

Interview: Filip

Date Transcribed: 17/02/2022

Interview Duration: 48 minutes

Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Filip

Emotions have been added into the transcript as i.e. [*sadness*] and interviewers have been placed in bold and italicised. Any sections that need to be checked for accuracy such as phrases in other languages or names of places I couldn't confirm the spelling of have been highlighted in red.

Conversation about home towns and previously lived locations between LR and F

Interview Starts at 0:09.08 on the recording.

CH: Lucia have you got the screen.

LR: Yes, I'll share the screen and, oh it says host disabled participant screen sharing.

CH: Oh there you go now.

LR: Ohkay. I got it. Can you see it?

CH: Yeah we can see it cool.

LR: Perfect. Ok shall we start from here. Maybe Filip you can talk us through these pictures that you've collected?

F: Right. I need to first say a few words of apologies. I must have misunderstood slightly what the original request for the pictures was. I know there was a comment that you wanted some sort of art work or picture that reflects experiences but I thought the first pictures that I'm going to send would be just to select the face to attach to the profile. So I selected a few and I said to Bart you can choose formal or informal picture to attach to the file. I think in a way the pictures probably reflect maybe not exactly the mood but the experiences of the last couple of years. I will start with the one in the middle. Basically in the middle of pandemic, in November 2020 I've learnt that my previous employer is going to restructure the operations and I'm going to be made redundant or at the time the way it was phrased is that I'm group at risk. Obviously as usual with the legal requirements there is consultation period and all that thing but basically it was almost given that I am going together with few other hundred people. So the final day with my previous employer was end of May 2021 and I started, basically I then set up a self employed business because I thought my previous employer was Bank and I've been with them for 15 years so redundancy pay was pretty decent I will say. So in a way it was almost that I wasn't desperate to get for example demoted and stay with the bank at all costs I thought I'd rather redundancy pay and try something else rather than go for lower paid job and see if they made me redundant lower paid job in two years [*chuckles*] time again. So I took the redundancy pay and set up my own business doing pretty much exactly the same what I did for the bank which is mortgage and protection advice but for myself. Just to give you a bit of a background. You cannot really do it, you can but it's quite a difficult, especially if your on your own doing completely independently so I joined a franchise. So basically franchised business provides all the software, bit of know how, bit of quality oversight all of that and I basically do what I was doing before and the reason for the picture was to create a profile with them because they've got a landing page on their system. So basically potential clients search my name or type mortgages it will probably come up top of the search on google then they click on the link on the google mini profile and it will take them to the landing page and that picture will appear there. Plus I've changed my picture a lot of professional and semi-professional platforms like LinkedIn etcetera using this updated picture. It was basically driven by the fact that I've been made redundant. That's the

first one. The other two probably is a reflection of the fact that I think during the pandemic as a family we became much closer. We spent much more time together for various reasons, various events and I spent much more time with the kids and I think that's a positive thing. I know a lot of people, and there's a lot of negative about the pandemic and there's a lot of unfortunately, sadly loss of life and sad events linked to it but the fact that I got the chance to spend more time with the family is good. I've found it as a positive when the first lockdown hit my moved pretty much all non-essential staff, myself included to work from home and that was to begin doing few other, few hours on few other task groups and then from June 2020 I returned to giving advice but I was doing that via Zoom like we do now and I loved it and saving couple of hours commuting time, big win, and I used that experience to move to what I'm doing now professionally. It enabled me to realise it's perfectly doable to do this job remotely and now I've got flexibility. I can arrange meeting with client in the evening and spend the day with the kids or I can arrange meeting, as a matter of fact I've got a meeting with clients on Sunday at four thirty pm but for that I can do a school run in the morning stress free, school run in the afternoon stress free and do little bits and bobs in between that I need to do. So the other pictures are basically reflection of spending more time with the kids. I think the one on the right hand side will be, I think the one with my daughter on my shoulders will be, I think it must have been some sort of event, outdoor event. I think it was... I can't remember where it was really. Somewhere in West Midlands. Some tanks and trucks and some sort of rally or festival and we randomly found it and went and then almost, well you had to pre-book it but almost from one day to another rather than planning it so many weeks in advance. I really enjoyed it and the one on the left hand side both of my children is taken in Nottingham fairly recently, during the Christmas, or after the break between Christmas and new year. .. other than being a dad and self employed mortgage broker I'm also a nerd. So I like all things like role playing games and miniatures I never did so much but since I've got a little boy we went, during lockdown we used to go few times to go on holidays toon the north sea coast and in that town there was little hobby shop when my son It was almost a tradition almost every other day we popped in there and he said daddy can I have a miniature and when he picked one from his pocket money and it was my job to steer him, the first thing he would pick is big dragon which was fifteen quid or so. Like look this little rat monster looks really really scary and good, oh yeah yeah I like it daddy. Oh success about three quid. It doesn't matter and then we went in because he wanted to paint them at some point so we did that and recently we took them to games workshop just as an experience. They're too little really to play, especially my daughter she's only three and a half years old. We've seen it and the whole place is semi-magical. There's big displays or dioramas of all the miniatures nicely painted so they had excitement out of that, little bit of excitement. So that's the story behind the pictures.

LR: Ok. Can I ask you a little bit more about this period during the lockdowns because you told us about what happened to you, especially the redundancy and your decision to go independent, but how did you feel? How was your emotional experience if we can call it that way?

F: Urm...

LR: I mean this thing, this Covid is a big thing. It's affected everyone's life.

F: It's massive. In a way I'm grateful that I had the chance. I know some people say ooft. People that have been furloughed that ooh that was great they didn't have to do anything and they will be paid for it but in a way I'm glad I had a chance to work or continue working throughout because reflecting on it now. On one hand you might think oh it would be nice to be furloughed and just spend more time with the kids maybe, but I think because I had to work and even readjust myself to a new way of working and environment it kept my mind occupied enough so I didn't have too much time to dwell on what's going to happen. At the very beginning I was scared, we were all scared, are we even going to be able to buy food. *[laughing]* To feed the family because I remember times when all the shelves were empty for example. I remember going to the office in ..., probably last or second last time to I think drop something off there at the very beginning of lockdown because you need to all work from home so. No I went there to collect things I kept in my office there so they don't be left and misplaced by someone accidentally and on the way out I just popped into a couple of shops like oh yeah they've got mince beef there I'll buy, they've got I don't know pasta, big pack of pasta left I'll buy that one as well just in case. We were not probably as scared or unprepared like as some other people because both myself and my wife we're quite risk averse, especially her she likes planning ahead as well and before the Brexit was to happen on 1 January 2020 I think where the change was supposed to happen with new rules etc. She built a little bit, so that was before the Covid, she built up a little bit of stock reserve in the garage. So tinned food, pasta etcetera. Well you never know what's going to happen after Brexit, it's good to have a little bit of non-perishable foods in reserve just in case there will be hiccups in the logistical chain so we had that and that was helpful. So that was

beginning. So I was scared what's going to happen and from the very beginning I pretty much knew it's not going to be a quick thing. I know some people say no it's going to be over in six months. I knew it's going to last long. I didn't expect it's going to last more than two years admittedly on and off but I knew it was going to be a long haul and I knew the only way out is mass vaccination programme because that was my guesswork but that guesswork was supported by information that I got from one of my friends that works in Oxford as a virologist. So quite close to the front line [*chuckles*] if you like and I was reading the updates regularly and that gave me a idea that yeah you need to prepare mentally for a long haul and the fact that we will be in this for a while. Don't panic just prepare yourself mentally and we did and we tried to make most of it. Yes on one hand there were moments where I thought. I think the times where I was most sad or moderately depressed is where I sometimes think about my home country and thinking I cannot fully just jump on the plane easily and just go there without almost second thought as I used to because it's much more complex these days and last time I seen my parents was in March 2020. Just, very last minute before the lockdown hit. That was because my father was diagnosed with kidney cancer again just before the pandemic started and he was about to go to hospital to undergo operation removal of one of the kidneys. So I thought I'll go there and see him because you never know. At the time there was new about something from Wuhan but you didn't know how it was going to develop exactly. So I thought I'll go there and see him at least over the weekend because I never know when I'm going to see him again so fortunately the operation was successful. He, touch wood, recovered and he's ok and it's all in remission and for now they don't see any other negative signs but I've not been able to see him face to face since then. For various reasons, in theory I could probably try but to begin with I was a bit too scared to go, mostly for him because I thought if I travel, and if I contract illness and pass it on to him, he's more vulnerable than I am. So I don't want to take that risk. Then recently that was November last year 2021 my brother decided to get married in out of all the times he could choose that, at the moment it was scheduled for three weeks before Christmas on the 11 of December something the wedding. Invited me and I thought well, I'm vaccinated now, fully vaccinated, my parents fully vaccinated so I'll give it a try. We quickly decided I will travel on myself, not with whole family because my son didn't have a passport. We decided not to renew his passport because we thought well there's no point we're not going to travel anywhere during lockdown or during pandemic. So we didn't renew his passport. There wasn't enough time to do it so it was just myself. So booked tickets, reserve parking at the airport etcetera and just about a week or two before gradually the rules become, or rules regarding the travelling become more and more strict. To the point I think where the Omicron become a big scare and a week or two before my travel to commence there was the new rule where you have to get yourself tested twenty four hours prior to departure from your country and I thought, one it's a logistical problem. I was just to go there for two or three days, just an extended weekend really, so will I find somewhere that will allow me to get tested and get the result in time so I could board the plane back. That's one thing that could potentially be overcome but what if I'm tested positive and I'm stranded over there and I can't be with my kids for Christmas. That was a bigger risk again I decided not to take so I've scrapped the plans. Fortunately the plane tickets weren't too expensive because it was completely out of season so it wasn't a massive financial loss, it's just my brother's wedding was fairly small. It was literally him, his wife to be, a couple of witnesses and my parents, that's it. No reception whatsoever because my mother refused to go to restaurants. She said, too scared, I don't want to mix with people now with the Omnicron and you're dad is till ill so they just went to the ceremony, said all the best wishes and departed all to their own ways so that was my hope to see my dad and then my mum and dad first time since March 2020. Didn't happen but I tried to focus my mind on children and my own family now and making sure they happy and they doing ok. Another low moment in the pandemic was the schools were closed and we had to do home schooling. Low in a way because it was bloody hard work.

LR: Yeah, I can imagine.

F: Honestly it was like pulling teeth because it's so different and child's mind I think is different perspective, listening to instructions from his parents rather than from a teacher. He's way more disciplined with a teacher's instructions than me saying we need to try some writing or reading or do this task. Honestly it took almost every day all day to make him to do all the task they said he was supposed to do. It was hard work. It was draining basically mentally and physically draining.

LR: Yeah I can imagine.

F: So that was a period where mentally and physically the lowest point. When the schools were closed.

CH: Filip were you here during Brexit? When Brexit happened.

F: Yes.

CH: How did you feel about that? About what happened.

F: Eh, in two minds. I can understand both sentiments on both points of view to be fair, despite me being an immigrant myself. I can see why a lot of people voted for Brexit. If I distance myself from my own self, and try to be objective I can see reasoning to a degree. Yes if you look purely at logic of economy, it's not necessarily best choice but a lot of choices are not made on logic. A lot of choices are made on emotions. I thought ultimately it's not going to affect me that much personally. The Brexit is much more predictable than Covid because basically you can expect what's going to happen to a degree. There's road map and rules set out quite far in advance and there's a way round it so I thought even being selfish. I didn't know that at the time being selfish, my wife she works in HR so she's given me some sort of perspective to things as well. She said from your selfish point of view Brexit in a way is short to medium term is probably safest solution in the way that there will be shortage on the job market, that there is. So it will be easier for anyone who's looking for a job then it will be easier to find work than it was before. That's just selfish point of view, obviously there are hiccups along the way for example lorry driver shortages and that's being caused by Covid, sorry not Covid but potentially as well and Brexit as well and all the other areas of industry as well like for example construction is another one where a good friend of mine works in construction and she's an architect and they said the quality of various projects suffer because they need to grab whatever workforce they find without checking how good they are at what they're doing and quite often the end result suffers because they don't check how long that kind of person worked or what they did before really. So yes if you apply logic from an economy perspective, probably not the best choice but I know there's a lot of people with various sentiments as to why I voted for Britain. For me I wasn't that bothered.

CH: Where you lived in England did you get any kind of feelings or from other people in relation to you being Polish or anything like that?

F: To be fair I was probably quite lucky enough for not to experience any negative feedback or not too much during my career with the bank. being an international organisation they have pretty much quite embedded culture of being open for various people of various backgrounds and that's prevalent. That's not an issue there whatsoever. So I don't think I've been mistreated or had any funny treatment from my work colleagues etc. There was never problem there. From clients during that time I had maybe of the fifteen years maybe a couple of times where people made funny comments or... I'm quite thick skinned to be honest. In the job you have to be and if they didn't make comments about my.... It was never a direct comment to be honest, it was more commenting of their heritage and reading between the lines how superior that is. *[laughing]*

LR: Can I ask a question in relation to what you just said. What you said, you know when you were talking about the Brexit both this decisions are not made with rationality but they are made on emotions basically. So can I ask what you think the emotion is underpinning the Brexit vote, underpinning the people who voted for Brexit. What do you think their main emotion is motivating them to go that way.

F: I think that there's two, one is people lost faith in European Union as an organisation. In a way that it came to bureaucratic, and this, to be fair this sentiment I share a little bit. I think as a concept it's great but at execution of this concept at this stage where we are as a European Union with all the bureaucracy around brussels it's just too fat. There's just too much there and are trying to.... Maybe not control too much but I think there's too much money wasted on unnecessary things while it could be utilised way better. So that's one thing and I think another, potentially it might be where people could think within European Union rules they're pretty much citizen across the whole organisation, have access to the same social system in each country. So maybe people will said that for example people coming over from i.e. Poland or I don't know Latvia or Slovakia, Romania, somewhere. Immediate access to state benefits and I could see this being upsetting for some and that's pretty much two things I could think of as potential sentiment as to why people voted the way they voted. As I said it's not necessarily rational but it makes me think about emotions that drive people to decisions as to what they made.

LR: Ok. Can I ask you if you've got British Citizenship.

F: No.

LR: Ok.

F: Not trying for it yet. I mean maybe one day I'll do it if I don't know if I'll have to or if I decide it's the right moment for it but no I'll have to do some, probably couple of tests or something which I can't really be bothered with.

LR: Yeah there is, I amn't got British citizenship either. I think I looked into it, you've got to pass a culture test and then a language test and then on top of that you've got to cough up about 2,000 pounds for it.

F: Yeah something along, it might be even dearer these days. Won't surprise me.

LR: Yeah I think so. So yeah.

CH: Did you have to apply for the European Settlement Scheme then?

F: Yes I did. So basically what happened is, when I came over to Britain that was October 2000. I mean just a bit of background about myself I have a family that lives in Britain basically for many years and I've been to Britain before so first time I was in Britain was mm mid-80's? I think it was '86 maybe. Just as a visit to family for a couple of weeks. Then couple of times in the 90s or I think no once in the 90s and then one in... No one in 90's then one 00's and then once probably few months before I decided to migrate because my grandad's brother. So the family is my grandad's brother have been captured during the war by Germans in Poland, during the occupation, then taken to Bavaria as a slave worker from which he escaped and through France managed to get to Britain during the war, then joined the forces during the war. He was a commander unit and as that kind of unit he was too scared to return to Poland after the war so he stayed in Britain and his daughter and granddaughter is my British family. So his granddaughter's pretty much on the same, probably a couple years younger than I so we kept in touch since I was little. Then when decision for moving over to Britain and all transition was probably easier for me than to many because I knew when I came over I knew people, some people that live in the country and it was easier for me to sort of settle in. So then when I came over answering question British so the settlement scheme, when I came over at that time there was this scheme by the home office where in theory should register yourself. I feel worker registration scheme was called a something in 2006. I registered in that, had the paperwork for it and then probably another easy thing was pretty much almost from arrival, few months after arrival I joined because I worked in financial industry in Poland before that so it was almost natural. Joined them and I worked for them until very recently so when it came to applying for the settlement scheme it was very easy for me because I just collect basically that's what they wanted to see at the home office. Said that there was no questions asked came back, easy and clean for me.

LR: So can I ask, I can understand the process of getting this settled status was very ok for you. Was very easy but did the Brexit change at all your, I don't know, your feeling about Britain? Did it change at all your approach or the way you feel about the country where you decided to leave.

F: No not really. No. I think of it more as inconvenience because it is more than anything and I think thinking about it is I feel safer, living in Britain than if I was living in Poland at the moment. Safe, I dunno safe is the right word but in a way probably yes on many levels safer from an economic point of view or brining over family. Also given how things develop in Poland from the political point of view safe in a way of stability and political stability. So I'm glad I'm here rather than Poland because I don't know whether you follow news, probably not too closely on development in Poland but one of the things that happened was that Poland had the European Union funds, rebuilt after Covid, all the funds frozen. All from European Union because they don't follow the guidance on what's called the rule of law so current rolling party is almost controlling the judicial system. It's kind of rolling down towards the autocratic system. I feel that in a way, they for example, using spy software to spy on the opposition leaders and all that so it's just... It feels unpleasant.

LR: And dangerous perhaps in a sort of way because it's verging towards an almost authoritarian kind of...

F: Yeah that's the direction that it feels like also you're quite close to Russia with all their aspiration and enforces now being amassed on Ukrainian borders so I'm glad I'm here and Brexit yes is a mild inconvenience but that's all.

LR: What are some of the inconveniences that you find?

F: So inconvenienced in a way for example it's probably, for some people it might be a bit more complex to travel, to cross borders and etcetera. With settled status I don't see that should be an issue for me but I've not tried. *[laughing]* I've not tested it yet but other than that and inconvenienced in a way that might affect the

economy in a way for example flow of goods and trade in the medium to longer term. Probably medium term, the longer term probably going to smooth out. So eventual scare of shortage of goods and that's it.

CH: You referred to Poland as home earlier. Do you see that still as your home?

F: Urm... not really. *[laughing]* I probably referred that out of habit. It's where I grew up and yes.... Again it's in my head I need to sometimes link emotions with logic and I know if I apply the emotions then they'll be that sentimental longing for Poland because in my head I remember how it was when I lived there and the time spent with friends when I left there and all those things but I know if I was to return there that it wouldn't be these romantic sentimental memories. For various reasons, one the country moved on since I lived there and operate probably slightly differently and secondly day to day living is not these romantic sentimental moments that you remember. It's not all positive memories just daily gruel *[chuckles]* and sometimes I know, to be fair I exercise of idea of returning to Poland a few times. One quite early when I lived in Britain because at the time tried to expand retrial operations to Poland and they actually wanted me, I spoke with Polish department and they wanted me and then I compared what I could get, would I have to re-locate and the cost and it was logical decision at the time not to migrate back to Poland because I wouldn't get same sort of, or equivalent even though the money wise would pretty much be the same but the whole package behind it, they didn't offer things like pension schemes etc. It did not exist in Poland so I thought hey its not worth doing I already had a mortgage in here and I thought no it'll be too much of a faff to do it. Then later on, I didn't exercise maybe at some point my wife had... it was an option more than an offer, just if she would really like to move to, it wasn't in Poland. It wasn't Poland but it was in Ukraine to move to because she works for and they were about open a hotel in Kiev. So we were toying with the idea and we tried and again we decided against it which was a good thing because the hotel never opened. There was some sort of corruption issue there and then that never opened and ... didn't eventually invest in it and then we thought, how about the kids being basically taken to another country away from both grandparents really and we decided against it. Then when we visited Poland before we had children we thought it would be hard work for me to re-adjust my back to way of living in Poland. Cause' I got used to things like people smile at you on the bus stop on here while it doesn't really happen here in Poland. I find it really nice, I like it. I like the fact that people in Britain are a little bit, at least where I live, maybe I don't represent the whole country but my experience generally speaking is a civil discipline is better so people. So the famous queuing, British thing. *[laughing]* There's no really fighting or jumping the que, occasionally but it doesn't really happen much and people tend to be polite enough to step out of each others way and then... Society is a bit more polite. I know maybe it's a façade but it... It makes your daily experience a bit nicer and also things like sorting things out with certain offices and the bureaucracy. Lot of things I can sort that out just picking up the phone or going online whilst I know from my parents and my brother Poland is still very much going to the office and talking a bureaucrat and presenting your case with a tonne of paperwork which I know would annoy me greatly and probably lastly very importantly for me I'm, other than being a nerd I'm a foodie. I love food *[laughing]* and I, I know there is a myth or stigma about British food being boring or grey but I find it, maybe not traditional British food but I find food I can get in Britain way more diverse and easy to get than what I can get in Poland. So every time I go in Poland, and some of that is geographical location. There's sea around Britain so you've got abundance of fish, sea food, whereas in Poland there's the Baltic sea which is shallow and not really nice and where I lived is south of Poland so it's miles away from the sea coast so you don't really have fresh fish there or forget about sea food. When it comes to other protein there is predominantly pork and chicken. Beef it's a luxury, lamb is pretty much non-existent. So other products as well, seen like either not considered or niche so I thought. Even silly things like cheese! What you can get here is way more diverse than in Poland and I thought, that'll be hard work to reduce back to eating Polish away.

LR: Yeah.

CH: Do you speak Polish to your children out of interest.

F: I tried. I tried but I gave up. *[laughs]* I... I'd like them to be bilingual but when I was still, before lockdown, before pandemic and when my father-in-law lived, because he passed away. My wife's father passed away in October 2020. So when he was around kids spent time with the grandparents a few days a week because that was basically an easy and low cost child care when I had to go to the Office, my wife worked full time as well. They spent quite a bit of time with them and they speak English only obviously because my wife's British. Then my son needs to or has the speech therapy in English because he struggles to pronounce certain words and certain sounds so while it would be nice for them to be bilingual I'll thought I'd be scared that he would be confused because he needs to perfect his first language being English first and then if I introduced Polish at the

same time I was scared he would be even more confused with it. I don't know if I can achieve them being bilingual in the future or not. No idea. Or it's no biggest issue.

LR: I am really sorry. I unfortunately have another meeting in ten minutes so Charlie are you ok carrying on?

CH: I think that's fine now thank you.

LR: Are you sure? I mean I would like to stay more. I'm trying to just press everything in and sometimes it's not easy to just. Like you said before during the lockdown it was nice to have a different approach to time but we are more or less pretty much back to almost the same rhythm as before here at university with lectures starting next week, most of them face to face so.

F: I can understand, a good friend of mine works in Edinburgh university.

LR: Ok. Yeah.

F: He's a lecturer there as well and different trade to yours he's an Astrophysicist so nothing to do with your trade.

LR: [laughing] The real scientist you mean!

F: Yeah different science.

LR: Yeah definitely yeah.

F: I can understand because I know what it takes.

CH: We'll arrange to send you the voucher if you could send us your address that would be great.

F: Oh is it postal yeah that's fine.

CH: Yeah sorry it's not online.

LR: Yeah they are actually physical vouchers we got.

F: Yeah I'll send you an email.

CH: That'd be great. Thanks for your time.

End of transcript