

AUTONOMY AND MINORITY REPRESENTATION:
THE CASE OF SOUTH TYROL

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Presentation of Sergiu Constantin, Andrásy University, 20th September 2012

In my essay I examine the living circumstances of the minority of South Tyrol. I put a great emphasis on the current political, educational system and the surrounding social problems.

Key words: South-Tyrol, Italy, ethnic minorities, Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement, Autonomy Statute

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In his speech, Sergiu Constantin, researcher of the European Academy (EURAC), analyzes the current situation of the German minority living in South Tyrol, Italy. He emphasizes the political problems evolved after the ratification of the Autonomy Statute in 1971. The presentation draws attention to the current social, cultural and ethnic-related questions.

At the beginning of his speech, Sergiu Constantin talks about the historical background of the emergence of the autonomous region. The Trentino-Alto Adige province as it exists today was created in 1919, after World War I. In 1946, the Foreign Ministers of Austria and Italy signed an agreement, called the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement, in which the Italian government guarantees the legislative and the executive autonomy in Bolzano Province².

The implementation of the Gruber-de Gasperi Agreement was not seen as satisfactory by the Austrian government, it became a cause of significant friction with Italy and was taken up by the United Nations. The issue was resolved in 1971, when a new treaty, called Autonomy Statute was ratified.³ The new autonomous status has resulted in a considerable level of self-government and proved broadly satisfactory, so the separatist tensions eased.

The current population of Bolzano Province is mostly German-speaking (70%), but there are also Italians (26%) and Ladins (4%).⁴ Nowadays the ethnical diversity still leads to significant conflicts.

Table 1. Ethnical diversity according to the census of 2011:

<i>Language</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
German	314604	69,41
Italian	118120	26,06
Ladin	20548	4,53
Total	453727	100

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² Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano - South Tyrol. The province has an area of 7,400 square km.

³ <http://www.provinz.bz.it/en/>

⁴ <http://www.provinz.bz.it/en/>

Since the Autonomy Statute was ratified, both the German and the Italian became an official language. The system of the bilingual education poses a few problems. Although the parents can decide which language their children must learn, there is an obligatory multilingual education in every school. The aim of the government with this law is to subserve the integration of the different ethnical groups. Based on the above, we can state that the government would approve the assimilation of the German-speaking population, however the majority of the Germans still choose a school according to their mother language, as an attempt to preserve their cultural heritage.

The biggest problem related to the linguistic diversity is the annual referendum, in which the population must declare which ethnical group they belong to. It is important because the social benefits are allocated to all municipalities in proportion to the local population. The problem with this system is that the people can only choose to be the member of one ethnic group, however in the past years the number of the mixed marriages has increased. Since the declaration is obligatory for everyone, the ones who have borned into an ethnically mixed family, need to take sides, even though they would want to officially belong to both ethnic groups. Though there is a fourth option (other) for those, who can not decide, but they still have to denote a preference, which eventually does not solve the problem.

In the past few years we can observe an important change at the political system of the province . Beside the German and the Italian parties, some multiethnic party came into the limelight. The most outstanding of them is the Green Party, which was founded in 1993. Their aim is to improve the relationship between the three language groups of the province. This is reflected in the division of political mandates between the different linguistic groups. They are successful in provincial politics, and are currently the fifth-largest party with two representatives in the Provincial Council.

Table 2. Results of the parliamentary elections in 2008:

<i>Parties</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Votes (%)</i>	<i>Seats</i>
South Tyrolean People's Party	146545	48,1	18
The Freedomites	43614	14,3	5
The People of Freedom	25294	8,3	3
Democratic Party	18139	6,0	2
Greens	17743	5,8	2
South Tyrolean Freedom	14888	4,9	2
Union for South Tyrol	7048	2,3	1

In the long run, we can allocate that the rigid rejection of the expansion of the minority rights is not a good solution, because it is still the aim of the German-speaking population to preserve their cultural heritage.

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Virág Katics: Autonomy and minority representation: The case of South Tyrol. *International Relations Quarterly*, Vol.4. No.3. (Fall 2013) 2p.

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