Information about interviewees:

István Székely & Tamás Kiss are researchers at the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities. Interview conducted in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

R1= Respondent 1 – István Székely

R2= Respondent 2 - Tamás Kiss

I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton

I: What has been the impact of the extraterritorial naturalisations of the ethnic Hungarians here in Romania by the Hungarian state?

R2: I have an article on the impact of this issue. I tried to investigate this issue at three levels, first at the level of how ethne or national identification patterns have changed. Second level is the level of institutions of minority institutions and the third level is the level of macro politics or the level of minority accommodation in Romania. What I found at the first level, I used survey and qualitative research on this issue, and what I found the ethne and levels of national identification have not changed radically. The inter-ethnic relations have not changed, or how Transylvanian Hungarians perceive themselves, that has not changed radically. For instance, there is a process of boundary making not only against the Romanian majority, but also against the Hungarians from Hungary. The Hungarians from Hungary are not in the in-group for the Transylvanians Hungarian and this has not changed radically. At the level of institutions it was a change because in fact, but this is not necessarily because of the citizenship, but because of the kin-state policies. One dimension of the kin-state policies is the citizenship policies, but subsidy policies are also a dimension and these subsidies have increased considerably. Today Hungary instigates some institutional processes in Transylvanian Hungarians and in the field of minority institutions. This increases the degree of ethnic parallelism, which is institutionally sustained ethnic parallelism, and this can be deepened or horizontally widened. This means that other domains enter the picture, for instance, this is the sport. For instance, here in Cluj, ten years ago it was unimaginable to have amateur sports clubs separated ethnically. Today it is normal. This is process is initiated by the Hungarian kin-state policies. Professional sport is another aspect of this. The deepening is happening, for instance, in the case of education. It means that the Hungarian kin-state subsidies, push towards separated institutional structures. Institutional structures are done mostly by churches.

R1: and financed very heavily from Hungary. For instance the media system is moving into such a direction.

R2: At this level, at the level of minority institution, I think that the changes are considerable. The third level is that of macro politics and of minority accommodation and here I think that the model of minority accommodation that was dominate here in Romania. We call this model unequal accommodation, kind of accepting that you do not have formal ethnic power sharing, but the minority accommodation is based on informal ethnic political bargaining between majority and minority actors and ad hoc political bargaining mostly targeting finances and resource allocation. The precondition of this kind of minority accommodation is that the resources that are available through bargaining with majority actors are incomparably higher than those offered by the kin-state and this has changed radically, but the erosion of this kind of setting was caused not by the Hungarian kin-state but by the internal processes of the Romanian political field, mainly the Romanian political discourse within the public sphere is dominated by this anti-corruption agenda and this anti-corruption agenda, criminalised this kind of particularistic and informal bargaining targeting resource allocation and financial issues, financing the minority institutions or financing areas inhabited by Hungarians. I think that this is the main cause why this model of minority accommodation has eroded but also the increase in significance of the Hungarian subsidies.

R1: You said lots of things, but maybe you should say something about the worsening of the attitudes of the Hungarians of one end, from the other side of the border, to each other. You said nothing changed, but on the other side of the border, maybe something has changed to some aspect. Maybe there are now less anti-transborder Hungarians. Of course this is very much related to the political party in Hungary. With this party which came second yesterday, to some surprise, they are the other end of the spectrum and they were the only ones to openly question the legitimacy of the citizenship and enfranchisement process, but otherwise they kind of accepted it. In Hungary as a domestic issue, it is now a closed. No party would probably, even if they are in the situation, for ten years at least, but even if they were probably, they wouldn't start to attack it and turn it back. But probably, but this is speculative, but probably this refugee crisis contributed to it. The enemy, or the significant other, could be constructed in a different way, and this could have contributed towards attitudes becoming more friendly.

R2: I agree. From my perspective, the anti-transborder Hungarian sentiment and anti-refugee and anti-migrant sentiments are connected to the chauvinism. What has changed, during the referendum for or against dual citizenship, at the very target of this vow for chauvinism, were Transylvanian Hungarians and trans-border Hungarians in general. During or after 2006, autonomous Roma in Hungary became the primary target, in vow for chauvinism. If you would like to name a year exactly. After that, following the refugee crisis, the refugees and migrants became the primary targets in the vow for chauvinism. These are very similar things, basically governed by this vow for chauvinism. It is also interesting, because in the case of the Transylvanian Hungarians, who are even more anti-migrant and xenophobic than the Hungarians from Hungary, but this xenophobia is constructed in another way, based on cultural and ethnic fears but not on this vow for chauvinism, so the Transylvanian Hungarians have another kind of chauvinism and racism than the Hungarians from Hungary.

R1: The propositions are different. They also have this cultural type of thing there too.

I: What is the goal of Orbán with regards to the kin-state policies?

R2: I think that the major step for him is to redefine the concept of the Hungarian nation. This is an internal issue. There was an on-going debate between the so-called left and the so-called right. Both wanted to redefine the Hungarian nation. The leftist, liberal intelligencia was attracted by this German idea of constitutional patriotism, you can find it in the works of Habermas, Werner Müller and this German type of constitutional patriotism was very attractive. Why? The right tried to redefine the Hungarian nations, along the trans-sovereign nation building.

R1: With a very heavy ethnic component.

R2: Yes. It was an ongoing debate, how to define the Hungarian nation and through this act became possible only following the electoral collapse of the left. With this act, Orbán put an end to this classificatory struggle and institutionalised his trans-sovereign and ethnocultural vison of the Hungarian nation. The major stake was this. This internal debate concerning how to define the Hungarian nation. This minority rights protection issues and the ethnocultural reproduction of this minority Hungarian communities were secondly only. Another issue could be this kind of demographic relevance, Hungary struggles with demographic issues, struggles with a labour force shortage and it is not explicit policy to attract Transylvanian Hungarians to Hungary, but if they would like to make a demographic reproduction through migrants, they would prefer migrants who are ethnically closer.

R1: In the other regions, it plays a more important role.

R2: Absolutely. Absolutely. In Ukraine, in Vojvodina.

R1: In Sub-Carpathia it is more important issue. There are already very serious demographic problems because of this out-migration of ethnic Hungarians. But otherwise this Waterbury framework is useful. She is making this argument, okay, she is talking about diaspora but anyway, but she is making this argument as diaspora as a resource and a liability. Here the liability is not very visible. There are some costs that the Hungarian state has because of this, but as a resource, we have already talked political resource in a sense of redefining the political community, but also the votes are not negligible. At the last parliamentary election, the argument can be made that they got the two-thirds majority because of the votes from the minority communities. Of course other arguments can be made, that the they got the two-thirds because of some stupid leftist candidates were unable to cooperate and because of this they lost their single member districts but anyway, mathematically terms it is true, politically it is not exclusively true, it is only an interpretation. But then the demographic resourcing it is also important, but the other types that she is talking about are obviously not important. With the costs, the big political costs, what happened to them in 2002 when arguably when they passed the Status Law, the first big experiment, establishing direct ties to the ethnic Hungarians abroad, then arguably that law played a role in them losing the 2002 elections. After the Status Law the main opposition party, started to communicate this sort of messages, now you will be overwhelmed by Romanians will flood the labour market and then you will see... This was the cost. This is no longer a real danger but some very small and not so important costs, the Ukraine and Russia line of naturalisation, seems to be a bit risky. This seems to be a bit risky. They were not cautious enough and gave out citizenship to some very fishy people. There has been some press attention....

R2: There have been some issues in the press concerning this issue. I don't think that it would be a great danger.

R1: The question is how large, in scale, it is. Probably a few thousand cases. It is not only speculation. Some people from the local governments have been dismissed because of this. They were accepting some applications for citizenship without really checking them. Probably there were some networks specialised in this, that they could arrange for Hungarian citizenship in Ukraine. This is to mention something about the cost part of the process.

I: Going back to the demographics. There hasn't been big migration to Hungary. Even from Zakarpattia, or Vojvodina, those with a Hungarian passport have not travelled to work in Hungary, but have gone further into Austria, Germany or the UK. Do you think that this was the objective to attract an ethnic Hungarian migrant population and its failed?

R1: This is a big topic. You cannot talk about it in the Hungarian public sphere. The official ideology is that they should stay in their own land and they prosper.

R2: They should protect Transylvanian Hungarians from their invaders.

R1: But there have been some. Some people have said there was this guy that we should go fishing for birds. Like a metaphor. Encourage the talented young people to go to Hungary, so probably played a role. They didn't really recognise it officially.

R2: If you monitor the institutional processes, I think that it would be clear this was an intention. Concerning the migratory process, we should distinguish between Transcarpathia and Vojvodina. In Vojvodina you have very well-developed networks of migration, even starting in the 70s or 60s towards Austria, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, and of course people with Hungarian citizenship can use these networks. In case of Hungarians from Ukraine, I think that the proportion of those who enter Hungary, and not Western European states is more significant than Serbian Hungarians. For them east of Hungary is an attractive place. Eastern Hungary is attractive, in the case of Vojvodina they are much more ambivalent. In this case, many people used Hungarian citizenship to migrate towards Germany or Austria. In Transcarpathia it is not so significant. They do not have the networks to do so. They might develop but it takes time.

I: Some people have described dual citizenship as a threat to national security or societal cohesion. Do you agree with this?

R2: It is too normative for me. I thought about this ethnic parallelism, this is an existing phenomenon. That institutions sustained ethnic parallelism and Hungarian kin-state policies increased this phenomenon, but institutionally sustained ethnic parallelism was not initiated by the Hungarian kinstate but was the project of the Transylvanian Hungarian elites and political actors. In this sense, even since the inter-war period. Following the change of the regime, and if you consider that in the case of this ethnically sustained parallelism, Hungarians are not integrated into Romanian, but from an interactionalist perspective who reject this kind of sub-state political loyalties, who can consider that Transylvanian Hungarians are not interrelated into the Romanian politics, but this is not because of the Hungarian kin-state policies but because of the project of the internal Hungarian actors. From another perspective this works, this interactionalist pattern, interethnic conflict in Transylvania. On the one hand, from an interactionalist perspective they offer emphasise the danger of this.

R1: If you turn the problem around and you look at the Romanian or Ukrainian state provides for these communities, then you can make an argument. There are have been speculation that the Hungarian state would build a big hospital, which would be better equipped. And in Ukraine it happens, because it is almost like a failed state. So basically the Hungarian state is paying part of the wages of the professors, of the physicians, healthcare staff and so on - even repairing roads. Here this came to the fore with regards to this hospital project, with regards to the university of medicine.

R2: Or with education in general.

R1: Education in general yes.

R2: In this sense yes.

R1: You can argue that this is weakening social integration, but the point is the home states are very happy that they don't have to spend money on this.

R2: I think that they are happy in the case of education, but I don't think that they are happy in terms of healthcare.

R1: Why? The question is, how do you design the policy in terms of health insurances, so it would be an exclusively private hospital. Why would the Romanian state objects to someone coming to pay for something?

R2: The Romanian public in general is very tolerant of this kind of Hungarian intervention. My feeling is that this is because the concept of the sovereignty has changed in Romania, and the Romanians have moved towards a de-territorialised concept of sovereignty. It is not the same in Slovakia where this is a sovereignty issue. In Romania, we made a lot of surveys for the Romanian population as well. The vast majority of them accept the Hungarian citizenship policy, but actually Romania has a very similar policy towards Romanians living in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

R1: But at the same time they are not supportive of other minority rights. Like language rights, not speaking about autonomy.

R2: Or ethnic power sharing. Or linguistic rights. Or state supported minority education system. The support for this is very low if you compare with a tolerance towards Hungarian kin-state citizenship policies. So this anti-Hungarian sentiments in Romania are not centred on the kin-state policy issues, but on internal issues, on access to state resources, or ethnic power sharing like autonomy or language use in administration it is less tolerated, less proportion of the Romanian public tolerates it. They perceive Hungarian language use in public administration as an unjust privilege for Hungarians. While Romanian is the fourth language of education and compared to these issues, they are very tolerant.

R1: For instance, there is this programme running, economic development programme. They started it in 2017, they started it in ethnically mixed areas. There was a pilot there, the sum of that much was not much. Then they moved it to the compact Hungarian areas, Székely Land, and there it is pretty big money. Basically there has been almost nothing on this, not even in the Romanian press. Very marginally. There are some guys who always objecting, they objected against this.

R2: Recently there has been an issue in the Romanian press.

R1: But it is not a big issue, compared to this cemetery issue.

R2: Absolutely, compared to this bullshit cemetery issue, it is not a big issue. But it is on the agenda. It is a symbolic issue. I was contacted by several Romanian journalist recently on this issue, and several articles appeared, but it is not a big issue.

I: How has the Hungarian kin-state policies affected the inter-state relations between the Hungarian state and the Romanian state?

R2: I think that it does not have a significant affect. This is shaped by other issues. For instance, geo-political, building of the Eastern European alliance. For Orbán he has a natural ally in building this anti-globalist, Eurosceptic cooperative and Eurosceptic bloc in Eastern Europe. I think that for Orbán and the Romanian political actors, these are the more important issues than the kin-state policies. For instance, Orbán and Hungary has a very intensive presence in the Balkans, in Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia. So they are very very influential. In these terms, and in Serbia, they are very influential. In Serbia they are aligned with the Serbian radical party and along these issues in building some kind of alliance of the semi-periphery of the Western European core. Romania would have been a partner, but the PSD, they were unable to enable an anti-globalist discourse. That is why they will fail.

I: I was once told that by an advisor to Fidesz in Budapest that it is the intention of Fidesz to build power bases outside of Hungarian territory. What do you think of this?

R1: It depends on what he meant by power bases.

R2: This kind of alliance building exists.

R1: Did he refer to areas inhabited by ethnic Hungarians?

I: Yes.

R1: In this sense yes, I mean if you look at the Székely Land then you have a compact, an almost compact Hungarian area, which is like two countries in Hungary, the second largest compact Hungarian area, next to Hungary and demographically it will probably remain soon. In this sense to invest there. Now with the northern part of Vojvodina, that is also pretty much Hungarian, pretty much compact, but there the demographic prospect is pretty much negative.

R2: The same for Transcarpathia. But actually they invested a lot of money there, comparatively if you compare to the size of the community, they invested much more in this area. I think yes, because of this large-scale endless migration the demographic basis of this compact community is questionable.

R1: Lots of these things were carried out, not concerned with the administrative way of doing things, they were carried out as special emergency measures, which means that there is trouble and we have to do something.

I: Like a crisis.

R1: Yes exactly. In this sense, it would be misleading to try and interpret everything that he does instrumentally.

R2: Colonising the region through institutions.

R1: I can really imagine, that some of them really believe that they are saving our poor ethnic brethren beyond the border. You have these components too. Of course, I would not completely rule out the instrumental component, but the emotional element is still there.

R2: I think they can go in parallel. It is both instrumental and emotionalised institutional process.

I: How does the financing of these projects work?

R2: The ministry of the interior, and the ministry of foreign affairs.

R1: They are implementing the financial projects at the moment, as well as the cabinet of the Prime Minister, you have this structure about the prime minister.

R2: I will send you an article, I have a figure or a diagram, of the actors, state actors involved in kin-state policies. At the ministry of defence you have some very small, symbolic stuff, like the cemeteries fallen at the wars, this is what they are doing. It is almost definitely the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior.

I: How has the ethnic Hungarian political party dynamic changed over the years?

R2: It is a long story. It is better to start with comparing the kind of structure of bargaining or patronage networks with the Romanians and Hungarian political actors, and from this perspective there is a radical difference in the structure of bargaining. In the case of relations with the majority actors, RMDSZ and RMDSZ leadership had a monopoly in bargaining, while in the case of kin-state actors, they do not have any monopoly. The kin-state actors bargain with many actors, many Hungarian parties, with the reformed church, with different factions inside RMDSZ. The question is, how different actors inside and outside RMDSZ figure in this patronage network dominated by Viktor Orbán and Fidesz. It is a more difficult position for the RMDSZ leadership compared with their position towards the Romanian actors. They do not have a monopoly, and this is a novelty for them. They have to struggle for resources, they are in a kind of loyalty competition for resources, they compete with internal factions and external ones. We are talking about dominant party.

R1: You should talk about this previous model when Fidesz was trying to build up alternative parties to RMDSZ, but this strategy failed. Exactly before this election yesterday, i read it on Facebook that one of the ex-leaders of these two small parties, was very optimistic that the RMDSZ will not make it into parliament.

R2: I met him, and he was very optimistic in this regard!

R1: One of the ex-leaders, the previous prominent figures in the Transylvanian party, and he was saying that if the RMDSZ will not make it, we have a huge chance to make the state policy towards of Hungarian towards the ethnic kin start from scratch. They were hoping, but this didn’t happen.

R2: They are hoping, because they are players in this competition.

R1: Yes. They are not completely pushed aside but they are on the bench. They are waiting for the opportunity. They are waiting that one of the main players on the field will get injured and they will get their chance.

R2: They are also financed by the Hungarian state. For instance, the media structure was changed, this media, the NGO, media concern. This is close to them in fact.

R1: Yes but I don't agree, because you are saying it goes through these networks. Through Turkey and so on. But they are independent and have been growing for a long time.

R2: It might be independent but even more independent from RMDSZ. It is closer to them compared to RMDSZ. What is quite important is that the majority of Hungarian language media is not dominated by RMDSZ. In mobilisation RMDSZ, depends on Fidesz structurally because of the media structure.

R1: It’s quite an ingenious structure that Fidesz came up with.

R2: But this loyalty competition is not only here is not only here in kin-state policy issues, it is a general way of exercising power of Orbán. The complication and duplication of functions is how totalitarian structures function.

R1: He is not claiming that Fidesz are totalitarian.

R2: Yes, I am not claiming this, but I use this as an analogy. I think that it is quite interesting, I think that during his student years, Orbán studied and read Hanna Ardent and this totalitarianism was an important topic for him

I: Are these policies conducted to de-stabilise the domestic political landscape?

R1: In Serbia, definitely not. They are such great friends there.

R2: They are close allies.

R1: In Ukraine, I mean, that is a difficult question, but you need to take into consideration that country is, I don't know how to put it in nice terms.

R2: It is a rather weak state, in terms of a model state which provides some services for their citizens. Not in that the sense that the policies are not strong enough.

R1: The Hungarian community is arguably one of the biggest losers of this conflict inside Ukraine, with the so called Western leaning Ukrainian elites coming to power and the Hungarians become collateral damage in this war against Russia. Ok, some ethnic Hungarians died in the war, but I am referring to the language law they passed and stuff like that. They are really hostile. Those Ukrainian elites are engaged in a belated nation building.

R2: In a really crazy way.

R1: Like the Romanians in the early 90s, there were similar actions done by the Romanian and it is what now the Ukrainians are doing now.

R2: From a human rights perspective, the Ukrainian situation is very problematic.

R1: It is also a very very poor country, levels of poverty, we were quite shocked when we went there. Romanian is not the most developed part of Europe, but it is shocking how big the difference is. Even Eastern Hungary is attractive for these people.

I: Do the home states fear the intention of Fidesz, with regards to border revisions.

R1: We don't find this realistic.

R2: As I explained, these fears are not very high in Romania. Because in Romania, also the public opinion of kin-state policy measures, but in the Romanian case the Romanians do not really care about this. It is not like it is in Slovakia, it is a sovereignty issue, or like in Ukraine even where it is perceived as more of sovereignty issue. In Romania it is not the major topic or the measure focus of the anti-Hungarians.

I: What is the state of claims for territorial and cultural autonomy?

R1: They are around, but this hasn't really been on the official agenda lately. RMDSZ had 5 years ago, the last document which was a draft statue for autonomy. It was exactly in the previous European election campaign, but nothing is really happening in that sense. It is an impasse situation. The Romanian elites are completely dismissive, and the Hungarian elites are very much aware of this and they cannot simply put the idea aside, because they don't have anything they can replace it with. If you go to Székely Land, you will see the people there, this has been a sort of vision for the future, they have been socialised, politically for 30 years, or 35 years and it is pretty difficult to replace it.

R2: Our argument is that RDMSZ and the Hungarian political elite employ a duality in discourse in this respect. They use autonomy in their political messages, and it is an important topic in the internal debates in the Hungarian community, especially in Székely Land, but they did not put on the real agenda with political bargaining with Romanian political actors, so this is the duality. In the parliamentary arena this is not a relevant issue for them, but in electoral messages it is used.

R1: In varying intensity. They have been periods when it was pretty much low. Then it came back. This coinciding with the period when there was inter-Hungarian competition, with two rival parties of course these smaller parties were pushing very hard to put the issue back on the agenda. But then since these two parties were pacified, one was pacified, the other is over. Since then it is again over.

R2: You have to distinguish between territorial and cultural autonomy. Because if you call the law of the minorities, this cultural or educational autonomy, this is on the political agenda, it is frozen, but it was a parliamentary initiative.

R1: Yes, it has been stuck in parliament for 14 years.

R2: Ok, but I think this is a serious issue. This education and cultural autonomy. Ownership or competencies over Hungarian institutional system, or Hungarian institutions, it is a serious issue. It is frozen, but it is a serious issue. Unlike territorial autonomy, which is not discussed seriously by Romanian political actors.

R1: Yes, but maybe the bargaining is going on occasionally. I don't know whether the next government will come and the RMDSZ will provide some parliamentary support, then maybe the government will provide some very small steps will be taken.

R2: I only said that this is on their map. Territorial autonomy is not on their map.

R1: Yes, yes. A good example is the 2011 education law which is still in force that contained an article that an institute should be created for researching educational issues of the minorities and this institute has been set up this year, or the end of last year or something like that. It took 7 or 8 years for the government bill to be passed, and that is probably a result of some bargaining, as a single event you could interpret it as a piece of the puzzle of the bigger picture, what he was talking about. The whole political interaction is not going on, in the sense that from tomorrow we will have cultural autonomy or not. It is background stuff.

R2: But they would like to have control over the Hungarian education system, formal control and over minority institutions.

R1: In this sense, we should also add that there are regional elites in the RMDSZ, in the Székely Land, who I would say who are more motivated in this sense.

R2: More motivated in mobilising Hungarian voters.

R1: They are more motivated in engaging in stuff that can be interpreted as taking the steps.

R2: Not as a serious struggle for autonomy.

R1: Not as a serious struggle, then you have this inventing process of the region which also involves creating or designing and created and inventing the symbols, so defining the region as a distinct entity.

R2: In this sense, I think that this is an ongoing process. Regional building or regional identity building in Transylvania.

R1: Also economic process.

R2: This is not only from above but also bottom up process with economic nationalism, with consumer nationalism, which is not designed necessarily by elites but also happens as a grass route something. This regional identity building exists, and for many people living in Székely Land area, the relevant entity with regards to identity is Székely Land and not Transylvania, this is the difference.

R1: Also the investments from the kinstate polices meet this sort of process because just look at the sports. So now you have a football team in the first division of the football championship and you also have one that got promoted to the second, and you have the media thing, we talked about the investment into the media, and now they just created a regional daily for Székely Land. You had lots of small dailies in the more important towns and they merged them into a single daily print. There used to be a portal but there was no print version.

R2: It translates as Székely Land homeland.

R1: It Is similar to what they were doing in Hungary. They also took over the regional or county level dailies because they are the most read papers. They have some function of symbolic defining the region.

R2: And it will end up with a Székely Land regional identity.

I: Which is getting stronger?

R2: Yes absolutely, in rough terms, this can lead to more well-established autonomy movements. From a political perspective, and from a political bargaining point of view, it doesn't exist.

I: Hungarian transborder financing has increased significantly. Do you think there will become a point when the Romanian government will say, enough is enough, and it reaches a breaking point?

R2: It might be, but there are no signs. There is an issue that several articles, but it is not a very hot issue in the Romanian public sphere. Plus as i mentioned, the Romanian public sphere is relevantly tolerant. It shows, because they have a very similar problem in Moldova and Romanians in Ukraine and very similar strategies towards them.