*Information about interviewee:*

*Erika Torsok was a Liberal Member of the Hungarian Parliament. The Interview was conducted Budapest, Hungary.*

*R= Respondent – Erika Torsok*

*I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton*

I: Please can you tell me about your role in policy formation between the Hungarian state and the ethnic Hungarians living abroad?

R: I was a liberal politician working as secretary of state for Policies on Hungarians living in the neighbouring territories until 2010 when Fidesz came to power. We were primarily focused on schooling and education rights and wanted the regions of to get closer and did not want to take a focus on ethnicity. The Serbian and Slovakian governments began to close the Hungarian schools, so we wanted to stop this trend. I used to travel a lot between Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia but back then this was certainly not encouraged, and the Hungarian authorities withdrew my passport twice! It was dangerous to travel between these countries back then. Right now the situation is very bad, I can see that it is worse now than it was back then. Many Hungarians and Romanians migrated to Yugoslavia to then continue onwards to Italy. Yugoslavia was closer to the west then Hungary was.

Our aim when I was in office was to create a situation where the cooperation was not symbolic but made a big impact on people’s lives. We focused on regional cooperation that would help everyone, not just based on ethnicity and minorities. Now we need to try to reinvigorate the social and economic relationship

I: What were the biggest challenges to your role?

R: Following the treaty of Trianon the fragments that followed hindered real economic development. The problem with this fragmentation was that it was not logical but arbitrary, artificial border drawing that creates problems with the current politics. The Fidesz party have taken a nationalist approach to this, which has divided the Hungarians both in Hungary and within the regions where the Hungarians divide. It has turned the Hungarians living in Hungary against the Hungarians living beyond our current territory.

I: What do you believe motivates Orbán?

R: Fidesz realised they could create political capital by adopting a divisive approach. They seek to demoralise, divide and conquer. We can see this at the moment as they are attempting, not to engage with the Hungarian communities, but colonise them.

The dual citizenship legislation in in 2010 was one of the first political actions Fidesz took with their super majority. They did not wait until the Slovakian elections and implemented this policy immediately prior to these elections. This therefore they cost the Hungarian Slovakian coalition party the election. He is creating fictional parties in many of the states that surround Hungary to support financially, and actually does the same in the Hungary to divide the support against Orbán and Fidesz.

In Romania, the Fidesz party and MND were actually against each other, one right-wing, one socialist. Now we can see that the linkages are very strong and getting stronger as they begin to love the taste of money that Fidesz can offer them. He does not wish to cooperate but dominate and colonise. We can see this with the economic development funds, as the massive amount of money that flows into Vojvodina is large unaccountable. There is no obligation to make this money transparent and visible. We interpret this as money laundering as we have estimate that 30 percent of the money invested, about 50 billion HUF, flows back into Hungary, 30 percent goes to Orbán’s political allies in Vojvodina through the VMSZ, and only 40 percent actually goes to the Hungarians in Serbia. Orbán’s minority policy is very dangerous. It is divisive and is damaging the future of Hungarians in these regions. We are very worried and sadden by the situation.

I: What is the solution?

R: We like to draw parallels between Fidesz and Orbán and Nicolae Ceaușescu. Hopefully we will see the same result. We can see Hungarian corruption is the highest in the EU

Mr Peter Port, in charge of Hungarian legislation is an extremely close friend of Mr Orbán and they have a strong grip on power and legislation to strengthen power. There are nine opposition parties and so the critical voice is fragmented. This is exactly what Fidesz want and they stimulate this.

I: How has the dual-nationality legislation affected the situation?

R: In 2004 the referendum basically was between two different perspectives. Most agreed that the Hungarians living in the neighbouring territories should be given the opportunity to create a real emotional attachment between them and the kin state. However, the big issue was the voting rights that would follow and now we see why this was a concern for many. It has been disastrous and creates an absurd situation where our election and even our constitution can be influenced by those living in another sovereign territory.

The distribution of passports was purely symbolic for those living in Romania and Slovakia. It is a different story for those in Serbia and Ukraine. But for those in EU countries, Hungary is no longer attractive. It was in the 1990s but no longer. These policies though, as a consequence, has meant many in Hungary now hate those Hungarians living in the neighbouring territories. The natural solidarity has disappeared, this is a trad edgy.

Some of the rhetoric surrounding this policy has revolved around the position that Hungary and the former Kingdom of Hungary was a homogeneous country ethnically. This is simply not true. We estimate that before Trianon, 51 percent of the population were ethnically Hungarian. What about the other 49 percent? Do they not matter? Are they not there? Not according to Fidesz. This rhetoric is flawed but powerful. Some people are easily swayed by this. Some even believe that Mr Putin will give Hungary a piece of Ukraine.

I: How is the situation different in Slovakia?

R: The relation with Mr Fico is strong now, but the questions of Hungarians is not on the agenda and there is no discussion about language rights. The young people vote MOST-HID and Fidesz is unable to influence this party. The older people and those who fear losing their rights are voting for SMK. This is where Mr Orbán is a specialist, he plays with emotions, fears and symbolism. He builds football stadia over hospitals and appears to look like he is helping Hungarian when in fact he isn’t.