*Information about interviewee:*

*János Fiala-Butora is a Hungarian/Slovakian legal scholar. The Interview was conducted online via Skype.*

*R= Respondent – János Fiala-Butora*

*I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton*

I: I am interested in discussing with you the Hungarian kinship policies.

R: Most academics working on the topic of Hungarian nation-policy or Hungarian nationalism look at the topic from a Western perspective. The ‘nation’ in Hungarian is complicated. Highly symbolic impact of citizenship. No long-term goal to nation-policy. All central European countries have extra-territorial citizenship legislation. Dogmatic government.

I: Territorial autonomy?

R: Not realistic. Not possible. Not desirable. Re-joining the nation across borders plays on sentiment as there is a favourable perception of re-unification. Given up on that goal. Exploiting Hungarians for their own domestic political goal as the Hungarian government gives money for new children. Orbán: “don’t look at what I say, look at what I do”. Concerning your research question: citizenship is only a minor aspect of Nation-Policy. There are very few Hungarian citizens in Slovakia, and the Hungarian state's economic influence there is not substantial. What you have as part of the Nation-Policy is support to cultural institutions, schools, NGOs, and political parties - but these have little to do with citizenship, they long predate the current citizenship debate. I heard the Hungarian government is now preparing some economic development plan for south Slovakia. I doubt it will have any substantial economic impact. Most likely it will give some pocket money to some of the Hungarian government's supporters in Slovakia. The Hungarian government would like to appear as if it was a major player in the lives of Hungarians in Slovakia, but in reality, it has very limited influence overall, especially economically. It does have some influence over MKP and MKP-friendly NGOs and media. Again, this is not related to citizenship. About "illiberalism": I am a researcher myself, and I understand the current hype to analyse everything on the liberal-illiberal divide (or spectrum), but I am sceptical about whether this is the right analytical approach. It might be, but than you would have to engage a lot in philosophical discussions of what is the "liberal" approach to e.g. extra-territorial citizenship. It is not a sufficiently developed standard yet to which we can easily measure things. Sovereignty I understand, extra-territoriality, conflicts of jurisdiction, etc. are more or less clear standards. But liberalism?

You will have to deal here with a lot of factual uncertainty, because a lot of the materials are in Hungarian only. So, you will have a hard time finding out what the government is doing exactly (they don't know that too. From the 17 stakeholders many don't know what the others are doing. Nobody knows what NSKI is doing, other than stealing money). Than you would have to understand why they are doing what they are doing. And then to evaluate it, you would have to develop a standard for a "liberal" approach in these issues. Seems quite a lot. And, as I said, citizenship is just a small aspect of Nation-Policy. So, you might have to clarify whether you are interested in the former or the latter. Some starting points for your research question: the Hungarian diaspora are unique in Europe. It is the largest, and in many countries, it is subject to severely repressive laws (if you want to see illiberal laws, look at the Slovak Constitution and the State Language Act), which periodically leads to tensions within their home-states and raises the public's interest in Hungary. They also have tons of contacts with Hungary, economic, educational, sport, cultural, you name it (think of literature - it is one market based on the Hungarian language, connecting readers and writers regardless of where they live). The Hungarian government cannot not-engage with the diaspora. It is just factually impossible. There has to be some engagement. And that is the case even if there is a leftist government in power, which tend to have bad political relationships with diaspora political representations, and which would like to avoid the issue of Nation-Policy if they could.

If we define a liberal standard in a way where a person's ethnicity should be irrelevant for the state than whole central Europe is naturally "illiberal" just because the existence of the huge Hungarian minority communities. The Hungarian state did not create these communities. Their respective home-states (Slovakia, Serbia) played a major role in defining them as political communities in opposition to their home-state through their own nationalistic policies elevating the Slovak and Serb ethnic nation and suppressing minorities, and by defining these states as ethnic nation-states in which the minorities don't fit. The Hungarian government is currently exploiting this issue to their own benefit, but it would be short-sighted to think that this situation is somehow their creation. They are definitely not that powerful. So, I am not sure the question "when illiberalism kicks in", which is the step or the method which can be characterized as illiberal, gives a satisfactory explanation of the situation.

As much I dislike the current government and think that they are doing nothing to improve the situation (and are doing a lot to exploit it for their own benefit), I am always surprised how much researchers underestimate the plight of minority communities in Central Europe. I think the current liberal order really failed these communities; the European standards provide them with very weak protection. The Yugoslav wars, for example, might be a historical event for researchers, but they are definitely a current issue for Hungarians living in Serbia. I don't see the "liberal" approach as the gold standard, if under it we understand the European standards on minority protection. They are terribly weak, lead to oppression of minorities, frequent periodic tensions, and eventual destruction of these communities (which seems to be an inevitable outcome \_within the current international order\_). And there are few positive examples from Western Europe (although there are some), so in this sense I would extend "illiberalism" to the treatment of minorities there as well (just look at France).