*Information about interviewee:*

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*R= Respondent – Kalman Petocz*

*I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton*

I: Can you please describe the focus of your work?

R: The European integration and awareness raising, and cultural heritage is of course closely related to the issues of national minority. When you look at the cultural heritage issue, you must be aware that, in most of these even European countries, cultural heritage by many political and public leaders is seen as some kind of recreation of ethnic lines of history. For thousands of years back neglecting all the other cultural phenomena that have been present on the territory. This is a little bit changing. At least in Slovakia, in Hungary it's going the other way. The government just adopted a new strategy of preservation of cultural heritage that it is clearly said that the cultural heritage of the National minorities is also part of the national cultural heritage, which is a very progressive idea, it's never been said this way in official document. Whether it be realised in practice is another matter because its White Paper strategy paper. When quite sure, but we hope that things have changed in Slovakia compared to the 90s definitely. Even if when you meet professional national minority leaders, they will of course argue that everything is of course bad and going in the wrong direction. I don't have everything is going in the right direction, but I would say that Slovakia is not the worst country in terms of treating national minorities at least at this stage. But maybe there are people would say this.

I: How would you describe the relationship between the Hungarian state and the minorities here in Slovakia?

R: The problem with anger and states is that the in the first 10 or 20 years, the policy regarding the national minorities abroad, the policies were drawn up by six party coalition. Now the policy's ongoing state are the policies of Fidesz, and now feeders are exploiting the national minorities abroad by various instruments through financing, they just simply interfere vis-à-vis, and this is not in line with at least my perception of liberal democracy.

I: Was the Slovak fear of 2010 justified?

R: It was not justified and it was not fair. The propaganda made by Slovakia was very insincere. You can only accuse someone of insincere intentions when your intentions are sincere. It was the case that there were two populists with insincere intentions that were just crashing against each other. The Slovak Parliament at that time in a very opaque way and onto the law ignoring all proper protocols. It was drafted in the morning and in the afternoon, it went through, without any thorough discussion in the group of experts, or the committees, or the civil societies, the Parliament and nothing with the national minority who were directly involved. From this point of view I think that this law the Slovak law is much worse than going one. I do not think that the Hungarian one is bad, maybe the intentions of Mr Orbán were not sincere, but I think that when the standards of democracy so low you can misuse any law. But it was not justified, the ones who are most affected another Hungarians, it was the others who went to other countries and could not retain their Slovak citizenship. The numbers show that those affected were not the Hungarian Slovaks but those with Hungarian/Slovak like inserts and something else. You should know that those who applied for Hungarian citizenship is much higher than those who are in the statistics. I think it is a couple of thousand or maybe 5000. But exactly because of the Slovak law they did not confess an ongoing state also doesn't provides the data related to the Hungarians in Slovakia. They have the data for the other angering communities in Vojvodina and Transylvania, but not Slovakia. It is not such a high number because Slovakia already member of the European Union and the Schengen area, so would make a big difference and only those who apply for Hungarian citizenship, just as if a sentimental reasons or strong feelings of identity, which I think is normal, but not for economic reasons or any other kinds reasons. which was the primary reason for Hungary and is in Vojvodina and Romania.

I: What are the intentions?

R: I don't know, there is a lot of speculation. Some people believe it is a clearly long-term strategy. Hungary is in demographic decline and the Hungarian state is not willing to fully integrate the Roma order migrants, so the only way to keep the Hungarian economy going is to attract the Hungarians abroad. And this is an instrument how to divide the Hungarian labour force. This might be a strategy. I think there is something in it, there must be something in it. It is quite logical idea in fact and whether he had other irredentist, identity and other ideas. I don't believe this wine is mind at that time. I don't know though. The ideas of his advisers are developing, his ideas are developing so we will see. I met Mr Orbán 15 years ago, when I was engaged in politics, for the only Liberal party in Slovakia, Hungary and Civic party, and I met him there and I mostly know the Fidesz people are engaged in foreign affairs, but they change the affiliation model 15 years ago. And now I very rarely meet Fidesz people.

I: What is the relationship between Fidesz and MKP?

R: It is a protégé party for Fidesz. It is the party who is in the eyes of feeders, the genuine representative of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. In Romania they also picked one, and in Vojvodina, and say this is the real genuine party. The problem is the other party, MOST, is openly declared as a not Hungarian party, or a traitor party. Like traitors, this is of course nonsense. This is exactly the kind of thinking, which is negating the fundamentals of democracy. Mr Orbán 's voice complaining that the Liberals are neglecting the democratic fundamentals, and this is exactly that. MOST was elected by votes of most over half of the Hungarians in Slovakia, in a democratic process, since he can't say that they are not a genuine representative of the Hungarian minority, it is nonsense. How can you say that from arbitrarily from your position, that then not receiving the directs vote, when you are a member of another country’s parliament? It is nonsense. It's just how democracy works, and what Mr Orbán is doing is simply undermining fundamental democratic principles. SMK are on very good terms with Fidesz, they receive a lot of money, considerable amounts of money from Hungary through NGOs and other institutes and creating unsound competition. Generating from outside, not a natural competition, but from outside. Not suggesting that he alone is to blame for the problems of Hungarian community, but he is definitely adding to it.

I: Why not engage with MOST?

R: They do need MOST, because they have Fico. The relationship between the two is very good. Why would you have Bulgar when you have Fico? They have common interests they go beyond Hungary national community in Slovakia. Fighting against migrants, Soros, whatever to play some kind of bridge between East and West and this is from the perspective from both, and this stage is a very fruitful cooperation. He doesn't need Bulgar. He has made his choice last year when he joined the government of Mr Fico, which was inconceivable at that time, that the Hungarian party goes with the Slovak National party. And now is on a trajectory which is set, and he cannot leave the government, because that would be fatal consequences. Maybe this would also have fatal consequences, but in three years’ time and in three years’ time you can achieve a lot personally. Orbán doesn’t need Bulgar but Bulgar needs Fico and it works. Orbán can play a double game, he is on good terms with the governing party and the opposition, but it works, because the frame of the broader interests of all are in line with the setting.

I: Did the 2010 counter-legislation from Slovak work in limiting Hungarian influence?

R: No. I would even say the opposite consequences because it forced the Hungarians to go into illegality. Because now the Slovak state has maybe 5000, 10,000 citizens who are de jure not citizens of Slovakia but de facto they are. But on the other hand enjoy all civil rights nor political rights and they vote in the national elections, which they couldn't do in normal circumstances, so it is a very opaque situation. It's not a situation that would be in line with any situation you would expect vis-à-vis rule of law. And it caused many to be hypocritical both to the Slovak state and to the Hungarian state. It was a very bad move. It was not debated or thought over, maybe if they hadn't done it so quickly maybe they would have changed their minds, so I think it's a very bad, unfortunate move from the part of the Fico government. And they didn't change it because that would be seen as defeat, but simply it is a very bad law and it doesn't help anyone. It doesn't help the Slovak state, it doesn't help the Slovakians who would like to get any citizenship from any other part of the European Union under circumstances where there is freedom of movement in the Schengen area and this is simply nonsense from the point of the Slovak citizens and the point of the Hungarians in Slovakia. It didn't solve any problems with the Hungarian in law, because it didn't prevent Hungarians to apply for citizenship, they only did it just hiddenly, not in a transparent way.

I: Has there been emigration to Hungary?

R: Not really. The processes in all Eastern European countries of the same. The majority of those who emigrate to the West, not to the south and east. I know very few Hungarians. This was the case in the 80s and the beginning the 90s but since the integration into the EU the trends have changed. Even Hungarians in Slovakia prefer going to study in the West more than to Hungary. I don't know the statistical data but I'm sure the much more on going’s and Slovakia go to the West instead of Hungary, in spite of the Hungarian law.

I: Why are they keen to shift their attention to an economic aspect?

R: They understand that if you want to preserve a national minority you need a stable economy, everything needs money and financing. I think that Hungary really has some sort of aspiration to be an economic leader of the central European region and this may be referring to the role the former Hungarian Kingdom played in central Europe. It is a natural geographic centre of the Carpathian basin in Budapest at the centre hungry is in the centre and of course this part of the strategy is trying to make the Hungarian in economy stable and sustainable. I think it is related to the citizenship policy and when you want to be an economic leader you need your labour force, you need people. But I don't know whether this is a very systematic strategy or whether these are just some ideas because when you just observe, how the Hungarian state functions, first idea is that there is no real economic strategy, the only economic strategies how to steal as much money as possible from the part of the political establishment and all those lobby groups that are linked to the establishment. Combine this very short-sighted strategy there may be a long-term strategy, and it may be a bit of both or maybe It is part of a long-term strategy to normally and naturally transform Hungary. Not irredentist in thinking, but for Hungary to become a natural economic leader of a central European region. This could be understandable. When you would see that Hungary works as a normal democratic state when in that case you would of course, expect this to happen. I have always been regional economic and political leaders. This faction causes any kind of worries we see that the democratic institutions just destroyed, and we don't know what the real political intentions of Mr auburn. Even the idea of becoming an economic leader raises some kind of concerns, which wouldn’t be raised if it were a democratic state. The Hungarian Slovaks might have contributed to the election of Mr Orbán with a very tiny margin anyone may be only one mandate by the votes of those of the Hungarians living abroad. It's not a considerable issue. The citizenship law is only one of the instruments that Mr Orbán uses to fix his power. It made a much bigger first in the countries surrounding Hungary than in Hungary itself. Fidesz is really a party that chose the ideology of the traditional Hungarian national, the rural national traditions of Hungarian in politics with a strong emphasis on ethnic identity linked to national identity and national pride and national meteorology that it was very natural it was very natural that they presented this draft because it was in line with their thinking. The general knowledge about interethnic cultures in central Europe is so desperately low that feelings can be easily change with some education. The negative feelings towards other ethnics is in people's psyche because of poor education and ignorance. The Slovaks know very little about history. The Slovaks still believe though were oppressed the hundreds or thousands of years by the Hungarians. And I asked them, my students, what you mean by being oppressed? Were they killed, discriminated against, segregated, tortured, whatever and the only know a couple of things that in the late 19th-century, that three Slovak schools were closed by the Hungarian government and the shooting by a soldier in 1907 and seven people were killed and a couple of days issues. And you asked them about the Holocaust, when 70,000 people were sent to death by the Slovak state, whether you can draw some kind of comparison between these issues, then you realise that they cannot place this into context. Of course in Hungary does not better, I would say it is even worse. The official Hungarian ideology is now, describing the Hungarian ethnic element is like pure something which has always been under negative influences of everybody else and the ethnic Hungarian element is the innocent part of the century-old oppression and the negatively influence from everyone else by the surroundings and the ethnic ongoing part of the population could not be blamed for anything. This is a common perception in central Europe. This looks like it is changing for the better in Slovakia, but I don't know, because the teaching of history and civic education is very bad it is a very low standard. I don't know whether people would choose to make a choice between radical options whether they would make the right choice. Until 2007 there was a Slovak law there was almost identical to the Hungarian law. According to that law Slovaks living abroad could apply for Slovakian citizenship and thousands state it was a replica of Hungarian law. And after in 2007 when Hungarian adopted the law and preferential treatment of ethnic Hungarians, Slovakia abolish the law just further political considerations, just so they could attack Hungarian Legislation. The proof required to prove the Slovak ethnic line was even worse in Hungary and is, the Hungarian in your wasn't specifically linked directly to ethnicity, but Slovakian law you had to provide official documents stating you are ethnically Slovak which is some people very difficult, it is not always common that the side your nationality or citizenship, your ethnic affiliation is written and for many, and I know many Slovaks who are living in Romania and Hungary, in Ukraine who are very sad by that that they are really Slovaks that they just couldn't prove it. There are rumours that hundreds are Slovaks just bought the Slovak citizenship but it's exactly the same in Hungary, thousands of Ukrainians bought Hungarian and citizenship through corruption. At this point of view the Hungarian law and is lacking or had very similar practical effects. At that time the Slovak abolish the law because it was seen by the so that it be more profitable politically to fight against the Hungarian law and just to get rid of those hundreds of Slovaks or couple hundreds of Slovaks, they would gain by offering them Slovak system. They would gain bigger political capital by fighting against Hungary law, and at that time it was true, it was that Time much more profitable to the anti- Hungarian. Both laws are to a great extent are just political considerations how to gain political influence, internal political Influence and maybe also electoral votes and it is changing. The Slovak it was good to have this law for 10 years and then it was much more profitable to change strategy, but the intentions were very similar.

I: If we suppose that the intention of these strategies is to attract ethnic Hungarians to Hungary, do you believe it will work?

R: I think the problem with this thinking that in spite of all this populist propaganda. It is not about the old people, is about a young labour force and they are thinking quite differently. And I think this is something that Mr Orbán has underestimated. Maybe you find 10 to 20% of the young population are a crazy will vote right-wing, but the majority of young people born in the European Union are born into democracy and I don't think that many would give up these achievements for the idea of being Hungarian Slovaks. So I think that the majority of Slovaks national identity is a different thing then this crazy traditionalist Conservative politicians, and I think this is something Mr Orbán has underestimated. I think that Mr Orbán receives filtered information, like an all autocratic regimes that the leader receives filtered information maybe doesn't have a real clear picture of things. 300,000 Of young Hungarian labour forces in the West and why does he think that, they would opt for Hungary another further west? It's illogical thinking, so I don't think it will work.

I: Is there much propaganda that reaches the Hungarian community here in Slovakia?

R: The Hungarian state TV is a hundred percent propaganda, but it is so boring, it is really so boring, that I don't think the Hungarian community even watched. The ongoing community regarding printed press, read the Slovak tabloids. Yes, 70% would vote for Fidesz, because they read about Fidesz here about them and they agree with two or three issues which are so important for them, they are forced to get into their minds. You can only absorb two or three issues and they are in line with Fidesz. Half of those who would vote for Fidesz if they could in Hungary, would vote for MOST, and they don’t see a contradiction in this. The average people don’t think about politics in complicated patterns. In the regional elections they vote for SMK, which is the case.

I: Is assimilation seen as a challenge here in Slovakia?

R: Yes. By both parties. It was the first big issue tackled by the Hungarian roundtable in Slovakia. On the other hand is a difficult issue because assimilation is something which is and has been present for centuries in all times, and here on the borderlines between ethnic communities there is always assimilation in both directions of course assimilation is always stronger towards the dominant nation. This one is normal natural that there is assimilation towards the domination because, there are no cultural cleavages, because sometimes the Slovak politicians argue that Slovakia is a multi-cultural nation but this is not true this is only true when they dispute between the white Slovakians and the Roma and this is not appreciated by the Hungarians of Slovakians. It might be natural on the one hand, but on the other hand it is fact that the Slovak state is doing little to slowdown assimilation all limit the speed of it. It is taken as a positive thing from the Slovakian point of view if the Hungarians are assimilated into Slovakia. Legally there is quite a lot of protection for Hungarian national minorities here in Slovakia there are funds and institutes et cetera, but the Slovakian state doesn't implement this and is not interested in slowing down assimilation so in practice it is different situation.