? She also claimed that the European Union has a united position. At the time, Péter Szijjártó spoke up to say that this is not the case.

The position of even a single country matters, as, after all, Hungary is also a full member of the European Union. But since then we have seen that others also have similar opinions. So back then poor Mrs. Mogherini – whom we also hope to see leaving in May – was able to ignore the opinion of a lonely Hungary. Since then, however, a great many things have happened, and it has turned out that Hungary is not a lone country with an isolated position, but that in fact ever more countries are now sharing that position. Consequently, from now on every European official should refrain from stating views on this matter of the kind that the Greek commissioner has stated.

You said that you are looking forward to the European Parliament elections. Does this also mean that we can expect to see defamatory articles and advertisements on social media of the kind that have been used by the pro-immigration opposition?

Well, we give as good as we get, and we shouldn't feel sorry for ourselves. Hungary has such a government today. This is clearly because we have the support of a large majority of the people. We have their backing, and we've been shown the evidence of this several times: in a referendum, in parliamentary elections and in consultations. So it is clear that this is not an opinion that is confined to people's living rooms, but a Hungarian standpoint voiced with conviction, from the gut and from the heart: a Hungarian resistance to migration, which reflects real fears. And if such a clear opinion prevails in a country, the Government cannot remain silent, and we cannot shy away in fear from the issue. There are countries in Europe – I will not name them – where there are coalition governments, where there are uncertain political situations, where the liberal press is overwhelmingly dominant, and where politicians do not really dare to represent people's opinions, but instead cautiously reject them. This is not characteristic of us, and if we are attacked, everyone can rest assured that we shall give as good as we get. This is not only out of concern for our own interest, for our own personal integrity – although we are also human, after all, and such things are also important. We do this in the country's interest. So we must make it clear that if someone takes a swipe at us, they can expect us to give as good as we get. We are not attacking anyone, we do not want to

force anything upon anyone, we are not denigrating or vilifying anyone, we are not unduly critical of anyone, and we do not want to tell others what to do, how to live, or how to decide. But when others want to do this to us, we shall always defend our independence, our way of life, and the Hungarian people's way of life. So, coming back to your question, we always give as good as we get, and therefore I don't want to whinge or whine about the European Parliament election campaign, but talk about it boldly and straightforwardly. Every campaign is a struggle. My wife always tells me, and I also meet many people – ladies in particular – who tell me that the important thing is calm, peace and security. And how right they are. But in order to have calm, peace and security, from time to time we need to be able to defend our position. And on the issue of immigration I would finally like there to be agreement in the European Union, to conclude this matter. Then I could tell Hungarian ladies and the public in general that henceforward there is no need to continue battling, because everything is being defended, and all we need to do is to settle down to our lives and work hard. But at this point in time this battle – the battle between pro-immigration and anti-immigration MEPs – has not yet been decided. We need to carry on, we need to fight this contest, and next May we must change European politics. Today the supporters of immigration in both the European Parliament and the Commission have an overwhelming majority. It is these people, that we refer to as the European elite, who also pose a major problem for democracy, as they represent something that the European people do not want. If you'll allow me, I'd like to share another observation with you. There are countries in which I can see that leaders are somehow trying to steer themselves over from their former pro-migrant position towards government policy seeking to restrict migration. This is all well and good, but it won't solve their political problems. Because the truth is that there is a single sentence that the European people want to hear from their leaders. They expect everyone to come clean, and state clearly whether they now see migration as something good – something involving difficulties, but ultimately good – or something bad. And those who are unable to give a straight answer on this will lose the people's trust – or at any rate will be absolutely undeserving of it. Many countries which seek to change their migration policy are doing so by citing technical considerations, while failing to say the single decisive sentence: that migration is bad; that migration is a threat to Europe, and in fact means population replacement, with ever fewer Europeans being born, and ever more outsiders being brought here. This will change our culture, and within a year or two we will not recognise our own villages, our own towns, our own countries and our own continent. So we are on the people's side in clearly stating that migration is a bad thing, and we want to solve this problem together with them. It is pointless for anyone to want to restrict migration,

while at the same time failing to state this: they will be unable to gain people's trust, and so distrust will increase, and people will increasingly feel that their leaders are acting against their will, and that they want to force something upon them. Furthermore, we Central Europeans also feel that, although we do not criticise them, they are intolerant of us and want to impose their position on us – while rejecting our position. This is the source of tension in European politics which everyone perceives today; and everyone is waiting for the resolution, the conclusion of this debate, one way or another. And this is why the European Parliament elections next May appear to be more exciting and more important to everyone than previous elections were.

Is it important that the US president Donald Trump has said that he is no friend of any kind of global governance, or global power? He lets every nation live the way they want to, but in return he expects them to allow the United States to do likewise. In other words, he is drawing attention to the sovereignty of nations – in contrast to what Mr Avramopoulos said, who claims that on this issue the European Union has a united position.

We must give the US president the respect he deserves as the elected president of the people of the United States. And as we cannot meet every American in person, we can express our respect for a people by showing respect for their elected leaders. Therefore I have never criticised the leaders of the United States, but I've always said that in the past they pursued a policy which was unfavourable to Hungary. Now President Trump is becoming something more than an individual person, and now we read that in the world his presence is more like that of an icon: a manifestation that represents something much more than his person alone does. So if we take a look at this manifestation, we will see – or we can think about – how different the relationship between the United States and the rest of the world is from how it has been over the past decade or two. How has it been? The United States has seemed to believe that in its pocket it had the “philosopher's stone” for the righteous way of life: that it knew what is right, what is moral, what is just, and how the world should be. We felt that it wanted to impose this on the world, including Hungary – and clearly at the same time without it running counter to America's interests. Well, I cannot begin to tell you how much I suffered during the term in office of Secretary of State Clinton. But we never thought about how this affected the Americans. Now when I listen to the President, I begin to understand that the Americans see this as their having committed to improving the world, and that this commitment was in fact contrary to their own national interests. President Trump is saying

that this is not in America's interest. He doesn't say that it's wrong; he says things like that too, but most importantly it's not in America's interest to pursue a world policy, a US foreign policy, which seeks to force American values upon the world. Because that also weakens America. And so it must not play such a role, but must instead stand on the basis of its own national interests. We had never thought that imposing America's approach on the world could also be seen as being contrary to US interests, but the US president has said just that. The President has made some very important announcements. For years he has been undermining the conceptual framework of the existing world order, which is founded on America's unbidden "world-saving" thinking and policy aimed at giving everyone a fine, just future and world; according to this, all we have to do is copy their way of life. Now the end of this policy has been announced. The election of this US president was an advance indication of this, but this is perhaps the first time that it has been stated so clearly and explicitly as a message intended not for America, but for the world. It is no coincidence that across the world last night powerful tremors could be felt, as massive weights were lifted from the shoulders of leaders and citizens in many countries. We no longer need to look upon America as we have done over the past decade or two. We do not need to mount a defence against it and its unwarranted attempts at exerting cultural influence, but we can try to establish a partnership on the basis of interests.

Let's look at domestic interests. There has been talk of launching a consultation, a consultation on the family, and on the most important issues related to demography. Do you already know the questions that you will put to voters?

I would like to finalise this series of questions this afternoon. I've been working on it for months. I've said, perhaps in answer to one of your questions, that one of this year's most important tasks is to come to an agreement with Hungarian ladies, Hungarian women, on how we can manage the problem of demography in Hungary. Since then we have expressed these questions in many different ways, we have carried out research, and we have checked these questions. This has its own political methodology: how to ask a question so that not only we – the ones asking it – understand it, but also those who read it. So we are trying to simplify these questions. But I will perhaps be able to finish this job this afternoon. To tell you the truth, I remain determined that the issue of demography should be the most important issue over the coming four years, for which we received our mandate in this April's general election. Demography is not a pretty word, and the birthrate is likewise not very close to

people's hearts. When all is said and done, we're talking about children, and about how young people plan their future. In the European Union they simply solve this problem by saying that demography is a science of numbers, and that there is a shortage of people.

“And so let's invite them in.”

“Let's replace them with people from elsewhere: we'll replace a European with an African; if we are short of a European, a Swede, a German or an Austrian, let's bring in someone from Asia to replace them – because what matters is that the numbers add up.” On this the Hungarian people think differently. The Hungarian people are a community with a strong national identity, community awareness, and strong family feelings. For us demography or population growth is not a matter of numbers. What we can say is that we do not want numbers: we want Hungarians. We want as many children as possible need to be born; and for that we need families; and for each family, if possible, we need a mother and a father – a man and a woman. We also need young people who want to have children. Surveys appear to show that they do want children, but in the everyday helter skelter of life they come up against obstacles which make them compromise on their earlier plans, and finally decide to have fewer children than they originally wanted – so fewer children are being born. I envisage a Hungary where not a single young person has to change their family plans just because they encounter economic, financial difficulties. This is what the consultation will be about: to find out how we – and how I personally – can give them the maximum assistance.

Yes, but this will cost a lot of money. Will the performance of the Hungarian economy allow this?

Well, I wonder whether it will cost a lot of money. There is the story poor King Ludwig of Bavaria, who is usually accused of rapidly driving the Kingdom of Bavaria into bankruptcy with foolish projects for building castles with elaborate towers – which perhaps we recognise from pictures or from tourist trips to Bavaria. He had these “Disneyesque” castles built. And just recently I read a study which claims that if we extend the budgetary figures of these investments over a period of a hundred years, then it turns out that these have been the most successful investments in Germany's history, as they have attracted so many visitors, and all sorts of other returns. So what I want to say is that just because something costs a lot of money at a given time and as an investment in the short term appears as a cost, we should not

necessarily shrink back from the idea. It may well be that, in the short term, investing in children and families gives Mihály Varga some sleepless nights, and he may well scratch his head and wonder where to get the money from. But as finance minister it is up to him to give us an answer to that question. In the long run, however, there is obviously no better investment than for young people to have and raise children, have them educated, teach them to lead an honest and decent lives, and then for these people to contribute to the country's overall performance. There is no better investment than this. It is undoubtedly true that there is a period of eight to ten years that needs to be financed; this is a political task, a governmental task, and the conditions for this must be created. We are working hard on this. If you look back to 2010 and recall how much we have done in the interest of families since then, we can confidently state that in 2010 it seemed completely unrealistic that we could introduce ideas such as tax allowances based on children, free school textbooks and meals, and the introduction of housing support and home creation systems. And indeed on paper these many figures at first seemed to be impossible to balance – but that is what we eventually did. So I'm not giving up. You are undoubtedly right that family policy costs a lot of money; but I'm not giving up the aspiration of harmonising our family policy goals with economic reality. And, indeed, the economic policy launched after 2010 has been successful. Perhaps putting it like this sounds immodest, but in my view this is not only the achievement of the Government, but is in fact mostly thanks to hard-working Hungarian people. This is something for which we can be jointly proud: in 2010 Hungary launched successful economic policy. We started this, but the people implemented it, and so it is a shared success. And as this is a successful economic policy, unemployment is falling, wages are rising, we are able to raise the tax revenues we need, and we are even able to reduce our government debt. So on the whole we have prospects which allow us to make brave, ambitious and costly decisions in order to support families. At least, this is my conviction at this point in time, and I have gained majority support for this plan in Parliament, as the House has adopted the 2019 budget. And also in the coming years I would like to obtain the support of the majority of Members of Parliament for very robust family support policy.

Finally in this interview, I'd like to point out that the International Day of Older Persons is coming up – it will be on 1 October. Will you have a meeting with the Seniors' Council? How will you answer them when they ask you if there will be a pension premium this year, and if the performance of the Hungarian economy allows for one?

I regularly meet pensioners. I'm one of those lucky people who are blessed to still have a grandmother, and my parents are also now pensioners. So I couldn't avoid them, even if I tried – but naturally I don't. Furthermore, there are a great many pensioners among the supporters of Fidesz and KDNP, and I also meet them on a very regular basis, and I also regularly visit pensioners' clubs. And there is also an official platform: there is the Seniors' Council, whose members I meet at least once a year, when we try to review our economic prospects. We will also have such a meeting this year, and this Seniors' Council will have new members. I look forward to this meeting. Yesterday afternoon I had the opportunity to work at length on next year's budget figures together with Mihály Varga. And the Minister said that, on the basis of the economic data, it is absolutely clear that at the end of this year, in November, there will be the customary pension premium, because the country's economic growth has reached a level which permits this and at which pensioners are entitled to it. I don't want to open a new chapter here, but in a country like ours, one of the most difficult technical and economic policy challenges is how to simultaneously give our large number of pensioners the financial recognition and respect they deserve, and at the same time provide sufficient funds to young people to ensure that enough children are being born. Because we must somehow maintain the balance between respect for the elderly and commitment to the future. This is a tricky juggling act. It is no wonder that we talk about the art of governance; if that is true, then perhaps this is the reason. We must create a balance in the present between the future and the past: the recognition of past achievements and future expectations. But let me reassure you, since 2010 we have in general managed this feat in every budget.

Thank you. You have been listening to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.