*Information about interviewees:*

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*R1= Respondent 1 – Ádám Szesztay*

*R2= Respondent 2 - Marton-John Bernadett Valéria*

*I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton*

I: Can you please tell me about your department and objectives?

R1: She’s given a presentation about our department so she can hand it over to you. Actually FCU has a similar department, how is it called? Strategic department or something like that. Actually our mission that is not necessarily part of a foreign ministry and planning department, but usually foreign ministries have different functions, and, in our case, our major function is the world from the point of view that how the different processes how do they influence the possibility of Putin’s foreign policy strategy of the government? And of course because you do not have any value documents about the foreign policy strategy, the last document was published in 2011, it really has changed a bit since that, although the government composition was the same as now. Nevertheless if you wish to compare the processes to the Hungarian foreign policy strategy then we have to suppose foreign policy strategies. We described strategy, that how do we see that what our governments follow [unclear] today as strategy and we compare with that and we analyse the how do we understand the global crisis; what are the tendencies in the global [unclear] and now we did a lot of different analyses between these two so different issues which on one hand reach out to the global situation and on the other hand have the conclusion is either that how the foreign policy strategy appears in that. Actually we are nowadays a practically new department because in 2014 there was a huge reorganisation of the foreign ministry and our department was sort of victim of it and but in two years the minister discovered how such a is needed.

R2: Because historically it has always been there. We’re changing portfolio but more or less it’s the same kind of//

R1: Here you have some things about that.

I: Thank you very much. As you may have noticed from my emails my focus is on the relationship between the Hungarian state and the Hungarians living abroad and in the neighbouring territories.

R1: If you are interested in the Hungarian issues then Subotica and Senta, these are the major, how to say, capitals of Hungarians, that are the centres of their public life. So I recommend you visit them. In Subotica we have a consulate too, and the embassy is in Belgrade. But if you wish to see the Hungarian diplomacy in action, Subotica should not be avoided.

I: From a policy perspective, how much of a priority are the regions neighbouring Hungary?

R1: The whole region is a priority, so I’m sure that gave you a history lesson. Probably he mentioned that right in the course of the birth of the Hungarian democracy in 1990 the first democratic elected prime minister had a speech about his foreign policy strategy saying points and he said that we have three super priorities: Was the Euro-Atlantic session, which at the time was really rubbish because [unclear] The other was good neighbourhood in neighbouring countries. The third is the representation of the interest of the ethnic Hungarian groups. The whole issue is prioritised, and the Hungarians abroad are of strategic interest to the foreign policy department. If you take the neighbouring countries. Serbia is a priority and Serbia is the gate of the Western Balkans, due to the fact they’re the biggest of the Balkan state. But actually the Hungarian ethnic group is just a third or fourth largest. The biggest acting group is in Romania and Romania is a strategic issue on the one hand because of the ethnic Hungarians living there and on the other hand because of the strategic place of Romania in Europe. Because this is the exit of Europe to the Black sea, this is the second biggest country of our region if we interpret Romania as a part of Central Europe. So it is strategically very important, not to mention the fact that they have a history with the [unclear] regime makes it a quite specific system here in our neighbourhood. If we speak about Slovakia where the second biggest ethnic Hungarian community lives; Slovakia is a member of the Visegrád cooperation: this is Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary; Started by [unclear] He was the initiator of this cooperation. Actually this is a renewed cooperation because you may have heard that in the 14th century, the Polish, Czech and Hungarian king met and they made an alliance how to avoid Vienna; how to develop some commercial rules that Vienna doesn’t take advantage, that Vienna doesn’t take all the commerce. So in 1991, they renewed it with the intention that they wish to abolish the Soviet block and they made the Wachau pact, this was quite successful, because in the summer of 1991 it was abolished. It was a cooperation for democratisation and Western integration of our region; which was [unclear] in 2004 when other countries became member of NATO and of the EU. And then Visegrád became, how to say, a pressure group. A central European pressure group, so today it is the representation of the Central European interests, especially in the EU, but also partly in NATO and globally. This is a kind of family playing quite important role in our foreign policy. Probably Hungary and Tsar (13.56) most active in that but not everyone is so enthusiastic about that like we are. But anyway all the four countries use this cooperation for speaking in one voice and being stronger together. So Slovakia is also from that point of view a strategic part but especially because of the interest of the Hungarian community. The third point of this strategic importance of Slovakia is the fact that it is in the middle of central Europe. So if we wish to get gas from the Polish then we need the transport through Slovakia. If we wish to have Norwegian gas, as it happened at the end of last year’s we tried before Mr. Orbán had the meeting with Mr. Putin, then we have to transport it through Austria, but if they are in pact with Russia that they do not transport then we need to transport it via Germany through Czech Republic and Slovakia. So Slovakia is very important from very different points of view; not speaking of the fact that Slovakia is a country which is [unclear] territory which belongs to Hungary, so Slovaks are somehow a brother nation of ours. This was such a part of former Hungary that was later connected to another country; it was connected to Czechoslovakia but now that they are independent, they have a completely similar culture and history with us, they are very similar people. They speak a Slavic language, but mentally they are totally Hungarians and Hungarians are totally Slovaks. I always joke with my Slovak friend, he says he loves Hungarians as they are just Slovaks speaking another language and I tell him “no you are wrong, I love the Slovaks as the Slovaks are just Hungarians speaking a Slavic language. But of course common heritage is always a burden too. In Czechoslovakia the Slovaks were educated and socialised against us. It is a very big question how to tackle this huge common heritage. Now the Slovaks are an independent and democratic country there is the possibility that there grows up a generation that are not socialised anymore in animosity created by the state of Czech Slovakia. Probably we’ll gain a friendly nation. To whom can I compare it? Probably a bit to the Polish – Hungarian friendship or something like that. Like the Americans and the British, two countries, two nations with common roots, common heritage. Ukraine as the third or fourth biggest Hungarian community, I do not need to speak for you about the strategic importance of Ukraine. It is strategically very important – not only for Hungary but for the whole of Europe. But because we are part of Europe that is also the case for us. We are very big friends with the Russians, but it is good to have someone between us; it’s always be easier with friends when you are not immediate neighbours. So more or less this way we could say, we have several neighbouring countries and in all of them there is an ethnic Hungarian minority and usually close to the border. There is a joke that Hungary is the only country that from all the sides has a … well that she is the neighbour of herself. Was it a proper interpretation of it? So with all our neighbours we have also other common strategic agenda. Now the big question is that history, because I told you this about Slovakia, but I could tell you this more or less about all our neighbouring countries and from different reasons. But more or less with all of them they were educated against us. And especially against the ethnic Hungarian minority there, that is why the presence of the ethnic Hungarian minority, which could benefit the both nations. Because these are people that speak the language of both countries and who are able to orient themselves in the system, who even emotionally can identify with both even if they were oppressed [unclear]. In Vojvodina, Transcarpathia they will tell you that they hate them, but they do not hate them indeed. Because they live together. They could become linkage between the countries and benefit both countries and the whole region. But it is very difficult to break through the stereotypes. Nevertheless in some cases you can see some advances, for example, in the case of Slovakia nowadays they just set up a new law about the minority culture; which is very revolutionary, the Slovak thinking. That the ethnic minorities, see the Slovakia is an independent country and this never has happened, such a big step for … like that. Or they have new regulation that on the train stations you can also write the Hungarian names for the ethnic minority. So there is some improvement in that situation, but eh it’s never very easy. But surely, I’m speaking very much, and you have questions so, or you can share with us your observations.

I: Well I’d be interested to know what the ideal situation would be from a Hungarian foreign policy point of view. What is the objective of engaging with the Hungarian population abroad?

R1: So If you wish to have to objectives, then the drawing of one of our colleagues would be the best for me to inform my Slovak counterparts of our intentions. Actually, if you take the whole minority question than it is always like a triangle. There are the two states and the ethnic minority group. Of course, these circles stand for the three partners are divided because well later the kin state, the residential state, the ethnic Hungarians are nationalist, liberalists, socialists, there are, I don’t know who, business man, everyone has their own interests, but, there is such a community that can state that in Transylvania, [unclear], and there are certain relations between them. Of course these regions influence each other because it is how is the relation between the residential state and the national minority. That someone influences the atmosphere between the residential state and the kin state. Of course how the ethnic national minority community interpret its situation, how patient they can be with their situation, but that’s not only the attitude towards them but also the attitude of the kin state. Because of that I have here [unclear] where they belong in their relation to us, then can be more, survive more, as if they feel oppressed from both sided. If you try to improve this situation. If you try to support, because you have the means on all three relationships to somehow regulate. In the case of the relationship between kin state and national minority, you can give grants, you can grant state citizenship or this specific status which was granted by the state. In the case of the relationship ship between the national minority and the state on which territory it is, the minority rights system including autonomic structures. These are the mean of regulation in case of the interstate relations, there is diplomacy to grant specific structures like these. So called mixed commissions, we spoke more about that. The problem is that if you try to improve one of the sides of this triangle, one of the edges of this. One of these three relationships, you influence also the other and not necessarily in the same direction. So if you maintain good relationship between the residential state and the kin state but the situation between the residential state and the ethnic national community is bad. There are no functioning minority rights. Then the national community will feel offended by the kin state and so they feel twice in a worse situation. And thus, they are frustrated with negative influence. The real content of the kin state. So if you take the objective of the Hungarian neighbourhood policy from the point of view of the minority question then it aims to improve the relationship on all the three edges on this triangle, simultaneously. That is the big question; how to do that? That everything goes in a better way, that everybody feels better in the situation and thus the internal cohesion of the region gets stronger.

I: Correct me if I’m wrong, but in 2010/2011, with the dual nationality/citizenship the relationship between Hungary and Slovakia was perhaps not at its best because of the strengthening of the relationship between Hungary and its population in Slovakia. What are the fears from Slovakia about these policies?

R1: Well the Slovaks were educated that whatever the Hungarians do, it must be bad for them. So if we wish to support the ethnic Hungarians, they suppose it is against them. They were educated so they can hardly imagine that is not against them but better for them if the ethnic Hungarians on their territory feel better. Their countries are richer if they preserve the cultural heritage of the Hungarian community. And Very slowly we start moving in that direction that we start to convince them about the fact that it is our mutual interest. That we should preserve the cultural heritage, language and cultural diversity of the Hungarian community there. You should study the governmental programme of the current Slovak government adopted in the late spring of 2016, which was a breakthrough because the first time when Czechoslovakia was created, Slovakia declared its value and that ethnic minorities inhabit their country. Simultaneously that was one paragraph, the other paragraphs spoke about the minority policy; so we should preserve the sovereignty of our country and the integrity of our country; so that show they are offended by minority rights. Nevertheless, the first time, also the fact that minorities represent some kind of value.

R2: it is important to mention at this point that it’s such a big issue because until now the constitutional [unclear] republic starts with us, the Slovak nation, which means that the nation that constitutes the country is only the Slovak nation. To understand from their side to explicitly say that it’s a value that the minority is there in their country is for the first time forward.

I: Okay, and at the moment there seems to be lots of economic developments, aimed at Serbia and Vojvodina, what explains this priority for the Hungarian state to focus…?

R1: it’s not only in Vojvodina. We have two big such programmes and two smaller, which are just being planned. Or three smaller actually. Two big are in Vojvodina and in the Zakarpattia region and the smaller is in Slovenia, Croatia and now we are prepared for Slovakia. The proportion is not the same; in the case of the Vojvodina it is 17 billion Forints, quite impressive amount and in the case of Slovakia its 10 billion Forints. So it’s rather symbolic the case of Slovakia. Of course, if the experiences are good then it can be raised later. But it is a kind of thinking that claims that the biggest problem with the ethnic minorities is that people do not find work in the region where they live. If youngsters emigrate of their region of origin and then nobody speaking Hungarian remains there. Now and that is why quite big amounts of money are offered for having business in those regions. And the thing is negotiated, and it seems that is it accepted by the state authorities of the neighbouring countries, which is quite logic. Slowly we can discover that we have common interests with our neighbouring state; what we say is that it is a support of Hungary to their state budget, creating working places there. Directly what is planned, 1/5th or 1/4th of that is transferred to taxes and goes through the state budget. And if people in Vojvodina spend almost 20 billion Forints is directly paid to Serbia, which is probably the same as the whole of the EU gives together, or not even that much, it’s a huge number of euros. It is calculated that it is worth that for us and for these regions to preserve their ethnic character. Of course I must tell you that I have some reservations with that because to create working place does not necessarily mean that Hungarians will take these spots. Once the youngsters are emigrated it is a very big question if they do return. However it is an interesting project.

R2: It is 55 million British pounds.

R1: From a country which is not the richest of the EU it is quite generous.

I: And are these programmes encouraged by your neighbours?

R1: I think so. It is interesting, with the Serbs we had the most bloody history; with the Slovaks almost nothing. However, the Serbs and the Hungarians probably have the best stereotypes of each other. I don’t know why, maybe because they were in the centre of Yugoslavia and Hungary was a poorer country. Somehow, they’ve less fears. I am really surprised and encouraged that Slovakia accepted the fact of a Hungarian development plan; this would be 5 years ago impossible. Even though if I was asked to forecast of their answer on that I would have said, two months ago, that it’s probably not the right time to start it. Nevertheless it was public that we start the programme, and no one reacted bitterly from the Slovakian side.

I: And who are the intermediaries that facilitate these programmes in the neighbouring territories? Who distributes the funds and decides where to allocate them?

R1: There is always one organisation selected that is there, usually this is the biggest acting Hungarian organisation. In the case of Vojvodina it is the VMS, in the case of the Zakarpattia region it is the Hungarian cultural alliance of Zakarpattia region. I think that in Slovakia it is either the Hungarian community party or the foundation which was done by them; I am not sure if it’s the party itself. I don’t know the details, probably you could approach Mrs Charlk she is the director responsible. However, I am not sure whether she is willing to communicate with a researcher, she’s not really an analyst type but rather a bureaucrat. She knows the details more than I do. Anyway, usually there is one organisation selected there.

I: Although my focus is on the relationship between Hungary and the Hungarians living abroad within Europe; is there any engagement with the Hungarians living in say, the U.S. or Australia?

R1: There is not that much of the Hungarian diaspora policy that is now somehow renewed. Because historically the Hungarian communities in the West were the source of the creation of different political challenges here; Hungarian uprisings, the persecution of the opposition at the communist time and so on. Partly, economic emigration and not Hungary supported them, but they supported Hungary. Now this generation who emigrated before 1999, starts to be retired and the new wave of Hungarian migrants appeared. Many 100.000s. Hungarians are probably proportionally the smallest group in the central European region. Polish, Baltic states, Romania are much bigger states. Nevertheless, the whole need for dealing with them was already discovered. For example in the system of Schengen, youngsters with a scholarship to them organised programmes for them, and so on.

R2: I would say; you (Andrew) are saying two different groups but I would probably distinguish three groups. 1. Immediate communities in the neighbouring countries. 2. Political migrants of earlier decades, which happened in more waves. Not only to the US but also in Latin America and Australia/NZ. The new generation is coming up and we have to develop a new approach because of mixed marriages created the generation where not all of them speak Hungarian at all, while they still identify with the country. One of those new approaches is the scholarships that people get to go and do whatever is needed in that specific regions. To teach language, or folks dance or anything that is related to Hungary. 3. A new wave of migrants from the early 2000, which is mostly within the chance of free movement within the EU. So they mostly migrate for economic or educational reasons. Many do not come home but settle wherever they are. That needs a certain approach to this group as they still bare Hungarian citizenship, most of them, they would give up in a couple of years or even a decade. Their young kids still have a chance to grow up as Hungarians. This needs development for the consulate, so they can handle their lives still as Hungarian citizens, as if they were at home and would do their things at the municipality in their hometown.

R1: and also it is a hugely complicated issue because we also need to deal with the Hungarians that emigrate from the neighbouring regions, like Vojvodina. Because the Hungarian state gave citizenship to Hungarians that were deprived of it during the Soviet Union, however, they did not do this for the ones that were deprived of it due to the Trianon peace treaty. A lot of them are living there for generations in Western countries or in America or South Africa. There is another group, again this is a diaspora of the ethnic Hungarian community from Transcarpathia during the SU, they were first transported forcefully for [unclear]. Later mixed marriages [unclear] many came back. But for example not from the Balkan states as they have pretty much the same living standards. There are very different communities and now we live in an era of rediscovering all these communities all over and that we should deal with them.

I: To what extend does Hungary support the political parties, for example the VMS in Serbia. How much political support is there? Or even financial support for all these parties?

R1: Well, I don’t know how it is with financial support. If they do not have any chance to survive on their own, their main finance comes from Hungary. Basically the doctrine has been that they define what they wish, and if they are in compliance with our goals there is support then, so theoretically we are not telling them what they should do. Of course not all the politicians understand this necessity. So It happens sometimes that the first right has a clear Hungary as, or the left say that they are nationalist, because they are bothering the relationship between Hungary and the neighbouring state. The main course of the Hungarian policy is that you can claim structures if we talk with the authorities with those countries and we try and tell them that it is a mutual benefit to grant it, is should be no obstacle. Surely it has limits. Would they claim territorial revision that we could not support it, but it has never happened yet.

I: And recently these policies appear to be developing and intensifying; do you see this to continue into the future?

R1: Good question, surely that would be a consequence of the feeling of [unclear] Probably yes, now everybody is very optimistic concerning that, Of course it also depends on the internal political situation of Hungary. Because there was a certain division between the political entities of Hungary in the 90s, even in the 80s. Not the very question of whether we had to deal with the ethnic communities but on how we should deal with them. That was long decided. One the other hand between the opposition and on the other hand between the different opposition movements. Have you heard of [unclear] I would recommend you notice him? Without his heritage it is hard to understand the structure of the Hungarian democracy. He was the minister of state of the revolutionary government of [unclear] in 1956, he was the only minister on the 4th of November with the Soviet troops intervened to stop the uprising. He was the only person that did not emigrate, later he was arrested by the communists. But because of India’s intervention, they were pro-Soviet at the time, but democratic, and they asked not to execute him. He was a bit idealist, and theorist of both democracy and internal relations, his most famous paper is de Jewish question after 1944, he fought for antisemitism for his whole life. On the other hand, just because of the fact that he was probably not stemming from any of the former Hungarian regions. He came from Zagat probably in Transylvania. He was very big theorist of the Trianon and how to tackle it. Everybody claims him. Socialists say that he was a socialist. Liberalists say that he was the greatest person of the Hungarian liberal movement. He died in 1979, so he was not able to say after the systematic change. He used to belong to a party that was then seen as left but would now be seen as right wing. Why am I saying this? Because just before his death he gave a lecture to the leaders of the democratic opposition, he said that the liberals should deal more with the ethnic Hungarians and should be more open with their claim for autonomy and minority rights. He noticed in the 70s, that this will be the division lines between the different democratic forces. And that has been the division line until the end of the first decade. Or until 2004, surely you heard about the referendum. That was the explosion of this conflict. He tried to convince the liberals to show more openness for this issue.