Information about interviewee:

Kristina Kallis is a member of the political party Eesti 200.Interview conducted in Tallinn, Estonia.

R= Respondent – Kristina Kallis

I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton

I: If we focus on the Russians that are staying in Estonia, correct me if I am wrong, but you are campaigning against assimilation policies?

R: Yes.

I: Why is that?

R: Because the assimilation policies are creating conflict. It is not 19th century, it is 21st century. First of all (unclear.) wise, it is not acceptable to pressure the assimilation, on the other side it doesn’t even work. So, maybe it worked with the Russian immigrants from the (unclear.) and France, that was the 19th century. In the early 20’s century they, you know, having all the coercive powers to force the minorities to accommodate and assimilate. But nowadays, it doesn’t happen, because it doesn’t have, because the global power is so much more stronger. And the minorities have a choice if they stick to the alternative or they stick to the state where they live. And this choice is given to them through the communication and information tools and the France transport tools that we have these days. So, in this sense, the state is losing its power to assimilate. But, if it still uses the coercive members, you know taking extreme measures of banning certain cultural rights for the minorities, it can be counter-productive, so, it’s going to create conflict in a society and we have seen it in Yugoslavia, where they experienced it worst, in 2007, how the minority actually used, how the minority was used and how the minority used the exterritorial power to/ I mean, Russia and that side, to/ You know, to fight for its cultural rights. That’s (unclear.) how it was. So, I think it is politically stupid thing to do, try and assimilate and I think value wise, it is not correct and the right thing to do. Because, you know, it stems from, uh, the Estonians want to assimilate from Russian, then they should expect the same thing done to them on a global scale.

I: So, what is the alternative?

R: To assimilation?

I: Yes.

R: Accommodation. I mean, you just need to accommodate the cultural rights and demands of various other groups. So and to roll over the status to look for the balance. To really look for the balance, it is um not to discern the power of one or the other group. I think in Europe, you have this pendulum swinging from one extreme to another extreme in a way that the nationalist socialists under Hitler, just, you know, just forced it to the one extreme, then came this very liberal, post-world war political order towards minority rights and expansion minority rights very extensively that actually pushed this pendulum a little bit on the other side leaving the majority group feel vulnerable. Because the minority group and the majority group is feeling their rights not so protected, it is constantly about the minority rights. What about me? What about my cultural rights and my rights, and that is why you have all of this colloquialism and that is why you have this white wing populist era which actually sticks to this majority right to feel owners of the country and to feel owners of the state and their cultural language and everything, so, I think we have to come back to this very extreme multi-cultural understanding of the minority rights which puts much focus on the minority, which is understandable. Because it has been discriminated for centuries. So, you kind of need to over exaggerate in a way to make your point, but, it has had a setback now, for the majority. So, we kind of need to bring it a little bit back to the majority side as well. That’s why I think in the Estonian case, when you talk about Estonian majority, you really need to look very carefully for this balance. Because, Estonians are very sensitive to any, not just to the minority mission, but the Russian mission. So, you know, Estonian cases are specifically difficult for saying the minority (unclear.) terms, so, which is not the case in many other countries. Maybe, I think, Vulcans are the other region where also the security comes in (unclear.) But not in Finland. I mean, the minority in question is not securitised, so, you not seen as a potential security threat to Finland. So being a minority in Finland is just being a minority. So, in this case, it is very difficult, uh, politically to be solved. Because, it security question and politics, um, you know, you need to be very careful how you address and you discuss this issue with the minority and with the majority. Because, it is very quickly evolving into um, severe conflict, actually, can see how it is actually very heavily into society.

I: Some people I have met on my trip so far have argued for greater autonomy for the Russian speaking community. What are your thoughts on that?

R: I don’t know what it means. How greater can it be? And it already is. What else do they want? They have every aspect. If you think about the concept of cultural autonomy in Europe, as it is known, in every aspect of it, linguistic, religion, this information access, it’s all available. So, I agree with Yana Toom who at some point said I don’t get the point of cultural autonomy, we already have everything that cultural autonomy law would otherwise provide us. So, I don’t see the point of this.

I: It was actually Yana Toom who announced, who argued for it.

R: What extra does she need?

I: She was arguing that there was a linguistic oppression from the Estonian state, of the Russian speaking community. She opposes the need to achieve a level of Estonian. She gave the example of a taxi driver who wanted to learn Estonian to a B-1 level…

R: Yes? And it is beyond what? Like, normal, like taxi drivers who speak Estonian isn’t it? A very strange argument, I don’t get it. The taxi driver in Russia doesn’t have to speak Russian or what is it? I mean, I don’t understand it. It is like ok if it only speaks the, I don’t know, Armenian, because he is from (unclear.) I don’t get it? It is very, uh/ The current political elite on the (unclear.) Russian side equally, is so uh, stuck in this fight, they only see it as a win, lose game, so, if we put more Estonian language into Russian schools, then the Russians lose. Which is not the case at all, you don’t/ If you put more Estonian into Russian school, you add to something what already exists. So, nobody is taking anything away from what exists already. So, they have already Russian education, they have mother tongue, they have literature, they have everything, they have information in Russia, locally and nationally, you just need to add something more there so that they more multilingual, because the Estonian language doesn’t exist in Russian schools these days. And at the same time, the Estonian community is that when you bring this Russian, you accept the existence of the Russian language as a language. Spoken publicly and actually defector existing understanding, you are not taking anything away from Estonian language. So, and this is such a problem to me, because/ Maybe because of my personal life story that I grew up bilingual. And that I understand that actually learning both languages and both cultures is possible. I don’t understand those people that are mono cultural and mono lingual and that they feel that if anybody else adds more to that, then everything else is taken away. Which is not correct, so, it is not about Russian or Estonian, it is about Russian AND Estonian. So, (unclear.) has the same problems, she doesn’t understand that adding/ The problem we have right now is the Russian goal is such, is excluded socially, politically, culturally, linguistically (unclear.) inside Estonia. They are not integrated at all. And this is a problem to me, this is a problem as a result of also Western understanding of minority rights, that’s exactly what I said, you need to give to minorities to everything, you know (unclear.) that results in their (unclear.) So, they are inside their little bubble which has happened in other Western, European countries as well, and that’s very bad for the society. That’s very bad. And that’s what we have in Estonia. We have always had it, we inherited it from the Soviet times and we haven’t been dealing with it at all. Because European pressures on us saying don’t touch the Russians, they have the right to be in their bubble. I don’t think they have the right to be in their bubble, nobody has the right to be in their bubble. Everybody has to be socially integrated, no matter what language you speak, this is your State, this is your citizenship, you are a taxpayer, you are responsible to participate, this part of democracy, this being a citizen and being a part of your responsibility. It is not a right, you just have to. Because otherwise, I can just take away your citizenship. Why are you here for, what is the State for? So, this is allowing Russians to be on their own, I don’t think this is the right they have.

I: So would you advocate for Russian to be an official language?

R: No, no ways. No, no. I don’t see a point in this. Again, what will be achieved by this? Because, then I am sure, that Estonian will lose. Russian language is a big, international language of communication. Adding Russian as an official language will be the same as putting English as an official language, then two generations of Estonians will be gone. Because then there will be no need to translate or produce anything in Estonian because there is another official language which is much more widely spoken, um, it is a perfect case with Singapore. Where English is one of the official languages, but English is taking over everything. It is taking over even Chinese. It is taking over entirely other language they have, the Malay language, so, you know, this other language is just kitchen talk, at home and at some primary school. But, everything else is in English, so, to me, it is not about the Russian language, it is about the fact that Estonian State is the only country on earth which has the right to protect the Estonian language. The only one, there is no other country in the world. So, this is the role of the Estonian State. It doesn’t mean that the other languages can’t exist in its territory. It doesn’t mean that. It doesn’t mean that Russian can’t be spoken publicly or that information cannot be provided in Russian or that education cannot be provided in Russian school, fine to me. But, the official language of communication between State and its citizens, maybe also the language of communication between citizens to me should be Estonian, because it is a Estonian country. Because Estonian law says very simple, uh, the other language is not banned from this territory, but the main principle of the law is that every person on this territory, which is a border of Estonia has the right to be served and to get information in Estonian language. That is it. He doesn’t have the right to do it in Russian, he can, and there is a possibility to do it, but there is, and I have the right to be served in Estonian language, he can’t be served in Estonian language anywhere else in the world. That is the whole logic.

I: And, therefore, I am assuming that you will be against dual citizenship?

R: No, I am not against dual citizenship. No.

I: Why would you be in favour of allowing dual citizenship?

R: It is kind of a consequence of the laws of 30 years of development in Estonia because of/ Dual citizenship concerns two categories of people in Estonia. Russian Federation citizens who live in Estonia, which is around 100 000 people and Estonian citizens which live abroad which is another 100 000 people. So, it concerns about 200 000 people. Ok, among Russian citizens, not everyone is eligible for dual citizenship, because not everyone was born dual citizen, uh, it only applies to those who were by birth. I mean, my principle is not dual citizenship to everybody, but dual citizenship to those who were born with dual passport. So, if you are a grown-up person and you didn’t decide to change your citizenship, then I don’t think it is necessary to keep the other one, because this is a conscious decision of choice, but, if you are a child, ah, born to parents or born to a country and parents that are from different cultures and countries, then this is a dual citizenship that I will support.

I: I met with someone from the Minister of the Interior this morning, and she framed dual citizenship as a security threat to Estonia. I am assuming that you wouldn’t agree with her on this point?

R: No, I think it is a security threat, right, because Russia has proved it uses citizenship as a means to fulfil their political goals. But, I am putting an argument of the sociologist here and not of international relations (unclear.) sociologist, my argument is if a child is born with dual citizenship on the territory of Estonia, goes to school, lives life in Estonia, then, uh, what is the probability of him being anti-Estonian if he has Estonian passport or if he doesn’t have Estonian passport? So, I argued that providing the right for this kid to have Estonian passport integrates this kid into society and that actually eliminates, not eliminate, but lowers the ability of Russia to use this kid. You have to look at both sides, yes, Russia from outside would argue internationally that this kid is my citizen, I am going to protect him, but, this kid, if we do it right is also an Estonian citizen, then we have to participate in politics and blah, blah, blah, then this kid would have to say I don’t care, yes, I have this passport, because my parents were from Russia (unclear.) and this is a country that I rather protect. Of course I understand there is a risk, there is always a risk, because we never know how this kid turns out. And whether Russia has a big influence on it or Estonia does. Unless Estonian language and citizenship falls into it (unclear.) reality. That is quite problematic. I agree, but, I think by not giving them citizenship, we actually push ourselves, those kids to be in the hands of Russia.

I: Do you think geography is important in this regard, in that there is a chance that if greater cultural autonomy be given to the Russian speaking community in Eastern Estonia, then it could be seen as a potential precursor for literal autonomy, territorial autonomy and //

R: Ah, but cultural autonomy, in Estonian case, at least it is not territorial, so, uh, for in this instance, uh, territorially, could not be, ah, used, if you know what I mean, so, they cannot say this is our cultural autonomy territory, there is no such thing. So, there is a thing that is Russian cultural all over Estonia that has a right to maintain certain cultural institutions. Such schools, such as churches, or cultural centres, they can do it today. I don’t see a reason why they would to establish cultural autonomy? They have schools, they have/ Yeah, ok, the point is they would have more political control over the institutions. Yes, maybe, that will be a security threat if control would be given over to the communities, this is what we have seen with the Islam in the West. So, since this Islamic communities are community controlled, they also have political control over those communities/ I mean, whatever the leaders and the State doesn’t. So, it is a security risk, yes. It is a security risk and it is a social cohesion risk.

I: Is there a tangible relationship between the Russian Federation and the Russians in Estonia?

R: Russian Federation as a political system? No. So, there is very little, if any, that’s what I have seen in my research between Putin administration, Minister of Foreign Affairs (unclear.) State and Regime and with Russians here. It is very weak, it is very unorganised, I would say, basically non-existent. So, there are some organisation called Compatriot Congress or something, but, it is not really working, it is very local and Russians don’t know it and they don’t participate in it, but the relationship between Russian cultural and linguistic information space and the Russians here, it is quite strong.

I: Is there a way to mitigate that strength?

R: Mitigate by Estonian state?

I: Yes.

R: No.

I: Ok.

R: No, I don’t see it, how? By banning Russian commercial tv channels? It doesn’t work, because internet is free. I mean, this is small Estonian, this is what (unclear.) tried to do, it doesn’t work, it is completely inefficient (unclear.) because minority would feel they are not trusted, uh, it would have zero result, it actually has negative results, so, I don’t think Estonian state could interfere into this Russian cultural space and the information space with the Russians here. What they can do, is to work with its Russians here and the Estonians in cultural and information space. Because that is what I see is normal. It is um, it is the battle, young people are normal, they are moving in and out of both areas, of both cultural spheres, they are operating in both, very skilfully, because they are bi-cultural, bi-national, bi-identity, everything. So the final, if you put the security google zone, and look at this, then you might get worried, because you think, oh shit, those kids are getting information from Russian language sources, we don’t know who is behind those Russian language sources, is it Russian state or not, you know, who is producing this, but, uh, I think the political question for Estonia is how smart we are to keep those kids, you know, leaning towards our information space and our cultural space. This is the key question and it is very, not very dangerous, but very balancing act, so, if you make, as I said, a stronger simulative move, that might push them actually more towards, uh, Russian, this, you know, being angry with Estonia and moving towards. So, I say, Estonia has to be smart, careful, like, a fox, really knowing how to operate, because you can’t do it with force. You are not big enough, you are actually very small compared to the competitor you are fighting with. The competitor is huge. It is attractive, it is a huge multibillion-dollar employment industry, um, it is a huge propaganda machine, there is a very power wise, a resource wise, it is a very little that Estonia can offer in return. But, that is why you have to be smart. So, in this instance, Estonia economic success story and Estonia digital success story has been those triggers that has leaned young Russians more towards Estonian culture, they want to be part of this success story. They want to be proud of being part of the country that is considered as successful other than being part of the country that is considered to be a failure. So, what I am worried now is that this story is not going forward anymore.

I: So, the focus on integration is going to be post assimilation?

R: Yes. For attraction, you know, it is a soft power question, right? The power of attraction. This is what Estonia needs to develop for towards the young Russians Estonia.

I: No, of course, sorry, go on. For one thing that has surprised me so far on my trip, is that the Russians that arrived say 40 years ago, 30 years ago, are still considered to be immigrants, by the state and the generations that followed from those arrivals. Would you agree with this? They should still to be considered immigrants?

R: Hmm, it not so simple question. Hmm, ok, some of them already third generation. Many of them still first generation, there’s lots of those people who came themselves, who are not born here, I mean, 50 percent of this society is not born in this country but have one of the highest percentages than New York. So, we have the foreign born of the population (unclear.) like for example, Sweden, I think we are the third. So, in this incident, we have a big group of people who are not born here, and then the descendants, the problem with them, with the second generation of um, so called Russian immigrants is that they also were not born Estonia. They were born in Soviet Union, yes, Estonian administered territory, but for their own minds, they were born in USSR. And then they suddenly became part of Estonian state (unclear.) So, it is a mental identity question for those Russians, I think, most of those Russians have consciously been living in Estonia since 1991. Ah and that is not very long time. That’s for 30 years. So, maybe not for those Russians who are somewhere else in Estonia, but those Russians who came in Soviet times. So, they didn’t really know what it is, they didn’t have a contact with this, they didn’t have historical memory of indigenous population, so, they have been doing this learning process of doing this integration for 30 years now. And 30 years is not really a long time. And we have only first generation of Russians who were born in Estonia, not in Soviet Union. So, this is the first generation that is now entering the market and entering politics. So, in this (unclear.) community because you cannot argue entirely correctly that in 1940’s that this was Estonia when they came. They didn’t come to Estonia. They came to Soviet/ They moved inside the Soviet Union. So, they became foreigners in 1991.

I: And correct me if I am wrong, but you have argued against the grey passport, the alien passport, is that correct?

R: Hmm, I think it is time to make a political decision here. Yes. Hmm, hmm.

I: Ok, so, that individual would be to take Estonian citizenship or learn and begin the naturalization process or to leave?

R: No, they don’t have to leave. No, no, no, nobody has to leave. It’s that grey passport was/ I am not against the decision of 1993 to issue those grey passports, because I think considering the time when this was all happening, this was a right decision. You know the whole story of how it happened, yeah?

I: Yes.

R: Because not many Russians were eligible to get Estonian citizenship, although their Soviet Union passports gets expired, because their country didn’t exist. So, there was a huge question of a few thousand people that didn’t have identity documents. No citizenship, nothing. So, Estonia said ok, you are not passing the language exam because you are not capable, you do not want Russian citizenship, you don’t want anything else, so, we are issuing you temporarily this document of something. Permanent resident of Estonia without defined citizenship. But that was meant to be a temporary document. So, you know, people would either choose a Russian passport to leave Estonia or choose Estonian passport and stay, so, you know, they were given time to just think. Because from 1991 to 1993 was a very short time. Most people could not just disorient themselves. Like, what is going on? But what has happened with this passport debate, it has become an institution on its own. So, Russians are choosing for this passport, not because they are forced to have it but there is no other option, but that is voluntary choice. Because this passport now as it turns out gives more rights than any other passport, in terms of travelling. So there is no passport now is more travel document rather than identity document. So, people are choosing this and I think this is wrong. So, I don’t agree with the fact that something that was considered temporary has become permanent and actually preferable choice for the minority. So, I think we should prohibit it in a sense of saying sorry guys, this was temporary, now, 30 years has passed. So, we are closing it and you can’t apply for this anymore and now you have to make a choice. That is it.

I: Is that not a danger that if that occurs, then Russia might begin to another way of passportization?

R: Yes, like what they do in the Ukraine now, right?

I: Yes.

R: Yes. Well then Estonia can do its own passport. That’s my argument that um, Estonia should um, first of all, hmm, I think the first step is to say that any kid that is born in Estonia, to state that this person is automatic citizen. If the parents do not want Estonian citizenship, they have the right to refuse, but then they have to come tell which citizenship the kid is. Based on the current Russian Federation, this kid cannot be a Russian citizen because if he is not born in Russia and so on and so on and so. And usually the parents are already second or third generation people in Estonia, so, they have not themselves been citizens of the Soviet Union, more so, it is kind of a complicated for those parents to apply for their Russian citizenships, so they want to rather stick to their Estonian passports. So, basically, we don’t issue grey passports anymore to new-borns, um, also not to underage kids, so, anybody who is under 18 is Estonian citizen by default, and if parents choose something else, then, you know, that is their choice, but, not the grey passport. Then the grownups, for those who are adults, and legally responsible for their own choices, I think we should do this one year amnesty window, where we say that all other requirements, the Estonian language requirements, um, cancelled for one year, considering all the other requirements you meet, you know, you are not criminally/ You don’t have active criminal charges, you have lived in Estonia for a permanent basis, for a long time, blah blah blah. So, you come, you give your oath, you get the Estonian passport. Everything else is valid except the language tests. So, you have to prove the language skills. This is one-year window, people can just come and apply. This is one-year window (unclear.) amnesty for the illegal migrants, you know, like once you are here, I know that you are not going to (unclear.) here is this one-year window for you to come legalise yourself without any fare or something. So, it is the same that we should do with the grey passport, give the one year and then those who are left, who didn’t want to, who didn’t use this opportunity properly but then that is their decision. But they cannot continue giving this passport to the kids. So, it is basically, this passport should die with their generation. Now they die and that is the passport dies. Because the kid doesn’t have the grey passport anymore because the parent cannot give it to them.

I: Is there a real thing in Estonia of similar occurrences happening here and in Ukraine?

R: In Ukraine?

I: Yes, and what happened in Georgia?

R: Hmm. I think there is, but, not to the same extent. I think what happened in Georgia and Ukraine, which is um, military intervention, by Russia, this is not possible, you know? So, Russia is capable of destabilising the political situation internally, but it is not capable of military intervention either, so, it is not possible. So, in this sense it is a little different situation here in Estonia. We have a strongly protected border. We are a NATO member so there is a huge load of geopolitical circumstances. Plus, I think, I might not be right, but, I think for Putin, it is also much more difficult to justify military intervention in Estonia. I think the Russian electorate would not really entirely understand, uh, you know, fighting for Ukraine is a very emotional thing for the Russians and this was very easy for Putin to explain why they are doing this is because, you know, our brothers and were always one country anyway. But here in Estonia this is not relevant, so Russians would think, ok that is imperialistic, or expansionist. So, I think will be hard for Putin to explain why he is doing this.

I: Some of the rhetoric appears to disregard territorial borders on grounds that they are defending their own people. But I put this to Yana Toom she didn’t know that she was a compatriot or not, do you believe her?

R: She is an interesting case in the way that um, I think she is a little bit, what is the English expression, she has cornered herself. Because, I don’t think she feels herself Russian in terms of belonging to the Russian Federation. I don’t think so, I think she feels herself very Estonian, this is her country, this is her life, everything here. So, in this sense, if President Putin addresses her calling her my fellow compatriot then I think she feels strange way at the moment. Not really, right? And living in another country, so you are not my President. So, in this sense I understand her, it is confusing, but, at the same time, she has made herself in Estonia into a corner in terms of protecting Russian rights to the extreme that is Estonians also don’t accept her as Estonians. She is not accepted there either of her/ She doesn’t want to be a compatriot but is at the same time not accepted by Estonians, but for Estonians, she is a compatriot. But she kind of voices Putin’s compatriot movement. So, I think she (laughs) has a difficult time with, in a way, and she is the only politician that I think in Estonia has gone through the process of having all of those three citizenships. She was first, after the Soviet Union collapsed, she had a status passport and she switched to the Russian passport, and then eventually she was given an Estonian passport too. She has been going through all those legal challenges in her career.

I: She hasn’t had to renounce Russian citizenship, is that correct, or has she?

R: She has, because of the lack of the dual citizenship rights. She was not born with both citizenships, she lived in Estonia and in turn she had to denounce the Russian one.

I: Do you believe the term compatriot policy, compatriot is fuzzy, do you think this is deliberately fuzzy?

R: Yes, of course. I think it has. The reality for the so called Russians, Russian speakers outside of Russia, are very diverse. It is very diverse but it is not very diverse in the realities we live, but also identities. Because Russia itself is not a nation state. Different from Estonia, which is a different nation state, so, maybe in Estonia has a very clear meaning. So, if you love in Australia and you say you are Estonia, then you know what you are associating yourself with. But, belonging to Russia can mean anything, because it can mean that you are post-Soviet citizen who belongs to this Soviet space, imperial space, or something like that, but, we do not have to necessarily be ethically Russian, um, like Ukrainian, or UAE, sometimes, even Azalides, or (unclear.) sometimes can call themselves, belonging to that, you know, Russian world, space, right? And Russia is also at risk asking them compatriots, because Russia is a legal, ah, what is it, legal owner of the Soviet Union, right? Russia declared itself as a continuation of the Soviet Union, which means that anybody that was a subject of the Soviet Union is automatically a compatriot for Russia. So, yes, I think it is fuzzy exactly for that reason.

I: What tools could the state, the Estonian State have in persuading or attracting the Russians living in Estonia towards the Estonian State as opposed to Russian State?

R: I think it is economy. It is quality of life and freedoms and standard of living, you know, all this, I think it is main importance. Not Estonian culture and language because that is not something that they can associate themselves with the economic success.

I: And it is quite clear that Russia is engaged in an information or as you say, propaganda machine. Is there any way to counter this?

R: Not, directly, no. It is pointless to fight propaganda with counter propaganda. For Estonia, at least, I mean. Because we are so small. It is interesting, can have a huge group shouting at something and you have this little mouse there in the corner saying but that is not correct, nobody hears you. And it is like huge loudspeaker that Russia is using, so (unclear.) What is important is you know, the value that you are taught at school, for the kids, and this is the problem in Estonia actually, because we come in this closed environment in Russian schools, which you are taught that that has to exist because that is how cultural values are transposed from one generation to the other. I mean that is fine, but, also other values, democratic and political values are transposed the same way and if they are different from the majority society’s democratic and political values, then we have a problem. This is exactly the problem again with Islam, in Western countries. There is no problem of having the right to being raised to Islamic tradition, there’s nothing wrong with that, as long as it doesn’t contradict liberal democratic values of freedom, individual freedom and other freedoms, freedom to choose, freedom to say and to speak. (unclear.) made this clear distinction between the minority rights and integration, he said that minority rights can be sustained to the extent that they don’t contradict level of democratic rights and values. As soon as they start contradicting this, I think we are going over the board of destroying society. And the same applies to the Russian schools here. Russian language, Pushkin, history everything is fine, until you don’t use those environments, to do liberal propaganda. Which is actually happening in schools. So, you know, fascists against gay rights, this is all going in Russian schools, so, this is not ok, because this is a value space Estonia, or at least some parts of Estonia would like to protect.

I: How would you describe the relationship between Estonia and Russia presently?

R: I think the relations are kind of, they are not existent, maybe that is why they are good (laughs) You know, I think the analogy of divorce is good, so, you have a divorce of each partner is very angry because none of them was happy with the previous relationship, how it went, so you have a divorce and then you fight over custody and borders and citizens and languages and everything and fight, fight, fight, in addition to this fight between you two, you also have internal fights inside your countries, because Jansen had to fight between all the neighbouring countries about the borders and properties and everything that is the result of imperial collapsed, and at the same time he had to fight internally for staying in power and the same was here, so, it was a complete mess. It was post imperial (unclear.) always a mess. So, now we are 30 years later, so, everything is cooled down, so borders are fixed, and citizenship, yes, we fought it, we never actually agreed on anything, but we kind of left it there and we walked away. So, I have this feeling that both sides have just walked away from this fight, and everyone has gone on with their own lives. So, Russia with its own agenda, which of course Estonia never agrees and says you know, Russia is still a stupid man, Russia says Estonia is still a stupid woman, but at least we don’t have to kind of fight every day. We sort of like everyone has their own life and that is how it is. So, everyone has their own life, and now our President has decided ok, we will pay a visit, let us see how he is doing. Is he doing ok, yes, he is doing ok. The same curiosity from the Putin side, how is Estonia doing, doing ok, but how is kind of nothing special I would say. So, I think that the emotions have cooled down, from the both sides, and that’s it. Maybe that is why the Nicholson said they better than before but it is not that they are good, it just before, horrible (laughing) So, maybe that is the case.

I: And how important is it, I have noticed that it is radically different interpretations from Russia, from Estonia and the other bordering states, about the collapse of the Soviet Union. How important is it for Putin’s ration this difference in (unclear.) historical interpretation exists? Does he frame it as a catastrophe or a tragedy?

R: I think he has been misunderstood in a sense that what he meant that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union is a catastrophe and it was, as I explained to you it was, and uh, for most of the people, expect maybe for the bordering states, life actually went worst, went miserable and there were crime rates, you know, jumped up, poverty rates went through the roof. Lots of new States were incapable of controlling their own territories and Ukraine is still a failed state, it still has not reached the point where it can actually control its own territory and has a control (unclear.) failed state (unclear.) but it is kind of a strange state. Georgia, Armenia, they are all kind of (unclear.) still there to have it properly settled, ok, Georgia is doing much better than it used to. But in 1990’s it was a chaos, a total chaos, so, I think that’s what he meant. He said it was a catastrophe, but for the people that followed, it was catastrophic. It wasn’t suddenly that everything went up, it didn’t, it went well in three or something states, but everyone else was doing horrible.There is no future, nobody knows what is going to happen tomorrow, where there is a State, or no State, who rules, who doesn’t rule, which rule applies, which rule doesn’t apply, where to get food, how much does it cost, you know, it is all a chaos. People in Russia don’t ever want this time back. And I think that is why they are sticking to Putin because at least under him, the Russian State has reached some stability. It doesn’t mean that it is perfect, but, at least, you know what the rules are, what tomorrow brings, kind of thing, some stability. So, I think Putin in this sense has been misunderstood (unclear.) longs back at Soviet Union, he just set some clear rules, relationships and systems in that territory should be established. That’s my interpretation. If I read this statement that you made.

I: Hmm, and what do you think is going to happen in the Ukraine? What is the endgame of the objective?

R: I don’t know. I haven’t actually followed in detail this passport to naturalisation the Russians have now started, I haven’t had time to dig deep in what is actually going on. It is (unclear.) right, for the people’s republic.

I: Last week or the week before they signed an agreement //

R: And the argument was that Ukrainian passports are expiring, I am very confused with the //

I: They were given initially Donetsk passports, Donbas passports were illegitimate other than Russia, and they are now giving Russian passports to those in the Easter Ukraine. Arguing that //

R: But think form the perspective are people right, can they get Ukrainian passports? Or how they can/ If their passports are expiring, let say you know the war has been going on for 5 years now, passport duration is usually 5 to 10 years, so, if your Ukrainian passport is expiring your DUR passport is useless, you can’t travel anywhere in the world with this. Ukrainian passport maybe you don’t want because you are angry with this state or maybe you can’t because there is no Ukrainian institutions in this territory. So, you will have to travel to, you know, across the front line to Ukraine to do it, so, what are the options? So people would otherwise be locked in this, you know, they can’t travel out. So, having Russian passport as an option to travel out on a recognised travel document, this is the same as what happened in Abkhazia right? 1990’s, because the Abkhazia was not recognised internationally by anyone, by having Abkhaz passport, what is this. Can’t get hold of this country. So, taking Russian passport for those people was the only option. Russia is smart in a sense of figuring it out. Saying oh, ok, but this people actually need a passport. And Ukraine is stupid, why not offering some solutions. Because they are angry with those people. Ukraine is angry with those people. It is angry that you are not loyal, you are separatist and I am not giving you a passport, but then making a failure to Russia for this. I think Ukraine should give those passports now. Irrespective of the fact that these people are not maybe loyal to Ukrainian state.

I: The Ukrainian state have followed up with this passport to naturalization by Russia by further prohibiting Russian language in Ukraine.

R: That is exactly what I am saying, it is not helping. At all. In any way. So, you are basically punishing them. They are punished already. They are punished already, they are punished by the fact that they are isolated, they have lost their country that they don’t believe in, they don’t believe in this new country anymore. So, they are punished already, many times. And they know that and they are fighting the situation they in, they are trying to look for the way out. Ad you are punishing them further. It is stupid, I think it is very stupid.

I: Ukraine is the only sub-case I have which the two larger pair cases overlap, because Hungary is also giving out passports in (unclear.) and again Ukraine has followed to by banning Hungarian language institutions. And it seems to be supported by a far-right movement that are targeting ethnic Hungarian institutions //

I: Far right movement, like a //

R: Ukrainian nationalists. What is the name of this organisation in Ukraine? Which is a right-wing organisation that we have?

I: Yeah, can’t remember the name either. But is there a danger that if you try to accommodating, it might force far right movements in Estonia?

R: There is a danger, yes there is a danger of that.

I: How do you combat that?

R: That’s why I also said in election campaign to Russian speaking electorates and that, we are not raising (unclear.) on purpose because we don’t want to give this to the right wing conservatist forces, the tool to mobilise people more. So, I think citizenship issues in Estonia, should be actually decided when there are no elections. The problem in Estonia is the time of elections. So we have elections ending 2 years, next elections are local elections. And then again there is only 2 years window to do something. But it shouldn’t be discussed in election period. Just not the opportunity to use it. But, the Ukraine case, I just start thinking that if I was president of the Ukraine and the situation in Russia is doing passport (unclear.) I would say that these are occupied territories. So, you have occupied our citizens. Ukraine is claiming those citizens and Ukraine is ready to give them passports. We only exclude people who are on the ruling positions in those republics, you know, in their government, or something, you know, so to say collaborators, with the aggressor, so, these people cannot have Ukrainian citizenship, but you know, punishing the regular residents, is stupid, you should actually tell them you are in my territory. This is Ukraine, you are in Ukrainian and we will fight for you till the end of my days and this is the passport you need and please come and take it, I will come and bring it to you. Not by punishing them by saying we prohibit you by using Russian language. So ridiculous.

I: To play devil’s advocate, some of those people are in favour of Russian intervention.

R: Yes sure but Ukraine should put their own on top of it. Not pushing them even more. By saying yes sorry, but not by saying you should actually be locked into this situation. It doesn’t matter what these people actually think. What matters is what you are going to tell them. So, this is politics, right (laughs) This is what I have learned in politics. As a political scientist you keep analysing situations in politics, you don’t analyse, you send out your messages, it doesn’t really mean what actually those people think. You just need to send out your messaging. Have you seen this movie with Tommy about the Brexit?

I: No.

R: No? You have to see it. Because that is exactly what he says. I don’t care about what people in Britain actually think. My point is that British people want to leave the EU, they want it and we have to convince them they want it. And I am going to get into the brains and I am going to do that. So, that is a very good movie.

I: Ok, I will definitely watch that.

R: Exactly and that is what I think the Ukrainian president needs to do (laughter) I am wondering what you are doing with the Hungarian case, because it is similar but not similar. It is a little bit different, right?

I: Yes.

R: I started reading now, it is a 10-year-old book about Transylvania in 2006, 2007 I think. I never read it before, so, I started reading it to see what he has used, what methodology he has applied to explain every day naturalization that is happening in those territories, because I have lived now for 3 years in Narva I am wondering and I am planning also to do some research on Narva. it is useful here to see how he analysed I can use something for Narva from there.

I: Yes. I have done some research in Serbia and Slovakia and Hungarian parts and in Budapest as well. I think the/ Although the agenda is totally different between Russia and Hungary, there are appears to be similar patterns in both Auburn and Putin use very similar rhetoric in find they go beyond the recognised territory modus to say that these are my people and we will look after them. And I don’t really know what the objective is for Auburn other than showing up domestic //

R: I think shoring up domestic support, I think very clearly for Putin it is geopolitical goal, right, so domestic support is not so important in this sense, because I don’t think Russians worry about what the Russians in Germany are doing, they are more worried about the internal things. But, maybe about Ukraine, I think Ukraine is a special case for Russia. But Putin states and Kazakhstan I don’t think they really care.

I: No, they don’t.

R: No. Hungary, yes, I think Orbán is using it for the internal support, mobilising the Hungarians inside and outside, but their historical roots of Hungarian cases are exactly the same. The imperial collapse that followed became the current territory. So, Russia became much smaller than the Soviet Union and Hungary was much smaller than it was before. Hungarian spread. So, in this case this constant narrative of greater Hungary right, it used to be there in the history is very good technological tool for Orbán to use to boost national pride and you now, if people are angry and building the economy and keep boosting/ But we used to be great, we used to be a big nation and we used to ruling the nation and that’s why we need to continue protecting our inheritance in the region. Hungarians who are left behind and all this. So, I think that’s kind of the simple political thinking how the politician thinks.