*Information about interviewee:*

*Elvira Kovaćs is a member of Parliament for the political party VMSZ in the Serbian Parliament. The interview was conducted in Belgrade, Serbia.*

*R= Respondent – Elvira Kovaćs*

*I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton*

I: Can you please describe some of the core objectives of the VMSZ and the challenges the party faces?

R: Generally speaking we are concerned with stabilising minority issues with a focus on media freedoms and cultural autonomy. We wish to help to empower people by giving them the financial support they need. We have state secretaries in the Serbian governing coalition at agriculture, infrastructure, health and education. Our Hungarian community needs to have the opportunity to study in Hungarian. This is becoming difficult because of the demographic issues we face. Some schools only have 3 or 4 students.

I: How has the Hungarian legislation on dual nationality affected Vojvodina?

R: It has had a massive impact. Hungary has the right to come to Serbia to talk to their people. These people are not only Serbian but legally and ethnically Hungarian. This is what has changed. Entire families are moving, not to Hungary but to other parts of the EU. The middle class has left. “The Hungarian legislation on dual-nationality has had a massive impact on Vojvodina. Entire families are moving, not to Hungary but to other parts of the EU. The middle class has left. The population is getting older”. This is particularly problematic in North Vojvodina.

I: What are the objectives of the Prosperitati foundation?

R:160 million euros over 2016/17/18. Housing for young couples. ½ the price of house paid for if they stay for 7 years. Agriculture. Businesses. Started in April 2016. Enough money for 16/17

I: Why are Hungary interested in engaging with Hungarians living in Vojvodina?

R: Because of voters. Fidesz needed voters from Vojvodina to help get them to a super-majority.

I: Does Fidesz finance the VMSZ?

R: No. But all the activities of the VMSZ are financed by Fidesz through the foundation

I: Does Fidesz finance the electoral campaigns of VMSZ?

R: No. But they do give political support. They come to Vojvodina to campaign on our behalf. We have a very good relationship with Fidesz. Our community has a 90% approval rating of Orbán. We love him. He does a lot for our community. The VMSZ is financed by the Serbian state budget but between 2004-7 we did not exist as a party

I: How is the commission involved with distributing funding?

R: There are always two experts. One from Fidesz, one from VMSZ. They allocate points to each application. If the difference in points is more than 20, a third expert (always from Fidesz) is assigned the application. The ultimate decision lies with Fidesz.

I: Was the large-scale emigration of Hungarians living in Vojvodina an expected outcome of the dual-nationality legislation?

R: It was expected but not to the extent it occurred.

I: Do you see this trend continuing?

R: Yes. Unfortunately. We are trying to keep people in Vojvodina but “it is trendy for people to go and work in Austria and Switzerland” even if they make less money doing it.

I: What is the next step in the relationship between the VMSZ and the Hungarian state?

R: We need to make sure these economic development programmes work. The Hungarian elections are due next year. “We will do everything in our power to help Fidesz gets the votes they need. We for sure understand that at the last election and referendum turnout was poor. This is something we have to address this for the next election”. The opposition parties to VMSZ, such as VMDK need to “find their way”. But we have a strong relationship with Fidesz, and we approve of their activities.

I: Does the VMSZ have any territorial autonomy ambition?

R: We can see three types of autonomy: personal, cultural and territorial. The Hungarian population is too fragmented to achieve this. If we were to seek territorial autonomy for the towns and communities bordering Hungary with Hungarian majorities, how would the people in Novi Sad feel? All our efforts would be directed towards this. What we do want is Hungarian representation at all levels of society. Not only public but private sector. We want there to be a positive discrimination to ensure that if you walk into a post office, or police station in Senta, you are able to speak Hungarian.

I: The distribution of Hungarian passports seems to be incoherent with the position that Hungary wants Hungarians to stay in Vojvodina?

R: Hungary sees the Hungarians living here as a cheap workforce.

I: To emigrate to Hungary?

R: No. But to invest in the region and to get returns on this investment.