*Information about interviewee:*

*Attila Lancz is a member of the political party, Party of the Hungarian Community in Slovakia (SMK). The interview was conducted in Bratislava, Slovakia.*

*R= Respondent – Attila Lancz*

*I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton*

I: What are the key objectives and challenges for your party?

R: It’s very simple. We define ourselves as an ethnic party, that might sound a bit weird, you find them all over across Europe, the Germans in Italy, the Swedes in Finland, in Belgium the German-speaking population as well. I'm not mentioning those in Eastern Europe. So quite naturally our basic aim is to maintain our specific identity of this ethnic group here in southern Slovakia. Specifically our region and also our country. I would say we are criticised by the Slovak party, because we're ethnic party. In a political system their parties which deal with different things, there might be some areas of life, which they concentrate on, for example the Christian Democrats on Christian democratic values, so there is nothing unusual when you compare us with other types of political parties. We are an ethnic party and minority party. We want to maintain and if there are possibilities to develop our ethnic identity, this is a shrinking minority you should know, because maybe you should know, in 20 years, in 2011 when the last census was conducted in Slovakia, in 1991 to today this community has shrunk by 20%, this is quite significant. For the hundred years we have been living here is a minority in Slovakia, but this rapid shrinking was not typical in any age or period during this time. Including during commonest times. This is the biggest challenge I think for our community, especially of course for our party, which represents our community. If you want to speak about what other means for this, it is more difficult. But this is our main objective we are an ethnic party outspokenly so.

I: What causes this?

R: There is no one reason only there are a couple of them. The three main factors are ageing, I do not know in which order, this could be first or second place, together with assimilation and of course emigration. This is quite significant to bear in every case is on the third place only. Where there are ethnic Hungarian minorities in Romania or Serbia, in their cases it is a bigger problem more significant problem, there is a strong emigration from their communities, but that is not the case here in Slovakia for our community rather group. There is immigration but it is not so significant. Assimilation was all the time present during our history, it was sometime stronger, it was sometimes weaker, sometimes it was of course, there has been pressure from state to accelerate assimilation, various types of means of unused to do this. Other times are stronger other times this is weak as pressure. We believe that one cause or one specific reason, why has accelerated this way, it is also the changing world. From the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism, a completely new world has come in the era of globalisation. In the case of my minorities, which mainly live in rural areas beforehand in these communities it was a closed society, everyone lived where he or she was born, and movement of people was not significant it is today. Today, people begin to travel more, and the base of your community gets looser and you cannot maintain the cultural and community life as before because the young leave from this point of view, communism and the close society, had a somehow beneficial effects on the maintaining of identity. Also the ethnic identity is a phenomenon became weaker by globalisation. In central Europe is notion of ethnic belonging as much more significance than it does in Western Europe, because of historical reasons. It has become weaker and weaker and our younger generations they do not become socialised in such an environment. They have an incarnation to pay attention to this. In the 60s or 70s of younger man moved from southern Slovakia to the northern parts, where there are no ethnic Hungary and is, he for a long time was able to maintain his ethnic identity, this is not typical any longer. If someone lives in an environment, where he or she does not receive any cultural influences, and cannot speak in in their native tongue, it is more likely that he or she will beget assimilated. This is the globalisation, as a fourth factor, and all these together is causing this problem.

I: How would you describe your relationship with the Hungarian state?

R: We are aware of the facts that alone in such circumstances that we have lived for a hundred years, the Slovak state or Czechoslovakian state, was not very keen on supporting us. The Hungarian state is one state that does have the intention to support us in this. I think the Hungarian state is the state, at least from cultural identity and national identity, is the key factor and all of the rest the relationships you can derive from this one. We live here in Slovakia of course, we pay our taxes here of course, we about this economy and live our daily lives here. At least 60 or 70% of our cultural budget is finance from Hungary. So this is a key factor in those fields which concern maintaining our ethnic identity. If we go further than talking about the state and we talk about parties, we have a strong relationship with Fidesz. We are on the same, or very similar, ideological platform and we are in fact part of the same political group in the European level, PPP. So we maintain contact with them. Of course we are keen on maintaining contact with the rest the parties as well, but they are the closest one from a couple points of view.

I: Political support?

R: Of course, it's a natural thing. As a state, they have a key role in maintaining this relationship and on the other hand on a party level from an ideological point of view, we get yes, strong political, strong backing from Hungary, given that our topics, the issues we deal with, mainly language issues, economic development of these regions, not only ethnic Hungarians live there but Slovaks also in the south, would like to strengthen these regions. The main direction of our politics is one concerned with the broader activity maintaining national identity projects and the economic development of the region where we live. If you look at both topics on the table, we receive substantial support from Hungary. A recent development is that Hungary wall directly support a huge economic development fund. This is a new feature of the special relationship. Until now we have received financial support from Hungary, but mainly to support cultural projects, enforcement of our law, of our rights and minority rights, civil organisations, NGOs, and money from Hungary goes to supporting these projects, there were some similar things in the 90s but not to this scale.

I: The objectives of this development?

R: Formerly it was quite agricultural. But I think the objectors will be the same as before. The weight and the significance of the agriculture has dropped dramatically, but still the agriculture as such, has great significance in this region. Our experts are already analysing our basic needs, the local economic initiatives, because we say that the government is intentionally neglecting our region, if some companies are Slovakian companies come to Slovakia, the government intentionally deals with these factories or enterprises do not come to these regions. They discuss with them and it is very rare for us to get these factories. It is a low land, there is a workforce, however it is getting fewer and fewer, but still in spite of this, we say that it has been neglected intentionally. We'd have to somehow balance this one, we do not have too much means more influence, and if the Hungarian government office such a significant part of money, of course with the happiest one. This is still in the initial phase, but it will be based on our specific needs after our analysis by experts. What specific types of the economy should be strengthened in order to reach the poor the possible greatest benefit.

I: Who provides the analysis?

R: There is one foundation and NGO that next week will be registered, it won't be them directly analyses, but we have one or two institutions, Hungarian institutions, experts of this that have already made general and comprehensive plan of the economic development of the south Slovakian regions. They already have action plans drawn up and so. And I think they have made some very actual analysis, when it was announced that such the programme be put in place.

I: Will members of SMK be on this board?

R: No, no. No its intentional. Everybody knows we have a good relationship with the Hungarian government but still, we do not want it to be a party issue. It will concern all of the inhabitants of this region, regardless of their ethnic or political belonging. We want to avoid any situation where we will accused of being biased, it will be a non-partisan project.

I: Why do you think the Hungarian state are interested in this development?

R: I think it is their set of values, they are conservative and nationalist and their basic way of thinking and philosophy is that there are not only states but there are nations. They believe that in this united Europe there are certain layers, there are nations there are ethnic communities. They look across the border to ask, they see that we speak the same language, the Same culture and they are some historical reasons have become part of other countries, and Hungary political elite Say that this cannot be justified, that this is not just decision these borders. There are treaties there are laws. Still we accept the situation, but you cannot ask from us, to leave these ethnic Hungarians and is to be assimilated. This is the philosophy behind it. And this philosophy drives concrete decisions. This support is developed gradually. In the 90s we would not have imagined this kind of dimension. We expected cultural support from Hungary, which concern identity, education languages use, laws and rights. These are needed. For example there is a law in Slovakia on minority language use, but the main problem with this law is that it is not enough, there are regions and sub regions in South Slovakia, where there are ethnic agrarian populations who are in the majority. These are compact areas. But even in these areas it's not possible to use Hungary language is quite sporadic to use it in the official communication and public communication. Even in these laws which are quite narrow, quite a big part of them is only on paper. For example, there is a provision in minority language use, that the Slovakian state has to translate the most important laws into the languages of the national minorities, there are 13 in Slovakia. This has been fulfilled all completed in the 90s, they translated some of these laws, maybe three or four of them. Since then, some of these laws have completely changed, nothing has happened since that time. According to this law in southern Slovakia where ethnic Hungarians reach 20% threshold at a local level, at a local state authority and the local authority on demand have to give you bilingual forms. But they have all of them only in Slovakian. They have probably an 800 or 900 of these forms, and maybe only three or four of them have been translated for example we have several NGOs in Slovakia, that are financed by Hungary, to translate these forms, using Hungarian money, which is a service the Slovakian state should be financing and take care of, but Hungary does it from Hungary money of course. These translations are not official. If there are any translations, they do not accept it. It's contradiction and it's crazy. I just give you one example of how these things are going, of course we can protest, and fire complaints and we are planning with an NGO to make a mass complaint and then they have to deal with them. So maybe after a certain time you be more effective for them if they would translate documents, rather to make all of these procedures.

I: Some suggest they want to attract workers to fulfil a workforce demands?

R: No. I don’t agree. Officially the Hungarian government is unambiguously declaring that their interest is that we remain here. Myself I was studying in Budapest, I'm a lawyer. But I was given a declaration to sign that meant they would finance my studies over the, to some extent, but I will have to return to Slovakia. It is not because they would not like me over there, but the official statement is that they want to maintain the community's identity and to remain to live there. If they caused people to come to Budapest it would cause some problems in the communities in neighbouring territories. On the other hand Hungary is in a demographic crisis but I think officially it has never been by any means supporting immigration, that Hungarians would go into Hungary. This was not the intention. On the other hand it happens, you cannot forbid the people. For example if I would choose to stay there, they could not do anything. He had no need legal effect and they would not chase me out of the country or force me to pay back scholarship. But officially, you should not come here, unofficially, you will choose. On the other hand, in the case of Hungary, for an economic point of view, it will be impossible to get people from Slovakia to work in Hungary. Theoretically yes, there are a couple of regions which are developed in the north-west of Hungary and in the Slovakian part of this region, the industry is underdeveloped, so theoretically it can happen and it happened that in the first 10 years of the 20th century there was quite high unemployment rates in South Slovakia and there was need for workforce in Hungary in northern Hungary so the people travelled therefore work on masses but until that time, lots of new workplaces have appeared, some big factories have left, such as Nokia who have left, this is a huge employer. In these parts they have a serious lack of workforce, as in Hungary. This is the case in Slovakia. Unofficially Hungary would have an interest to absorb and attract a workforce from here, but it is nearly impossible, not to mention the fact that the wages in Slovakia are a little bit higher. This might be the case in the Hungarian communities in Romania and in Vojvodina. Because Vojvodina is not part of the European Union and economically underdeveloped, and similar Romania but not to the Same extent. There was a serious emigration in these regions, but it has stopped. Those who wanted to leave it have left. In Slovakia we have more workforce from Serbia Romania. There is a Samsung factory on the language border with a huge factory in Slovakia but still the Hungarian language is quite present the and the Romanians that work there our Hungarian Romanians, because they can speak Hungarian.

I: What is your party’s position on the dual-nationality legislation counter from Slovakia?

R: Whatever law the Hungarian government wants to pass, it is their business, whether we want to accept or not it doesn't matter. Our business is the business of Slovak government; of course however this legislation affects us more than most. We have course criticise this measure, not because the consequences of it, but the reasoning because of it. When the public debate began on this it was framed in a manner which made us a national security issue, even in the draft legislation we were considered a national security threat. When it was submitted to the Parliament it was outspokenly there that this law should be passed because the Hungarians in this point of view, in a bigger amount might be out of apply for Hungarian citizenship. This is not pleasant to hear. We are taxpayers. We are not Kosovan Albanians and get the rifles, we have chosen to accept everything in the history, and still want to maintain our identity. We are in the European Union and the boarders do not have Same significance anymore. We never thought of ourselves as a national security issue, we are peaceful people, we are taxpayers who live here together with Slovaks and we have of course our own national identity because of history, but we do not want to change the borders we want to live here. But we have a very tight cultural and political relationship with Hungary, one should accept this, this is how things work. You cannot always just accept what history goes to, but the issue is the responsibility of this. This was the main reason of the outrage and upheaval that came from our side. From a legal point of view every country is free to govern its citizenship issues as it pleases, this is not subject of international law, there are minimum standards in the frames of the Council of Europe. From a legal point of view we accept this however, from a Slovak point of view there are quite a few hypocrisies. Under Slovak law if you apply for another citizenship you lose your Slovak citizenship. But the Same is not true in reverse. So this is illogical. It was not just; the only reason was to hurt us. Course this is not what they said, they said the Slovak government have done an analysis about citizenship around the world and we have decided to structure our citizenship laws like this, we decided to go this way and we wanted to go this way. There is a more blatant contradiction, for example, the Hungarian citizenship law was criticised for being focused entirely on ethnicity, people said this was outrageous, however, this law was passed in 2010 but from 1997 to 2005 Slovakia had an absolutely identical Legislation, in fact it was even more outrageous an even more based on ethnicity. The Hungarian legislation was not actually based on ethnicity, it was based on ancestry and Hungary language use. This was the official formula, of course it was more based on this ethnicity than this. Some 12 or 15,000 Slovaks applied for Slovak citizenship based on this legislation. The first Orbán government raised this with the Slovaks, finally they managed to make a law on these allowances for the Hungarian card, it offered not nationality but allowances for the ethnic and gatherings to come to Hungary and these allowances could be enforced by this ongoing card. It was not an identity card that it was a card which allow for allowances. At that time the political elite noticed what was going on with this card and realise at the Hungarian government mites want to offer Hungarian citizenship to these people and so they abolished their own law for this reason. Just based on this card. Just so that they could be in a position to criticise Hungarian in law. Serbia and Romania offer identical Legislation. Of course they could not criticise for this reason. At that time in 2010 Slovakia did not have this law, only because they got rid of it a few years earlier. Very hypocritical. The perpetrators of this Slovak law have completed their task. The main objective of this counter law was to prevent or threaten the ethnic Hungarians to apply for citizenship, and this is happened. Some 3,000 and 4,000 ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia have applied and acquired Hungarian citizenship. According to the official statistics in Bratislava, only 150 have noted this. The fine is €3300. They wanted this just to threaten the people. I think the Slovakian government have assessed the situation and realised they had reached their goal; the Hungarians cannot apply in big numbers for citizenship and the rest we don't want to make it a deal about it. If they did, they weren't bring back a topic which has been put to bed.

I: Has this limited the potential influence of Hungary in Slovakia?

R: In fact it only has a symbolic effect because the European Union. It has a bigger significance for the Vojvodina Hungarians and the ethnic Hungarians in Romania because the Schengen system which for them is still a problem. That is why here in Slovakia it is in effect prohibited, but this is not the reason why the number is so low because it has only symbolic and no practical relevance benefits for the ones who apply for it. Even those who have taken hunger and citizenship lost their Slovakian citizenship has no real practical consequences. Other than voting issues. This is all, I think. The rest of life is intact, the pensions, the healthcare, the remaining important in issues.