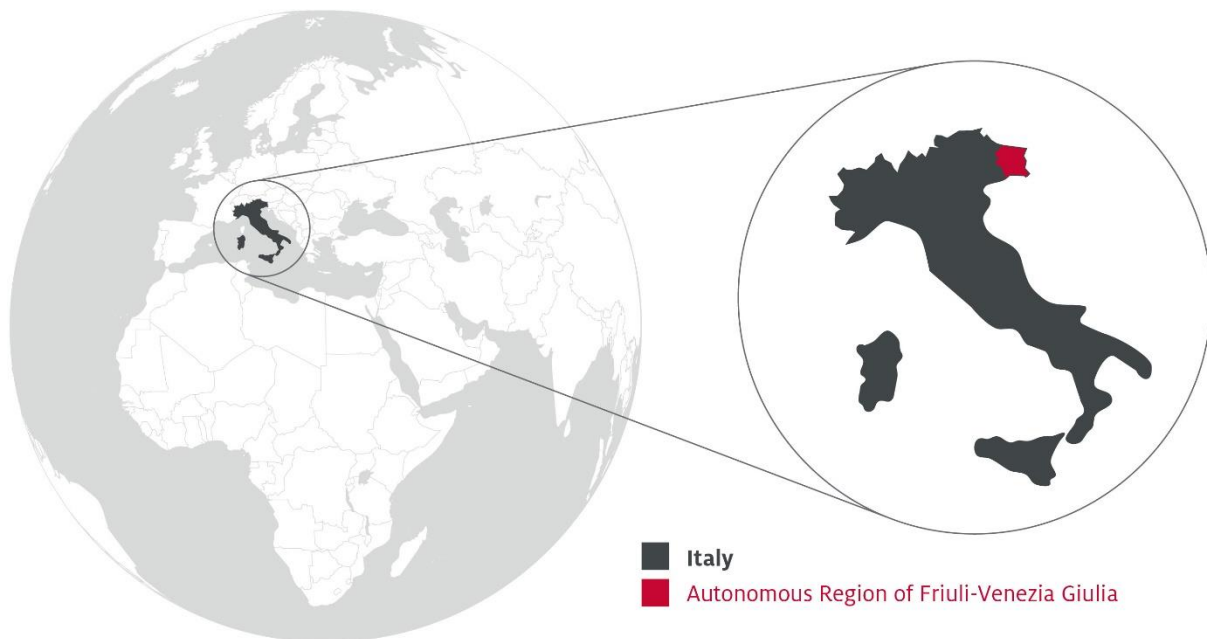




## Cultural Autonomies in the Italian Autonomous Region of Friulia Venezia Giulia

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November 2023



**Recommended citation:**

Vidau, Zaira. 2023. "Cultural Autonomies in the Italian Autonomous Region of Friulia Venezia Giulia". In *Autonomy Arrangements in the World*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57749/qx4n-fz39>.

**Autonomy Arrangements in the World**

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## 1. Essential Facts and Figures

Italy's autonomous region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (hereinafter FVG or the Region) covers the tri-border area of Italy, Slovenia and Austria. Here, one can discern the presence of three minorities: the German-speaking, the Friulian and the Slovene minority groups. These three minorities can be distinguished based on their status, characteristics, structure, history and expression of collective interests.

In the Italian Constitution<sup>1</sup> and legislation as well as in the Region's legislation, all three communities are identified as *linguistic minorities*, irrespective of their socio-political and socio-linguistic situation (Vidau 2013, 33). This term is used in Italian legislation as such a definition is the minimum possible common denominator of all legally protected types of minority groups in the Italian peninsula which comprise border-area national minorities (e.g., Slovenes and Germans), communities speaking regional languages (e.g., Occitan and Sardinian) and minorities that form linguistic islands or archipelagos (e.g., Albanian and Greek-speakers). However, the use of this term can be also controversial, if the term is used by the majority nation to diminish the political significance of the presence of a minority. Consequently, the problem of minority rights is reduced to merely a problem of language, even though the nature of a minority is usually multifaceted and also includes the issues of political and broader social engagement. Moreover, the term *national minority* is used in international instruments such as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM).

Several other historical communities were established on the current territory of FVG during economic migrations in the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These included Serbian, Croatian, Greek, Armenian, and Jewish communities. They do not have specific socio-political objectives comparable to those of linguistic minorities. Nor do they fall within the scope of the national and regional legislation on the protection of historical linguistic minorities. In addition to historical minority groups, FVG has an array of immigrant communities from approximately 150 different countries. Notably, the largest among them are the Romanian and Albanian communities. Some immigrant communities are concentrated in certain areas: e.g., Serbs around Trieste and Bangladeshis around Monfalcone near Gorizia (Institute of Economic and Social Research of Friuli Venezia Giulia 2022).<sup>2</sup>

FVG is divided into 215 municipalities spread across the four geographical areas of the former provinces of Gorizia, Pordenone, Trieste, and Udine which were abolished in 2016.<sup>3</sup> Regional Law 21/2019 on local and

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<sup>1</sup> The updated text of the Italian Constitution is available online at [https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione\\_inglese.pdf](https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf) (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> In 2021, foreign citizens living in FVG accounted for 9.7% of the total population of the Region, totaling 59,239 individuals out of 1,197,295 residents (Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia 2022, 289).

<sup>3</sup> For details see Constitutional no. 1 of 28 July 2016, Amendments to the Special Statute of the Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia [*Legge Costituzionale n. 1 del 28 luglio 2016, Modifiche allo Statuto speciale della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia*] and Regional Law no. 20 of 9 December 2016, Abolishment of the provinces of Friuli Venezia Giulia [*Legge regionale n. 20 del 9 dicembre 2016, Soppressione delle*

regional administrative authorities in FVG<sup>4</sup> established four new entities called *enti di decentramento regionale* (EDR) that are in charge of some regional administrative functions. Each EDR covers the territory of a former province. In the Region, there are officially designated Slovene, Friulian and German-speaking areas and 90% of municipalities (that is, 194) are included in one or more of these three minority language-speaking areas (Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia 2021, 308). The total population in the region was 1,192,191 on 1 January 2023 (Italian National Institute of Statistics 2023).

### 1.1. The Slovene-Speaking Area

The officially designated Slovene-speaking area covers 15% of municipalities in FVG (that is, 32): eight in the area of Gorizia (*Gorica*), six in the area of Trieste (*Trst*) and 18 in the area of Udine (*Videm* or *Viden*)<sup>5</sup> including Benecia (*Benečija*), Resia (*Rezija*) and Val Canale (*Kanalska dolina*) (Jagodic 2020, 38). The traditional Slovene settlement area in FVG would be larger and corresponds to a total of 39 municipalities (ibid.).

The Slovene-speaking area was defined according to the national Law no. 38/2001 on the protection of the Slovene minority in FVG (hereinafter the 2001 Slovene Minority Law)<sup>6</sup> and the decree issued by the Italian president on 12 September 2007 regarding the approval of the list of the Region's municipalities in which the measures to protect the Slovene minority are applied.<sup>7</sup> The Regional Law no. 26/2007 for the protection of the Slovene linguistic minority (hereinafter the 2007 Regional Law on the Slovene Minority)<sup>8</sup> specifies that its regulations apply in the entire territory of FVG, except in cases expressly referring to the Slovene-speaking areas identified in accordance with the 2001 Slovene Minority Law.

The Slovene national community is a border-area national minority. Most of its members would define their community as such, emphasizing its role in the political decision-making processes as well as its function of

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*Province del Friuli Venezia Giulia*]. These regulations abolished the four provinces of FVG and transferred their competences to the Region and municipalities. The two laws are available online (in Italian) at <https://www.normattiva.it/> and <https://lexview-int.regione.fvg.it> respectively (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Regional Law no. 21 of 29 November 2019, Coordinated exercise of functions and services among local authorities in Friuli Venezia Giulia and establishment of regional decentralization bodies [*Legge regionale n. 21 del 29 novembre 2019, Esercizio coordinato di funzioni e servizi tra gli enti locali del Friuli Venezia Giulia e istituzione degli Enti di decentramento regionale*] The law is available online (in Italian) at <https://lexview-int.regione.fvg.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Hereinafter, I use the term "area(s) of" Gorizia/Trieste/Udine/Pordenone to refer to the territory of the former province(s) of Gorizia/Trieste/Udine/ Pordenone.

<sup>6</sup> Law no. 38 of 23 February 2001, Norms concerning the protection of the Slovene linguistic minority in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region [*Legge n. 38 del 23 febbraio 2001, Norme a tutela della minoranza linguistica slovena della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia*]. The law is available online (in Italian) at <https://www.normattiva.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Presidential Decree of 12 September 2007, Approval of the table of municipalities in Friuli Venezia Giulia in which the measures for the protection of the Slovenian minority apply, pursuant to Article 4 of Law no. 38 of 23 February 2001 [*Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica del 12 settembre 2007, Approvazione della tabella dei comuni del Friuli-Venezia Giulia nei quali si applicano le misure di tutela della minoranza slovena, a norma dell'articolo 4 della legge 23 febbraio 2001, n. 38*]. The decree is available online (in Italian) at <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Regional Law no. 26 of 16 November 2007, Regional norms concerning the protection of the Slovene linguistic minority [*Legge regionale n. 26 del 16 novembre 2007, Norme regionali per la tutela della minoranza linguistica slovena*]. The law is available online (in Italian) at <https://lexview-int.regione.fvg.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

mediation and connection between Italy and Slovenia as its kin-state.<sup>9</sup> However, the perception of what is the Slovene community can vary depending on the settlement areas. For instance, Slovenes in the area of Udine aim to preserve their identity and promote minority rights by focusing on linguistic and cultural matters. Therefore, they would present themselves in media and publications as a Slovene linguistic community.

Members of the Slovene national minority in Italy speak both standard Slovene, which is the state and official language in the Republic of Slovenia, as well as its various local dialects or variants (Dapit, Jagodic and Kaučič Baša 2020). Moreover, they are all fluent in standard Italian and/or its local dialects. In the area of Udine some individuals only speak a local Slovene dialect. Due to the lack of educational opportunities in the Slovene language in the past, they are not familiar with standard Slovene (ibid.). Nowadays a bilingual school functions in San Pietro al Natisone (*Špeter*). It first operated as a private school but was subsequently incorporated into the public school system (Bogatec 2020a, 2020b).

There are no recent official data regarding the number of members of the Slovene minority in Italy. Estimates based on the population census from 1910 made under the Austro-Hungarian Empire account for 125,000 Slovenes living at that time in the areas of Trieste, Gorizia and Udine (Čermelj 1958; Jagodic 2020, 42). According to population estimates from the 1970s and the 1990s, the Slovene minority had between 46,882 and 96,000 members (Sussi 1998). Thus, there was a considerable decline in the population of the Slovene national community in Italy over just one century (Jagodic 2020, 42). The number of Slovenes living in Italy was recently estimated to be between 65,000 and 85,000, taking into account self-declared Slovenes and those who have declared Slovene as their mother tongue (Bogatec 2020a, 7).

Slovenes in FVG have established a thriving network of activities, institutions and associations that focus mainly on cultural and sports activities in the framework of professional institutions or in grassroots associations, parishes and other centers (Simčič 2020; Sosič, Kafol and Cossutta 2020; Verč 2020). A system of Slovene-language state schools has been set up in the areas of Trieste and Gorizia as well as in San Pietro al Natisone in the area of Udine (Bogatec 2020a, 2020b). The regional branch of Italy's national public broadcasting company RAI provides Slovene language radio and TV programs and there is a variety of print and online media available in Slovene (Tuta 2020).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia protects the Italian and Hungarian border-area minorities. Article 64 of the Slovene Constitution calls these two communities *narodne manjšine*, usually translated as *national minorities*. In the Slovene language, *narod* refers to a nation without a state while *nacija* to a nation with its state. The Slovene Dictionary defines *narod* as a community of people, usually in a determined area, who are historically, linguistically, culturally, and economically connected and share a common consciousness. For details, see <https://fran.si/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> *Radio Trst A*, a radio station broadcasting in Slovene language since 1945, and the TV programs in Slovene language are available on the website of RAI's regional office for FVG (<http://www.sedezfjk.rai.it/>). The Slovene language daily newspaper *Primorski dnevnik* is published in Trieste and distributed over all the Slovene settlement area in FVG and in Slovenia (<https://www.primorski.eu/>). Other relevant newspapers in the Slovene language in FVG are the weekly *Novi glas* (<https://www.noviglas.eu/>), the weekly *Novi Matajur* (<https://novimatajur.it/>) and the biweekly *Dom* (<https://www.dom.it/>) (accessed October 27, 2023).

## 1.2. The Friulian-Speaking Area

The Friulian-speaking area covers 80% of municipalities in FVG (that is, 173): 15 in the area of Gorizia (*Gurize*), 122 in the area of Udine (*Udin*) and 36 in the area of Pordenone (*Pordenon*) (Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia 2021, 308). The Friulian language is spoken also in seven municipalities in the region of Veneto (Regional Agency for Friulian Language, n. d.). The Friulian-speaking area in FVG is officially designated by several regulations: Article 5 of the Regional Law no. 15/1996 on the protection and promotion of the Friulian language and culture (hereinafter the 1996 Regional Law on the Friulian Language)<sup>11</sup> and Article 3 of the Regional Law no. 29/2007 on the protection of the Friulian language (hereinafter the 2007 Regional Law on the Friulian Language)<sup>12</sup> which refer to two decrees of the president of the regional council of FVG<sup>13</sup> and several resolutions issued by the former provinces of Udine and Gorizia (Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia 2021, 312).

The main cohesive element of the Friulian-speaking community is the Friulian language with its various dialects. Friulian is an illustrative example of a European regional language. It is currently experiencing a period of revitalization owing mainly to its use in different communicative situations outside the traditional family language environment, e.g., in schools, universities, cultural activities, public administration, media, as well as in work environments (Picco 2006).

According to a 2015 study on the socio-linguistic condition of the Friulian language, the number of people fluent in Friulian has been estimated at approximately 600,000 speakers which means more than 60% of the population in the areas of Gorizia, Udine and Pordenone or, considering also the population of the area of Trieste, 50% of the regional population (Regional Agency for Friulian Language, n. d.).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Regional Law no. 15 of 22 March 1996, Norms concerning the protection and promotion of the Friulian language and culture and establishment of the office for regional and minority languages [*Legge regionale n. 15 del 22 marzo 1996, Norme per la tutela e la promozione della lingua e della cultura friulane e istituzione del servizio per le lingue regionali e minoritarie*]. The law is available online (in Italian) at <https://lexview-int.regione.fvg.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Regional Law no. 29 of 18 December 2007, Norms concerning the protection, enhancement and promotion of the Friulian language [*Legge regionale n. 29 del 18 dicembre 2007, Norme per la tutela, valorizzazione e promozione della lingua friulana*]. The law is available online (in Italian) at <https://lexview-int.regione.fvg.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Decree of the president of the regional council no. 412 of 13 November 1996, Regional Law no 15 of 22 March 1996, Article 5. Identification of the regional territory in which the Friulian language is traditionally and significantly spoken [*Decreto del Presidente della Giunta Regionale n. 412/Pres. del 13 novembre 1996, Legge regionale 22 marzo 1996, n. 15, articolo 5. Individuazione del territorio regionale in cui la lingua friulana risulta tradizionalmente e significativamente parlata*]; Decree of the president of the regional council no. 160 of 20 May 1999, Regional Law no. 15 of 22 March 1996, Article 5. Territorial redefinition for the application of the norms for the protection and promotion of the Friulian language [*Decreto del Presidente della Giunta Regionale n. 160/Pres. del 20 maggio 1999, Legge regionale 22 marzo 1996, n. 15, articolo 5. Ridelimitazione territoriale per l'applicazione delle norme per la tutela e la promozione della lingua friulana*]. Both decrees are available online (in Italian) at <https://lexview-int.regione.fvg.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that the Friulian language is spoken also by emigrants from these communities and their descendants in Northern Europe, Germany and Belgium, Canada, Argentina and Australia (Vicario 2006). Friulian speakers emigrated for economic reasons during the period extending from the annexation of Friuli to Italy in 1866 to the 1960s. These communities maintain contact with their native Friuli through a network of expatriate organizations such as *Fogolârs furlans* (Friulian fireplaces) and *Fameis furlanis* (Friulian families) (ibid.). For details, see [www.friulinelmondo.com](http://www.friulinelmondo.com) (accessed October 27, 2023).

There are numerous cultural associations active in the field of the valorization, preservation and development of the Friulian language and culture that are scattered across the entire territory (Cisilino 2006; Janežič 2004, 231–32). They are active mainly in the fields of theatre, music, film and literature. Media available in the Friulian language include various print and online outlets, as well as a private radio station.<sup>15</sup> To a somewhat lesser extent, radio programs in this language are also present in the regional branch of Italy's national public broadcasting company RAI for FVG. Moreover, Friulian can also be heard on various private local radio and television stations.

### 1.3. The German-Speaking Area

German-speaking minorities live in 3% of the municipalities (six) in FVG which are all located in the area of Udine Alpine area bordering Austria (Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia 2021, 308). The German-speaking language area is regulated by Regional Law 20/2009 for the protection of German-speaking minorities (hereinafter the 2009 Regional Law on German-speaking Minorities)<sup>16</sup> (Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia 2021, 312).

German-speaking communities relate partly to standard German as their language of reference, some of them also continue to use their local dialects of German origin. In this case, we can therefore speak of the process of revitalization of archaic dialects as elements of a particularly relevant regional cultural and linguistic heritage. The German-speaking communities perceive themselves as four different entities characterized by the territory where they reside and by their German dialect and heritage. The four German-speaking communities reside in Val Canale (*Kanaltal*), Sauris (*Zahre*), Timau (*Tischlbong*) and Sappada (*Plodn*). Val Canale is a highly multilingual area where one can even find cases of quadrilinguality (in German, Slovene, Friulian and Italian) (Janežič 2004). It was estimated that German is spoken by about 15% to 20% of the total population in the three municipalities of Tarvisio (*Tarvis*), Malborghetto-Valbruna (*Malborgeth-Wolfsbach*) and Pontebba (*Pontafel*) (Kravina 2004, 269). On 1 January 2023, the three municipalities had a total population of 6.159 inhabitants (Italian National Institute of Statistics 2023). The German dialect spoken in this territory belongs to the family of Carinthian dialects and was also traditionally influenced by standard German (Janežič 2004, 215). In the 1990s, German became part of the regular curriculum of primary schools

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<sup>15</sup> *Radio Onde Furlane* is a private radio station that airs programs in Friulian regularly (<https://radioondefurlane.eu>). *Radio Spazio 103* also gives considerable airtime to broadcasts in Friulian ([www.radiospazio103.it](http://www.radiospazio103.it)). The monthly *La Patrie dal Friûl* is available also online in the Friulian language (<https://www.lapatriedalfriul.org/>). Other publications have regular contents in the Friulian language, such as the weeklies *La Vita Cattolica* (<https://www.lavitacattolica.it/>) and *Il Friuli* (<https://www.ilfriuli.it/>), and the monthly freesheet *Il País* (<https://www.ilpais.it/>). For more details, see <https://arlef.it/en/language-and-culture/media/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Regional Law no. 20 of 20 November 2009, Norms concerning the protection and promotion of German-speaking minorities in Friuli Venezia Giulia [*Legge regionale n. 20 del 20 novembre 2009, Norme di tutela e promozione delle minoranze di lingua tedesca del Friuli Venezia Giulia*]. The law is available online (in Italian) at <https://lexview-int.regione.fvg.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023). It is worth noting that Article 5 of the 2001 Slovene Minority Law regards the protection of the German-speaking communities in FVG. This basic provision was inserted at that time in this national law as a minimum standard since in 2001 there was no regional law for the protection of German-speaking minorities.



in Val Canale in a variety of formats that provided for multilingual instruction together with Slovene and Friulian (Gliha Komac 2019). Moreover, from the school year 2019/2020 an innovative experimental instruction model using four languages (i.e., German, Slovene and Friulian besides Italian) was introduced in all kindergartens, primary schools and secondary lower and upper schools in Val Canale with large support from the parents (Mezgec 2021).

Sauris, Timau and Sappada are three so-called *linguistic islands*. The three different local dialects belong to the language group of Southern Bavarian German dialects and are similar to the dialects from Tyrol and Carinthia in Austria (Cattarin 2004, 225; Janežič 2004, 432; Protto 2004, 196). On 1 January 2023 there were 389 inhabitants in the municipality of Sauris and 1,314 inhabitants in the municipality of Sappada (Italian National Institute of Statistics 2023). Timau is part of the larger municipality of Paluzza. According to the latest estimates, German dialect speakers account for about 70% of the population in Sauris and Timau and around 50% in Sappada (Cattarin 2004, 228; Janežič 2004, 432; Protto 2004, 200). The percentages vary greatly between different age groups. Youngsters have a mainly passive command of these dialects, while many adults still speak them (Cattarin 2004, 228; Janežič 2004, 432; Protto 2004, 200). Sauris and Timau are trilingual areas with speakers that master Italian, Friulian and the local varieties of the German language (Janežič 2004, 214–15). The dialects are used primarily within the family circle and in the workplace, in shops, in church and public places (Janežič 2004, 214–15; Protto 2004, 200). Since the 1990s, Sauris and Timau have been known to incorporate their local German dialects into kindergartens and primary schools in addition to Friulian and Italian (Craighero and Plozner 2004, 229–34; Protto 2004, 201–02).

Val Canale and Sappada, Sauris and Timau have various cultural groups, associations, choirs, folk groups and parishes that are actively engaged in the valorization of the local culture and language (Cattarin 2004, 226; Janežič 2004, 433; Kravina 2004, 274; Protto 2004, 202–06; Unfer 2004, 235).<sup>17</sup> They occasionally publish various publications in German and the local German dialects. They also cooperate with similar organizations in Austria.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. Autonomy and State Structure

Since the unification of Italy, the development of Italian public administration in the late 19th century followed the model of a centralized state and was geared towards the cultural and linguistic homogenization

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<sup>17</sup> Examples of cultural organizations dedicated to the preservation and development of the local German-speaking communities are the *Kanaltaler Kulturverein* in Val Canale, the cultural association *Plodar* (<http://www.plodn.info/>) in Sappada, the cultural association *Giorgetto Unfer* (<http://www.taicinvriaul.org/>) in Timau and the cultural association *Fulgenzio Schneider* (<https://www.sauris-zahre.org/>) and the choir *Zahre* in Sauris.

<sup>18</sup> In Sauris the local parish publishes *De Zahre reidet* with contents related to the social and cultural life of the local German-speaking community. The *Plodar kirche kolènder* is an annual publication edited by the local parish in Sappada in cooperation with the cultural association *Plodar*. In Timau the cultural association *Giorgetto Unfer* publishes the journal *Asou Geats* three times per year with articles in the local Timavese language variety, Friulian and Italian.

of the population; linguistic and ethnic pluralism was incompatible with the goal of consolidating the nation-state (Vidau 2015a, 269–70). Italy overcame this problem in 1948 when it incorporated into its democratic constitutional design a territorial-administrative system based on regions, provinces and municipalities (ibid.). Nevertheless, this administrative-political structure failed to emphasize the mixed ethnic and linguistic composition of individual regions. The few exceptions were the regions of Aosta Valley, Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol,<sup>19</sup> and partly Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG), in which some minority communities enjoyed a special status of border-area national minorities under international agreements between Italy and their respective kin-states (ibid.).

The policies of diversity management of decentralized state administrations, such as regions, are crucial for linguistic minorities, as they directly impact the processes of identity preservation and development. Without the support of the state and its local administrations, achieving the goals set by a minority community based on its organizational structure would be challenging, if not unattainable. In fact, local administrations are those legal entities that enable the implementation of minority rights in everyday life. In Italy, their role in this field intensified following the adoption of Law no. 482/1999 on the protection of historical linguistic minorities (hereinafter the 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law).<sup>20</sup>

The Italian state comprises various territorial units, including regions. They are the largest and most important subnational entities. The purpose of the region is to represent the local interests of the population that transcend the boundaries of individual provinces and municipalities within a specific area (Bartole and Mastragostino 1997, 43). Relations between the state and the regions are based on the principle of unity, which assumes that the republic is a single and indivisible entity (Palermo 2005, 190; D’Atena 2006, 508). These relations are also subject to the principle of subsidiarity, according to which the distribution of tasks and functions within the state must take into consideration the institutions or social units closest to the stakeholders (ibid.).

The administrative and political structure of the Italian state consists of 20 regions.<sup>21</sup> Five of these regions – Aosta Valley, Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol, Sicily, Sardinia, and Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) – enjoy a special autonomy regime. They are so-called regions with special status, while the other 15 regions have ordinary status. The five regions with special autonomy are distinguished from ordinary regions by different processes of approval of statutes and regulations of their operation, by the scope and quality of their powers and by

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<sup>19</sup> The autonomous region Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol consists of two special autonomous provinces (i.e., Trento and South Tyrol) which are vested with most legislative and administrative powers. For details, see Alber and Zwilling (2022).

<sup>20</sup> Law no. 482 of 15 December 1999, Norms concerning the protection of historical linguistic minorities [*Legge n. 482 del 15 dicembre 1999, Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche storiche*]. The law is available online (in Italian) at <https://www.normattiva.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>21</sup> In alphabetical order: Abruzzo, Aosta Valley, Apulia, Basilicata, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Calabria, Campania, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardy, Marche, Molise, Piedmont, Sardinia, Sicily, Tuscany, Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol, Umbria and Veneto.

the different organization of their financial relationship with the state (Bartole and Mastragostino 1997, 27; Palermo 2021).

Statutory autonomy is not identical across the regions that enjoy special autonomy; it differs for specific economic, political, social, cultural, geographic, historical, linguistic, and other reasons (Palermo 2021, 136). Italy has an asymmetric system of government (Palermo (2021; 2005, 185–93). After the Second World War, the development of Italian regionalism differed among individual regions at the level of laws, administrative acts and rulings of the Constitutional Court, mainly due to the weak constitutional provisions on the autonomy of local administrations, which were to adequately protect diverse regional interests (ibid.).

In recent decades, the regional state structure has changed through decentralization and transfer of state powers to local public administrations, becoming more similar to the federal state regulation (Vidau 2015a, 269–270). However, from the perspective of linguistic minorities and different regional and local affiliations, the element of diversity management did not appear as an important political element in these processes (ibid.). From an analysis of the level of the protection of the Slovene, Friulian and German-speaking communities in FVG it also emerged that they are indirectly affected by the decentralization system that characterizes Italy (Vidau 2013, 23). Basically, they enjoy cultural but not territorial autonomy as they are not the majority population in a specific region or area, or their members are dispersed (ibid.).

Palermo (2005, 185–93) characterizes the system of autonomies in Italy as a “devolutionary asymmetric federalism in the making” on the border between regionalism and federalism. He describes this system as devolutionary, as the development of federalism has taken place from the top down by transferring competences from the central state to the regions and municipalities. Palermo also explains that the system is still “in the making”, and the term “federalism” does not appear in constitutional reforms, as the system of Italian decentralization has not yet been recognized as such (ibid.).

Vidau (2015a, 126) proposes that the reasons for the Italian state’s developmental move towards a federal system of government are mainly related to the functional needs of managing public administration within the framework of postmodern state regulation, which must conform to the principles of subsidiarity and loyal cooperation rather than to the requirements of restructuring power relations within the state based on the needs and interests of national minorities. It is mainly about the need for greater economic and financial functionality of the state apparatus which was no longer efficient in its centralized form (Vidau 2015a, 269–70).

Similarly, Palici di Suni Prat (1998, 155; 2002, 94–95) and Mazzarolli (2009) argue that there is no direct link between the protection of national minorities and administrative decentralization in Italy. Article 117 of the Constitution regards the competences of the regions and does not mention the competence for the protection of minorities, neither in terms of exclusive powers of the state nor in terms of the competences shared between the state and the regions (ibid.). Italy has also not experienced the phenomenon of

regionalist or separatist movements that would base their political agenda on a distinct regional cultural identity, as is the case in the Basque Country and Catalonia in Spain, and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the UK (Vidau 2015a, 126).

The structure of the Italian state also provides for smaller administrative units within the regions in the form of provinces, municipalities and metropolitan cities (Alber 2021). As for the regions, the principle of autonomy also applies to these smaller units (Vandelli and Mastragostino 1996, 24). They have the official authority to pursue the goals and interests of their own local communities based on their political and administrative powers. Just like the regions, they also enjoy financial autonomy in terms of financial independence (Palermo 2005, 191), even if taxation remains mainly a central state power and on the subnational level a regional one, but in a limited way (Valdesalici 2021, 82). Being governed by their own statutes, they have autonomous legislative and administrative powers (Palermo 2005, 186). The statutes of the provinces and municipalities contain the basic rules for the functioning of institutions, the powers of individual bodies, the regulation of public services, the forms of cooperation between municipalities and provinces, public participation and access to information and administrative procedures (ibid.).

### **3. Establishment and Implementation of Autonomy**

After the Second World War, Italian political elites, the Italian state and local administrations generally did not support minorities' claims for protection of their distinct national and regional identity in Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG or the Region). This lack of support can be attributed to at least three major socio-political factors: the interethnic tensions between the Slovene and Italian population living in the region after the post-war delineation of the border; the geopolitical role of this border region on the southern flank of the Iron Curtain; and the absence of a post-war cultural and intellectual debate related to the question of Italian citizens having different ethnic or national identities or mother tongues (Vidau 2012, 146).

Stolfo (2009, 207) underlines that the calls for the protection of their languages and communities on the part of various linguistic minorities were perceived as an expression of localism, a reluctance to accept advancement in Italian terms and inclusion into the broader society. Moreover, he argues that the recognition of minority languages and the introduction of safeguarding norms as well as active protection policies was like questioning the unity of the nation and even its very existence.

The first changes began in the 1990s with the inclusion of the minority rights issue in national and local political agendas. Vidau (2011) shows that this was supported by the broader revival of the intellectual and political debate regarding the Italian national identity and the role of the Italian state in contemporary society. New political powers based on a regional logic developed during this period in Italy and were embodied in the Northern League political party. This led to the crisis of the Italian nation in the civic sense

as the state-political unit, which originated a revival of patriotism as an ideological tool to maintain the national state (ibid.). At the same time, greater attention to the ethnic elements of regional identities and the revitalization of minority and regional languages made sense. In the 1990s some regions began paying greater attention to the issue of ethnicity (Palici di Suni Prat 2000, 102; 2002, 102–06; Stolfo 2009, 178–79), adopting a series of laws in favor of regional languages and local dialects in the spirit of safeguarding cultural and linguistic heritage and preserving local identities. However, Italy's ratification of the FCNM in 1997 played a role in the adoption of the 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law (Cisilino 2004, 101–04; Palici di Suni Prat 2000, 102; 2002, 106).

In Italy, FVG represents a special case as it has been dealing with ethnic and linguistic pluralism since its creation, due to the presence of the Slovene, Friulian and German minorities. This autonomous region came into existence in 1964 following the adoption of Constitutional Law no. 1/1963.<sup>22</sup> It was the last Italian region established in the post-war period, following the resolution of the *Trieste issue* in 1954 by the London Memorandum (Bartole and Mastragostino 1997, 17–19; Bartole et al. 2003, 13). Article 3 of the special Statute of Autonomy (ASt) of FVG recognizes the cultural and linguistic diversity of the region.

Previously, under the Peace Treaty of 1947, the area of Trieste consisting of the municipalities of Trieste (*Trst*), Duino-Aurisina (*Devin-Nabrežina*), Monrupino (*Repen*), Muggia (*Milje*), San Dorligo della Valle (*Dolina*) and Sgonico (*Zgonik*) constituted Zone A and was administered by the allied Anglo-American forces. The situation changed in 1954 when the governments of Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States and Yugoslavia signed the London Memorandum,<sup>23</sup> based on which this territory came under Italian rule. In the same year, a presidential decree appointed a commissioner of the Italian government in Trieste. In addition, Trieste received representation in the lower house of the Italian parliament in 1956; these deputies were followed by senators in 1961 (Bartole et al., 1973, 55–56).

Due to the international dimension of the situation in FVG and the border between Italy and Yugoslavia, approval of the statute of this region was previously impossible. Interethnic tensions were not resolved despite the delineation of the border between Italy and Yugoslavia having been agreed upon at the international level under the London Memorandum and later confirmed by the two states in 1975 with the Treaty of Osimo.<sup>24</sup> The state border could not be perfectly in line with the ethnic border and thus did not satisfy the claims over these territories from various national groups. The existence of ethnically mixed areas

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<sup>22</sup> Constitutional Law no. 1 of 31 January 1963, Special Statute of the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia [*Legge costituzionale n. 1 del 31 gennaio 1963, Statuto speciale della Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia*]. The law is available online (in Italian) at <https://www.normattiva.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>23</sup> The Memorandum of Understanding regarding the Free Territory of Trieste (with annexes and exchange of notes), signed in London on 5 October 1954, is available in volume 235 of the UN Treaty Series, starting from page 99: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20235/v235.pdf> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>24</sup> The Treaty of Osimo (with annexes and exchange of notes), signed on 10 November 1975, is available in volume 1466 of the UN Treaty Series, starting from page 119: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/UNTS/Volume%201466/v1466.pdf> (accessed October 27, 2023).

with a Slovene population on the Italian side of the border and with an Italian population on the Yugoslav territory required proper legal protection of minority rights for both national minorities. This issue was partially resolved by several norms stipulated in a special statute annexed to the London Memorandum.

In addition to the already complicated interethnic relations, the ideological and political dimension of the Cold War division between the democratic/capitalist and totalitarian/communist systems emerged and prevailed until the late 1980s. The Italo-Yugoslav border made up a part of the Iron Curtain, thus minority protection was consequently perceived as ideologically supporting the *enemy within the state*.<sup>25</sup> It was almost impossible to treat the minority protection discourse outside the ideological contraposition until the geopolitical changes in this border area in the 1990s as a result of the end of the Cold War: the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the independence of Slovenia in 1991, and its democratic transition and EU integration.

Upon the establishment of FVG, Slovenes and Friulians saw the special autonomy as a possibility of explicit recognition, also through forms of cultural and territorial autonomy of minority communities (Stranj 1992). Some authors such as Paladin (1973, 18–19), Bartole and Mastragostino (1997, 25) and Bartole et al. (2003, 40) argue that FVG was established as a region with a special statute of autonomy mainly because of its ethno-linguistic diversity and specifically related to the presence of the Slovene-speaking population. However, the AST of the Region adopted in 1963 did not focus on minority issues. Its main aim was the socio-economic integration of the different areas of Friuli and Venezia Giulia, which were historically and economically detached (ibid.).

The self-governance system of FVG thus developed mainly in the sense of administrative autonomy of the region, provinces and municipalities and was based on the principle of subsidiarity rather than on the objective of creating autonomous political-administrative units stemming from their respective regional identity (Vidau 2015a, 269–70). It is worth noting that the Slovene minority at that time was mainly concerned with the issue of international relations between Italy and Yugoslavia. The Friulian community had already made proposals for their autonomy, but they did not have a cultural-linguistic base comparable to that of today's Friulian language (which has consolidated its presence in education, media, public administration, etc.) (Vidau 2015a, 258). In the post-war years, the Friulian language was not even mentioned. Instead, the idea of Friulianism was mainly associated with the notion of a certain local cultural-linguistic specificity (ibid.). The German-speaking communities were the last minority to receive basic legal protection.

The autonomy of FVG is an expression of the socio-political events of the post-war period and, as such, does not reflect more modern approaches in line with European autonomous and regional movements on an ethnic basis (ibid., 136). Although linguistic minorities are not the main reason for granting autonomy to FVG,

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<sup>25</sup> The Slovenes from FVG were perceived as supporters of the Yugoslav regime while the Italians from Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia were suspected of links to the previous Italian fascist regime.

they have become an important factor in its justification and maintenance (ibid., 258). As the political framework of the Cold War no longer exists, the region has also developed into a modern integrated economic area in financial terms (ibid., 134).

#### **4. Legal Basis of Autonomy**

The Slovene, Friulian and German-speaking communities in the autonomous region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG or the Region) enjoy various forms of cultural autonomy and the protection of their minority rights. This section presents the relevant national and regional legal framework focusing on the period after the adoption of the two national laws on minority protection, the 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law and the 2001 Slovene Minority Law.

Article 3 of the Autonomy Statute (ASt) of FVG acknowledges a general right to equality for all citizens, irrespective of the language group to which they belong, and provides for the preservation of their ethnic and cultural characteristics, but does not mention any explicit guarantees for the protection of the Slovene, Friulian or German national communities as constitutive elements of the regional society and administration. Nor does it envisage any specific minority legislation or exclusive powers in the field of minority protection, as is the case in the autonomous regions of Aosta Valley and Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol (Palici di Suni Prat 1998, 158; 2000, 102; 2002, 54).

The more recent legislation of FVG on the protection of minorities falls within the scope of Italian national legislation in this field and is exercised at the regional level. The protection of linguistic minorities is a constitutional principle of the Italian Republic. Article 6 of the Constitution stipulates that the Republic shall protect its linguistic minorities by means of special provisions. The 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law establishes the framework and principles for the legal protection of historical linguistic minorities in Italy and represents a milestone at the level of state legislation. It eliminated the former distinction between recognized and non-recognized linguistic minorities in Italy. On the one hand, border-area minorities, such as the German-speaking community in South Tyrol, the Slovene community in FVG and the French-speaking community in the Aosta Valley already had forms of legal protection by international agreements or regional statutes. On the other hand, other small minority languages, such as Occitan, Friulian or Sardinian, were previously largely without legal protection (Palici di Suni Prat 2002, 106; 2006, 639; Cisilino 2004, 105). According to Article 2 of the 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law, the Republic protects the language and culture of the "Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovene and Croatian populations and those speaking French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan and Sardinian." The law regulates the following areas of use of minority languages: education, public administration, public broadcasting, personal names, toponymy, etc. (Vidau 2013).

The Italian parliament adopted the 2001 Slovene Minority Law when the 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law had already been in effect. The two regulations therefore share certain similarities in structure, content and certain procedures. Referring to the forms of minority protection in the post-war period, the 2001 Slovene Minority Law highlights the unique position of this minority in Italy as compared to other historical linguistic minorities recognized by the 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law. It recognizes the Slovene minority living in the areas of Trieste (*Tržaška*), Gorizia (*Goriška*) and Udine (*Videmska*) as a single entity, whose members enjoy equal rights regardless of their specific place of residence in the territory where the law applies.

The 2001 Slovene Minority Law covers various minority rights, such as

- the use of personal names in the mother tongue;
- the use of spoken and written Slovene in interactions with public institutions;
- the use of Slovene in elected assemblies and collegiate bodies;
- the use of bilingual signs and topographical indications;
- the education in the minority language;
- the cross-border cooperation;
- the restitution of property that had been confiscated during the Fascist period to Slovene organizations;
- the protection of historic and artistic heritage at the level of public planning, land use, economic, social and urban planning.

It was not until the beginning of the 21st century that FVG began developing its regional legislation for the three linguistic minorities, thus assuming the role of an institutional policy-making body concerning the preservation and development of its historical minorities (Vidau 2013). Between 2007 and 2009, three important regional laws regulating the protection of its recognized minorities were adopted: the 2007 Regional Law on the Slovene Minority, the 2007 Regional Law on the Friulian Language and the 2009 Regional Law on German-speaking Minorities. This legal framework presents an important milestone as FVG assumes an active role in managing ethnic diversity in the field of its linguistic minorities. In part, these policies are already in the implementation phase and also stipulate certain forms of funding. Some of these provisions are of a planning nature and as such delineate the strategies for future development.

The 2007 Regional Law on the Slovene Minority represents an innovation in terms of defining minority rights and instruments of minority protection when compared to the 1991 regional law on cultural and artistic activities for the Slovene minority in FVG, which mainly focused on financing.<sup>26</sup> Article 1 places the protection

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<sup>26</sup> Regional Law no. 46 of 5 September 5, 1991, Interventions for the support of cultural and artistic initiatives in favor of the Slovenian minority in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region [*Legge regionale n. 46 del 5 settembre 1991, Interventi per il sostegno di iniziative culturali ed artistiche a favore della minoranza slovena nella regione Friuli - Venezia Giulia*]. The law is available online (in Italian) at <https://lexview-int.regione.fvg.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).



of the Slovene minority within the legal and policy framework of FVG aimed at protecting and developing the cultural and linguistic diversity within its territory, and its Slovene, Friulian and German linguistic minorities. The 2007 Regional Law on the Friulian Language is an expanded and updated version of the 1996 Regional Law on the Friulian Language but does not replace it entirely. The 2007 regulations retain the principles expressed in the preceding regional law, as well as the definition of the Friulian-speaking area and a few other provisions. However, compared to the 1996 Regional Law on the Friulian Language, the 2007 Regional Law on the Friulian significantly expands the previous regulations, especially in the fields of education and language policy.

The 2009 Regional Law on German-speaking Minorities represents another step towards the revision of the regional policy on the valorization of the linguistic and cultural features of FVG. Before this regional law, the protection of the German-speaking community in Val Canale was recognized by Article 5 of the 2001 Slovene Minority Law.

The three laws emphasize FVG's recognition of its minorities as part of its historical, cultural and human heritage. They embody the legal principles of the protection of minorities and recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity as stipulated in Article 6 of the Italian Constitution and Article 3 ASt and refer to the most important international documents in the field of minority rights and human rights. The three regional laws supplement and implement the relevant national regulations<sup>27</sup> and deal *inter alia* with:

- the territorial scope of application of the stipulated minority rights;
- international relations with the countries and regions of cultural and linguistic reference;
- inter-minority relations within FVG;
- recognition of reference organizations and other organizations of each minority;
- operation of regional advisory committees for different areas of application of legal provisions, particularly in education, language policy, and funding of each minority's organizations and associations;
- organization of regional conferences intended to evaluate and assess the implementation of legal provisions;
- proper public use and spelling of first and last names, titles and topographical indications in minority and regional languages;
- the use of minority and regional languages in public administration and in the private sector;
- the use of minority and regional languages in education and the media;
- the protection of the social, economic and environmental interests of minority communities;

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<sup>27</sup> The 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law, the 2001 Slovene Minority Law and the Legislative Decree no. 223/2002 on the implementation rules of the special statute of FVG for the transfer of functions regarding the protection of the language and culture of historical linguistic minorities, from the national to the regional level.

- the implementation of activities promoting regional and minority languages and their local variants;
- the protection of linguistic and cultural heritage of these communities;
- the procedures of funding individual minority organizations and associations.

In the field of education in regional or minority languages, regional legislation shows considerable dissimilarities between individual linguistic communities. The reason for this lies in the differences between the individual models of teaching in minority and regional languages that have been established in FVG over the decades. Unlike the Friulian- and German-speaking communities, the Slovene minority has a separate state school system with Slovene as the language of instruction and a regional education office for Slovene schools. Slovene schools are governed by national legislation dating back to the 1960s and 1970s. Friulian was introduced in kindergartens and schools during the 1990s, based on the regional legislation of that time. This legislation has since been updated and expanded. Friulian and German are integrated into school programs for a limited number of hours, while Slovene has the status of a language of instruction within a separate school system. Regional legislation and the 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law are important milestones on the path towards consolidating the presence of Friulian and German in the state school system, while these laws do not introduce any significant novelties into Slovene-language education (Vidau 2013, 43). The regional legislation concerning Slovene and German emphasizes cooperation with foreign universities to consolidate the knowledge of these languages among members of minority communities. It is worth noting that, at the same time, the laws for the protection of the Slovene national minority and of the German-speaking communities contain specific provisions for the protection of local language varieties. In the field of education, regional legislation is certainly the most elaborately detailed for the Friulian language, as it also makes provisions for a competent advisory committee and a suitable language policy.

In conclusion, the legal framework led to an asymmetric system of the management of regional linguistic diversity (Vidau 2015a, 258). Thus, the regional legislation that has been developed and adopted remains separate for each minority, albeit structurally similar. The asymmetry of minority protection is also associated with the requirements for each minority's recognition of its linguistic and identity distinctiveness which is based on the dialects and the needs of their speakers (ibid.).

## **5. Autonomous Institutions**

In the last decades, the Friulian, Slovene and German-speaking communities in the autonomous region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG or the Region) have developed various autonomous institutions and mechanisms for self-representation and as such have an active political role at national, regional and local levels. The autonomous bodies and mechanisms are regulated by national and regional legislation in various sectors, such as education, culture, public use of minority languages, public financing, consultative and advisory

bodies, media etc. Moreover, autonomous institutions and organizations promoting the interests of these communities in different fields of activity are the expression of a very dynamic and aware civil society. The system of autonomous institutions of the three recognized minority communities in FVG includes public bodies, commissions, and assemblies, as well as advisory and consultative bodies regulated by national and regional laws. Additionally, there are numerous associations dedicated to preserving the minority culture, language and interests which are included in specific official lists published by regional authorities (see Tables 1–3 ).<sup>28</sup>

While the Slovene, German-speaking and Friulian minorities lack legally guaranteed administrative or political autonomy, they have representative organizations that operate at the political level as well and are involved in decision-making processes. Election of own representatives is not legally guaranteed. Nevertheless, individuals recognized as members of the Slovene minority, who actively promote its interests have consistently been elected to the Italian parliament as well as provincial and municipal bodies. The Region’s electoral rules provide for a lower threshold for the election of a candidate from a party representing the Slovene minority.<sup>29</sup> The law contains no similar provisions regarding the Friulian and German-speaking communities. However, there are also elected political representatives pursuing the interests of the Friulian and German-speaking minority communities and using Friulian and German (and its varieties) in their political activity, even if they are not elected as representatives of these communities.

**Table 1: Autonomous institutions of the Friulian community in FVG<sup>30</sup>**

<b>Public bodies</b>	<b>Function</b>
Regional Agency for the Friulian Language (ARLeF)	It is a public body operating under the auspices of the Region and aiming at the coordination of activities related to the protection and promotion of the Friulian language.
University of Udine	It provides for higher education related to the Friulian language and educational programs for Friulian teachers.
<b>Minority organizations</b>	
Friulian Philological Society Graziadio Isaia Ascoli	It plays a primary role in promoting the Friulian language and culture defined by the 2007 Regional Law on the Friulian Language.
Regional list of organizations of the Friulian linguistic minority in FVG	The list includes five cultural organizations dealing with the Friulian language and culture that can apply for public financing.
<b>Advisory and consultative bodies</b>	
	<b>Function</b>

<sup>28</sup> For details, see the regional registers of organizations of the Slovene, Friulian and German-speaking communities at <https://www.regione.fvg.it/rafvvg/cms/RAFVG/cultura-sport/patrimonio-culturale/comunita-linguistiche> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>29</sup> Regional Law no. 17 of 18 June 2007, Determination of the form of government of the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia and the regional electoral system, pursuant to Article 12 of the Statute of Autonomy [*Legge regionale n. 17 del 18 giugno 2007, Determinazione della forma di governo della Regione Friuli Venezia Giulia e del sistema elettorale regionale, ai sensi dell'articolo 12 dello Statuto di autonomia*]. The law is available online (in Italian) at <https://lexview-int.regione.fvg.it/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

<sup>30</sup> Thanks to William Cisilino from the Regional Agency for the Friulian Language for advising on the list of autonomous institutions of the Friulian community in FVG.

Assembly of the Friulian linguistic communities	Advisory body on regional legislation and administration regarding minority rights in the Friulian-speaking area, composed of representatives from 138 Friulian-speaking municipalities.
Commission for education in the Friulian language	Advisory body on education composed of members of the regional directorate for education and regional directorate for minority languages, experts on the protection and use of the Friulian language, and a representative from ARLeF.
Regional consultative commission for the Friulian linguistic minority	Advisory body on issues related to the implementation of the 2007 Regional Law on the Friulian Language, composed of representatives of the regional authority and other institutions dealing with the Friulian language.
Regional conference for evaluation and proposals for the Friulian language	It evaluates the implementation of the 2007 Regional Law on the Friulian Language and is organized by the president of the regional council of FVG.
<b>Administrative offices of FVG</b>	
<b>Function</b>	
Service for minority languages and co-regionals abroad	It deals with the procedures for the implementation of the regional protection laws of the Friulian, Slovene and German-speaking communities in FVG.
Regional office for the Friulian language	It operates under the frame of ARLeF and deals with translations and interpretership as well as advising on language policy and toponymy.
Service for education, university and the right to study	It deals inter alia with procedures for the implementation of education in the Friulian language in schools in FVG, including financing and managing the list of qualified teachers of the Friulian language

**Table 2: Autonomous institutions of the Slovene community in FVG**

<b>Minority organizations</b>	<b>Function</b>
Slovene Cultural and Economic Association	Left-wing and lay-oriented umbrella organization for the Slovene national community in Italy, recognized by the 2007 Regional Law on the Slovene Minority. It is the expression of civil society and acts as an interlocutor with various European, national and local political institutions in Italy and Slovenia.
Confederation of Slovene Organizations	Center-left and Catholic-oriented umbrella organization for the Slovene national community in Italy, recognized by the 2007 Regional Law on the Slovene Minority. It is the expression of civil society and acts as an interlocutor with various European, national and local political institutions in Italy and Slovenia.
Regional list of organizations of the Slovene linguistic minority in FVG	It includes 229 organizations active in the fields of language, culture, politics, sports, media and social welfare which can apply for public financing, based on the 2001 Slovene Minority Law and the 2007 Regional Law on the Slovene Minority.
<b>Elected representatives</b>	
<b>Function</b>	
Member of the Italian parliament	A member of the Slovene minority has thus far been regularly elected as a candidate of an Italian left-wing party. However, there is no legally guaranteed seat for the Slovene minority.
Member(s) of the regional council of FVG	The number of Slovene regional councilors has varied from 1 to 5, elected mainly from the lists of Italian left-wing and center-left parties, as well as from the ethnic party Slovene Union ( <i>Slovenska</i>

	<i>skupnost</i> ). Regional electoral rules provide for a lower threshold for the election of a candidate from a party representing the Slovenes.
Mayors and members of municipal councils	In seven bilingual municipalities in the areas of Trieste and Gorizia and in some municipalities in the area of Udine, the mayor is usually Slovene-speaking or alternates with an Italian-speaking individual. In 2014 there were 130 Slovene-speaking municipal councilors in 20 municipalities (Vidau 2020, 214–15).
<b>Advisory and consultative bodies</b>	
	<b>Function</b>
Joint institutional committee for the issues of the Slovene minority	Advisory body composed of Slovene-speaking and Italian-speaking members, appointed by public bodies and representative organizations of the Slovene community in FVG. It deals with the implementation of the 2001 Slovene Minority Law.
Institutional Table for the Slovene Minority	Consultative body on the legal protection of the Slovene national community in Italy for the Italian Ministry of the Interior. It is composed of government officials and representatives of the Slovene national community.
Regional consultative commission for the Slovene linguistic minority	Advisory body for the allocation of public funds by the state to FVG intended for activities of Slovene minority institutions and organizations, and for other relevant issues related to the implementation of the 2007 Regional Law on the Slovene Minority.
Regional education commission	Advisory body on education in the Slovene language in FVG, regulated by the 2001 Slovene Minority Law.
Representative of the Slovene community in the Higher Council of Education	Consultative body of the Italian Ministry of Education which deals inter alia with education in the Slovene language in FVG.
Consultative committee for the issues of the urban ethnic minority	Consultative body of the municipality of Gorizia which is composed of members appointed by the municipal council.
Assembly of the elected representatives of the Slovene minority	Consultative body regulated by the 2001 Slovene Minority Law and composed of elected Slovene-speaking mayors and councilors.
Regional conference on the protection of the Slovene linguistic minority	It evaluates the implementation of the 2007 Regional Law on the Slovene Minority and is organized by the president of the regional council of FVG.
<b>Administrative services of FVG</b>	
	<b>Function</b>
Service for minority languages and co-regionals abroad	It deals with the procedures for the implementation of the regional protection laws of the Friulian, Slovene and German-speaking communities in FVG.
Central office for the Slovenian language	It leads and coordinates activities related to the use of the Slovene language in public services, to ensure that members of the Slovene community in FVG use the Slovene language in their relations with local public authorities. It coordinates the “Network for the Slovene language and financial contributions” which supports municipalities and other local authorities with the public use of the Slovene language and translations.
Regional education office for the Slovene schools	It is an autonomous office within the regional Education Board of FVG (Bogatec 2020a, 20).

**Table 3: Autonomous institutions of the German-speaking community in FVG<sup>31</sup>**

<b>Minority organizations</b>	<b>Function</b>
Regional list of organizations of the German-speaking minorities in FVG	The list includes nine cultural organizations dealing with the German language (and its varieties) and culture that can apply for public financing.
Association of the historical German-speaking linguistic islands in Italy	It includes representatives from cultural associations of the German-speaking linguistic islands in Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Trentino Alto Adige/South Tyrol, Piemonte and Aosta Valle. It aims to protect and support the language and identities of these communities.
<b>Advisory and consultative bodies</b>	
<b>Function</b>	<b>Function</b>
Regional commission for the German-speaking minorities in FVG	Advisory body on issues related to the implementation of the 2009 Regional Law on German-speaking Minorities and regional financing. It is composed of representatives of regional authorities, the regional Education Board of FVG, and other institutions dealing with the German language and its varieties.
Regional conference on the protection of the German-speaking minorities in FVG	It evaluates the implementation of the 2009 Regional Law on German-speaking Minorities and is organized by the president of the regional council.
<b>Administrative offices of FVG</b>	
<b>Function</b>	<b>Function</b>
Service for minority languages and co-regionals abroad	It deals with the procedures for the implementation of the regional protection laws of the Friulian, Slovene and German-speaking communities in FVG.
Regional office for the German language	It deals with the protection, promotion and coordination of the oral and written use of the German language in the public administration in FVG, offering translation services and language support.

## 6. Autonomous Powers

The legal system for the protection of the German-speaking, Friulian and Slovene minorities in the autonomous region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG or the Region) does not grant them autonomous legislative and executive powers, territorial self-government or power-sharing arrangements. The legislative framework provides linguistic minorities with cultural autonomy based on the structure of minority organizations and associations, and the network of consultative and advisory bodies, which, however, lack veto rights even in matters deemed of vital importance to these minority communities. The Slovene community also has its own elected representatives from mainstream political parties and the ethnic party Slovene Union (*Slovenska skupnost*).

Nevertheless, the role of the municipalities in the Friulian, German and Slovene-speaking areas should be taken into account. They have their own statutes and councils with legislative and executive autonomous

<sup>31</sup> Thanks to Lucia Protto from the cultural association *Fulgenzio Schneider* for advising on the list of autonomous institutions of the German-speaking community in FVG.

powers concerning many sectors supporting the public use of minority languages and thus implementing minority rights, such as:

- the public use of bilingual or trilingual signs in majority and minority languages;
- the public use of minority languages in the municipal councils and the administration, including administrative documents;
- translation services in minority languages;
- financial and other support to minority organizations and associations;
- support for education in minority languages, including transportation, food supply and maintenance of school buildings;
- support for small and medium-sized enterprises and various economic entities that are expressions of minority communities in different sectors.

The extent of support for minority rights in these municipalities depends on the mechanisms of political participation of minority representatives in their elected bodies. The more minority representatives play an active and leading role in a municipality's council, the better minority rights are implemented.

## 7. Financial Arrangements

The legislation of the autonomous region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG or the Region) on the protection of its three minorities recognizes various institutions and organizations as essential for the preservation and development of minority communities. Their legal recognition is a prerequisite for obtaining funding and is acquired through registration on a specific list of organizations and associations for each minority, managed by the Region.<sup>32</sup>

Brezigar S. (2020, 242) points out that the Slovene community in Italy relies on several sources of funding from both the Republic of Italy and the Republic of Slovenia, which represent the financial basis for its cultural autonomy in terms of activities and infrastructure in the Slovene language. The 2001 Slovene Minority Law and the 2007 Regional Law on the Slovene Minority ensure public funding for the cultural, artistic, scientific, educational and publishing activities pursued by the Slovene institutions and organizations in FVG. The Region allocates the public funds following consultations within the Regional consultative commission for the Slovene linguistic minority (see Table 2 above; *ibid.*, 244). Similarly, the 2007 Regional Law on the Friulian Language and the 2009 Regional Law on German-speaking Minorities ensure funding for the activities of organizations and associations of the Friulian and German-speaking communities and the Region allocates the public funds after consultations within the regional consultative commission for the Friulian linguistic

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<sup>32</sup> See footnote 28 regarding the regional registers of organizations of the Slovene, Friulian and German-speaking communities.

minority and the regional commission for the German-speaking minorities in FVG (see Tables 1 and 3 above). Considering the importance of public financing for the three communities, the loss of such resources “would require a reorganization and radical shrinking of the community’s activities” (Brezigar S. 2020, 242).

Some organizations receive additional specific funds from other public budget sources: the *Primorski dnevnik* (the Slovene language newspaper in FVG) and the *Slovensko stalno gledališče* (the Slovene Permanent Theatre in Trieste) are funded also through national legislation on publishing and theatrical activities. Taking another example, the public radio and television programs in the Slovene language are fully financed by the state through a special agreement between the government and the Italian national broadcasting company RAI (ibid., 245). Similarly, the programs in the Friulian language of RAI are financed by the state.

The Region’s schools with instruction in Slovene are part of the Italian public education system and are as such fully financed in the same way as schools with tuition in Italian (ibid., 243). The use of the Friulian language in schools in FVG is financed by the Region based on the 2007 Regional Law on the Friulian Language. Similarly, the German language and its varieties are taught in schools in FVG through specific programs and projects financed under the 2009 Regional Law on German-speaking Minorities. In addition, the 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law provides for the financing of teaching activities in German (and its varieties) and Friulian as well as translation services in minority languages in municipalities located in minority language areas. The Region and the Regional Agency for Friulian Language provide funding for such translation services as well. The German-speaking communities do not receive regular financial support from Austria or other German-speaking states.<sup>33</sup> However, there are many forms of cultural cooperation between organizations of German-speaking communities in FVG and organizations in Austria, especially those located in Carinthia (ibid.).

Additional financial resources of the three minority communities include money from economic activities, membership fees and service charges (e.g., fees of associations, entrance fees for cultural events, newspaper and magazine subscriptions, fees for various training courses) and contributions from various funds or foundations (ibid., 242). Detailed analyses of financial aspects are included in the proceedings of the 2021 edition of the regional conferences for the Slovene, Friulian and German-speaking communities (Jagodici 2022; Regional Agency for Friulian Language 2022; Fusco 2022).

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<sup>33</sup> Information based on the correspondence between the author and several minority representatives in December 2022: Marcella Benedetti, email to the author, 6 December 2022; Velia Plozner, email to the author, 29 November 2022; Lucia Protto, phone call with the author, 24 November 2022; Alfredo Sandrini, phone call with the author, 7 December 2022.



## 8. Intergovernmental Relations

The national and regional minority-related laws do not regulate relations between the Friulian, Slovene and German-speaking communities and the central and regional governments in cases when minority interests are negatively affected by (in)action of public or private actors (e.g., violation of minority rights, lowering the acquired level of protection, non-compliance with minority-related legislation). The three communities act mainly through their representative organizations while the Slovene community also has its own elected representatives in the Italian parliament and the regional and local elected bodies in Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG or the Region). The governor of FVG and the regional government can also act as interlocutors with the central government concerning minority issues.

In the case of the Slovene community in FVG, the Republic of Slovenia can apply diplomatic and political pressure and act as a mediator through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassy in Rome and consulate in Trieste. The Republic of Slovenia also has a specific Ministry for Slovenians Abroad which can intervene at the political level. It is worth noting that, in 2000, Italy and Slovenia signed a bilateral agreement concerning cooperation in the fields of culture and education.<sup>34</sup>

The presidents of the Republic of Italy and Slovenia may play an important role as well. For example, Italian president Sergio Mattarella and former Slovene president Borut Pahor were instrumental in the process of returning the *Narodni dom* (National Hall) to the Slovene community in FVG. The building was burned down by members of the fascist movement on 13 July 1920. It was returned to the Slovene community 100 years after this dramatic event, which marks the beginning of the repressive fascist period for the Slovene community in Italy. On 13 July 2020, the Italian president signed the formal act of restitution during his meeting with the Slovene president in Trieste for the commemoration of the 1920 event.

## 9. Inter-group Relations within the Autonomous Entity

The policies of the autonomous region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG or the Region) concerning the protection of its national/linguistic minorities are promoting the multicultural and multilingual character of the Region, including the Slovene-Italian and Austrian-Italian border areas. The approach of FVG to safeguarding linguistic minorities is integrated into an overall strategy for the development of interculturality as a feature and value of the Region, based on cooperation between minorities and the majority population at the local, regional, cross-border and international levels. FVG fosters cross-border cooperation and international relations for

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<sup>34</sup> Agreement on cooperation in the fields of culture and education between the government of the Republic of Italy and the government of the Republic of Slovenia, Rome, 8 March 2000 [*Accordo di collaborazione nei settori della cultura e dell'istruzione tra il Governo della Repubblica italiana e il Governo della Repubblica di Slovenia, Roma, 8 marzo 2000*] ratified by Law no. 164/2017. The ratification law and the agreement are available online (in Italian) at [www.gazzettaufficiale.it](http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it) (accessed October 27, 2023).

the benefit of minority communities. The three regional laws for the protection of the Slovene, Friulian and German-speaking minorities contain specific articles regarding the support from the Region for cooperation between the organizations and associations of minority communities also through common projects.<sup>35</sup> Thus, FVG assumes an institutional role in supporting inter-minority cooperation.

The three minorities cooperate through various projects and activities in the fields of culture and education. The Slovene minority's organizations started cooperating first with organizations of the Italian minority in the Republic of Slovenia to develop several projects in the framework of the Interreg Programme of the European Union (EU) and utilize the EU's structural funds, following the accession of Slovenia to the EU (Brezigar B. 2020, 63). Later, organizations from the Friulian community were also included in projects funded by the Interreg Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2014–2020. An illustrative example is the EDUKA2 project.<sup>36</sup> It produced didactic materials for schools with instruction in Slovene and Friulian and common guidelines on teaching these languages, and promoted networking between schools. Quadrilingual teaching in the schools in Val Canale exemplifies the integration of the three protected minority languages. This new and experimental school model includes the teaching of Slovene, Friulian and German in addition to Italian (Mezgec 2021).

At least once every five years, the president of the regional council of FVG convenes a regional conference for each community to discuss the implementation of their respective regional protection law. These conferences aim to provide a platform for the representatives of various minority organizations and regional representatives to exchange views on the measures outlined in the regional protection laws. In October 2022, the Region organized a minority-related conference in a new, comparative format. The event provided an additional comparative assessment of the socio-political and socio-cultural situation of the three minority communities.

## 10. Membership and Special Rights

Members of the Friulian, Slovene and German-speaking communities enjoy their minority rights based on the principle of territoriality. Administrative boundaries define the territorial scope of application of minority-related regulations and their practical implementation. Several municipalities constitute minority language-speaking areas. Within these so-called *protected areas*, the personal principle applies: any resident of a municipality from a protected area who is interested in working towards the aims of the respective minority

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<sup>35</sup> Article 4 of the 2007 Regional Law on the Slovene Minority; Article 4 of the 2007 Regional Law on the Friulian Language and Article 4 of the 2009 Regional Law on German-speaking Minorities.

<sup>36</sup> The EDUKA2 project addressed the shared challenge of poor cross-border cooperation in the field of education. The overall objective of the project was to strengthen cross-border cooperation and change the current situation by establishing common governance tools and shared educational and teaching models. For details, see <http://www.eduka2.eu/eng/> (accessed October 27, 2023).

community can exercise the minority rights stipulated by the national and regional laws. Affiliation with a minority community is a personal choice. If membership requires a formal request, the interested individual usually self-certifies their cultural and territorial sense of belonging to the respective minority community and/or their knowledge of the minority language.

FVG is a multicultural and multilingual region with a high level of integration. Therefore, it is common that families who may not identify as part of minority communities enroll their children in schools (or educational programs) with instruction in Slovene, Friulian or German as well as in school activities that aim to preserve local languages and heritage. Moreover, anyone who is interested in supporting the goals of minority communities can become a member of their organizations and associations and benefit from their cultural and sports activities or other services.

National and regional legislation on minority rights does not explicitly grant official status to the three protected minority languages. The 1999 Linguistic Minorities Law states that the official language of the Republic is Italian. However, one could argue that, in practice, these minority languages have acquired a status akin to that of an official language in the protected areas of FVG due to those regulations allowing the use of minority languages in public administration and the display of bilingual and multilingual public signs and toponymy (Vidau 2015b).

## **11. General Assessment and Outlook**

Between 2007 and 2009, the autonomous region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG or the Region) adopted three important regional laws regulating the protection of Slovene, Friulian and German-speaking communities. This legal framework represents an important milestone for these minorities strengthening their system of cultural autonomy. At the regional level, FVG plays an active role in managing cultural diversity and protecting linguistic minorities. Some of the Region's policies aimed at the preservation and development of its minority communities are already in the implementation phase and include various forms of funding. Other measures are of a planning nature and as such delineate the strategies for future development.

The cultural autonomies of the three minority communities are based on networks of associations, organizations and public bodies. These networks enable them to negotiate on crucial matters with local, regional, and to some extent state authorities. Moreover, they can participate in the decision-making processes through various forms of cooperation with public authorities (mainly at the local level). This collaboration occurs through joint commissions and advisory or consultative bodies, involving public officials and representatives from minority communities.

However, the question of political participation remains unsettled. The national and regional minority-related regulations do not guarantee the representation of the German-speaking, Friulian and Slovene

communities in elected bodies. While the regional electoral rules provide for a lower threshold for the election of a candidate from a party representing the Slovene minority, there are no similar provisions regarding the other two minority communities.

The functioning of cultural autonomy systems in FVG can be influenced by several crucial factors. First and foremost, the socio-political context may have an impact on their implementation. Such socio-political factors include, for example, the political pressure exerted by the national majority, the public opinion of the regional population, and the bureaucratic processes of the public administration. Additional relevant questions revolve around the sustainability of the system of public financing of minority organizations and the extent to which members of minority communities and speakers of minority languages exercise their rights.

The fact that cultural autonomies of the Friulian, Slovene and German-speaking communities rely on public financing can still elicit negative reactions from the public, politicians and the media. This occurs because they are viewed as a wasteful expenditure of public resources or because they are still perceived as conflicting with the traditional national idea that FVG, as a part of the Italian state, should be *exclusively Italian* in terms of culture and language.

In conclusion, the system of diversity governance in FVG provides the three recognized minorities with equality and non-discrimination, as well as cultural rights and a basic form of non-territorial self-government. However, the principle of territoriality defines and limits the implementation of the stipulated minority rights in three minority language-speaking areas.

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## List of abbreviations

ARLeF – Regional Agency for Friulian Language (*Agenzie Regionâl pe Lenghe Furlane/ Agenzia Regionale per la Lingua Friulana*)

ASt – Autonomy Statute

FCNM – Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

FVG – Friuli Venezia Giulia

RAI – Italian Radio and Television (*Radiotelevisione italiana*)

## About the author

**Zaira Vidau** is a researcher at the Slovene Research Institute (SLORI) in Trieste (Trst), where she also serves as the president of the Scientific Committee. Currently, her main position is at the Research and Grant Office of the University of Trieste. She holds a Ph.D. in Political Science and Ethnic Studies from the Faculty for Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana. Her main fields of interest include: political participation and cultural rights of national and linguistic minorities in Italy and Europe (special focus: the Slovene national community in Italy, including youth participation and associations of the Slovene national community); the use of minority and regional languages, and diversity management in public administration of multilingual and multicultural areas (special focus: the public use of Slovene, Friulian, and German languages in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region); intercultural education and communication; nationalisms and nation-states.

Financial support: This work is based upon the research funded by the Slovenian Research Agency, Project J5-3117 - Political participation of national minorities and persons belonging to them: comparative study of political participation of Slovene communities in the neighboring countries of the Republic of Slovenia.