*Information about interviewee:*

*István Székely Is the Executive Vice President of the political party, The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ) in Cluj-Napoca. Interview conducted in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.*

*R= Respondent – István Székely*

*I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton*

## I: What are the main objectives of the party?

## R: The protection of the rights of the Hungarian community in Romania and the forwarding and the prospering of the emancipation of the community are the main goals.

## I: How has the situation changed over the last two decades for the Hungarian community here in Romania?

## R: Would you like to hear about the last two decades or after the revolution which is in '89?

## I: After the revolution.

## R: We have had many achievements in the field of education and the use of the mother tongue. We have managed to restore the situation as far as schools are concerned, as it used to be in the 60s and 70s. As far as the use of the mother tongue is concerned, we have achieved the adoption of good laws, but the use of the laws is not so good in this field as far as the city name plates are concerned, and the name of the city is shown only in one language. As far as the restoration of properties are concerned, we have managed to make some good progress as far as individual properties, not institutions. As far as community properties or church properties are concerned, we have managed to get about half of them back. Furthering the rights of the minority in Romania, as well as the restoration of properties, was halted after Romania joined the EU in 2007. An explanation for this, is that, Romania has met very few criteria before joining the EU. So Romania has tried to compensate for the very little things they have done before joining the EU, by making progress on the minority rights in the post-Soviet context.

## I: What is the current situation of the political support from the Hungarian state?

## R: We have had some sort of political support from Hungary, ever since the beginning of the 90s, but it has changed somewhat over the years. Usually when the socialists have been governing in Hungary, the support for our community has been significantly lower, but when the conservatives and especially the current prime minister, Viktor Orbán, have been governing, since 2010, the support has been growing. There are two ways of seeing nations in Europe, one would be how the French see it, one would be how the Germans would see it. The French would say, everyone who is a citizen of France is French, regardless of their ethnicity. While the Germans say, everybody who speaks German is in German, is a German and Germany feels that they should help them, whether they live in Germany or some other country. Romania and Romanians tend to think like the French, but Hungarians, including the Hungarians in Romania tend to think like the Germans. That is why there is some misunderstanding between the two nations or the two countries.

## I: In 2010 and 2011, the Hungarian state began the naturalisation of the ethnic Hungarian community here in Romania. Did this change the relationship between the Hungarian state and the Hungarian community here in Romania?

## R: I would like to put this in some context. Between the years of 1998 and 2002 during the current Prime Minister's government, Hungary made an ethnic card that would, as they saw it, as a solution to the problem. The Committee of Venice and the member states of the EU had a bad opinion of this, a negative one, and they reduced the use of this card so much, that the Hungarian state could not provide the level of support they wanted to provide via this card. To understand this, we need to go back to 1992 when the Prime minister in Hungary, adopted a law regarding the Hungarian communities outside of Hungary. The gist of this law would be to give some rights to some people, but in order to do that, they needed to specify who these people were, but because this ethnic card failed, they needed to provide citizenship. We need to state that with citizenship, the Hungarians in Romania felt that Hungary has reached out to them. This was both a legal and an emotional relationship. So over the past decade, Bucharest has seen this in a negative way, this new relationship with the Hungarians here, and we can see a lot of nonsense regarding flags used by our community, or even terrorist threats, or so-called terrorist threats, experienced by the Hungarian community. This shows a shift in the relationship between the Romanian community and the Hungarian community here in Romania. We need to specify that starting from 2004/2005 the Hungarians in Romania have started to follow media from Hungary, TV stations from Hungary. We need to also state that Hungarians in Romania are aware that matters concerning their everyday lives are decided upon in Bucharest, but as far as their ethnic identity, their cultural identity and matters relating to this, they know that Budapest and Hungary play a major role. We need to also see the geo-political situation, we need to mention that since our organisation and the current Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin have a good relationship, Romania thinks that we play into the Russian agenda. Which is of course is not true, because we know that our rights, as a minority, our language rights, only come from the EU and following a European set of values, East of here, minority issues are usually solved by tanks.

## I: Are the protestations by other states against Hungary's kin-state policies completely unfair or an overreaction?

## R: In the case of Ukraine, they have approximately 16 million Russians, this is way they are not keen on the whole dual citizenship situation, because they cannot say, Russians can't have it but Hungarians can, they just said no one can. In the case of Slovakia the case can be different, as the majority of the Hungarians live right near the border; this could be why the country is not keen on dual citizenship. Neither of these cases apply in Romania for several reasons. Firstly, the place where Hungarians live, about 700,000 of them, they live in the centre of the country. The other reason would be, is that before Hungary had decided to give citizenship to Hungarians living here, Romania had already been giving citizenship in Moldova, over 100,000 of them, so they could not say anything. So the international examples, show, such as the one in Portugal, that if a country decides to give citizenship to people outside of the country, the tendency is that people will have a stronger bond with that country, that gives them citizenship. We are a bit concerned that the dual citizenship act will lead to Hungarians from Romania going to Hungary. We can already see that if someone wants to go and work abroad in Europe, they can easily do so if they have a Hungarian passport as opposed to a Romanian passport, but right now the economic difference between Romania and Hungary is not big enough for Hungary to be able to draw people to Hungary. Ever since we have joined the EU, approximately one third of the Hungarians in Romania consider Hungary as a destination they would like to relocate to, and this is actually a drop down in percentage.

## I: If we can talk about the funding from Hungary here in Romania. How has the increases affected the community here?

## R: We can say that this is a substantial support but compared from EU funds and other funds you can access; it is not that big. But they are very useful or significant for the Hungarian community living in Romania, because they can be used for ethnic and cultural projects that the EU or Romania does not provide for. This is due to the fact that EU sees culture and education as being a member state level issue. You can use EU funds to build something, maybe even a cultural building, but what goes on within that building the EU has not control over. Another thing we need mention is that this support from the Hungarian government, reaches to an individual level, so as a Hungarian in Romania, there are only a few of us that can actually access these funds. So for example, the reformed church in Transylvania, last year, renovated 700 churches but this is not an individual. I would also like to share with you, that these churches are 500 years old, 600 years old and have not been well kept so they desperately needed some help. So this is not like Saudi Arabia financing mosques in Albania, it is old buildings being restored. Even though Hungarians in Romania, on an individual level, if they don't see this support immediately in their pockets, but because it finances community projects, they feel like Hungary has reached out to our community.

## I: Is it necessary to be a Hungarian citizen, in order to receive funding from Hungary?

## R: No. Generally no, but there has been one example, when the Hungarian government decided to give support for Hungarian farmers to buy equipment in the amount of, at most, 15,000 euros. That is when they thought about linking it to Hungarian citizenship, so they changed their minds and decided that any Hungarian can receive this money, even though they are not citizens. The other support that the Hungarian government is giving to the Hungarian community in Romania would be the one which is about 140,000 euros, it is for children who start school, for their supplies, this is support for Hungarian children going to Hungarian schools.

## I: Has there been any reaction, positive or funding, from the Romanian state, about Hungarian state funding within Romania?

## R: Good question. I would say that the only time when the Romanian government has, so to speak, frowned upon these measures, was when the Hungarian government thought about linking the use of this funding to having Hungarian citizenship. The other thing is that Romania has been doing the same for Romanians in Moldova and the German government has been supporting the few Germans that have remained here in Transylvania. I would say that the Hungarian support from Hungary, that is for economic project has had some negative comments from the Romanian government, but as far as cultural and education related projects, there have been none. All together there hasn't been any very negative, any outstanding reactions from the Romanian government.

## I: I was told this morning, that there were plans for a Hungarian funded hospital here. Is this correct?

## R: No. So there is a law in Romania that says that some universities need to provide places for Hungarian students, not for Hungarian students specifically, but for teaching in Hungarian. This is a law that is served by a university here in Cluj, also a university teaching theatrical studies in Târgu Mureș, but is not served by a university in Târgu Mureș for medical students or medicine. We think that the 1.3 million Hungarians living in Transylvania, should be able to go to a doctor and tell them what needs they have in Hungarian, and therefore we think that teaching young doctors in Hungarian is very important. So we think that this right of the 1.3 million Hungarians, to go to a doctor in Hungarian, is a basic human right. So we thought that the university here to open a new department to teach Hungarian doctors, this would entail a practical study, meaning they would have to build a teaching hospital. Sadly this comes at a very great cost, so it is still a plan, and nobody wants to fund this cost. So the main problem would be, that the main problem in Târgu Mureș, that teaches pharmaceutical and medical studies, does not abide by the law, they do not provide teaching in Hungarian and they get away with it.

## I: How much of a priority is cultural or territorial autonomy for the party?

## R: When we talk about autonomy, we see this as a solution to some problems that other states have had and they have solved these problems through autonomy. We don't necessarily want autonomy in and of itself, but we want a solution to these problems. Let me give you an example; the law currently says, if you want to start a class of students, you need at least 7 children to be in a class. Still every year there are some negotiations and some anxiety, about where we can have new classes, first classes where classes exist, because the law says that every child is entitled to go to school and learn in Hungarian, but this is the law, but in practice, they actually need a school and class to go to and the forming of these classes is always a big negotiation every year. So what we are asking is that we as a minority decide for ourselves, how many classes we need for our children, of course we want to do this within the legislative framework, but we want to decide which child goes to which school and how many children we have in each school. Whether this is called autonomy law, or modifying the current education law, we don't really care, as long as we can have a say in the way that we give our ethnic and national identity to our children, the way they inherit this from us. The situation in Székely Land is somewhat different. There, apart from the fact they want to have a say in cultural matters, and want to decide for themselves with these matters, they also want to have economic autonomy, and this is because this region of the country is one of the poorer ones, the least developed ones. If you look at the annual budget of the country of the past thirty years, you can see that the way that they have divided the funds between the counties and the state clearly shows, that the two counties where Hungarians live, have always had less funds given to them. If you look at the current autonomies in Europe, you can see that in every case where they have autonomy, you can see economic development coming with autonomy. So again, our goal is not autonomy in itself, but we would like to see this part of Transylvania develop and prosper economically.

## I: What is Viktor Orbán's intent or objective with regards to the Hungarian state's kin-state policies?

## R: If we think about this rationally, we can say that there is a side to the story and a demographical side to the story. If you look at Hungary, and see that some of their young people have chosen to migrate towards the western of Europe for work, and if you look at the birth rate, you can see that families usually have 1.3 or 1.4 children, but in order to make up for the loss in demographics, you need to have 2.1. So in order to counter the demographic loss, Hungary, as opposed to let's say Poland, who have also lost some workers, they have a lot of Ukrainians working in Poland. So as opposed to this country, Hungary have always been not too keen on people from a different culture or of a different language to join their country, so this is the political solution to the demographic decline. So I think that Hungary has chosen to see Hungarians living here as a solution to the demographic solution, because the integration of our Hungarian community to the Hungarian community would be seamless. The other aspect would be entirely political, and with citizenship, comes the right to vote, and we can see that Hungarians in Romania have a tendency, 90 percent of them, to vote for the current Prime Minister. When the election results are close, then this difference could make a big difference. So if I would bring up an example it would be that the President of Croatia, who had secured his second term office, with the votes from the people living outside of the country. The second term in office of Romanian's president, has been secured by the votes of the citizens of Romania from Moldova. There could come a time when the current ruling party of Hungary could secure another term in office with the aid of the votes of the Hungarians living outside of country.

## I: Have the demographic elements of the kin-state policies created tensions between Fidesz and your party?

## R: No and the reason for which I am saying this is that when the current governing party has decided about the citizenship bill, the relationship between our party and Fidesz was not a good one and when we have rekindled our relationships, a third of the Hungarians living in Romania had already had Hungarian citizenship and we cannot undo this. So we have decided to accept the situation.

## I: An advisor to me once told me that the part of the objective of the extraterritorial naturalisation practices by the Hungarian state was to facilitate the creation of power bases beyond Hungary's territorial borders, do you believe this to be correct?

## R: I do not see where Hungary could use this influence, or make use of this influence, as both countries are members of the EU, both countries are members of the North Atlantic alliance and Romania is twice as large as Hungary. I don't see how Hungary could use financial and political influence. Hungarians in Romania represent 6.5% of the population, Hungarians in Zakarpattia are 0.3% of the Ukrainian population, Hungarians in Vojvodina are about 20% of the population. So the only place where Hungary could make use of such an influence maybe would be Slovakia, because near the borders Hungarians are in the majority. But even there, redrawing the borders, would be much more of a hassle than gain. So it would be not realistic to say that any borders would change or would shift with this influence, maybe if Ukraine falls apart but even then, the territories where Hungarians live near the borders, would be twenty or thirty villages so it’s not that significant. So even if Viktor Orbán did have the political will to redraw borders based on ethnic situations, these regions are so varied and so mixed ethnically that you cannot redraw borders based on the ethnicities of the people living there.

## I: Does your party here have a relationship with other Hungarian parties in Ukraine, or with the VMSZ in Vojvodina for example?

## R: Yes, we do. These relationships usually involve Budapest or Hungary. So there are some, but very few relationships between our party and the Party of the Hungarians living in Vojvodina, for example. So we like to establish a relationship based on exchanges on expertise, but in every other aspect aside of the cultural and linguistic one, our situation is very different, and we cannot help each other or relate to each other.