*Information about interviewee:*

*Géza Tokár is a Spokesperson for the Roundtable of Hungarians in Slovakia. The interview was conducted in Budapest, Hungary.*

*R= Respondent – Géza Tokár*

*I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton*

I: Can you please describe the relationship between the Hungarians in Slovakia and the Hungarian state?

R: Discussing the Hungarian state is not a primary concern of most Hungarian Slovakians as most feel mentally committed to Slovakia. The influence of the Hungarian state is not that important. However, the Slovakian state does fear Hungarian involvement. They are particularly worried that there will be an attempt to change the borders and of de-stabilisation attempts. The big question is how loyal these communities are to Hungary? There is a big difference between territory and homeland, and so while they have a connection to Hungary, the territory they are living on is now in Slovakia.

I: How do the Hungarians living in Slovakia perceive the Hungarian state?

R: Most sympathise with Orbán and Fidesz. I would say most of the Hungarians living in Slovakia are right-wing and emphasise with his attempts to reconnect the motherland.

Fidesz are therefore viewed very favourably. The socialist and liberal parties were not popular after the 2004 referendum, which many were disgusted at.

I: How would you describe the relationship between Slovakia and Hungary?

R: Not so friendly, in fact, quite unfriendly in the past. There is a long history of historical grudges. Hungary is seen by Slovakia to be past oppressors. On the Hungarian side, Slovakia is seen as a nuisance. However, now, they are quite aligned. Both are pro-Russia and anti-Western and therefore we can now see them as allies. Hungary sees Slovakia as an ally against Brussels.

I: How did the dual-nationality legislation affect the Hungarian communities in Slovakia?

R: Fidesz and Orbán are pragmatic. The Slovakian countermeasures are perceived very badly by the ethnic Hungarians. Even though most Hungarian Slovakians would gain nothing by taking Hungarian citizenship, and many would not bother, they felt disgusted that Slovakia denied them the choice and opportunity. Now that it is illegal to take Hungarian citizenship, we can see that the engagement polices of Hungary within Slovakia are the least intensive. It is a side effect of these policies that now they are unable to gain voters from Slovakia, so the incentive is not there for them to invest politically and economically as much in the region as elsewhere. There is no direct political capital Fidesz and Orbán can get at, so they are not generously supported. For the Slovakians there was no real economic advantage to take this passport, so they did not take it. For some there maybe would be emotional reasons to take it. So as it stands, these communities are hard to mobiles and Fidesz knows it. For many of these people the only economic benefit would be the discounts they get as Hungarians on museum visits etc. but they have this already from the ethnic identity cards that were issued previously. The Slovakian counter legislation no doubt affected the numbers of ethnic Hungarians taking up Hungarian citizenship. However, it was not the sole reason for the lack of interest. There is a lack of material benefits this passport brings. Slovakia is in the EU too, and salaries here are slightly higher than in Hungary. Now that it is illegal to take Hungarian citizenship, we can see that the engagement policies of Hungary within Slovakia are the least intensive. It is a side effect of these policies that now they are unable to gain voters from Slovakia the incentive is not there for them to invest politically and economically as much in the region as elsewhere. There is no direct political capital Fidesz and Orbán can get at, so they are not generously supported

I: I understand that there is to be an economic development programme from the Hungarian state within Slovakia?

R: Yes, but I am sceptical of its use. I doubt it will be systematic and will probably involve some clientelism aiming to strengthen ties with those loyal to Fidesz. There are regions of Slovakia that are undeveloped, but this programme will probably operate on an ad hoc level because much of Slovak is more developed then Hungary

I: What are the priorities for the Hungarian communities living in Slovakia?

R: To implement strict legislation for Hungarian language use in official offices. To have greater control over schools and education and economically to address some underdevelopment in the regions where these communities live. The Hungarian state contributes huge funding to education in these regions. Approximately 2 billion Forints.

I: Do these communities have any autonomy aspirations?

R: Some regions want bigger competences. The current political structure was implemented in Slovakia in order to stop municipalities with Hungarian majorities from gaining political autonym. The VUCs therefore do not reflect the demographics of Slovakia and it is constructed unfairly. The 5% minimum threshold for parliamentary representation will always hold back ethnic Hungarians but I cannot see this changing to the detriment of Hungarians in Slovakia. There is fair representation at a municipality level but not at VUC level

I: What are the biggest issues facing these communities in Slovakia?

R: Language use is important. There is a tendency to send Slovaks in the public sector to these regions, particularly a tendency of the Slovakian railway in some sort of controlled population change. In Slovakia there is no punishment if the public offices are not able to speak the minority languages, even if it is in the legislation

I: To what extent does the Hungarian state have political influence within Slovakia?

R: Within the MOST-HID party there is minimal influence. Maybe this will strengthen in the future as both parties are pragmatic. Within SMK there is a strong connection between Fidesz but how strong is this in reality? We don’t know. This party would fail without direct financial support from the Hungarian state, no doubt. The SMK and Fidesz voters are very similar

I: Why do you think the Hungarian state wants to engage with these populations?

R: Ultimately, I think they feel responsible for them

I: What do you think the next step is for Hungary?

R: In 2006 there was a romantic vision of patriotically politically unifying the nation – a goal which they now have achieved through legislation. I believe there is no big vision or goal, but policies may become more sophisticated. They see the Hungarian community as a political tool to gain political control and they use it very well. Orbán being classified as right-wing is misleading. However he is a populist and he transform political institutions to result in maximum political output and political profit – this will continue.

I: Do you believe the Hungarian state desires a territorial reunification?

R: The desire has always been there. The real question for these regions that supposedly hope to have autonomy is – what would they actually do with it? The concept of autonomy is once again a rhetorical tool to supposedly fix problems. Likewise the counter measures introduced by Slovakia against Hungarian legislation were implemented just before a Slovakian national election and can be seen as a tool to make the government appear strong and decisive.