*Information about interviewee:*

*Balázs Orbán is a senior advisor to the Hungarian government and a Foundation Director of Research at the Századvég School of Politics. The Interview was conducted Budapest, Hungary.*

*R= Respondent – Balázs Orbán*

*I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton*

I: Please can you tell me a little about your organisation?

R: We are a centre-right think tank, who since 2010 are the official advisors to the government. We conduct opinion polls, have a politics school, publication house etc.

Since 2015 we have become increasingly single issue – mainly on migration and the irregular migration crisis we currently face in Hungary. The Hungarian government position about the migration of the Hungarians is that although migration is natural, and the number of Hungarians leaving to Western Europe is decreasing, ultimately, we want to keep Hungarians living here and in the neighbouring territories with large ethnic Hungarian communities. In some ways this migration to the West is beneficial for educated Hungarians as many returns with good experiences, and they send money back etc. The number of Hungarians emigrating as stopped since 2004 but then increased in 2004, 2008 and 2011 as Austria and Germany liberalised their labour markets. This trend is fortunately slowing. The number of young people moving is slowing.

I: What is the strategic goal of the Hungarian state vis-à-vis migration?

R: The single most important strategic goal of this current government is to have Hungarian communities living in the territories in the Carpathian basin. It is not much use to us to have a Hungarian diaspora in London, but in Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Ukraine – this is extremely important. The most important.

I: Why?

R: Because of history. Hungary has always ruled the Carpathian basin and are the most dominant culture there. We want to re-gain this power that we used to have to show that we are a strong country. For this we need Hungarians living in these states and Hungary should organise the lives of the people in our former Kingdom’s territory, as has always been the case. Without the Hungarians, there is no legitimacy to have a say in this process.

Although the most logical workforce to help solve Hungary’s need is the ethnic Hungarian community living in these regions, this is not what we want. We want to them to stay there.

At the moment the problem is that for many, Hungary is not attractive for them as a destination, although then the Ukrainians and Serbian Hungarians.

I: What is the goal of this?

R: In 2010 we managed to achieve a political unification of the nation with voting rights and a definite cultural connection. But I am sure you understand. Engaging with our community requires more than just folk dancing. It is not easy to focus on cultural issues when you are a minority. Therefore we need to create a hub or area where it is trendy to stay. It needs to make sense on three fronts: economically it needs to be beneficial, as well as politically and culturally.

I: Where is the biggest priority for Hungary?

R: In Ukraine and Serbia we are financing economic development programmes that attempt to stabilise these regions, but the situation is very bad in Ukraine. We have got to a point where the Hungarian government is directly subsidising the salaries of nurses, teachers, doctors, even public officials! These people have more interaction with Hungary than they do with Ukraine!

I: So Hungary is performing state functions in Ukraine?

R: Yes. Because what would happen if we didn’t? The people would just move! They would leave the area and then it would be bad for everyone. It is controversial with Ukraine, especially after Crimea and Donbas but ultimately, they have no choice.

I: Why does Hungary want to have a population in these regions?

R: For two reasons. We want to increase the Hungarian influence in the region. To create job opportunities for our Hungarian communities there.

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

R: Very good. In fact, when the migrant crisis was at its peak and we had to build a fence between Hungary and Serbia. This was very negative for the Serbians, but they said no negative words.

I: What is the relationship between Hungary and the VMS?

R: Not much to say really, they have our support and they are in power

I: What is the relationship like between Hungary and the political parties in Slovakia?

R: It is the position of the government that we only want to cooperate with political parties who are 100% Hungarian. The fact is that MOST-HID is not completely Hungarian, so our relationship with them is not good. We support the right-wing political party there (SMK) but the political representation of Hungarians there is too slow. There are signs of assimilation. We defend the pure Hungarian interest. In Romania we had a similar policy, although initially we wanted to not support the socialist parties and so we supported the smaller right-wing parties. However, this policy is changed. We realised that not supporting the 100% Hungarian socialist party meant that our position in Romania was weakened. So now our position has changed. We will support which ever Hungarian party in the territories have the best opportunity to be elected in their respective governments.

I: Does Hungary support territorial ambitions of these regions?

R: Well it is always a topic. Especially in Romania. In Transylvania we would welcome some regional autonomy – which is being promoted by Romanian Transylvanians and Hungarians, as we may be 6% of the entire population of Romania but in Transylvania, we would be 20% - this would create a better leveraging position from a Hungarian point of view.

Interestingly there is a billboard campaign promoting this as protection against Bucharest, funded for by Romanians.