Information about interviewee:

Aleksandr Kuzmin is a researcher for the NGO, Russian Union and also advises Latvian MEP, Tatjana Ždanoka. Interview conducted in Riga, Latvia

R= Respondent – Aleksandr Kuzmin

I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton

I: What is the perspective of your party and NGO on the current situation in Latvia with regards to citizenship legislation?

R: The biggest issue we have is the issue of statelessness. This is a human rights issue that the Latvian government are ignoring as they are positioning themselves to privilege ethnic Latvians only. For them, the state of Latvia only belongs to ethnic Latvians. They are quite obviously attempting to create a nation-state based on ethnicity.

I: Why would the Russian Federation be keen to take advantage of the sentiment of exclusion expressed by the Russian population in Latvia?

R: I think they [are trying to show the West, show NATO, show Latvia that there are clear hypocrisies in western democratic countries with regards to human rights abuses. The West attack Russia for being anti-democratic and for their supposed human rights violations, yet they are fine with the abuses taking place within the European Union. This is why they are keen to support the Russian population here in Latvia

I: It is clear that the Latvian legislation on dual citizenship, tolerates dual citizenship within the country for most, but Russia. It has been framed as threat to national security. What do you think of this argument?

R: What is a threat to national security is the continued exclusion of such a large population within Latvia from multiple political and societal realms.

I: You work for both an NGO and a political party. How do you split your time?

R: I manage to work for both without a problem. Some of my work is voluntary.

I: How is your NGO funded?

R: We receive some funding from the Latvian state, but also, we receive some funding from the Russian Federation.

I: Your political party has previously been an outspoken supporter of the Russian annexation of Crimea and recently of the Russian activities in Donbas. Can you comment on this?

R: We support nations expressing their desire for self-determination, we have done so with our support for our Basque friends and our friends in Catalonia. We also work on an institutional level with the Europe Free Alliance party which also has some Hungarian members.

I: Some have argued that the non-citizen status is actually a preferential status for many ethnic Russians, as they are able to travel freely to the Russian Federation. What do you think of this argument?

R: It is true that for some, this is a benefit. But I believe it is the only benefit for an otherwise oppressed community.

I: How has Russia’s ‘Compatriot Policy’ affected the situation in Latvia?

R: I do not believe it has. This has been in place since 1998 but in Latvia, the citizenship policy has only changed once. In 2013.

I: I have been informed by the Ministry of the Interior that they suspect the number of Russian citizens within Latvia is significantly less than the official numbers suggest. What are your thoughts on this?

R: It is true that there are some cases of Latvian citizens, who have been found to have Russian citizenship, but these are isolated cases and it is not a mass phenomenon.