Information about interviewee:

Yaroslav Halas is the Governor of Zakarpattia. Interview conducted in Uzhhorod, Ukraine.

R= Respondent – Yaroslav Halas

I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton

I: Do you agree with the position that dual citizenship can be a threat to national security?

R: Practice shows that you need to go deeper into every situation. In case of Russia, definitely it is a threat. In case of Hungarian citizenship it is not a threat to separatism, or the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

I: Is Orbán's rhetoric about uniting greater Hungary a problem for Ukraine?

R: It is not only Orbán's thinking, it is also Jobbik when it comes to uniting the territories in Slovakia and so on. But this political rhetoric, when we turn to laws, Hungary is a small state inside the EU and NATO and theoretically they do not allow any thinking about changing the borders. The second thing, this is a pretty small country with a small army and their armed forces cannot even be compared to the armed forces of Ukraine by strength. You have to divide political statements and political actions. In Kiev, for example, we also have top politicians that issue pretty debateable statements, which can make quarrels between different nations. But we all know it means nothing, we know we have politicians of this kind in Britain as well.

I: Definitely. It does appear that, however, that Hungary is gaining more and more influence or power in the region. Salaries of teachers and nurses are being subsidised by Hungary. What are your thoughts on this?

R: Those that get this help are mainly ethnic Hungarians. To do something to prevent this would not be right from the Ukrainian side. It would be better for the official support for Zakarpattia to come from Kiev, and it needs this support as it is not a profitable region at this moment. The second point, if you compare the expense, that Ukraine gives the local hospitals and schools and so on, it is incomparably more that what Hungary gives. It is just to grab some attention from the media and points to some problems, but in fact, Ukraine spends much more money. So let it help, its fine. It would be good if Ukraine had the same doctrine and helped ethnic Ukrainians in Transnistria, in Abkhazia and in other regions, because Ukrainians live not only in the wealthy, well off states, but also in poor more troubled states. It is a nice doctrine. For example, Hungary helps in different countries. In Romania the help is much more significant, because there are a million Hungarians. But here Transcarpathia is a multinational region, we have Slovaks, Romanians, Germans, but the help from Hungary is the most significant. You can see this on local television, they have local editorials and the Hungarian one gets the most help.

I: Is there a danger that, by financing one ethnic group at the expense of another, it can create further divisions? In this case, the Hungarians get more wealthy at the expense of other ethnic groups in Transcarpathia?

R: If you compare different ethnic minorities or ethnic groups, who are the wealthiest here, it is definitely not the Hungarians, it is the Romanians. Who do not have any help from the Romanian state, but their villages are posh. They are have some villas, which are not even in Britain a common thing, because they move abroad for work, and come back and invest in houses. This definitely won't be a game changer, because the level of help from the Hungarian state is even less than a thousand dollars a year, they also give creditors for tractors and greenhouses and so on, but this is not to the level that can change your life drastically. I want to give one example about the dangerousness of the passports given out, since the war started, 97 people from Zakarpattia have died in the conflict, among them there are 12 Hungarians. This is larger than the percentage of Hungarians here. 3 of them had dual citizenship, which was uncovered after their death. This is irrelevant to their patriotism to what the served and what they gave their country. We should not forgot that those who received these Hungarian passports are also ethnic Ukrainians and Roma people. They do not do this to vote for Orbán as some people do, they do this to get better prospects for their work and to move to another country. I personally know people who are ethnically Ukrainian, who got Hungarian passports, without knowing the language, they just paid a bribe, it was easier. Now it is also possible. Now they are in Britain working there. I understand their position, as this region, receives reductions from the budget and its not so easy to make a living here.

I: From the individual's perspective, I can understand that having two passports is beneficial, especially for those who want to work in Europe. But from the state, does it cause any problems, for example with emigration, this large-scale naturalisation practices?

R: This is a problem, but it is not one you can stop. If you look at Hungary, they have a bigger problem. They have towns where 60 percent of people, who cannot do any work, and have left. They do not have any doctors, so they cannot run their hospitals. So they are taking everybody they can from here to fulfil their positions. This is a common situation for many post-socialist countries, although 95% of those who go abroad, yes, it is better for themselves and better financially, but they come back. As you could see, if you travelled in Transcarpathia a bit, the houses are quite decent, they were built on the money they gained abroad, mostly, by their hands. This is investment in Transcarpathia after all, so you just have to deal with it.

I: What is the intent of the Hungarian state with regards to the extraterritorial naturalisations?

R: Regarding the worsening of relations between the two countries, the main reason is the law for education and for language, this is a very delicate topic and sometimes even a war can start out of this. There are some cases of this. Regarding the overall situation, Ukraine learned the Slovak experience. In 2008 Hungary installed this law, allowing dual citizenship and easing the process, Slovakia in turn, immediately closed the chance for dual citizenship, as Slovakia is a smaller country and the Hungarian diaspora is large there, so Slovakia were more way afraid than Ukraine is. It went even in Slovakia to the blocking of the Hungarian president. Hungarian built schools for Hungarian- Slovakians and made all the infrastructure, that beat themselves, because those Hungarians who studied there, went to Hungary and they did not stay in Slovakia. Now Hungary does the same for local Hungarians, to allow Hungarians to stay in Ukraine. But if you don't know the Ukrainian language, you can't just stay there, because you won't find many possibilities in life. In Slovakia what happened now, is that all the schools still function, but they are not Hungarian kids, they are Roma kids, who study in these Hungarian schools. The same case in Ukraine in 2001, when we had a demographic census, there were 150,000 ethnic Hungarians, they still operate this number, but it is probably way less than 100,000. This is the Hungarian doctrine, is to support their diaspora, by any means possible, even if it means quarrelling with other presidents, even if it is illogical. Slovakia is an EU member, they don't need to make their lives easier, it was just a doctrine, way before the war in Donbas. Those who do not follow the story, they think that Orbán was inspired by Putin, but he himself is quite an emotional person, who does something despite of the quarrels it creates with Poroshenko. He started doing this even more, giving more support, which is illogical.

I: Are there parallels between the Russian compatriot policy and Hungary's kin-state policies?

R: There are many countries which support their diaspora abroad, their people abroad. We can also compare them to Russia, but it won't be correct. Russia uses this support to start the war, this is what they did in Transnistria, this is what they did in Abkhazia and in Ossetia as well. Putin is unpredictable. Orbán is more or less predictable. They are an EU member, a NATO member, they have some Russia that they cannot omit, so it is a different story.

I: After attending yesterday's court case with Karolina Darsci, some might argue, that there is a discrepancy between the constitution and citizenship legislation with regards to dual citizenship. Is there potential for legislative amendments to prohibit dual citizenship with some threatening countries, such as Russia, but not un-threatening, such as Hungary?

R: Most countries allow for dual citizenship. What about Britain by the way?

I: Yes.

R: As Ukraine is leaning towards Europe, we need to make some amendments. For example, we have one rule now, formally dual citizenship is not prohibited unless you work for the state. If you are a state servant, you need to have only Ukrainian citizenship. If you have two citizenships, if somebody uncovers that you have two citizenships, you have three days to leave your post. In the case of Karolina, and other people, for example, unofficially from my sources, I know that several mayors of local towns have Hungarian citizenship. When it goes public, you have to do something about, so probably, in order to cope with the mess here, you just have to make an amendment not to let local city council and local mayors not to have dual citizenship as well. There are other cases. The information about how many Hungarian citizens there are in Ukraine is classified, so there is no way to know for sure, but there are cases of when people have been stripped of their citizenship and there are cases of those who were living here in Transcarpathia. For example one orthodox bishop, it was quite a curious case. I think the Roma people got this citizenship because of a hole in the legislation, and there is no real reason to refuse them this.

I: Two years ago, I met with some officials in Budapest, who suggested that the Hungarian state are attempting to build infrastructure for influence in their neighbouring territories. What are your thoughts on this?

R: They make think this, but what would happen for this to happen? The EU should dissolve, Ukraine should be broken into dozens of smaller entities and a third world war should start? What are the other reasons to make this a reality? Over a beer, many people can say a lot of things. For example, if you ask a German politician, he or she can also say something about the former glory of the state. We also know that Hungarians are in part quite similar in Russia, in terms of their emotions. They can put themselves higher in terms of thinking about their own state. This can be understandable, but this cannot be real.

I: What is the logic behind Russia's passportization in Ukraine?

R: Russia can enter their army into any region, just to protect Russian citizens. That's enough. This was the case in Abkhazia, where there was passportization before annexation, before there was aggression. In Crimea for example, there was no passportization, because locals could easily go to Russia, there was no problem with this. The passportization started after the annexation of Crimea. The same case with LPR and DPR.