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## **NORWEGIAN PM: MIGRANTS NEED TO WORK MORE AND FIT IN**

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For a relatively small country, Norway is certainly at the cross roads of many global hot topics and the prime minister has to navigate issues such as growing tensions with Russia, Britains decision to leave the European Union and the refugee crisis.

Isabelle Kumar spoke to Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg, at the Council of Europe for the World Forum for Democracy, in Strasbourg, France.

Biography: Erna Solberg

Solberg became Prime Minister in October 2013

She has been leader of the Conservative Party since 2004

Was dubbed iron Erna in early 2000s for her stance on immigration

She enjoys computer games and currently plays Pokemon Go

Isabelle Kumar: You share a short border with Russia. You have recently agreed to have US troops stationed in your country and that seems to have sparked a certain amount of displeasure in Moscow...

Erna Solberg: I am not worried about that. We have a good relationship with Russia on a lot of issues. It is part of what we need to make sure that our allied countries are coming to our country to learn how to do warfare in a winter situation and to work with our different troops...

Isabelle Kumar: But Russia does not like the fact that there are these troop build-ups on its border in Nordic countries but also in Eastern Europe □ do you think there is a certain amount of provocation there?

Erna Solberg: We dont feel there is a tension on the same level in the north as we have seen in the Baltic sea for example. But we are firm on the fact that when Russia has been breaking international law, the situation in Ukraine, we are supporting the Ukrainian people, but at the same time in the northern part we are trying to have a good open relationship with the Russians.

Isabelle Kumar: You have built a fence between yourselves and Russia □ it is one of the many fences going up these days □ thats to curb immigration \* It has been deemed to be successful in some circles because immigration has been cut by 95 percent.

Erna Solberg: We had good talks with Russia on a diplomatic basis, I think they knew this was a

security area for them. They have three fences before anyone reaches the Norwegian border on the Russian side, so I think to curb migrants from using this area was important for them too.

Isabelle Kumar: Is it sensible to be building these barriers to stop people coming in, who are in desperate need?

Erna Solberg: We are one of those countries that are resettling the most refugees: 3,100 people are being taken out by the UNHCR quotas to come to Norway. We have done this for a stable long period, so even if we have a low number this year and a large number last year we are in fact participating a lot in this humanitarian crisis.

Isabelle Kumar: High levels of education are obviously associated to greater tolerance of diversity and pluralism, so what are you doing to educate Norwegians to be more welcoming to refugees? Because we often ask refugees to integrate, but we also need to have populations who welcome them.

Erna Solberg: It is part of our normal educational system that you are discussing why people are fleeing from some countries, what is the convention, what is the responsibilities we have, this is all part of the school curriculum in Norway. There is also a clear view that if you move and get refuge, you have to live by Norwegian standards, you cant come and think you live in your home country when it comes to womens rights, not to be puzzled if you see two men kiss on the street, because there are gay people in our countries and it is normal, its part of our system...

Isabelle Kumar: Ironically it was your integration minister who created a bit of a furore, because she stated that new arrivals should be very clear on the fact that people around them will be eating pork and drinking alcohol. It just struck me that at ministerial level that seemed a simplistic approach to what is quite a complex issue – what do you think?

Erna Solberg: I do not think it is a complex issue that if you are going to come to our country and you have to work to sustain a living, you cannot say no to jobs like working in a restaurant where they will serve pork or alcohol. You cannot expect that the Norwegian society will pay you benefits if you are refusing to work for religious reasons...

Isabelle Kumar: That must be a minority, mustnt it?

Erna Solberg: There are too low numbers of migrant women working in Norway, we know that some reasons are they have a lot of children, so that is work in itself. But sometimes it is also because they make some demands that make it more difficult for them to get a job, and sometimes it is because their husbands dont like to see them get too involved in the Norwegian society, because then they get a taste of the freedom of women in our society, so there is also some type of patriarchy in this.

Isabelle Kumar: Anti-immigration sentiment was in part what fuelled in Britain the vote to leave the EU, the Brexit vote. Now as Britain goes forward in this ☐ and it has become quite entangled in this ☐ they do look to the Norwegian model. You dont think thats necessarily going to be the right model for Britain?

Erna Solberg: So much of the discussion on Brexit was about the four freedoms. I said I dont think they will like it if they have the Norwegian type of model. I think it is very good for us, it gives us an economic connection that gives us the possibility both to sell our products and our services,

but \* also the migration to Norway for some years from other countries has been quite welcome, because we needed the manpower.

Isabelle Kumar: Do you fear a knock on effect and other countries might leave?

Erna Solberg: Well I thought it (the Brexit vote ) might give even a bigger spurt than it has. I think one of the reasons is now everyone is a bit anxious about what will happen afterwards, and maybe the insecurity of what is happening in Britain is calming down a lot of those who think its easy to leave.

Isabelle Kumar: We often hear that to get into a position like yours, Prime Minister, you have to work twice as hard as your male counterparts and really fight for your position- has that been your experience?

Erna Solberg: I am not the first female prime minister of my country, I am the second. And I often say that I am happy that Im the second, because somebody did the work before. In Norway people are accustomed to women being leaders in politics and in a lot of other areas. It also gives me greater freedom of being myself and not being half man, than the first women who became Prime Ministers and really had to adapt to that type of standard.

Isabelle Kumar: One of your ways of relaxation, and it is quite well publicised, is Pokemon Go ☐ what has got you hooked, why do you enjoy it?

Erna Solberg: It just started in my holidays when it became a craze and everyone else was playing it. Every Pokestop is usually a building or a sculpture so you can see the cities in a new way, because you will see the small things on the side of a wall, you will see art in a new way, you experience things a little differently. I think it is funny that people dont understand that politicians do relax in the same way as other people do.

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