*Information about interviewee:*

*Árpád János Potápi is Secretary of State for National Policy. The Interview was conducted via email correspondence.*

*R= Respondent – Árpád János Potápi*

*I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton*

I: Why does the Hungarian state feel it important to engage with the ethnic Hungarian communities in the neighbouring territories?

R: As a consequence of the so-called Peace Treaty of Trianon – which was concluded at the end of World War I (1914–1918) on the 4th of June 1920 in Versailles, in the big Trianon Palace near Paris – Hungary lost two thirds of its former territory, leaving one third of its population, three million two hundred thousand people of Hungarian origin stranded outside its borders. The Treaty deprived Hungary of about sixty percent of its national wealth and relegated the country from the status of a medium-sized regional power to that of a small country. Due to this treaty and several other processes which took place in the 20th century, today one-third of the Hungarian population lives beyond the country’s borders. Hungary bears responsibility for these communities and has a state framework necessary for operating this policy. Hungary’s Constitution, the Fundamental Law of Hungary declares the unity of the Hungarian nation. It states that: “Bearing in mind that there is one single Hungarian nation that belongs together, Hungary shall bear responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living beyond its borders, and shall facilitate the survival and development of their communities; it shall support their efforts to preserve their Hungarian identity, the assertion of their individual and collective rights, the establishment of their community self-governments, and their prosperity in their native lands, and shall promote their cooperation with each other and with Hungary.” Since April 2010 - the establishment of Viktor Orbán’s second government - sweeping reforms have been made within the policy for Hungarian communities abroad. In 2010, the Hungarian National Assembly adopted the Act on the Testimony for National Cohesion. It is the basic principle of the policy for Hungarian communities abroad. The Act states the following: ‘The Hungarian National Assembly declares that all members and communities of the Hungarian nation, subjected to the jurisdiction of other states, belong to the single Hungarian nation whose cross-border cohesion is a reality and, at the same time, a defining element of the personal and collective identity of Hungarians.’

I: What are the priorities with regards to this engagement policy?

R: In November 2011, the Hungarian Standing Conference - which consists of the Hungarian Government, Hungarian parliamentary parties, Hungarian political parties abroad, and the representatives of Hungarians living in the diaspora - jointly adopted the document entitled Policy for Hungarian Communities Abroad – The Strategic Framework for Hungarian Communities Abroad. This is the first document to draw together the objectives of those active in policy for Hungarian communities abroad, and it serves as a comprehensive basis for guiding the future of those communities. This document outlines the main priorities with regard to our engagement policy. Concerning Hungarian communities abroad, Hungary’s main goal is to help Hungarians communities abroad prosper in their new homeland while preserving their Hungarian language and identity. Our primary objective is to realize these communities’ prosperity in four main fields: population growth (communities experiencing population growth are characterized by an increasing number of members, a decreasing tendency for assimilation, and higher quality of life), intellectual growth (communities experiencing intellectual growth have strong national identity, community members acknowledge community norms as their own, possess competitive knowledge, and preserve and develop the communities’ culture), economic growth (Communities experiencing economic growth are characterized by coordinated development, which includes efficient utilization of opportunities and cross-border cooperation, as well as coordination of clusters) and growth of rights (Communities experiencing legal growth achieve the enhancement of their rights, exercise them in a confident manner, and protect and extend them, if required).

The full text of our strategic document can be reached via the following link:

<http://www.nemzetiregiszter.hu/download/b/12/10000/policy_2013.pdf>

I: How do you see these policies developing in the future?

R: Since 2010, we have paid more and more attention to Hungarian communities abroad. We help Hungarians living outside the kin-state in almost every field of life: we ensure considerable financial support for these communities (we help them maintain and operate their educational and cultural institutions, Hungarian churches and scouts abroad, different associations, programs and initiatives which serve the permanence of Hungarian identity, Hungarian culture and traditions). In recent years, the Hungarian Government has started to pay increased attention to the economic strengthening of Hungarian communities in the Carpathian Basin and launched large-scale economic development programs in order to boost Hungarian economic life in these regions. Out firm intention is to continue these aims and guidelines in the future as well.

I: Does the Hungarian state support any aspirations of autonomy for these communities? If so, to what extent?

R: We believe that autonomy is an essential tool which can contribute to Hungarian communities’ prosperity in their homeland. There are several examples of existing forms of autonomy in Europe (South Tyrol, Åland Islands) which are functioning well. Hungarian communities abroad which have aspirations for autonomy are not demanding anything extraordinary or something that is unprecedented in Europe. We believe that every community should decide what form of autonomy (cultural, territorial etc.) is good for its members, and the kin-state – Hungary – should support these ideas and aspirations.

I: How would you describe the relationship between the Hungarian state and the political parties representing the Hungarian communities in the neighboring territories?

R: Hungarian political parties which represent Hungarian communities abroad are Hungary’s strategic partners. We believe that the enforcement of national minorities’ rights is of utmost importance. The success and prosperity of Hungarian communities abroad depends greatly on their political strength in the concerned country. Therefore, the Hungarian Government maintains strong ties with these parties and supports them. Such parties include the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ), the Party of the Hungarian Community (MKP) in Slovakia, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (VMSZ) in Serbia, the Cultural Association of Hungarians in Transcarpathia (KMKSZ) in Ukraine, to mention only a few. Hungarian parties abroad are also members of the so-called Hungarian Standing Conference (MÁÉRT). The MÁÉRT was convened by the Hungarian Prime Minister on 5 November 2010 to serve as an institutionalized forum for Hungarians living in the kin-state and Hungarian communities living outside Hungary. The members of the Hungarian Standing Conference include organizations and parties of Hungarians living abroad, the Hungarian Government, Hungarian parliamentary parties and representatives of Hungarian diaspora organizations. The aim of the MÁÉRT is to harmonize the joint issues of the Hungarian nation within the framework of an institutionalized forum. The MÁÉRT holds a plenary session every year and two conferences per year in a committee system.

I: How would you describe the relationship between Fidesz and the political parties representing the Hungarian communities in the neighboring territories?

R: Fidesz – as a current governing party – considers parties representing Hungarian communities and Hungarian interests in the neighboring territories its strategic partners.

I: To what extent does the Hungarian state support these parties?

R: We support them in different forms. We pay particular attention to the regular and continuous strengthening of relations with these parties through meetings and different institutionalized forums, providing them an opportunity to present their situation, main problems and needs.

I: From the perspective of the Hungarian state, what is the ideal situation to be reached for the Hungarian communities in the neighboring territories?

R: Our main goal is to help Hungarian communities living abroad remain and prosper in their new homeland while preserving their Hungarian language, culture and strengthening their ties with Hungary. For the realization of these aims, we provide every possible kind of support for them.

I: The extra-territorial naturalizations of ethnic Hungarians resulted in many leaving these regions for Hungary and other parts of the EU, was this the intention of this policy?

R: In 2010, the Hungarian Parliament approved the amendment of the 1993 Act on Hungarian Citizenship and introduced a simplified naturalization procedure. Its novelty is that there is no need to have a permanent residence in Hungary, and there is no obligation to take a citizenship test. This new regulation entered into force on 1 January 2011 and concerns mainly those who or whose ancestors were deprived of their Hungarian citizenship due to historic reasons. Every non-Hungarian citizen living in the neighboring states, Western Europe or overseas, whose ascendant was a Hungarian citizen or whose descent from Hungary is provable, and so is the person’s Hungarian language knowledge, is eligible for the simplified naturalization. The procedure enables Hungarians to acquire the Hungarian citizenship (besides their original citizenship), no matter where they live in the world, without having to leave their country of residence. With this procedure, our main aim was to unite the Hungarian nation under common law. It was absolutely not an intention of the Hungarian Government to encourage them to leave their homeland. The number of Hungarians leaving their homeland and moving to the EU or other countries has not increased due to this measure. This phenomenon – moving to countries with a higher standard of living – was present long before the introduction of the simplified naturalization procedure.

I: To what extent is Hungarian engagement with the Hungarian communities living abroad related to attracting voters to Fidesz?

R: To no extent. As it is written down in answers 1 and 2, our main goal is to support Hungarian communities abroad. It is not our intention to attract voters and win political advantage from our compatriots living outside the kinstate.