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# Au to no my Report

**South Tyrol 2025**



For reasons of readability, in this report, alongside the term “Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano–South Tyrol,” other variants are also used, such as South Tyrol, Province of Bozen/Bolzano, Autonomous Province, and similar. The same applies to the term “Autonomous Region of Trentino–South Tyrol”.

# **Autonomy** **Report**

**South Tyrol 2025**

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FOREWORD

The word “we” in South Tyrol has a special significance. In the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano–South Tyrol, “we” signifies diversity. There are three legally recognized linguistic groups: Italian, German, and Ladin. By declaring membership to one of these three groups, the citizens of South Tyrol enjoy, within the framework of provincial autonomy, the extensive rights granted to them. However, in daily life, South Tyrolean society is even more diverse, and autonomy is part of everyone’s daily experience.

For historical reasons, the language and culture of the German and Ladin linguistic groups receive special protection. In 2022, the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the second Statute of Autonomy was marked. This statute is the foundation of South Tyrol’s broad powers of self-government. In addition to the Province of Bozen/Bolzano, autonomy also extends to the neighboring Province of Trento; both were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the First World War. Since 1948, they have jointly formed the Autonomous Region of Trentino-South Tyrol, which differs in many respects from the other 19 Italian regions.

This report aims to highlight the key aspects of South Tyrolean autonomy: the extensive territorial self-government, the coexistence of linguistic groups, the conflict resolution model, and the global challenges faced by a region with just half a million inhabitants. At the same time, this discussion intends to provide an overview of the importance of autonomy for the entire South Tyrolean society.

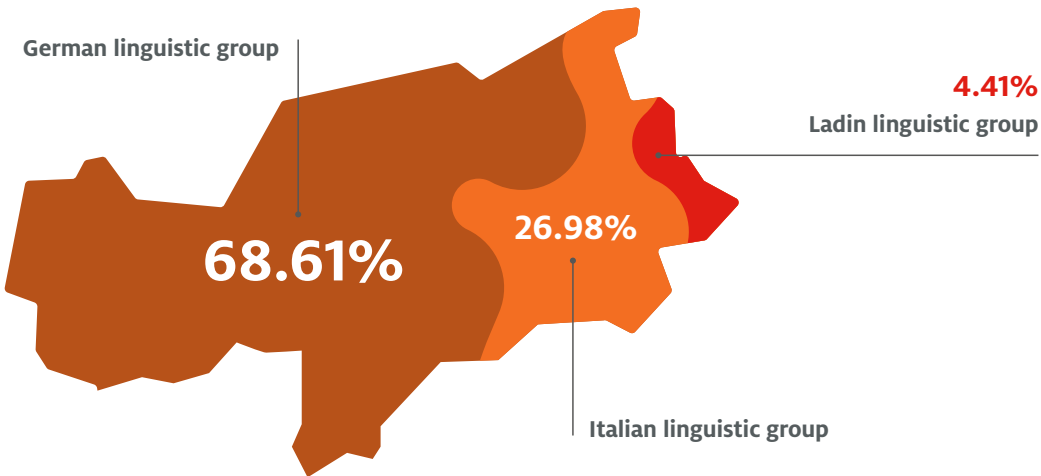


What does “Autonomy” mean?

The word comes from Ancient Greek “au-to-nomía”, where *autós* means “self, one’s own” and *nómos* means “law”. It broadly defines the ability to govern oneself with one’s own laws. More generally, autonomy is not only the capacity for self-determination and self-government, but also the freedom to decide and act. In ancient philosophy, autonomy was primarily the human being’s ability to define and regulate their relationships with others and with the polis, that is, the city-state in which they lived. When nation-states began gaining importance in the 18th and 19th centuries, aspects such as language, culture, ethnicity, and history became essential distinguishing features of a community.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, these characteristics were considered necessary to recognize the “purity” of a nation-state. However, in many European nation-states, there were ethnic or religious groups that did not identify with the majority population. These minorities frequently demanded the “right to self-determination,” a term that could mean two things: the right to decide their territorial future – such as through joining another state they felt they belonged to – or the demand for broader powers of self-government and self-regulation, and therefore greater autonomy. The first European country to introduce territorial autonomy was Finland, which granted it to the Swedish minority of the Åland Islands in 1921.

2024 LANGUAGE CENSUS RESULTS





ASTAT, “Ergebnisse Sprachgruppenzählung – 2024/Risultati Censimento linguistico – 2024,” *astatinfo* 56 (dicembre 2024).

Over time, conflicts have repeatedly emerged, overcome only with difficulty, through patience and years of negotiations and mediation. In addition to tools for conflict resolution and the promotion of peaceful coexistence, the report also presents recurring debates on the possibility of exporting the “South Tyrolean model” to other contexts characterized by so-called “divided” societies.

The contents presented in this publication are the result of many years of scientific research conducted by the authors on interdisciplinary aspects related to South Tyrolean autonomy. Far from merely reflecting the legal and political framework, the report highlights how society experiences this autonomy based on observations of everyday life. In the following pages, South Tyrolean autonomy is examined through a thematic division into the following blocks: institutions, politics, daily life, finance and economy, historical narratives, diplomacy and external relations, challenges, and future prospects. The focus is on both past and present, with a view toward the future and the reform of autonomy.

**South Tyrolean autonomy in numbers**  
The Autonomy Dashboard South Tyrol presents relevant statistics on South Tyrol, its autonomy, and minority protection. It brings together data from various statistical institutes, research organizations, and public institutions on a single platform. The platform enables the identification of key trends and comparison of the collected data.

 Link to  
**Autonomy Dashboard  
South Tyrol**

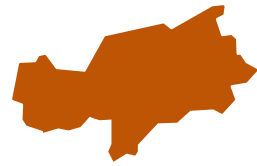




# The Road to South Tyrolean Autonomy

## Mid-19th Century

Modern-day Tyrol and South Tyrol come under Habsburg rule in 1363; it is only at the beginning of the 19th century that Trentino is fully integrated into the County of Tyrol and the Austrian Empire. Natural disasters and poor harvests lead to poverty and emigration, which in turn fuel demands for autonomy, demands that are rejected by the German-Tyrolean side. At the same time, Italian irredentism is growing stronger, fighting for the independence of Italian-speaking areas. In 1861, following the unification of Italy, radical nationalists like Ettore Tolomei view the Brenner Pass as the new, desired northern border.



## 1918: End of World War I 1919: Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye

The Austro-Hungarian Empire is among the defeated in the four-year-long war. Under the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the area of Tyrol south of the Brenner Pass is assigned to Italy. It is officially annexed in 1920, giving rise to the territory of South Tyrol as we know it today.

1900

1910

1920

1930

1940

1950



## The Outbreak of World War I in 1914 and the Secret Treaty of London in 1915

At the beginning of World War I in 1914, Tyrolean *Kaiserjäger*, including tens of thousands of soldiers from Trentino, are deployed on the Eastern Front against the Russian Empire. The Secret Treaty of London (1915) promises Italy the territory up to the Brenner Pass in exchange for leaving the Triple Alliance and joining the Entente. In this context, the area south of the Brenner and Reschen/Resia passes is first referred to as “Cisalpine Tyrol”.

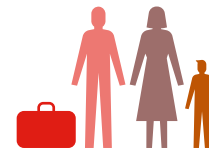


## 1920s–1930s: Italianization and Nazi Influence in South Tyrol

Following Mussolini's rise to power in 1922, a targeted policy of Italianization is implemented in South Tyrol: German-language schools are banned, and the settlement of Italian citizens is encouraged. The German-speaking population resists passively, establishing secret schools. From 1933 onwards, some South Tyroleans hope that the Nazi rise to power in Germany would lead to annexation into the Reich. The patriotic front “Völkischer Kampfring Südtirol” secretly spreads Nazi propaganda and maintains its own clandestine schools.

## 1939: The Option Agreement

Hitler and Mussolini sign the so-called “Option Agreement”: German- and Ladin-speaking South Tyroleans have to choose between emigrating to the German Reich and taking German citizenship or remaining in South Tyrol without any protection against forced assimilation. The population is split between optants (those willing to leave) and *Dableiber* (those intending to stay). Eighty-six percent choose to leave, but the outbreak of World War II largely prevents their relocation.

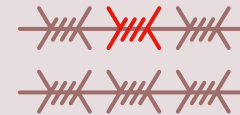


## 1948: First Autonomy Statute

The Italian Constituent Assembly approves the first Autonomy Statute, uniting the provinces of Bozen/Bolzano and Trento into the Trentino–Alto Adige Region, which is granted a regional parliament and government. The South Tyrolean provincial council, however, is given only very limited legislative powers.

## 1948–1957: A Disappointing Autonomy

Between 1948 and 1957, South Tyrol's autonomy fails to take off, as the interests of the German- and Ladin-speaking minorities are overshadowed by the Italian majority. Key provisions of the Degasperi-Gruber Agreement are not implemented. The heavy influx of Italian workers, mostly employed in the public sector and industry, further heightens tensions. Many German-speaking South Tyroleans are forced to emigrate to Germany, Austria, or Switzerland.



## 1943

On September 8, 1943, the German Wehrmacht occupies large parts of Italy and establishes the “Operations Zone of the Alpine Foothills”. While many German- and Ladin-speaking locals see this as liberation, Italian-speaking South Tyroleans perceive it as a threat. Opponents, including *Dableiber* and Jewish citizens, are persecuted. In summer 1944, a Nazi transit camp is set up in Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan. Until its closure at the end of April 1945, it holds over 10,000 prisoners. One-third are deported to extermination camps.

## 1945–46: End of the War and the Paris Agreement

American troops liberate South Tyrol from Nazi-Fascist rule. The Anglo-American military administration is replaced by an Italian civil administration. Re-annexation to Austria does not occur. With the Degasperi-Gruber Agreement (also known as the Paris Agreement), Italy and Austria guarantee South Tyrol linguistic, cultural, and economic rights. The Paris Treaty is internationally recognized in 1947.



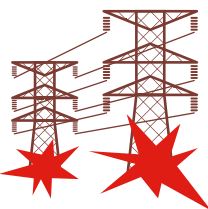
## 1957: The Schloss Sigmundskron/Castel Firmiano Demonstration

At a mass rally held at Schloss Sigmundskron/Castel Firmiano, 35,000 demonstrators protest the failure to respect the Paris Agreement and, under the slogan “Los von Trient” (“Away from Trento”), demand autonomy for South Tyrol separate from Trentino.



### 1960–61: The South Tyrol Issue at the UN

At the initiative of Bruno Kreisky, Austria's Foreign Minister – Austria having regained its sovereignty in 1955 – the United Nations General Assembly unanimously approves resolutions on the South Tyrol issue. Italy and Austria are invited to negotiate to resolve all disputes related to the Paris Agreement. In the context of the broader decolonization debate, the South Tyrolean cause receives strong support from the so-called "Third World" countries.



### 1961: The Night of Fire

On the night of June 11, 1961, the separatist group BAS ("Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol" or Committee for the Liberation of South Tyrol) blows up several high-voltage pylons. A worker from Trentino loses his life. The goal is to draw international attention to the South Tyrol issue. Italy responds by sending a large contingent of military and law enforcement forces to South Tyrol.



### 1961: The Commission of Nineteen

The Commission of Nineteen (composed of seven German-speaking members, one Ladin-speaking member, and eleven Italian-speaking members), appointed by the Italian Council of Ministers, is tasked with addressing the "South Tyrol issue" and formulating proposals to be submitted to the government. The results of the negotiations between Rome and Bozen/Bolzano are later incorporated into a set of measures for South Tyrol, known as the "Package".

### 1963: The First Center-Left Government in Italy

Under the leadership of Christian Democrat Aldo Moro, Italy forms its first center-left government, which includes the Italian Socialist Party. During this period, attention to negotiations between South Tyrol and Rome increases.



### 1965–1980: Economic Boom

With the second Autonomy Statute in effect, South Tyrol also experiences an economic boom. Tourism becomes a key economic driver, alongside agriculture, crafts, and growing industry, particularly in the province's peripheral areas.



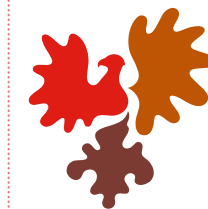
### 1969: Approval of the "Package"

In 1969, the parliaments of Rome and Vienna, as well as the provincial assembly of the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP), approve the proposals of the Commission of Nineteen, which become known as the "Package". During a special party congress at the Kurhaus in Meran/Merano/Maran, a slim majority votes in favor of the Package, consisting of 137 "measures in favor of the South Tyrolean population".



### 1972: The Second Autonomy Statute

The "second" Autonomy Statute, guaranteed by the Package, comes into force on January 20, 1972. It ensures equal rights and protections for all three language groups in the Province of Bozen/Bolzano and grants broader powers to both the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano and the Autonomous Province of Trento.



### 2015–2017: The Autonomy Convention

The Provincial Council initiates a participatory process to revise the Autonomy Statute. Within the Convention framework, citizen representatives develop proposals for reforming the statute, proposals that have not yet been implemented.



1960

1970

1990

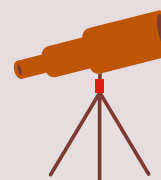
2000

2010

2020

### 2014: The Guarantee Agreement

An agreement redefines financial relations between the State and the Province, establishing, against the backdrop of the 2008 economic crisis, South Tyrol's contribution to the national fiscal recovery. However, it guarantees that the State can no longer withhold resources and funds owed to the Province. This assurance, combined with the retention of locally generated tax revenue, gives the Province greater financial planning security.



### 2025: The reform of the Autonomy

The South Tyrolean provincial government is negotiating with Rome to reform the Autonomy Statute to strengthen competencies and reduce conflicts before the Constitutional Court. Goals include: restoring the 1992 powers, clearly defining and expanding provincial powers, enhancing the role of joint commissions, and introducing the principle of mutual agreement for future statute amendments. Negotiations have been underway since October 2023.

### 1992: The Declaration of Dispute Settlement

With Austria's issuance of the so-called "declaration of dispute settlement", negotiations on the South Tyrol issue at the UN formally conclude: the main measures of the Package have been implemented, and effective minority protections have been achieved. South Tyrol's autonomy is thus enshrined in international law.





# Autonomy and Institutions

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# Autonomy and Institutions

Together with the Autonomous Province of Trento, the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano–South Tyrol forms the Autonomous Region of Trentino–South Tyrol, one of Italy’s five regions with a special statute (along with Aosta Valley, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, and Sicily). Its legal peculiarities include, for example, a long list of topics that South Tyrol can regulate through its own laws – many with exclusive competence, others within the framework of national parameters.

The “fundamental law” of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano–South Tyrol is the Second Autonomy Statute, which came into force in 1972. Since then, it has been implemented primarily through **enactment decrees**, which are defined jointly by representatives of the State, the Region, and the Autonomous Province in the **Commission of Twelve** and the **Commission of Six**, through bilateral and equal-level negotiations until a compromise is reached (The core of autonomy > see below).

## The Core of Autonomy: Negotiating to Build Trust



Autonomous regions with special statute differ from regions with ordinary statute, among other things, in how they manage their relationship with the State. The State negotiates bilaterally and on an equal footing with special-statute regions or provinces and cooperates with them in good faith. To this end, Joint Commissions have been established. In Trentino-South Tyrol it is called Commission of Twelve because it consists of “twelve members, six representing the State, two from the Regional Council, two from the Provincial Council of Trento, and two from that of Bozen/Bolzano”, of whom “three members must belong to the German-speaking group” (Article 107, paragraph 1, of the Autonomy Statute). Since 2017, the State may choose to appoint a Ladin-speaking member instead of one of the German-speaking representatives. In addition, the South Tyrolean Provincial Council may also appoint one of its two representatives from the Ladin-speaking group.

The balanced distribution of the entities involved ensures that a negotiated compromise is reached when all interests are represented. The lengthy process required to achieve a shared outcome is now considered a key factor in the success of the “South Tyrolean model”.

The Joint Commission of Twelve is responsible for issues relating to the entire Trentino–South Tyrol Region. Within this commission, there is a sub-commission known as the Commission of Six, which deals exclusively with matters relating to the Province of Bozen/Bolzano (there is no equivalent commission for the Province of Trento, as there is no special protection of the German-speaking minority there).

In the Commission of Six, three members represent the State and three represent the Province. The State is required to appoint at least one member

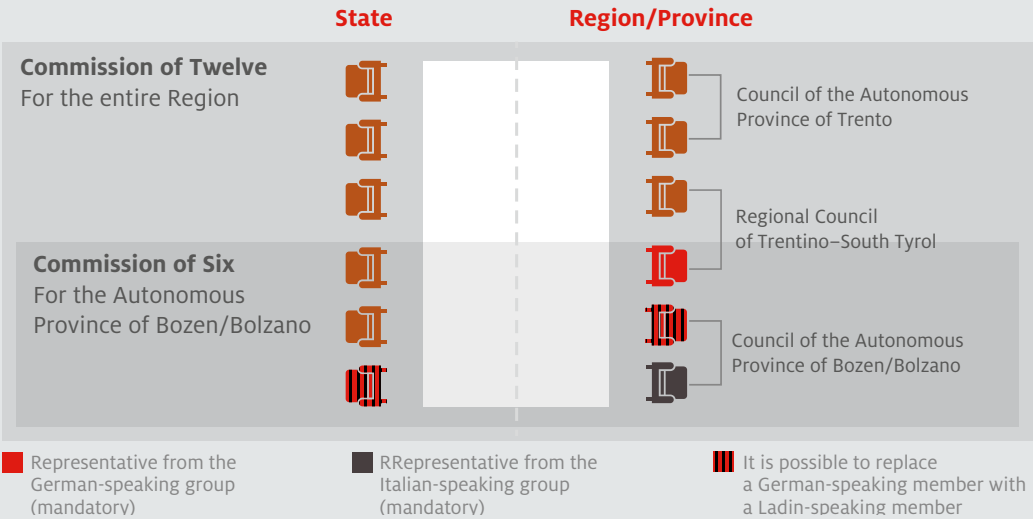
from the German or Ladin language group, while the Province must appoint at least one Italian-speaking member. Overall, the linguistic groups must be represented with equal weight. This is the only way to ensure equal representation of the State, the Province, and the two main linguistic groups.

The Commission of Six is the cornerstone of South Tyrol’s relationship with the State. It is within this framework that enactment decrees are developed to ensure the further development of the Autonomy Statute. The Commission effectively carries out legislative functions for all matters that the Statute defines but which require detailed regulation. These enactment decrees are a source of special law and, in case of conflict, take precedence over

ordinary laws of the Parliament. The goal is to make enactment decrees difficult to amend, primarily to protect the German and Ladin-speaking minorities.

Enactment decrees can cover nearly all matters relevant to autonomy, such as education or bilingualism, with the exception of financial relations, which are defined through separate agreements with the State. New transfers of powers from the State to the Province are also usually made through enactment decrees – for example, in areas such as energy or transport. The uniqueness of the Commission of Six, along with the procedural aspects of the enactment decrees, lies in the fact that this body is designed to foster trust: between the State and the Province, but also among the different language groups in South Tyrol.

### Composition of the Joint Commissions



One of the fundamental elements of autonomy and minority protection in South Tyrol is the **proportional** system, which stipulates that public administration jobs and public funding are allocated to the three linguistic groups in proportion to their population size. This system aims to prevent conflicts between linguistic groups regarding the distribution of positions and resources. The size of each linguistic group is determined through anonymous statistical surveys, known as the language census. Individual affiliation with one of the three groups, however, is expressed through a **declaration of linguistic affiliation/aggregation**, which every resident of South Tyrol over the age of 14 can make. Other

cornerstones of autonomy include the regulations on **multilingualism** and **toponymy**, which ensure the use of one’s mother tongue both in public life and in legal proceedings, as well as in public spaces through the use of place names (see Living in the Land of Autonomy > page 40 and Autonomy and Political Participation > page 23).

A particularly important aspect of South Tyrolean autonomy is the fact that it is guaranteed at the international level by the Peace Agreement with Italy, signed by the Allies in Paris in 1946. To this day, Austria maintains a protective role in defense of the German- and Ladin-speaking minorities.





ACHIEVEMENTS  
AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES

What makes the South Tyrolean model of autonomy special? What results have been achieved so far, and what remains to be accomplished? These questions are answered by Esther Happacher and Francesco Palermo, who have been studying autonomy for decades and are experts in constitutional law. Esther Happacher, a professor at the University of Innsbruck, was a member of the Commission of Six and the Commission of Twelve in 2020–2021, representing the State on behalf of the German-speaking group. Francesco Palermo, former senator of the Republic, directs the Institute for Comparative Federalism Studies at Eurac Research, is a professor at the University of Verona, and from 2014 to 2018 represented the Italian-speaking group for the State within the Commission of Twelve and the Commission of Six.

What differentiates South Tyrol’s autonomy from other territorial autonomies in Italy? Palermo: The two main differences lie, first of all, in the fact that it is enshrined at the international level in the 1946 Paris Agreement, which, as part of the peace treaties with the Allied powers, guarantees its protection under international law; and secondly, in the protection of the German and Ladin minorities, which serves as both the justification and foundation of the autonomy itself.

In your view, what is a particularly commendable achievement of the Autonomy Statute, and what is still missing? Happacher: One achievement worth celebrating is that, thanks to the Statute, the conflict between the linguistic groups has been resolved, bringing prosperity to the entire population of the province. However, what is still lacking in Italy is a genuine culture of autonomy: the centralizing tendency of the government in Rome continues to demonstrate this!

Palermo: I agree on both points. In South Tyrol, there are still few opportunities for dialogue, for example in schools or volunteer organizations, that promote cooperation between linguistic groups even where the Statute provides for their separation. There is also a lack of institutions capable of facilitating collaboration between different levels of government. In Germany, for example, the Länder participate in the legislative and administrative process via the Bundesrat, whereas in Italy, there is no equivalent chamber of the regions.

The principle of negotiation is at the core of defining and further developing autonomy: the State and the Province are called to make agreements. Is cooperation within the Joint Commissions of Twelve and Six truly the key to success, as is often claimed?

Esther Happacher



Francesco Palermo



Happacher: The obligation to negotiate on an equal footing is certainly a fundamental element of the relationship with the State. Those representing the State and the Autonomous Region or the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano are required to jointly develop enactment decrees and thus reach an agreement. Examples range from place names to proportional representation to teacher training.

South Tyrol holds legislative powers in numerous areas: which three provincial competencies would be the most painful to lose?

Palermo: The issue isn’t the powers themselves: South Tyrol already has exclusive competence in many areas. Should we now also demand it for the police and judiciary, for example? What really matters is the degree of leeway in exercising those powers. An “environmental competence”, as is often called for, would give South Tyrol almost no decision-making margin. The Constitutional Court considers the environment a cross-cutting matter, and legislative power is therefore exercised where there is a so-called “prevailing interest”. Often, this means not in South Tyrol, but in Rome or Brussels.

Happacher: Yes, the decisive factor is the ability to exercise existing competences according to South Tyrol’s specific needs, even by deviating from national legislation. However, this autonomous room for maneuver is repeatedly limited by the Constitutional Court and by centralist national legislation (see “Limits to autonomy” > page 18).

Proportional representation continues to be commonly referred to as a cornerstone of autonomy, a principle whereby public posts and resources are distributed among linguistic

groups according to their numerical strength. Yet in recent years, South Tyrolean society has become much more diverse, also due to immigration from abroad. Do you think an adjustment in proportional representation is necessary?

Happacher: The rules on proportional distribution not only aim to redress past injustices suffered by the German-speaking population under Fascism, but also to maintain social peace today, an immensely valuable asset and an objective that must continue in the future. Adjustments have always been made wisely and carefully, and that will continue.

Palermo: The goal of redress has already been achieved through proportional representation. What matters today is its role in maintaining social balance, something that requires every change to be made with care and deliberation. Adjustments are certainly necessary, and many have already been made, for example regarding the census or a more flexible application in specific sectors, such as bilingual healthcare staff (Living in the Land of Autonomy > page 45, Interview with Gregorio Gobbi).

Let’s conclude with a look into the crystal ball! Will the declaration of linguistic affiliation still exist on the 100th anniversary of the Autonomy Statute?

Happacher: It is likely, as it’s a key element of the minority protection system.

Palermo: The possibility of radical changes due to external factors seems rather unlikely, although of course not impossible. What is certain, however, is that the declaration will be made differently and will serve different functions from those it serves today.

The Relations of the Autonomous Province with the State, other Regions, and Municipalities

To effectively promote South Tyrolean interests at the national level, networking both politically and institutionally is more important today than ever. But who shapes the relationships of the Autonomous Province with the outside world? And what are the relations like with the region and the municipalities?

Since the Region of Trentino-South Tyrol has taken a back seat following the signing of the Autonomy Statute in 1972, it is now almost exclusively the two Autonomous Provinces of Bozen/Bolzano and Trento that manage relations with the State and with other Italian regions. To shape these relationships, South Tyrol makes use of two legal instruments: on one hand, bilateral negotiations with the State; on the other, multilateral cooperation and agreements with other regions.

In negotiations with the State, South Tyrol and Trentino have, within the framework of the Joint Commissions of Twelve and Six, defined nearly 200 enactment decrees and

several financial agreements, thereby gaining greater responsibilities as well as broader financial autonomy. Bilateral negotiations can also be initiated with other regions. Where this is not otherwise feasible, South Tyrol has reached agreements with other regions through institutional consultation meetings, for example within the framework of the State-Regions Conference. In Italy, the governors of the regions – that is, the presidents of the provinces – participate in institutional networks of relations. These consultations, and therefore also the relations beyond the provincial borders of South Tyrol, are shaped by the approach taken by the Provincial Government.

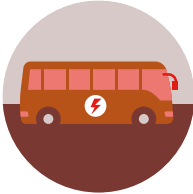


And what is the relationship between the Province and the 116 municipalities of South Tyrol? Municipal authorities carry out a wide range of functions, and thus have a strong impact on the daily lives of residents. These activities are primarily regulated by provincial laws, but the municipalities still play an active role. Since 1954, the Association of Municipalities of the Province of Bozen/Bolzano has represented the interests of the municipalities to both the Province and the State. For example, the Province consults the Association when discussing funding methods for the municipalities. Since 2010, a Council of Municipalities has also been established, which is institutionally involved in decisions made by the Provincial Government and the Provincial Council, as it is required to provide its opinion on all matters concerning municipalities.

Autonomy and Climate Protection

Within this framework of institutional relations, the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano holds a substantial set of powers, allowing it to regulate various sectors that have a direct and significant impact on the lives of its citizens. Among these, it is worth mentioning all thematic areas in which

the Province can influence – either directly or indirectly – a cross-cutting issue such as climate protection. Consider, for instance, the regulation of provincial mobility, energy, or spatial planning: within the legislative framework defined at both the European and national levels, it is the Province that can concretely define the details of these policies, thereby also pursuing its climate goals.

The table below presents concrete actions undertaken by the Province in these three sectors:

Sector			
Concrete Actions Taken by the Province	Incentives for electric cars, Alto Adige Pass, Green Mobility Fund	Creation of the CasaClima agency, which sets high energy efficiency building standards	Municipal development programs for land use and landscape planning

Let’s look at some examples of good practices:

- In the mobility sector, in addition to provincial incentives for private electric mobility, the Province promotes the use of public transport and aims to reduce the impact of private mobility on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions through initiatives such as the Alto Adige/Südtirol Pass: a single travel pass for the provincial territory (and for some extra-provincial routes), which rewards frequent public transport users with discounted fares. Another important initiative is the creation of the Green Mobility Fund, which finances studies and initiatives, especially by municipalities, aimed at reorganizing urban traffic to produce fewer emissions.
- In the energy sector, the establishment of the CasaClima Agency as an instrumental body of the provincial administration has introduced a high energy-efficiency building standard

throughout the Province. The agency is also responsible for an information desk that provides consulting services to municipalities to help them improve energy efficiency and achieve savings.

- Finally, in the field of spatial planning, the Municipal Development Programs for Land and Landscape are ten-year planning tools focused on long-term development goals related to services, land use and existing buildings, mobility, tourism, and agriculture. These programs involve a process of civil society engagement to identify issues that will significantly impact adaptation options within the provincial territory.

There is still much to be done for the fight against climate change to become a stable, structured, and participatory part of the Provincial Administration’s action, but the examples illustrated represent important steps in this direction.

The Constitutional Court’s  
Limitations on Autonomy



Since the constitutional reform of 2001, the Constitutional Court has often ruled that it is the State, and not the Province, that holds legislative authority. This centralized interpretation of the powers of the Autonomous Province has limited South Tyrol’s room for action in certain areas, such as commerce.

With the reform, all Italian regions were, at least on paper, granted a more significant role (Article 114 of the Constitution of the Republic); regional competence became the rule, and state competence was theoretically meant to be the exception. In practice, however, due to the Constitutional Court’s centralist stance, the State’s role has become increasingly prominent, and its competence is considered either prevailing or overlapping. The principle of prevalence comes into play when a legislative power cannot be clearly assigned to either the State or the Region: in such cases, the Court declares the State’s exclusive competence to be dominant, thereby removing that power from the Region (in this case, from the South Tyrolean legislator). The notion of overlapping competence refers to an increasingly broad definition of what constitutes a cross-sector matter. As a result, there has been a significant increase in situations where the State is deemed entitled to intervene in areas of regional or provincial legislative competence, thereby undermining that competence and making it practically impossible for the Provincial Council to issue new legislation. One example concerns the State’s competence in matters of environmental protection, ecosystems, and cultural heritage, which has significantly reduced South Tyrol’s legislative power in the field of hunting. Another example involves competition protection, where the State imposes such broad substantive constraints that the South Tyrolean legislature is left with virtually no room to maneuver.

In 1992, at the crucial moment when disputes over the full implementation of autonomy were resolved, South Tyrol still enjoyed broad legislative freedom in these areas. Although some conflicts have since been resolved through the adoption of enactment decrees, the issue persists. At the time of writing this report, the two Autonomous Provinces are in negotiations with the Meloni government regarding a reform aimed at restoring the original legislative powers.

Autonomy in Europe:  
Models and Diffusion

Autonomy can grant minorities within a state a high degree of control over matters that concern them, while also ensuring their effective and equal participation in public life. Autonomy is also a tool for governing a territory efficiently and democratically, benefiting all groups living in that area.

As social challenges and political decision-making processes become increasingly complex, the role of autonomy is gaining greater importance. There is no universally recognized definition of the term “autonomy”; even in political and academic discourse, the term is not always clearly distinguished from other concepts like decentralization, self-government, federalism, or self-determination. However, models of autonomy can be broadly categorized into two ideal types: territorial autonomy and non-territorial autonomy. The following table provides an overview of the main differences:

	Territorial Autonomy	Non-Territorial Autonomy
On what principle are autonomous powers transferred?	Principle of territoriality: autonomous powers are transferred to a territorial entity, such as a province, canton, or region.	Principle of personality: autonomous powers are transferred to a group defined as a community of people, such as an organized minority.
Who benefits from autonomy?	The entire population living within the borders of this territorial entity.	Exclusively the members of the minority, through its organization.
How is autonomy implemented?	The national territory is structured so that a national minority constitutes the majority within the borders of a territorial entity (when autonomy is designed as a minority protection tool).	The minority exercises autonomous powers in an organized form on issues particularly concerning the group (such as culture or education), and only in relation to that group.



📷 In Flensburg, in northern Germany, about one fifth of the population belongs to the Danish minority. Associations and institutions are funded by grants from both States: an example of non-territorial autonomy.

In practice, autonomy models often combine elements of both types. Even in territorial autonomies, rights may be granted to certain groups on a non-territorial basis. For example, in South Tyrol, there is a right to use the Ladin language in interactions with public administration, not only in the two Ladin valleys (Val Badia and Val Gardena) but also with provincial offices that primarily or exclusively deal with Ladin-related matters (such as the Department of Education and Training or various commissions operating in the field of culture).

Across Europe, different models of autonomy show a clear geographical distribution. In Western Europe, territorial autonomies are predominant (e.g., Scotland, South Tyrol, Basque Country), while non-territorial forms exist only in a few

isolated cases (such as the Danish minority in Germany or the Slovenian minority in Italy). By contrast, Central and Eastern European countries have mostly opted for non-territorial forms of autonomy (e.g., Estonia, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia); in this part of Europe, territorial autonomies are rare and tend to have much more limited powers, making them not comparable to those in Western Europe (examples include Vojvodina in Serbia or Gagauzia in Moldova).

The preference for non-territorial solutions in Central and Eastern Europe can be explained by several factors: for instance, minority settlement areas in these countries are generally less compact and clearly defined; in addition, there is a widespread perception that territorial autonomy threatens the unity of the state.



André Lecours



THE APPEAL OF SOUTH TYROL  
SEEN FROM CANADA

Political scientist André Lecours is a professor at the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa and author of *Nationalism, Secessionism, and Autonomy* (Oxford University Press, 2021). He had just begun working on the book when, in 2017, he spent a research period in Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan as a Federal Scholar in Residence at the Institute for Comparative Federalism. Observing how South Tyrolean autonomy functions had a decisive influence on the theory of secessionism developed in his book.

Professor, what fascinated you about South Tyrol to the point that it became pivotal in writing your book?

Discovering South Tyrolean autonomy was a revelation for me. During my visit to South Tyrol in the summer of 2017, I heard for the first time the phrase "dynamic autonomy". That concept helped clarify the puzzle I was trying to solve: Why do nationalist movements take on more or less secessionist forms at certain times and in certain places? I had already ruled out many variables (such as the degree and nature of autonomy, populism, the EU, etc.) when I began to look into the workings of the joint commissions, and that got me thinking. Perhaps the key to solving the puzzle is to look at how autonomy evolves – or fails to evolve – over time.

In your view, what are the key ingredients behind South Tyrol's success?

I believe there's an element in this region that you don't find elsewhere. South Tyrol is a community that includes a minority group and makes up a very small portion of Italy in both territory and population. The autonomy model chosen for South Tyrol, especially the commission system, is difficult to replicate in other contexts. In other words, the idea of accepting to negotiate and renegotiate autonomy, and not seeing it as a final settlement,

is something that can be exported. The model itself, however, is less transferable. It would be difficult for national politicians in other settings to accept mechanisms by which autonomy is continually renegotiated. This is because in most multinational states, where minority groups represent a larger share of the population, the state wants to retain greater control.

Is there room for improvement in South Tyrol?

There is probably room for improvement in terms of increasing civil society participation in the joint commissions, which would also help reduce some of the typical weaknesses of consociational democracy (Autonomy and Political Participation, page 24). We are often faced with elite structures operating from a top-down approach, and they don't always incorporate the concerns and aspirations of the broader population.



The Federal Scholar in Residence annual program of the Institute for Comparative Federalism promotes academic exchange on comparative federalism and regionalism.







# Autonomy and Political Participation

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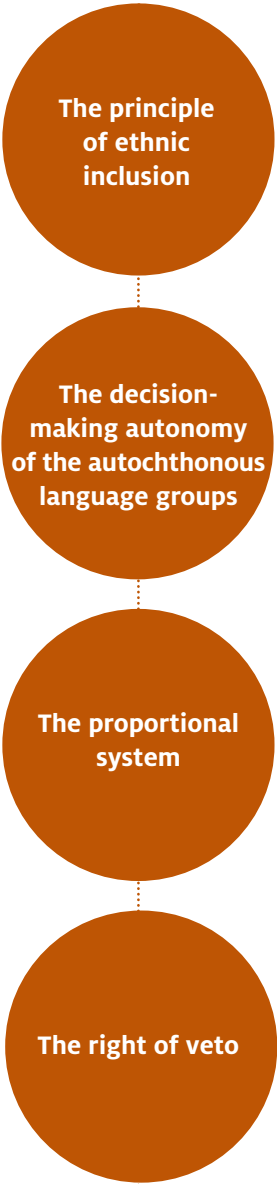
# Autonomy and Political Participation

The political system of South Tyrol is structured as a parliamentary democracy. It is based on the model of consociational democracy and the socio-institutional separation of linguistic groups.

Consociational democracy refers to a form of democratic governance in which social and political conflicts are not primarily resolved through majority rule, but rather through mediation, compromise, and cooperation among different linguistic groups.

Two key characteristics define South Tyrol's political system: fragmentation and division of powers. On the one hand, South Tyrolean society is fragmented into well-defined ethnic sub-societies, which exist across the political, administrative, associative, and civil spheres. On the other hand, these entities are held together by mechanisms of concordance, which prevent South Tyrolean society from disintegrating under centrifugal forces. Furthermore, voting in local or provincial elections in South Tyrol requires four years of continuous residency in the Region of Trentino-South Tyrol, primarily in South Tyrol, a rule introduced to protect linguistic minorities and prevent sudden immigration from altering the political balance.

The four fundamental principles of the South Tyrolean political system are:



## The Principle of Ethnic Inclusion

All autochthonous linguistic groups (German, Italian, and Ladin speakers) participate in the exercise of executive power. Special rules apply to the Ladin group.

The Autonomy Statute establishes that the composition of the Provincial Government must in any case reflect the size of the linguistic groups as represented in the Provincial Council. According to most political science literature, autonomist parties are those that defend the autonomy of their territory. Among German-speaking parties, however, some are considered semi-autonomist – supporting autonomy as an intermediate step but ultimately aiming for secession. Italian parties that follow a semi-autonomist approach, by contrast, call for greater State presence in the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano.

German anti-autonomist parties do not completely oppose autonomy, though they do not view it as a valid tool for the survival of the minority. Italian anti-autonomist parties, on the other hand, reject any form of autonomy altogether, following a centralist view of the State.

### 2023 Provincial Council Elections

The Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP), the dominant political force since 1948, achieved its worst electoral result in 2023 with 34.5% of the vote (13 seats out of 35). Already in 2013, when it fell to 45.7%, it had lost the absolute majority for the first time. In 2018, it

remained the leading party with 41.9%. On that occasion, it entered a coalition with the Lega, which was voted for by 44% of Italian-speaking voters, thereby including the Italian electorate as broadly as possible. This coalition marked a turning point in South Tyrol's political history. With the Lega, for the first time, a right-wing Italian party joined the Provincial Government, while the SVP continued to lose its representative power among the German and Ladin linguistic groups. 55% of those voters no longer supported the SVP.

The 2023 elections and the subsequent formation of the Provincial Government (accompanied for the first time by civil society protests) mark a historic turning point in South Tyrol's political landscape.<sup>1</sup> For the first time since the 1948 provincial elections, a second German-speaking party Die Freiheitlichen has joined the Provincial Government, in office since February 1, 2024. The initial government coalition included SVP, Freiheitlichen, Fratelli d'Italia, and Uniti per l'Alto Adige–Lega Alto Adige Südtirol. The sole representative of Uniti per l'Alto Adige switched to Forza Italia at the end of January 2025. La Civica is one of the coalition partners.

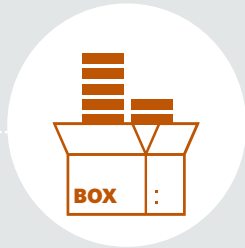
The entry of Fratelli d'Italia into the government is seen as the breaking of a dam, particularly given that the party has never officially distanced itself from Fascism. The coalition was driven by the need to guarantee and strengthen autonomy, by the national government (Meloni's cabinet), and by the will of the Italian-speaking electorate. With five out of 35 councilors (14%), the Italian-speaking group is underrepresented compared to its numerical weight (27%).

As a result, the party system in South Tyrol has evolved into a more competitive, highly volatile, and fragmented system.

POSITION ON AUTONOMY OF PARTIES IN THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL 2008–2023<sup>2</sup>

	Italian Parties			Interethnic Parties		German Parties	
Year	Anti-autonomist	Semi-autonomist	Autonomist	Semi-autonomist	Autonomist	Semi-autonomist	Anti-autonomist
2008	Unitalia	–	FI, PD, LN	VGv	SVP	DF, Union für Südtirol	STF
	1.9%		16.4%	5.8%	48.1%	16.6%	4.9%
2013	–	–	PD, AAnC, M5S, Team Autonomi	VGv	SVP	DF, BU/L/W	STF
			13.8%	8.7%	45.7%	20.0%	7.2%
2018	–	–	Lega, PD, M5S, AAnC/FdI	VGv	SVP, TK	DF, STF	–
			19.0%	6.8%	57.1%	12.2%	
2023			La Civica, PD, FdI, Lega	VGv	SVP, TK, Vita, FS, DF	JWA, STF	
			15.1%	9.0%	56.5%	16.8%	
Difference 2008–2023	–1.9%	–	–1.3%	+3.2%	+8.4%	+3.2%	–4.9%

AAnC    Alto Adige nel Cuore  
BU      BürgerUnion für Südtirol  
DF      Die Freiheitlichen  
FdI     Fratelli d’Italia  
FI      Forza Italia  
FS      Für Südtirol mit Widmann  
JWA    Lista Jürgen Wirth Anderlan  
L       Ladins Dolomites  
LN      Lega Nord  
PD      Partito Democratico  
STF     Südtiroler Freiheit  
SVP    Südtiroler Volkspartei  
TK      Team Köllensperger  
VGv    Verdi-Grüne-Vërc  
W       Wir Südtiroler



Disparities in the Exercise of Power

Since the 1990s, the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP) has increasingly formed coalitions with Italian parties that, while meeting the requirements of proportional representation in government, represented only a minority of the Italian-speaking electorate. As a result, most Italian-speaking voters felt excluded from the decision-making process, contributing to the so-called Italian “disagio” (discomfort). Only in 2018, with the SVP–Lega coalition, was this asymmetry almost fully rebalanced. However, after the 2023 elections, with only five representatives of the Italian linguistic group in the Provincial Council, this imbalance is once again growing.

In reality, there are few objective reasons to justify the Italian “discomfort”. However, some studies indicate that this social phenomenon is underestimated within South Tyrol’s political system, creating fertile ground for new conflicts. Others argue instead that the discomfort is partly

self-inflicted, due to the Italian group’s lack of interest in political dynamics (Living in the Land of Autonomy > page 44 and The Narrative of Autonomy > page 68).

Notably, until 1986, extra-party political participation was more pronounced among Italian speakers than German speakers. Since then, the situation has reversed. Due to the lower voter turnout of Italian citizens in Provincial Council elections, political representation has gradually shifted in favor of the German-speaking group. This generates a paradox: Italian speakers perceive their group’s social standing more negatively than the other two language groups. Around half believe their group is disadvantaged, even though this perception is not supported by objective data. Conversely, when comparing with the German-speaking group, Italian citizens actually view the economic and political situation in South Tyrol more positively.<sup>3</sup>



The Ladin Language Group

With a share of 4.4 percent, Ladins make up the smallest autochthonous language group. To ensure their political representation, the Autonomy Statute provides special provisions: the electoral law guarantees at least one Ladin representative in the Provincial Council, a safeguard that applies if no Ladin candidate is elected.

The Ladin language group can also be represented in the Provincial Government regardless of its numerical strength in the Council. Normally, this possibility is used: a Ladin provincial councilor may be included in the Government through a special procedure. From 1993 to 2003, the Ladin-speaking group was represented in the Provincial Council by its own party: the *Ladins*.

Decision-Making Autonomy of the Autochthonous Language Groups:



Education, culture, media

Decision-making autonomy is concentrated mainly in the sectors of education, public media, and culture, with legal provisions ensuring a separation between the language groups in the first two areas. The division in the cultural sphere stems from the social structure and the existence of different cultural spheres of influence. Funding is also allocated according to ethnic proportionality.



Ethnic permeability

Over the past three decades, there has been a trend toward easing relations among the various language groups. However, proficiency in the second language has not significantly increased, and social contacts between the groups remain limited. Ethnic separation has nevertheless become slightly more permeable in recent years. Exchanges and cooperation, particularly in the educational and cultural fields, are growing. Examples of more intensive cooperation between language groups include the Provincial Commission for Equal Opportunities for Women, Eurac Research, the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (rejected in the 1970s as a “Trojan horse” of assimilation), the Zelig documentary film school, and the future library hub of Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan.



Economic interests

Economic concerns are usually at the forefront for major interest groups. In organizations like *Confindustria* and *Confartigianato*, the structure is interethnic. The same applies to professional associations recognized by state law, such as the bar association, the medical association, and the association of architects, among others. In contrast, the trade union *Autonomer Südtiroler Gewerkschaftsbund* (ASGB) is organized on an ethnic basis.

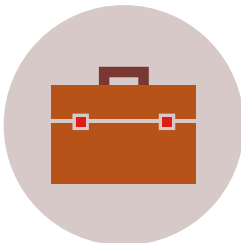
The Proportional System

Ethnic proportionality applies in politics, in access to public employment, and in the distribution of social subsidies and provincial funding.



Foundation

The basis for applying the proportional system, also referred to as *ethnic proportionality*, is the certification of belonging or affiliation to the German, Italian, or Ladin language group (Living in the Land of Autonomy > page 45). Ethnic proportionality served two main purposes: first, to redress the injustices suffered by the German- and Ladin-speaking populations under Fascism, which had excluded them from public office; and second, to prevent competition between language groups by moving it within each group instead. Access to political positions, public administration, and resources is therefore dependent on membership in a language group, that is, on certification of affiliation with one of them.



Application

In 1975, on the eve of the introduction of ethnic proportionality in public employment, representation was still highly imbalanced. By 2023, proportional representation has been almost entirely achieved. Since 1980, positions in public administration have essentially been allocated based on ethnic proportionality. However, leadership roles in the provincial administration are often assigned regardless of the candidate's language group affiliation. Even in public competitions for technical or specialized roles, there is a growing departure from strict “ethnic entitlement”. State-assigned jobs based on proportionality now amount to only a few thousand, compared to more than 40,000 positions within provincial and municipal administration.



Adjustments

At the time of its introduction, ethnic proportionality was one of the main sources of political conflict. Today, it is being adapted to a changing society. Some public services (such as cleaning services) are being privatized due to the inability to fill the corresponding positions. This has led to the application of the so-called “flexible proportionality”, a kind of credit-based system. In this case, positions may be temporarily filled beyond the established proportion by one language group, with the obligation to balance it out later. “Soft proportionality” relaxes the requirement for bilingual certification, particularly in filling vacant positions in the healthcare sector. Certification is required only five years later.

PUBLIC EMPLOYEES – 2023

Administrations	Language Groups (percentage distribution)			Total (absolute values)
	German	Italian	Ladin	
Provincial administration (strict sense) <sup>4</sup>	64.8%	33.3%	1.9%	2,763
Provincial instrumental bodies	72.9%	22.1%	5.0%	664
Provincial Forestry Corps	79.5%	14.2%	6.3%	254
Road Services	85.0%	8.8%	6.2%	467
Education sector	72.4%	23.9%	3.6%	8,281
Teachers in state-run schools	73.2%	22.2%	3.9%	9,540
Municipalities	68.5%	27.7%	3.8%	4,745
Health authority	64.6%	32.9%	2.5%	10,391
District communities	78.1%	17.0%	4.9%	2,232
Other local entities	29.2%	6.7%	1.1%	4,702
Total	68.3%	28.3%	3.4%	44,039

astatinfo 04, febbraio 2025 (dati 31.12.2023)<sup>5</sup>

The Right of Veto

The majority of the members of a linguistic group seated in the Provincial Council can request a separate vote by linguistic groups when they believe that the equality of rights or the ethnic and cultural peculiarities of the groups themselves are at risk.

If the request for a separate vote is denied or if a law proposal is approved despite the opposition vote of two-thirds of the members of the linguistic group that feels disadvantaged, the majority of that group can challenge the law before the Constitutional Court within 30 days of its publication.

The right of veto has been invoked only on two occasions. The Italian linguistic group has tried several times to use this tool but failed due to its strong political fragmentation. The necessary two-thirds majority of representatives in the Provincial Council was never reached. Twice, it was a member of the Ladin group, who was also part of the opposition, who invoked the right of veto.

Since 2009, the publication “Politika”, Südtiroler Jahrbuch für Politik – Annuario di Politica dell’Alto Adige – Anuar de politica dl Südtirol, provides detailed information on the aspects of the South Tyrolean political system. Electoral analyses, political activities, and lobbying are some of the topics covered in the publication.<sup>6</sup>



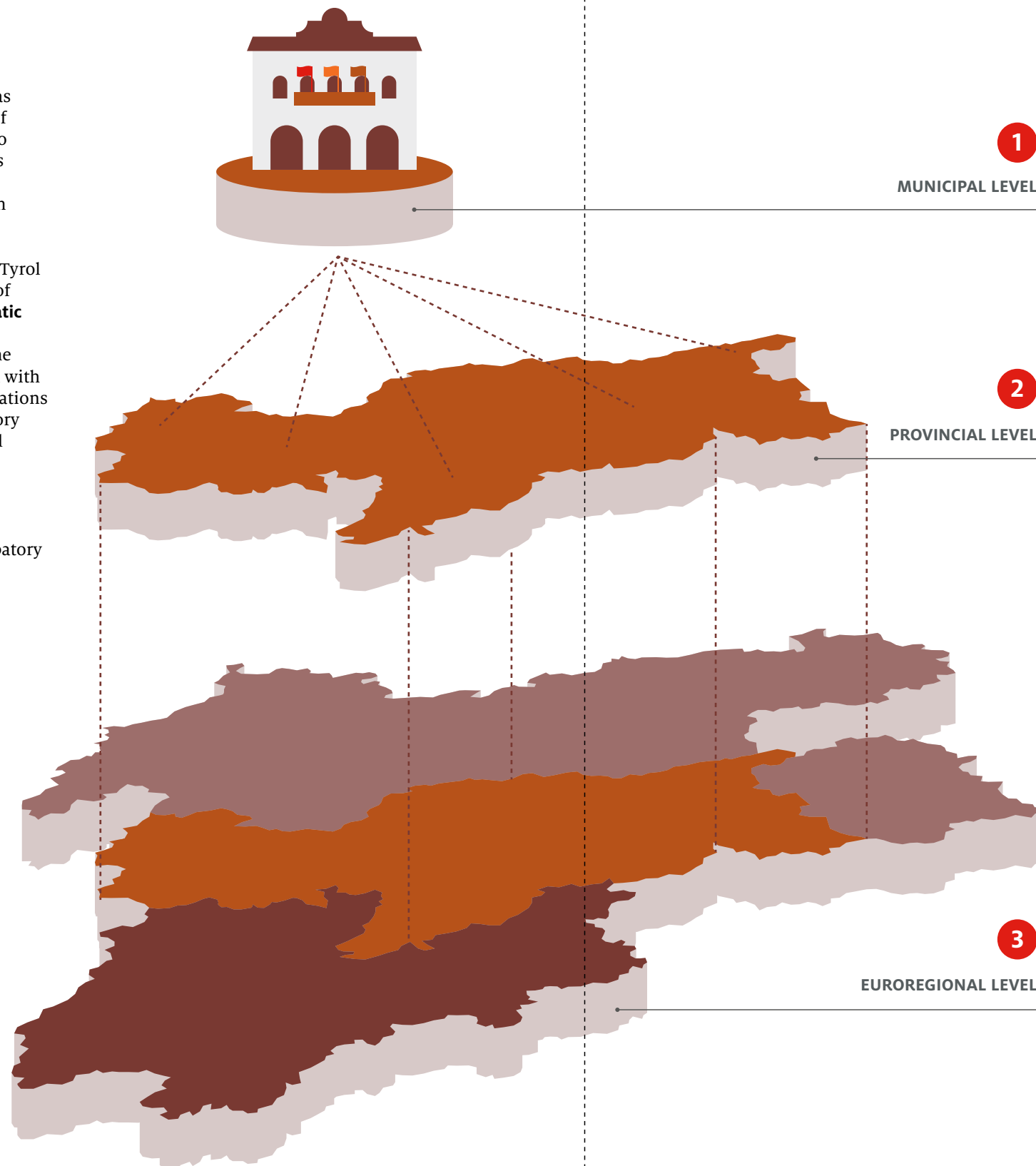
PPolitika, the South Tyrolean political yearbook, focuses primarily on the political and social reality of South Tyrol, but also looks at Tyrol and Trentino and occasionally beyond.



## Democratic Innovations

So far, the South Tyrolean political system has worked well. However, to make it crisis-proof and fit for future challenges, it is necessary to broaden the inclusion of all linguistic groups and all residents of South Tyrol in decision-making processes by increasing participation in policy development. A political culture of participation, multilevel and multi-actor, is needed. For this reason, as elsewhere, South Tyrol is also moving toward the use of new forms of political participation: the so-called **democratic innovations**. This term refers to situations in which citizens are invited to participate in the management of public affairs in cooperation with elected public authorities. Democratic innovations are thus forms of co-decision and participatory democracy that do not oppose the traditional mechanisms of representative democracy or the referendum-based instruments of direct democracy, but rather complement them.

Below, we present some examples of participatory democracy at various levels of government:



### Municipal Level

The statutes of the 116 South Tyrolean municipalities provide for various forms of citizen participation in political life: advisory boards, councils, committees, assemblies, public debates, or participation forums. What all these forms of participation have in common is their nature: they are processes that allow the municipal administration and the citizenry to engage in constructive dialogue and jointly develop shared solutions to issues of collective interest. Some municipalities make regular use of these tools, others do not. However, regularity is a fundamental criterion to ensure that participatory democracy processes function effectively and contribute to social cohesion.

#### Advisory Boards (Consultazioni)

Advisory boards are venues for meeting and discussing specific topics. Their role is to support and enrich the work of local government bodies. Representatives of different local associations can participate in these boards, depending on the topic for which they are established. Many South Tyrolean municipalities provide for the establishment of advisory boards for young people and the elderly; the municipalities of Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan and Meran/Merano/Maran have established advisory boards for immigrants. There are also boards that represent the interests of women or families, for example in Natz-Schabs/ Naz-Sciaves, or for environmental protection in Vahrn/Varna.

#### Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is the most widespread tool for citizen participation worldwide. In South Tyrol, it has been implemented in Mals/Malles Vinschgau/Val Venosta and Eppan an der Weinstraße/Appiano sulla Strada del Vino. The municipal statutes of Kurtatsch an der Weinstraße/Cortaccia sulla Strada del Vino and Wolkenstein in Gröden/Selva di Val Gardena also provide for it. In a participatory budgeting process, citizens are called upon to decide on the use of a portion of the municipal budget. The population expresses its views on the expenses and investments it considers most appropriate for the community. These may include specific services or the construction or renovation of public buildings, playgrounds, green areas, bike paths, or benches. In short, the population contributes ideas, and the most voted project is implemented.



Provincial Level

At the provincial level, steps have also been taken toward institutionalizing new forms of political participation. Provincial Law No. 22/2018 provides for the establishment of a Council of Citizens (‘Consiglio’) and an Office for Political Education and Participation. Additionally, various advisory councils exist at the provincial level. Examples include the Provincial Student Council, the Provincial Council for Integration, and the Provincial Youth Services Council, and the Provincial Commission for Equal Opportunities for Women.

Council of Citizens

The Council of Citizens is activated at the request of 300 citizens. It is structured in three phases, co-managed by professionals in the field of participation: the actual "Council", in which 12 people (aged 16 and over) participate on a voluntary basis; a public event where the results of the ‘Council’ are presented; the final report is sent to the Provincial Government and the Provincial Council, compiled by the Office for Political Education and Participation.

To date, a Council of Citizens as defined in Provincial Law No. 22/2018 has never been

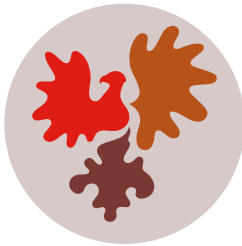
activated. However, local use of citizens’ councils in South Tyrolean municipalities is expanding. Examples include: Free Space Merano 2022, Schenna. Weiter. Denken: 40 obiettivi per Schenna, and Bozen/Bolzano’s Citizens’ Climate Assembly. Naturns/Naturno established one as early as 2014.

Citizens’ Council for the Climate

The South Tyrol Climate Plan 2040, approved on July 18, 2023, by the Provincial Government, provided for the establishment of a Citizens’ Council for the Climate, which met for five sessions between January and June 2024. 50 adult residents of South Tyrol and six young people were involved in the process of defining the Climate Plan. The working languages of the Citizens’ Climate Council were Italian or German, with no simultaneous translation. Based on the input from the Citizens’ Climate Council, the opinion of the Climate Stakeholder Forum, and the results of other monitoring mechanisms, the Climate Plan Coordination Center prepares, once a year and in cooperation with the relevant departments, a proposal for the modification, adjustment, and integration of the Climate Plan to be presented to the Provincial Government and the Provincial Council.



Idea Collection: as part of the Autonomy Convention, citizens had the opportunity to contribute suggestions for the reform of the Statute of Autonomy. One of the Open Space forums was held at Eurac Research headquarters.




Euroregional Level


Autonomy Convention

The Autonomy Convention (‘Convention’) represented one of the most significant participatory processes ever carried out in South Tyrol and is unique globally as a sub-state experience within a consociational political system. The ‘Convention’ was established as a consultative body to the Provincial Council. It took place between 2016 and 2017 and involved nearly 2,000 people. Citizens, political representatives, and experts came together to discuss and develop proposals on how the current Statute could be adapted to the needs of a changing political, legal, and social context. The ideas that emerged formed the basis for the work of the two bodies of the ‘Convention’: the Forum of 100, composed of 100 citizens, and the Convention of 33, composed of 33 members appointed by the Provincial Council, including legal experts, politicians, representatives of social partners, and members of the Forum of 100. The set of proposals developed by these two bodies to renew the Autonomy Statute was presented to the Provincial Council.

In 2022, for the first time, the Euregio Citizens’ Council (‘Council’) took place, a consultative body established within the framework of the Euroregio Tyrol–South Tyrol–Trentino. The "Council" involved citizens from three municipalities: Hall (Tyrol), Brixen/Bressanone/Porsenù (South Tyrol), and Arco (Trentino). The “Council” was held in Arco on October 1st and 2nd, 2022. The discussions focused on the question: “How can the Euregio Tyrol–South Tyrol–Trentino become more visible and tangible within the municipalities and the entire Euregio area?”. The proposals developed during the “Council” are currently under review by the Euregio Board and include: the creation of a delegate responsible for information, communication, and event organization on Euregio-related topics, the establishment of a Euregio Festival, and the introduction of a unified and universal mobility pass for the entire territory of the Euroregio.



**Archive of the Autonomy Convention** includes the outcomes of Open Space events and meetings of the Forum of 100 and Convention of 33.



Note

- 1 Elisabeth Alber, Alice Engl, Günther Pallaver, eds, *Politika 24* (Bozen: Raetia, 2024), <https://www.raetia.com/de/politika/940-politika-24.html>
- 2 Günther Pallaver, “Kontinuität und Wandel”, in Alice Engl, Günther Pallaver and Elisabeth Alber, eds., *Politika 2019* (Bozen: Raetia 2019), 166; and Ergebnisse der Landtagswahlen 2023, Landtagsparteien zu Beginn jeder Legislaturperiode, Civis.bz.it.
- 3 Hermann Atz, Max Haller, Günther Pallaver, eds., *Ethnische Differenzierung und soziale Schichtung in der Südtiroler Gesellschaft* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016). Hermann Atz, Max Haller and Günther Pallaver, eds., *Differenziazione etnica e stratificazione sociale in Alto Adige* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2017).
- 4 By provincial administration (strict sense) is meant the provincial offices only (by departments)
- 5 ASTAT, "Öffentlich Bedienstete – 2023/Dipendenti del settore pubblico – 2023", *astatinfo* 4 (febbraio 2025), [https://astat.provincia.bz.it/it/news-pubblicazioni-info.asp?news\\_action=4&news\\_article\\_id=688930](https://astat.provincia.bz.it/it/news-pubblicazioni-info.asp?news_action=4&news_article_id=688930)
- 6 In Open Access:  
DE <https://www.politika.bz.it/taetigkeiten/das-jahrbuch/>  
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# Living in the Land of Autonomy

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# Living in the Land of Autonomy

Autonomy is not a closed system of government, distant and locked away in halls of power. In addition to granting broad legislative and administrative powers to South Tyrol, it also contains a system of mechanisms designed to protect the German- and Ladin-speaking populations and to regulate coexistence among the language groups – mechanisms that influence people's daily lives. In particular, the Statute provides for four emblematic elements that residents of South Tyrol may encounter in their lives: rules governing the use of German and Ladin in the public sphere, rules on place names (toponymy), the school system, and the declaration of linguistic affiliation/aggregation.

These rules are based on the recognition and preservation of the three language groups, each with its own language and culture, in a distinct way. This system has maintained a certain level of separation among the language groups, who partially live their cultural and social collective lives separately. Adding to this is the division between rural areas – predominantly German-speaking – and urban areas, where most of the Italian-speaking group resides, while the Ladin-speaking group mainly lives in the Ladin valleys.

However, the impact that the Statute's rules have on everyday life has changed over time. On the one hand, some rules, like those concerning the declaration of linguistic affiliation/aggregation, have been modified or are now approached more flexibly, for example through multilingual school projects and exchange programs between

students from different language groups. On the other hand, one must consider the important role played by associations and volunteer organizations, which are particularly significant in South Tyrol. Although sometimes divided along linguistic lines, many associations and volunteer groups play a key role in promoting moments of collaboration and sharing among language groups. Finally, South Tyrolean society itself has changed due to sociodemographic transformations, particularly with the arrival of people from other countries. In light of these developments, the following pages explore how people living in South Tyrol today navigate autonomy and its minority protection rules.



**The role of associations in South Tyrolean society and their connection to autonomy is discussed in interviews (in German) with the president of the South Tyrolean Music Band Association and the president of the Alpenverein Südtirol:**

Die Rolle der Vereine in der Südtiroler Gesellschaft:  
Interview mit **Pepi Ploner** (eurac.edu)



Die Rolle der Vereine in der Südtiroler Gesellschaft:  
Interview mit **Georg Simeoni** (eurac.edu)



Two worlds:  
Many rural areas of South Tyrol are almost entirely German-speaking, with few daily opportunities for contact with the Italian-speaking group. In contrast, the historic center of the provincial capital (Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan) is marked by the coexistence of languages and cultures: nearly 74 percent of Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan's inhabitants are Italian-speaking. Above: the view from Dorf Tirol at the entrance to Val Venosta/Vinschgau. Below: Leonardo da Vinci Street in Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan.



# Autonomy regulations in daily life



German is equal to Italian, the official language of the Italian State.

German (and Ladin in Ladin valleys) can be used in interactions with public offices.

Documents intended for public use or for general distribution to citizens or multiple offices are produced in both Italian and German.

Specific rules govern the use of languages in judicial proceedings, so civil and criminal trials at first and second instance can be either monolingual or bilingual.

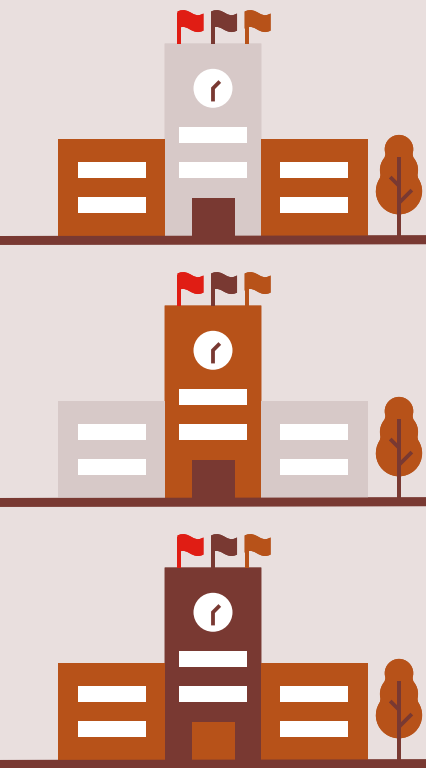


Anyone working in public offices must demonstrate adequate knowledge of both Italian and German (and also Ladin in Ladin valleys), in a way that matches their job duties, by:

1. Providing specific certificates (i.e. patentino, managed by provincial offices, and since 2010, international language certificates); or
2. Combining a high school diploma in one language with a university degree in the other, or university degrees from institutions in Italian and German.

The term *Südtirol* is official, as it has been mentioned in the Italian Constitution since 2001. Bilingual and trilingual place names are regularly used, although a law formally regulating their use is still lacking.

Since many Italian toponyms were introduced during the fascist period, sometimes based on ancient Latin names, or through translations or inventions, some of them are contested. In recent years, legislative proposals have been made to allow exceptions to the principle of absolute bilingualism in place names.



Teaching in kindergartens, primary, and secondary schools takes place in the pupils' "mother tongue" (Italian or German) by teachers for whom that language is also their mother tongue. Teaching of the second language is mandatory, and in Ladin areas, Ladin must also be used and taught.

Second-language teaching is carried out by mother tongue teachers.

These provisions have been implemented with the creation of three distinct school systems, each with its own administrative structure: Italian-language schools, German-language schools, and schools in Ladin areas, where teaching occurs in both Italian and German, with Ladin used as both a medium of instruction and a subject.

In Italian-language schools, and since 2013 experimentally in German-language schools, the CLIL methodology (Content and Language Integrated Learning) has been adopted for second-language teaching – i.e., teaching certain subjects in the second language. This approach is supported both nationally and by the European Union.



Parents have the right to choose which type of school to enroll their children in, though with some limitations. According to an enactment decree of the Statute from 1988, students must demonstrate adequate knowledge of the language of instruction, which can be assessed by a dedicated commission. If not, the child is automatically enrolled in the school of the other language group; this decision can be appealed before the autonomous section of the Regional Administrative Court in Bozen/Bolzano.

To preserve the integrity of German-language schools, in recent years measures have been introduced and/or discussed to guide parents' choices – particularly in response to the tendency of some, especially from the Italian-speaking group, to enroll their children in schools of the other language group, and in relation to the number of enrollments of students with migrant backgrounds.

Some aspects of South Tyrolean autonomy, such as ethnic proportionality, require knowledge of both the size of each language group and individual affiliation. This is established through a specific declaration of linguistic affiliation or aggregation.

Today, there are two distinct types of declarations: an anonymous declaration, submitted by all Italian citizens every ten years and used to calculate the size of each language group; and an individual and nominative declaration, used to determine individual affiliation. This can be submitted at any time by residents aged 14 and older, including EU citizens and, since 2015, long-term EU residence permit holders and those with refugee or subsidiary protection status, even if not resident.

These nominative declarations are stored at the Court of Bozen/Bolzano.

It is possible to change, revoke, or submit a new nominative declaration, but under specific conditions to prevent declarations made for convenience.




## How People Experience Autonomy

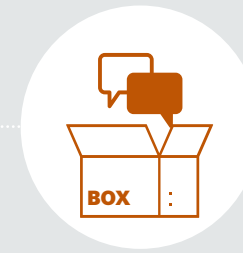
The main success of South Tyrolean autonomy is undoubtedly its ability to eliminate tensions and encourage peaceful coexistence among the linguistic groups, offering them, especially the German-speaking group, a sense of protection and the guarantee of being able to continue existing as a collective within the Italian State.

In particular, autonomy has shown that it is possible not to view “the other” as a threat and to move beyond a conflict-driven mindset of “us versus them”. For example, in most political discourse, there is a prevailing positive image of diversity (among the Italian, German, and Ladin language groups), which allows South Tyrol to serve as a bridge between the Italian and German cultural worlds. Surveys show that an increasing majority of South Tyroleans view multilingualism and cultural diversity (of the Italian, German, and Ladin groups) as an advantage. Very few people now hold a negative view of this diversity. For instance, the percentage of people who believe that the existence of multiple language groups in South Tyrol and their own multilingualism is, or could be, enriching rose from 58.6% in 1991 to 77.9% in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

However, the notion of exclusive language groups, which are still somewhat in competition, persists. This is reflected, for example, in people's sense of identity and belonging to the South Tyrolean community. Surveys reveal a clear distinction between linguistic identities, such as “South Tyrolean” or “Italian”. At the same time, a shared sense of territorial belonging is slowly emerging. Talking about identity raises questions about what it means to be South Tyrolean. What are the factors that unite people in the “imagined community” of South Tyrol? Shared ancestry? Living in the province? Being bilingual? Wearing the traditional Sarner jacket, eating pizza with speck, loving autonomy or the mountains? In reality, there is no objective answer to this question, because there are various ways of identifying as South Tyrolean. Trying to define criteria would mean limiting this variety and imposing a hierarchy of belonging that risks being exclusionary.



 The fact that one is in a bilingual province is particularly evident from the signs and road signs.



### School and Bilingualism

The school system divided by language groups, in which teaching in the mother tongue is guaranteed, is one of the fundamental principles of South Tyrol's autonomy. However, it is also an expression of the social separation between language groups that has its roots in the 1970s, when the Second Statute of Autonomy came into force. In this regard, one must ask whether and how this system contributes to hindering the creation of opportunities for socialization, exchange, and cooperation between the groups, and to the achievement of effective and functional bilingualism.

For years, there have been widespread complaints about poor second language (L2) proficiency, particularly among the Italian-speaking group. Two studies conducted by Eurac Research during the 2007/2008 and 2014/2015 school years (*Kolipsi I*<sup>2</sup> and *Kolipsi II*<sup>3</sup>) on fourth-year high school students indeed revealed inadequate levels of L2 competence relative to the number of hours and years spent studying the second language. According to data from *Kolipsi II*, 34% of Italian-speaking students have B1-level competence (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), meaning they understand messages on familiar topics and can produce simple texts on known subjects. Meanwhile,


38% have elementary-level skills (A2), being able to understand and communicate basic information – simple and isolated sentences and common expressions – on familiar and everyday topics. A further 10% have even lower proficiency levels. Among German-speaking students, who are generally believed to be more competent in L2, half reach B1 level and nearly a quarter are at A2 level.

*Kolipsi II* also identified several factors that can “predict” good L2 competence. Above all, the private use of the L2 outside the school context appears to be decisive for both language groups. For Italian-speaking students in particular, active extracurricular use of the L2 and, even more significantly, a good (passive) understanding of the South Tyrolean dialect seem to correlate with strong skills in standard German. The dialect (in its various forms) is used by German-speaking South Tyroleans in the family, with friends, and during leisure time, while standard German is mainly used at school and with people from other German-speaking countries. The exclusion of the dialect from L2 teaching in Italian-language schools creates an inconsistency between ‘learning bilingualism’ and ‘functional bilingualism’.

In summary, for both language groups, the key to successful language learning seems to lie in contact between the different groups, not only or mainly in the adoption, especially by the Italian-language school system, of alternative teaching approaches such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). While this ‘possibility’ of contact is naturally limited by the asymmetrical distribution of language groups in the province (with the Italian-speaking group concentrated in urban centers), even indirect contact, such as through television, has positive effects on second language acquisition.

The distance that persists between the language groups is also reflected in what is known as social capital, meaning the network of interpersonal relationships, social connections, and trust in others. On the one hand, South Tyroleans have a high level of social capital, which is evident, for example, in the large number of people engaged in volunteer work. On the other hand, many tend to have friends from their own language group and mostly associate with people belonging to that same group, although the situation has improved compared to the past.

In other words, “bonding” social capital – that is, cohesion within one's own group – often outweighs “bridging” social capital, which builds connections between different segments of the population.<sup>4</sup> However, this must be considered in light of the geographical distribution of the language groups, with the Italian-speaking population living predominantly in urban centers. Additionally, an increase in interaction and cooperation between language groups has been observed in various sectors (Autonomy and Political Participation > page 28).

 Diversity, old and new: That the historic *Torgglhaus* on Obstmarkt/Piazza delle Erbe in Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan also bears an Italian name has long been known. Today, however, the city hosts people from many different cultures, as is evident from the vendors at various market stalls.



However, autonomy is not experienced in the same way by everyone.

For example, the term “disagio” (discomfort) has often been used to describe a certain unease experienced by the Italian-speaking group living in South Tyrol, who, following the implementation of the Second Statute of Autonomy, lost positions of power due to being numerically a minority in the province. What is the cause of this discomfort? Several explanations can be considered, related to the socio-economic and political status of the Italian-speaking group. According to research conducted by Atz, Haller, and Pallaver, the discomfort does not stem from actual objective differences, such as professional occupation, but is rather a matter of perception.<sup>5</sup> In any case, the concept of discomfort should be reconsidered, especially given that, from a socio-economic perspective, the most disadvantaged segment of the population is actually that with a migration background. There are also significant inequalities within the linguistic groups, especially within the German-speaking one (see the chapters Autonomy and Political Participation > page 27 and The Narrative of Autonomy > page 68 for more on “discomfort”).

Like the Italian-speaking group, the Ladin-speaking group is also a minority in the province. On the one hand, the Ladin population benefits, though not entirely, from the protection mechanisms granted to the German-speaking group (see Autonomy and Political Participation). On the other hand, it must be remembered that the Ladin community is divided across the

territories of South Tyrol, Trentino, and Veneto; and Ladin-speaking residents of Veneto do not enjoy any form of autonomy and do not have the same linguistic rights as their neighbors in South Tyrol (The Narrative of Autonomy > page 70).

Focusing only on the linguistic groups mentioned in the Autonomy Statute overlooks the fact that South Tyrolean society is much more varied and diverse, undergoing constant demographic transformation. There are people who either cannot or do not want to identify with the three official linguistic groups. These individuals reflect the so-called dilemma of “exclusion amid inclusion,”<sup>6</sup> which characterizes consociational democracies (Autonomy and Political Participation > page 24): that is, the institutional inclusion of recognized groups occurs at the expense of excluding other communities. For example, people from mixed-language families (Italian, German, and Ladin) are not accounted for in the South Tyrolean consociational system, and their exact number is unknown. In the past, their situation – particularly regarding the declaration of linguistic affiliation – sparked many protests. These found a political champion in Alexander Langer, who denounced the creation of “ethnic cages” in which South Tyroleans were forced to categorize themselves. Today, such protests appear to have diminished, and the issue has lost attention, partly due to adjustments in the declaration of affiliation that now allow individuals to aggregate to a linguistic group. Still, the question remains: to what extent have mixed-language individuals aligned themselves with the division among linguistic groups?



Gregorio Gobbi



## THE DECLARATION OF AFFILIATION/AGGREGATION

interview with Gregorio Gobbi, former Coordinator of the Central Services Department at ASTAT

In the past, the declaration of linguistic affiliation raised various issues.

The main concerns included:

- respect for privacy
- the truthfulness of declarations and the issue of declarations made out of opportunism
- declarations from those who feel they do not belong to any linguistic group

The declaration has therefore been modified several times.

What have been the most significant developments?

Let's start with a clarification. The collection of data on linguistic groups was already carried out in the 19th century under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which covered a vast territory with many linguistic minorities. There were no issues with it; this data was collected alongside other demographic information. This practice continued until 1921. After that, the Italian censuses of 1931, 1936, and 1951 did not record linguistic groups. They were included again in the 1961 and 1971 censuses, still for general statistical purposes. In 1972, with the Second Statute of Autonomy and the introduction of the ethnic proportionality, a new feature was added: a language census with two purposes – calculating the linguistic proportions between the three groups and allowing individuals to declare their linguistic group for personal interests, such as applying for a public sector job. Between 1981 and 1991, some debates emerged, and the legislation had to be amended to recognize the possibility for individuals to declare that they did not belong to any linguistic group and to aggregate themselves to one. It was a workaround: there has never been an option to declare oneself as multilingual. For the purpose of calculating proportions, nothing changed, since the total is calculated as the sum of both declarations of affiliation and aggregation. The most significant change came later: the declaration for calculating proportions, which is mandatory by law, although there are no penalties, was separated from the declaration made for personal interest.

Does the declaration, as it exists today, still present issues or attract criticism? If so, what are they?

Since the declaration for calculating proportions is now entirely anonymous, the criticism about opportunistic declarations is no longer valid. What remains is a “statistical” declaration concerning the three linguistic groups. Rather, the Data Protection Authority is less concerned with the anonymous census itself and more with the nominative forms kept in court, which represent a significant issue. If someone were to gain access to them, they would have names, surnames, and linguistic group data.



As for the anonymous census, the problems are bureaucratic. Until 2011, the anonymous declaration was made during the general population census, held every ten years. That is no longer possible, as in 2018 the decennial general census was replaced by annual sample surveys. In 2021, a regulatory amendment allowed for the anonymous declaration to be submitted online. However, individuals who do not do it online must still be reached in person, which involves costs. There is the question of whether a full census is really necessary to calculate proportions. Statistically, a sample survey would be sufficient.

**What do the data collected through the declaration of affiliation/aggregation tell us about South Tyrolean society and its different linguistic groups?**

Since 1991, the declaration has been separated from the sociodemographic data gathered in the general population census, such as age or occupation. So, from a statistical point of view, it has no real significance, because without cross-referencing the data, the statistical information remains meaningless. For example, are all farmers native German speakers? We can't know that from the declaration. There is a general lack of interest in that kind of analysis. Nevertheless, data does exist and is published. *The Südtiroler Sprachbarometer/ Barometro linguistico dell'Alto Adige* by ASTAT allows for the cross-referencing of various data, such as linguistic affiliation and the language spoken by parents, offering a realistic picture of society and its evolution. It's worth noting that linguistic groups change very slowly, unless something extraordinary happens, like a war. Currently, the most rapid change in society is caused by the presence of foreigners. The world has changed, and South Tyrol is a cosmopolitan society as well. The declaration of affiliation/aggregation does not reflect these changes; it merely complies with the Statute's requirements for calculating proportions.

And how is autonomy experienced by people with a migration background, who have for decades now been a structural reality in the province? Today, foreigners represent about 10 percent of the resident population, in addition to those with a migration background who have acquired Italian citizenship. On the one hand, they encounter a society that is already bi-/trilingual and culturally diverse; on the other hand, within the South Tyrolean consociational system, they find themselves having to navigate distinctions between linguistic groups and shift between different languages and cultures. It is therefore important to assess how people with a migration background relate to the linguistic groups and the cultural particularities of South Tyrol, and whether autonomy supports their social integration through policies tailored to the specific needs of the territory. Similar issues arise for the Roma and Sinti people (about a thousand in South Tyrol), communities that are not recognized as historical linguistic minorities under the Italian legal system, nor

are they included in the Statute of Autonomy, even though they have lived in Italy and in the province for centuries.

In any case, when discussing linguistic groups and other categories of belonging, it should not be forgotten that these are, in fact, highly diverse entities. Within them, there are differences, such as social class or urban versus rural context, that influence how people experience and live autonomy.



Luana Franco Rocha

**AUTONOMY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PEOPLE WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND**

**Sociologist Luana Franco Rocha is originally from Brazil; since 2016, she has lived in South Tyrol, where she works as a research associate at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. In her work, she conducts studies and research on language policy, integration of people with migration backgrounds, and the relationships between old and new minorities.**

**How is South Tyrolean autonomy experienced by people with a migration background?**

Dalle tante interviste che conduco per la mia From the many interviews I conduct for my research, it emerges that these individuals generally experience autonomy in a dual way. On the one hand, the multicultural nature of the province is seen as enriching; on the other, there is often a certain disappointment regarding the practical aspects of everyday life. There is a strong awareness of the clear separation between the Italian-speaking and German-speaking groups, with all the consequences this has in many areas of social life, from enrolling children in school to participating in associations. Those who arrive from elsewhere and do not automatically fall into one of the three recognized linguistic groups can feel deeply uncomfortable in such a tripartite society. Even people who move to South Tyrol from another German-speaking country often feel that speaking German is not enough – they must also learn the local dialect to feel truly accepted.

**The declaration of linguistic affiliation is one of the pillars of the proportional system. How is it perceived by people with migration backgrounds?**

They see the proportional system and the declaration of linguistic affiliation as important tools that, in the past, helped protect minority rights and repair the injustices of the Italianization imposed by Mussolini. However, people with migration backgrounds stress that today's reality is very different from that of 50 years ago: the diversity of South Tyrolean society now encompasses much more than just the three

linguistic groups. In today's globalized world, there is a potential that South Tyrol, in the view of those participating in my study, fails to fully tap into when it limits diversity to just these three groups. As for the declaration of affiliation, those who are not native speakers of Italian, German, or Ladin face the problem of choosing one of the groups, when they have no real cultural or linguistic connection to any of them. This is a very delicate issue for people with migration backgrounds: some feel uncomfortable being forced to declare affiliation with one of the three groups just to obtain certain sociopolitical benefits. They also believe that the institutional tripartition directly influences the local population's mentality, even worsening social divisions.

**In your research, have you found out what people with migration backgrounds would like to change about South Tyrol's autonomy system?**

People with migration experiences generally support the idea of a multilingual, more integrated society in which it is not necessary to choose a group. In this light, most of the individuals interviewed in the study expressed a desire for reform of the school division system currently mandated by the Statute of Autonomy. Since institutional education is an important tool for socialization, they believe a multilingual school system should be introduced – one that fosters interaction not only between the three historic linguistic groups, but also between them and migrant families. The goal is certainly not to dissolve the specific identities protected by the Statute of Autonomy, but rather to strengthen the

potential that South Tyrol enjoys precisely because of its diversity.

**You also have a migration background. What aspects of South Tyrolean autonomy do you most appreciate?**

I admire its commitment to protecting minorities, especially considering the historical context in which the Second Statute of Autonomy was implemented. After a difficult period of tensions, autonomy finally brought peace and stability to

the people of the region. However, as the results of my study show, it's time for the Province to reflect on the new types of minorities living in South Tyrol today. Compared to other areas where there is only one official language, I appreciate that in South Tyrol it's possible to address public offices in the language one feels most comfortable with. In complex situations, such as a medical visit or an appointment at a public office, it is reassuring, especially for newcomers, to know they can rely on this kind of linguistic flexibility.



## CONCLUSION

### Pursuing Autonomy Toward Tomorrow

Autonomy and its measures significantly shape the lives of those living in South Tyrol. However, on the horizon, a series of challenges are emerging that could influence how people experience autonomy. First and foremost, in an increasingly complex society, certain rules of autonomy are creating problems. For example, for several years there has been some difficulty in finding medical personnel while still respecting the proportional system and bilingualism requirements.

At the same time, the difference between life, and perhaps also the development, of urban society and life in the valleys and highly rural areas is becoming increasingly evident. In particular, the fact that many rural areas are becoming almost entirely monolingual (German-speaking) has an impact not only on the population's level of bilingualism but also on coexistence between the linguistic groups. Added to this is the diversity brought by people with a migration background, raising the question of whether we are witnessing an adequate process of inclusion for this segment of the population or whether new divisions are instead emerging within South Tyrolean society.

More broadly, we should ask how much and in what ways the new generations, who are far removed from the tensions of the past, identify with the values of autonomy and the protection of minorities. It is thought-provoking that, according to a 2022 ASTAT survey, the majority of respondents believe that much has already been done for the protection of minorities and the coexistence of linguistic groups, or that this issue is not a priority and attention should instead be focused on more practical matters such as the housing crisis or healthcare.<sup>7</sup> There is a risk that interest in issues related to linguistic group relations may decline and that autonomy may be taken for granted rather than seen as a path to be continued day by day.

This path lies between the need to protect and nurture autonomy and the need to perceive it as flexible and responsive to the current problems of society. The challenge, therefore, is how to steer autonomy so that it can be a tool for developing and valuing a society that is much more diverse and multifaceted than South Tyrol was in the past century, without reverting to outdated models of the past.

#### Note

- 1 ASTAT, *Südtiroler Sprachbarometer/Barometro linguistico dell'Alto Adige 2004* (Bolzano/Bozen: Provincia autonoma di Bolzano-Alto Adige, 2006), 193; ASTAT, *Südtiroler Sprachbarometer/Barometro linguistico dell'Alto Adige 2014* (Bolzano/Bozen: Provincia autonoma di Bolzano-Alto Adige, 2015), 181.
- 2 Andrea Abel, Chiara Vettori and Katrin Wisniewski, eds., *KOLIPSI: Gli studenti altoatesini e la seconda lingua: indagine linguistica e psicosociale* = *KOLIPSI: Die Südtiroler SchülerInnen und die Zweitsprache: eine linguistische und sozialpsychologische Untersuchung* (Bolzano/Bozen: Eurac Research, 2012), <https://bia.unibz.it/esploro/outputs/editedBook/KOLIPSI-Gli-studenti-altoatesini-e-la/991005773127601241>
- 3 Chiara Vettori and Andrea Abel, a cura di, *KOLIPSI II: gli studenti altoatesini e la seconda lingua; indagine linguistica e psicosociale* = *KOLIPSI II: die Südtiroler SchülerInnen und die Zweitsprache; eine linguistische und sozialpsychologische Untersuchung* (Bolzano/Bozen: Eurac Research, 2017), <https://bia.unibz.it/esploro/outputs/editedBook/KOLIPSI-II-gli-studenti-altoatesini-e/991005773213701241>
- 4 Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
- 5 Hermann Atz, Max Haller and Günther Pallaver, eds., *Differenziazione etnica e stratificazione sociale in Alto Adige* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2017).
- 6 Timofey Agarin, Allison McCulloch e Cera Murtagh, "Others in Deeply Divided Societies: A Research Agenda", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 24, no. 3 (2018): 299-310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2018.1489488>
- 7 ASTAT, "Politische Prioritäten und sozialer Zusammenhalt - Februar 2022/Priorità politiche e coesione sociale - Febbraio 2022", *astatinfo* 16 (Aprile 2022).



# Financial Autonomy and Economy

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# Financial Autonomy and Economy

This chapter outlines the pillars that support the financial autonomy of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano and analyzes the local economy's performance, with a focus on tourism. Tourism is not only one of the leading sectors but also one of the areas over which the Province has primary legislative authority, meaning it enjoys the highest degree of autonomy.

## Main Features of Financial Autonomy

Provincial finance and economy are closely interconnected. The financing scheme of the Province is based on a model of derived finance, meaning that most of its revenue “derives” from taxes set and regulated by the central State. The revenue from these taxes is transferred to the Province in full or in part (the well-known 9/10) based on criteria that take into account the wealth generated within the territory: when the local economy grows, the provincial budget also grows, thus allowing for better public services for the population.

This fosters political and financial accountability, since the Province holds significant political autonomy, and its decisions can influence the economic development of the territory. Over time, various administrative and legislative responsibilities have been transferred from the State to the Province, along with the related spending powers. Today, the Province covers almost all public sectors through its own budget.

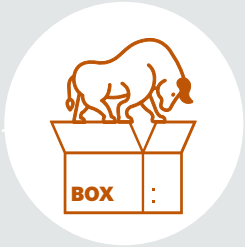
Since 2010, the Province also retains power to vary the rates of certain State- taxes, as long as the revenue thereof is devolved to the Province. These include, for example, the IRPEF surcharge (personal income tax) or the IRAP (regional tax on productive activities). For IRAP, the Province set a 3.30% rate for 2023, compared to the standard 3.90% rate. The Province also sets a number of special rates and exemptions for specific types of businesses, such as insurance companies, banks,

or non-profits. Through these measures, the Province defines its own fiscal policy.

The financial autonomy of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano must also balance with solidarity, understood as the provincial contribution to the rebalancing of national public finances. In the past, the central State often requested, or compelled, the Province to contribute to this purpose. Since 2014, the situation has changed: the Autonomy Statute now provides for a fixed annual contribution, which starting in 2028 will be adjusted annually based on the percentage change in the public administration's debt burden. The Statute also sets allowable deviations from this rule (+10%) and defines the circumstances under which such deviations are possible (i.e., exceptional public finance needs or extraordinary measures necessary to meet EU obligations), but only for a limited period. In other words, the Province cannot be forced to contribute more than what is established by the Statute.

Overall, this system has proven effective, although it does not include tools for managing temporary emergencies. In the event of an economic downturn in the Province's finances, as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the Statute there are no built-in 'solidarity parachutes' or mechanisms for the temporary suspension of rules. In such cases, a new agreement with the State is always required.

## The Case of Spain



As in Italy, where two types of regions coexist, ordinary and special, Spain also has two types of Autonomous Communities (Comunidades Autónomas, or CCAA), which are governed by two different financing models: the common system applies to 15 out of the 17 CCAA, whereas the foral system is exclusive to the Basque Country (under the *concierto*) and Navarre (under the *convenio*). The Canary Islands, as well as Ceuta and Melilla, also benefit from special tax regimes due to their geographical features.

The common model is based primarily on shared taxes, meaning that for certain taxes, the State transfers either a portion or the entirety of the revenue to the CCAA (e.g., 100% of the electricity tax, 50% of IRPF [personal income tax] and VAT, 58% of excise duties). In some cases (such as donations, inheritance, gambling, and wealth taxes), the regions also have legislative authority over specific elements of the tax. In contrast, own taxes of the CCAA generate minimal revenue. In addition, the CCAA receive equalization transfers to guarantee equality and protect the welfare state.

In contrast, the communities under the foral regime enjoy much broader fiscal powers. They collect all taxes, except for customs duties and social contributions, and bear all related risks, as there is no solidarity safety net from the central government.

Furthermore, these communities make annual payments to the State (called the *cupo* in the Basque Country and the *aportación* in Navarre) to cover the costs of services provided by the State in their territory. These include defense, foreign affairs, infrastructure, and social security. This system is particularly controversial in the case of the Basque Country because the *cupo* is determined through bilateral negotiations, which tend to underestimate the costs and scope of services provided by the State. This results in a higher per capita resource allocation compared to CCAA under the common system. At the same time, the limited contribution of the foral communities to national solidarity has frequently generated tensions with other regions.





Economic Recovery  
with Political Support

For much of the early modern period and the 19th century, the area corresponding to today's South Tyrol was a poor region. Mountain agriculture provided the population's subsistence, supplemented by modest artisanal and commercial activities. Thanks to its favorable geographic position, the city of Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan became a center of trade and transit as early as the Middle Ages. Beginning in 1850, the expansion of the railway network made South Tyrol an increasingly popular tourism destination. However, even after the start of industrialization in the 1920s and up until the 1950s, agriculture remained the main economic sector.<sup>1,3</sup>

After annexation to Italy, the restrictions imposed by Fascism, the unrest caused by the options (for emigration), and the prolonged political uncertainty until the late 1960s (see The Road to South Tyrolean Autonomy > page 6) drove many German- and Ladin-speaking South Tyroleans to relocate elsewhere. At the same time, many immigrants from other Italian regions arrived, drawn by Mussolini's policy of Italianization and employed mainly in new industrial plants in Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan, Meran/Merano/Maran, and other urban centers within the province.<sup>2</sup>

Following the disappointing implementation of the 1948 Autonomy Statute (The Road to South Tyrolean Autonomy > page 6), Italy and Austria signed the so-called "Accordino," a bilateral agreement based on the Paris Agreement,

intended to resume economic relations between South Tyrol and neighboring Austrian Länder. However, it was only with the second Autonomy Statute of 1972, granting South Tyrol self-government in many sectors and extensive fiscal autonomy, that the foundations for political stability and socio-economic well-being could be laid.<sup>4</sup>

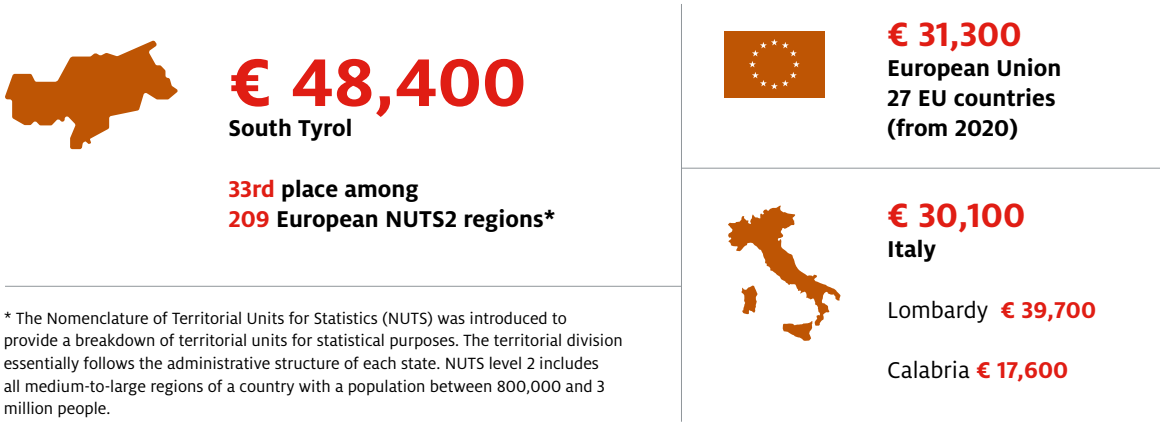
The recovery was supported and promoted by financial aid from Germany and Austria, along with strong inflation of the Italian lira, which persisted from the 1970s until the establishment of the European Monetary Union in 1999. The inflation rate allowed companies to benefit from lower interest rates on loans and South Tyrolean tourism destinations to take advantage of favorable exchange rates.<sup>2</sup>

Among the powers granted to the Province under the Autonomy Statute, it was primarily the exclusive legislative authority in urban planning and land management that had a major impact on economic growth. Thanks to this, the Provincial Government was able to counter the centralization attempt by the Italian state. In 114 out of 116 municipalities, 777 artisan-industrial zones were created, helping to slow the abandonment of rural areas. Even the most remote valleys remained vibrant and continued to maintain cultivated land. It is precisely because of this carefully preserved cultivated landscape that South Tyrol is now well known beyond provincial as well as national borders. Over the past fifty years, the region's economic prosperity has enabled it to offer a higher quality of life and a higher level of social security compared to other Italian regions.<sup>1</sup>

South Tyrolean Economy  
in Numbers<sup>6</sup>

The Province of Bolzano – South Tyrol ranks among the wealthiest regions in Europe: in Eurostat's ranking of 290 NUTS2 regions, it holds the 33rd position in terms of per capita income. In Italy, only Lombardy and the Autonomous Province of Trento show per capita income levels comparable to that of South Tyrol, even if the gap remains significant.

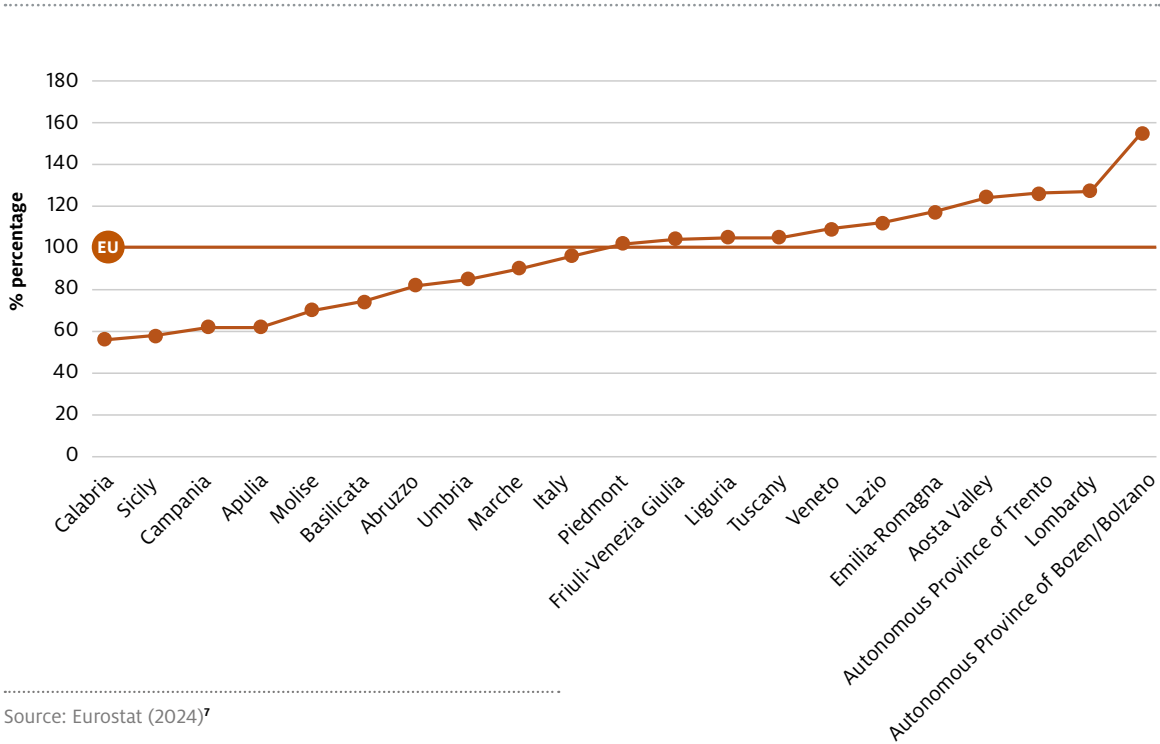
GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT PER CAPITA 2019 :



\* The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) was introduced to provide a breakdown of territorial units for statistical purposes. The territorial division essentially follows the administrative structure of each state. NUTS level 2 includes all medium-to-large regions of a country with a population between 800,000 and 3 million people.

Source: Eurostat (2024)<sup>7</sup>

GDP INDEX 2019 (EU 27 = 100%)



Source: Eurostat (2024)<sup>7</sup>

Between 2011 and 2019, the growth of the GDP in South Tyrol was slightly slower than the average of the 27 EU countries (Eurostat 2024<sup>8</sup>).

GDP PER CAPITA 2011 – 2019



YEAR	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU27 (from 2020)	25,700	25,800	26,000	26,600	27,500	28,200	29,300	30,300	31,300
Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano	40,900	42,400	42,600	42,900	43,600	44,300	45,600	47,300	48,400

Source: Eurostat 2024<sup>8</sup>

RELEVANCE OF INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC SECTORS

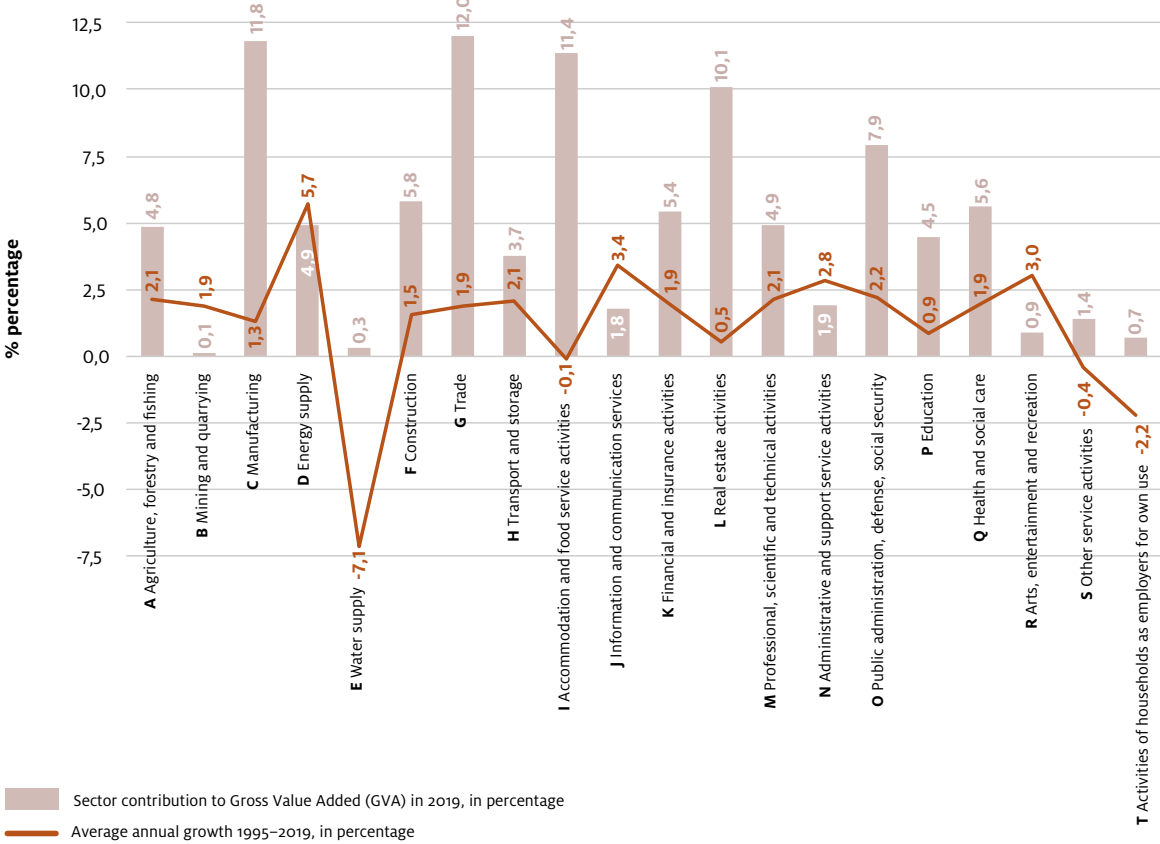


Fig.1: Economic trends in South Tyrol from 1995 to 2019; the sector breakdown follows the NACE classification of the European Union (*Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne*). Sources: ISTAT (2022a)<sup>8</sup> Valore aggiunto per branca di attività (1995–2019). ISTAT (2022b) Banche dati: Occupazione provinciale per branca di attività (2011–2019).

The South Tyrolean economy is dominated by five sectors that together account for 53 percent of its gross value added: manufacturing, trade, accommodation and food services activities, real estate activities, public administration, defense, and social security (> Fig. 1). In 2019, 40.4 percent of the total 308,400 entrepreneurs and employees were working in the three strongest sectors (“Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles”: 44,800 employed persons; “Accommodation and food service activities”: 42,100 employed persons; “Manufacturing industry”: 37,500

employed persons). These are followed by labor-intensive sectors such as construction, education, health and social services, each employing between 7.2 and 7.6 percent of the workforce.<sup>8</sup> Over the last quarter-century, nearly all of the twenty NACE sectors (Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community) have grown in real terms. Sectors with above-average annual growth rates, i.e., over 3 percent in real terms, since 1995 include: energy supply (5.7 percent), information and communication services (3.4 percent), arts, entertainment, and recreation (3.0 percent) (> Fig. 1).

Tourism

Since the 1950s, tourism has steadily grown in importance for the South Tyrolean economy. This trend is partially illustrated through the NACE category "Accommodation and food service activities" (> see figure on page 57). It should however be noted that this category also includes the food service sector and thus is influenced by the economic effects of canteen services. Likewise, the economic impact of daily visitors and second homes cannot be extracted from the "Accommodation and food service activities" category.

In 2019, the tourism sector contributed 11.4 percent to the gross value added (GVA) of South Tyrol. Only manufacturing and trade had a greater impact. Tourism has consistently ranked as the third-largest sector since 1995, with only a few exceptions. The most recent and detailed study estimates that direct tourist consumption accounts for 11.2 percent of the GVA. When including indirect effects (such as intermediate consumption from other sectors feeding into tourism, like food production) and induced effects (from the reinvestment of tourism income), the impact rises to 12.4 percent and 16.2 percent of the GVA, respectively.

Detailed data on tourist arrivals and overnight stays show that tourism flows in South Tyrol have steadily increased over the last 30 years, with arrivals growing faster than overnight stays. As a result, the average length of stay has decreased, while the number of both arrivals and departures has risen.

The high number of overnight stays recorded in 2019 (nearly 33.7 million) was even surpassed after the COVID-19 pandemic: in 2022, South Tyrol counted 34.4 million overnight stays, 66 percent of which occurred during the summer season (May to October), with the remainder in the winter season (January to April and November to December). In 2023, the number of overnight stays rose further to 36.1 million.



ACCOMMODATION SECTOR:

**7,547** businesses  
(11.4% of all businesses in South Tyrol)

**28,000** employed persons  
(9% of total employment)



FOOD SERVICE SECTOR:

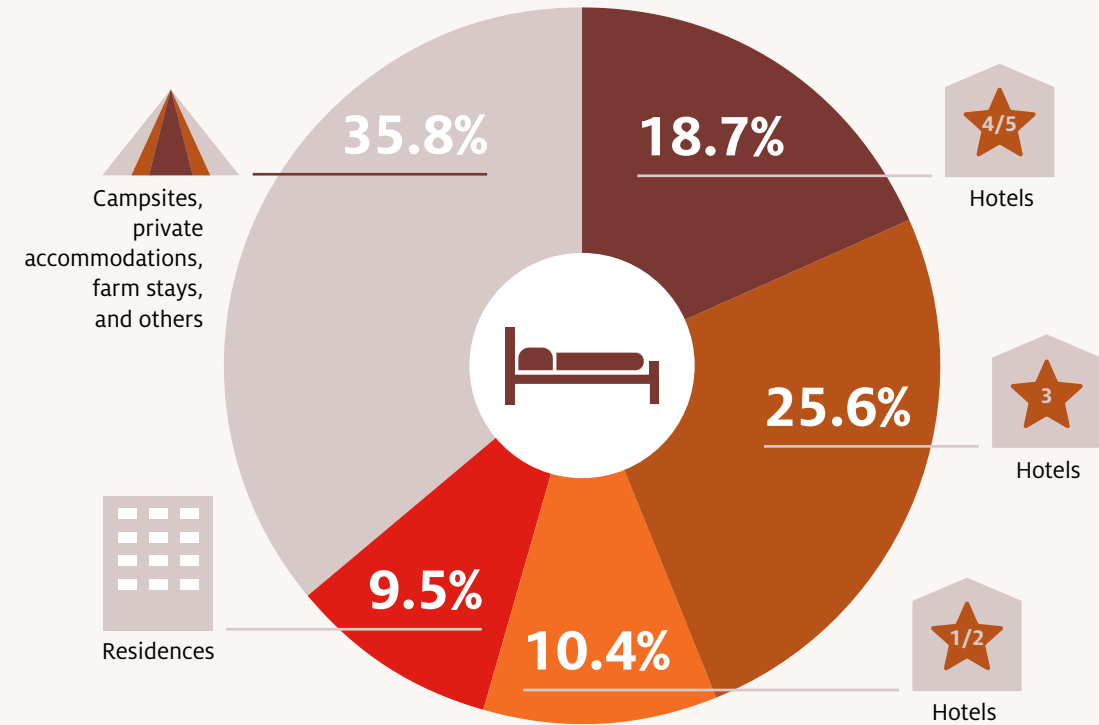
**4,763** businesses  
(6.9% of all businesses in South Tyrol)

**14,000** employed persons  
(4.7% of total employment)<sup>9</sup>

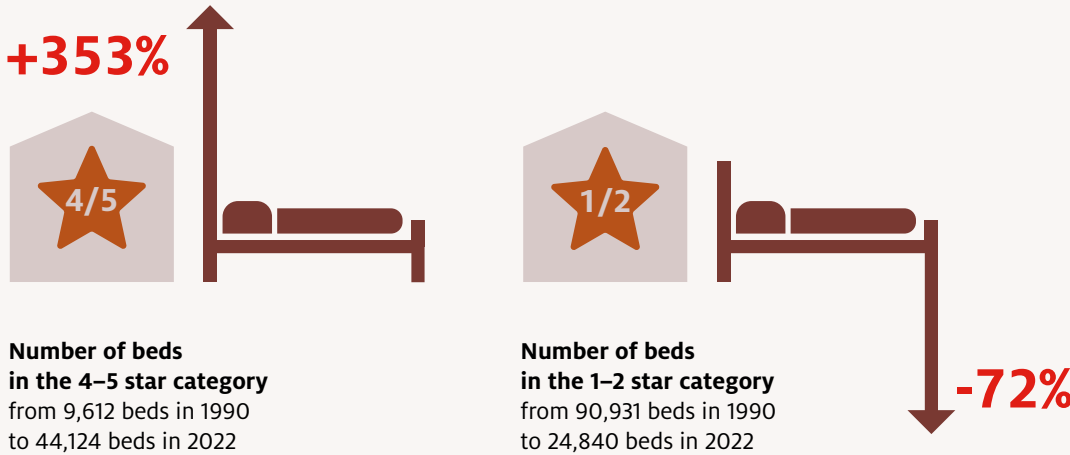
BEDS AVAILABLE:

Data updated to November 2022<sup>10</sup>  
Total beds

**239,331**




REDISTRIBUTION 1990–2022:





The record number of overnight stays recorded in recent years has intensified the ongoing debate about the future development of tourism. The focus is mainly on the need for the sustainable use of resources, the constant increase in tourism flows, and the integration of tourism infrastructure into South Tyrol's natural and cultivated landscape. The Provincial Government is also reflecting on the role South Tyrol wants to play as a tourism destination and the direction its tourism development should take. One example is the legislation enacted to limit the number of available beds.<sup>11</sup> The province enjoys legislative authority in defining strategic guidelines for the tourism sector; however, it remains to be seen how this power will be exercised.

 Calfosch/Colfosco/Kolfuschg, in Alta Badia, photographed in 1960 and again in 2019. Thanks to tourism and a decentralized land-use planning policy, even the most remote valleys of South Tyrol have remained vibrant.







**Some Considerations on South Tyrol's Economic Development**  
(Luciano Partacini and Georg Lun, WIFO)

South Tyrol has a balanced sectoral structure, which positively impacts both its overall economic performance and employment situation. Looking at the evolution of individual sectors from 1995 to 2019 (before the COVID pandemic), it can be observed that the contribution of agriculture and manufacturing to the total gross value added has decreased: from 6.1% to 4.8% for agriculture, and from 14.3% to 11.8% for manufacturing. However, this does not mean that these sectors are currently generating less value added. In fact, during this period and in real terms (i.e., evaluated at constant prices, net of inflation), the value added produced increased by 65% in agriculture and 37% in manufacturing. The fact that their relative weight within the total value added in the province has decreased simply means that other sectors have grown more or experienced higher price increases. South Tyrol's trend mirrors what is observable at the national level: the impact of agriculture and manufacturing on total value added has also declined across Italy.

A distinctive feature of South Tyrol, however, is the strong growth of its energy supply sector, which increased by 279% in real terms from 1995 to 2019. This growth in productive capacity was strongly driven by economic policy decisions and investment choices, particularly in the fields of hydroelectric plants and district heating systems. The South Tyrolean construction sector also performed better during this period compared to the national level, with a net growth of 44%, versus a 21% decline in the Italian average. Reasons for this development include the introduction of CasaClima energy-efficiency standards, renovation activities, increased building volumes, and investments by both the public and tourism sectors. More detailed analyses of tourism's economic effects are mostly possible through the Tourism Satellite Account – an internationally recognized method that allows for the measurement of tourism's economic impact. Unfortunately, its most recent assessment dates back to 2008. At that time, tourism spending was estimated to have a multiplier effect of 88.1% on GDP, taking into account direct, indirect, and induced effects (Tourism > page 58). This means that each euro spent by tourists in South Tyrol generated an additional €0.88 in GDP.

**Note**

1 Thomas Wieland and Horst Fuchs, “Südtirol: Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung und Herausforderungen einer “ländlichen” Boomregion”, in Ulrich Harteisen, Christoph Dittrich, Tobias Reeh, Swantje Eigner-Thiel, eds., *Zukunft von Leben und Arbeiten in ländlichen Räumen*. Conference proceedings of 27.11.2018 in Göttingen (Göttingen: Goltze, 2019), 115-156.

2 Camera di commercio di Bolzano, ed., *Economic History* (Bolzano: Studio IRE, 2014), 23

3 Camera di commercio di Bolzano, ed., *Economy in Figures, L'economia altoatesina vista da vicino* (Bolzano: Studio IRE, 2016).

4 Giunta provinciale di Bolzano, *Manuale dell'Alto Adige con lo Statuto di autonomia* (Bozen/Bolzano: Agenzia di stampa e informazione della Provincia di Bolzano, 2019).

5 Urban Perkmann and Thomas Schatzer, *Flächen mit Potenzial: Gewerbegebiete in Südtirol. Wirtschaftliche Analyse und Ausblick* (Bozen/ Bolzano: Studio IRE, 2020).

6 At the time of writing this report, some economic data were only available up to 2021, a year in which the data were, however, distorted due to the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore unable to provide an accurate representation of the regional reality. To ensure a consistent and meaningful portrayal, it was therefore decided not to include this data in the research.

7 Eurostat, Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by NUTS2 and NUTS3 regions (2024), [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/explore/all/all\\_themes](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/explore/all/all_themes)

8 ISTAT, Conti e aggregati economici territoriali (2024), <http://dati.istat.it/>

9 ASTAT, Imprese e addetti per classe di addetti e settore economico, [https://qlikview.services.sdiag.it/QvAJAXZfc/opendoc\\_notool.htm?document=IA\\_I.qvw&host=QVS%40titan-a&anonymous=true](https://qlikview.services.sdiag.it/QvAJAXZfc/opendoc_notool.htm?document=IA_I.qvw&host=QVS%40titan-a&anonymous=true)

10 ASTAT, Esercizi ricettivi e posti letto per categoria: <https://qlikview.services.sdiag.it/QvAJAXZfc/opendoc.htm?document=Tourismus.qvw&host=QVS%40titan-a&anonymous=true>

11 Riepilogo del regolamento d'esecuzione “Criteri e modalità per il rilevamento, la definizione del limite massimo e l'assegnazione di posti letto” [https://preview-assets-eu-01.kc-usercontent.com/c1c45d5a-c794-01a3-3c24-89f77bf8cab4/5b7d16d9-59b4-4b4c-88f5-424e59fe8be2/202209113\\_LTEK\\_Zusammenfassung\\_DVO.pdf](https://preview-assets-eu-01.kc-usercontent.com/c1c45d5a-c794-01a3-3c24-89f77bf8cab4/5b7d16d9-59b4-4b4c-88f5-424e59fe8be2/202209113_LTEK_Zusammenfassung_DVO.pdf)



# The Narrative of Autonomy

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# The Narrative of Autonomy

### Collective Memory

The French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs defines "collective memory" as the ability of a group of people, such as a family, a religious community, or a certain social class, to remember past events. Individuals within the group recall these events, share memories of them, recognize common elements, and, when necessary, learn that they can rely on the memory of other group members. From this arises the awareness that certain memories are important for the pursuit of people's goals, as well as for shaping individual behavior and identity. Ultimately, these memories are an integral part of society and can be recalled and revisited at any time.

The birth of South Tyrolean autonomy is closely linked to the region's recent past. The way autonomy is perceived by the population, and how its history is told and remembered, whether privately or in public debate, is always tied to views of that past. At the time of its introduction, South Tyrolean autonomy (especially since the Second Statute) could be understood and perceived either as a system designed to protect, balance, and correct the injustices of the past, viewed positively, or as a mechanism that granted unnecessary privileges, favored certain language groups, and produced new injustices, viewed as a threat.

The concept of "autonomy" had been discussed in the historical Tyrol region long before the approval of the first Autonomy Statute in 1948. In the 19th century, in Trentino, greater "autonomy" within the Princely County of Tyrol under the Habsburg monarchy was being called for. It was the age of nationalism, and issues of national, linguistic, and cultural identity carried great weight. Parts of the Trentino population felt disadvantaged compared to the German-speaking majority in

Tyrol. However, their demands for administrative autonomy were rejected by Innsbruck. After the annexation of South Tyrol to Italy in 1920, autonomy once again became a subject of debate – this time in the newly formed "German South Tyrol" within the Kingdom of Italy. The German-Tyrolean narrative of that historical period was the opposite of earlier views: while administrative autonomy had previously been seen, in the case of Trentino before WWI, as insubordination by the "Italian-speaking Tyroleans," it now became a political priority for South Tyrol, second only to the demand for self-determination. From 1922 onward, however, the anti-minority assimilation policies of the fascist government made any such ambitions impossible.

After the disappointment of the First Autonomy Statute, the Second Statute marked a decisive step toward the protection of the German- and Ladin-speaking minorities. Moreover, it allowed all three language groups in South Tyrol to define, shape, and live out their cultural identities without interference. In hindsight, the 1972 Second Autonomy Statute, followed by

### Culture of Memory

Certain events, such as wars, spectacular victories, regime changes, injustices, emergencies, or persecutions, are considered so significant that they are remembered not only by specific groups but by the entire nation, in order to foster a sense of spiritual cohesion within the broader community. Narratives of the past play a crucial role in shaping the self-image of these groups (for example, the German-speaking population in South Tyrol identifies with the historical narrative of oppression experienced during Fascism). To preserve these collective memories over time, a "culture of memory" develops, encompassing elements such as monuments, commemorations, and rituals. Other examples in Europe include the remembrance of the Holocaust, the Italian national unification of 1861, or the French Revolution of 1789.

the gradual implementation of administrative autonomy, can be considered a milestone in local history. At the time, however, neither the South Tyrolean public nor its political representatives saw 1972 as a year of great significance, nor was the Statute's introduction regarded as a historic moment. The importance of the reform was felt gradually, as the numerous small-scale measures began to merge into a broader process. Over time, the practical potential of the new autonomy system became clear, along with the opportunities and benefits it offered: the Statute made it possible to support all economic sectors, build a solid healthcare system, and shape areas such as education, culture, environmental protection, and housing according to the province's specific needs. The concurrent economic growth, delayed compared to Austria and Germany, led to widespread social well-being and eventually to increasing public satisfaction, first among the German- and Ladin-speaking communities, and later also among the Italian-speaking population. This growing satisfaction also fostered acceptance of the new Autonomy Statute.

Since then, generations of commentators have reiterated that in a historically restless land like South Tyrol, autonomy has served as a tool for peace. They have highlighted its success in protecting minorities and resolving the conflict affecting a minority group within Italian territory; in particular, the aspects that granted the German- and Ladin-speaking populations a relatively broad degree of self-determination and administrative self-governance within the Italian Republic.

In retrospect, the achievement of autonomy is often described as an "thorny path," a phrase that emphasizes the sacrifices endured by the German- and Ladin-speaking populations during Fascism and the postwar period. In this view, Italian oppression and the international community's indifference led to a situation resembling a civil conflict. Ultimately, however, thanks to appropriate regional policies and Austria's support as a protecting power, agreements were reached with Rome that eventually resulted in the implementation of autonomy.



## The Italian Linguistic Group

What does autonomy mean for the other major linguistic group in the Province, namely, the Italian-speaking and culturally Italian population, to whom this autonomy also applies? In the past, the term Italian “disagio” (discomfort) emerged more than once, expressing both unease and dissatisfaction over being relegated to a marginal role in the socio-political context of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano (Political Participation > p. 27, and Living in the Land of Autonomy > page 44). This situation may seem surprising, considering that the Italian-speaking population also gained access to greater tools for the peaceful development of its culture.

However, for Italians, the starting point was fundamentally different, as there was no Italian-speaking South Tyrolean culture comparable to the German-speaking one. The seemingly monolithic German-speaking South Tyrol contrasted with a group of individuals who had moved to the province from other parts of the Kingdom of Italy to live and work. Their identity was shaped by family ties, as is often the case for people who migrate in search of employment.

The introduction of the second Autonomy Statute in 1972, with its minority protection measures (ethnic proportionality, reassessment of the German language, which until then had been almost unused in public administration, and the requirement for language certification via the bilingual exam), initially spread a sense of “loss” among South Tyrolean Italian speakers. This collective sense of unease was powerfully expressed in Sebastiano Vassalli’s 1985 report “Sangue e Suolo” (Blood and Soil), which sparked intense controversy. The widespread feeling of protest was mainly harnessed by the Italian Social Movement (MSI), a party considered neo-fascist in orientation, which, starting in the 1980s, grew to become the dominant political force among the Italian-speaking population in South Tyrol. Since 1948, the MSI had opposed South Tyrolean autonomy. Only its successor parties gradually developed a more favorable stance toward the region’s autonomy.

Another factor that contributed to the unease among Italian speakers was the fact that, after decades of humiliation, the German-speaking citizens began asserting control over the economic and social fabric, and even sought political roles such as mayoral positions in cities that had previously always been governed exclusively by Italian-speaking political representatives, such as happened in Meran/Merano/Maran in the 1980s.



📷 In 1938, construction began on the outskirts of Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan of the “Dux District”, a housing complex of “semi-rural” homes for people from all over Italy who had come to work in the newly established industries. The goal of the fascist government was to transform Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan into a city of 100,000 inhabitants with an Italian-speaking majority.

The Italian-speaking population’s strong cultural connection to their homeland, significantly shapes their collective memory. A clear example of this identity-based memory is how the architectural legacy of Fascism is mostly seen not as a remnant of dictatorship, but as a symbol of past Italian presence in the region.

Political representation of South Tyrol’s Italian-speaking population is relatively fragmented and reflects the national party landscape (Autonomy and Political Participation > page 26). The inclusion of Italian-speaking political figures in the South Tyrolean Provincial Government, as required by the Autonomy Statute, has done little to change the sense of discomfort felt by many Italian speakers in South Tyrol who feel like a “minority in their own land”, especially since, except for certain urban areas, social participation seems quite limited across much of South Tyrol.



## The Ladin Linguistic Group

The Ladin-speaking population is historically the oldest linguistic group settled in the area. In the Habsburg County of Tyrol, the valley communities of Val Badia, Gherdëina, Fascia, Fodom, and the Anpezo area formed a cultural and linguistic enclave. Under Fascism, between 1923 and 1927, the Ladin valleys were divided among the three provinces of Trento, Bozen/Bolzano, and Belluno. The Ladin language was downgraded to an Italian dialect by Ettore Tolomei and other regime ideologues and, like German, became a victim of the Italianization process. This assimilatory abuse, committed against the smallest linguistic minority in the area, was in fact nothing new: as early as the 19th century, the Ladins had already found themselves caught between German and Italian nationalism and stigmatized as a “minority lacking cultural roots”.

In the 1946 De Gasperi-Gruber Agreement, the Ladin linguistic group was not mentioned at all. It was only with the second Autonomy Statute of 1972 that Ladins were substantially acknowledged, and further significant improvements came with the constitutional laws of 2001 and 2017. The 2001 constitutional law allowed for the possibility of Ladin representation in the Provincial Government: “The Ladin linguistic group may be granted representation in the Provincial Government of Bozen/Bolzano, even by derogating from the principle of proportional representation.” Ladin participation in the “Commission of Six” or the “Commission of Twelve” is not mandatory; currently (as of 2025), it is nonexistent. Until 1994, the political representation of the Ladin linguistic group was shared between the Südtiroler Volkspartei and the Christian Democracy party. After the dissolution of the latter, the leadership passed to the “Lista Ladins”, led by Carlo Willeit from Marebbe. Some critical voices within the Ladin community also emphasize that while South Tyrol’s minority protection system does indeed safeguard the German-speaking group and, to some extent, the Ladin group within the framework of autonomy, it also reinforces the fragmentation of Ladinia into separate zones.



### From “Dynamic” to “Full Autonomy”: Political Models for the Future of South Tyrol

Almost simultaneously with the 1992 declaration of dispute settlement, which ended the dispute between Italy and Austria over the South Tyrol issue brought before the UN, the political leadership of the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP) developed two new models of autonomy: the “dynamic” autonomy and the “full” autonomy models.

The dynamic autonomy model was intended to lay the groundwork for future developments. It envisioned the transfer of additional powers to the Province of Bozen/Bolzano, along with the integration and improvement of the current enactment decrees. By the mid-1990s, early ideas about creating a European Region of Tyrol–South Tyrol–Trentino were also part of this dynamic autonomy context.

With the full autonomy project, the SVP aimed to acquire all competencies from the State, except for foreign policy, defense and monetary policy, civil and criminal law, and the justice system. This model was (again) revisited and discussed during the 2016 Autonomy Convention (Autonomy and Political Participation > page 35).

In 2012, the party Die Freiheitlichen called for the creation of a free and independent state, to be realized in collaboration with all three language groups. The Südtiroler Heimatbund, on the other hand, advocates for a return to Austria.

Süd-Tiroler Freiheit, one of its successor parties, views autonomy only as an intermediate step on the path to South Tyrol’s independence, which it believes must be achieved by “asserting the right to self-determination”.



Sebastian De Pretto



## CULTURES OF MEMORY IN SOUTH TYROL

**Sebastian De Pretto is a historian at the University of Bern. The history of South Tyrol in the 20th century is one of his main research areas. In his doctoral thesis, he focused on South Tyrolean sites connected to memories of the Abyssinian War.**

### How has South Tyrol’s culture of memory evolved over the course of the 20th century?

In South Tyrol, there has never been a single, unified culture of memory. This region has always been multilingual, characterized by the coexistence of different narratives. Starting in the 19th century, both the German and Italian narratives attempted to claim the cultural belonging of South Tyrol (the mountain valleys around Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan, Meran/Merano/Maran, Brixen/Bressanone/Porsenù, and Trento) for their respective language communities. After World War I, irredentists and nationalists like Ettore Tolomei wrote their version of history into public space, on city outskirts, monuments, Italianized place names, and street names, often dedicated to battles and “heroes” of the fascist colonial wars in Africa. Fascism aimed to prove that South Tyrol was Italian.

### How did South Tyrol’s culture of memory change after the end of World War II in 1945?

In the newly founded democratic Italy, the German-speaking group also gained the opportunity to publicly express a German-Tyrolean and partly nationalist vision of history. Thus, in the postwar period, several distinct and competing cultures of memory coexisted, vying for dominance in public debate and space. In cities with Italian-speaking majorities, fascist monuments and street names expressed this ambition. In smaller, predominantly German-speaking towns, cemetery monuments dedicated to the fallen and “heroes” of the world wars played that role. Another form was the Dorfbücher (village chronicles) in German, widely printed though not widely read, often prefaced by political figures and intended to bring a particular version of history to the most remote corners of the province. This was the publicly sanctioned culture of memory. However, it is important to note that in private, memories were and still are often very different, more critical and nuanced.

### Did the second Autonomy Statute of 1972, with its improved minority protections, influence South Tyrol's culture of memory?

The second Autonomy Statute was negotiated by realistic and moderate politicians aiming for compromise. However, differing memories of the past continued to influence the coexistence of the linguistic groups. For the Italian-speaking group, the years following 1972 often brought a sense of discomfort, triggered by feelings of loss and disorientation: suddenly, the German language, which many were barely accustomed to using, gained significant institutional importance; public sector jobs were allocated according to the actual size of the language group, and so on. This led to a renewed attachment to collective memory symbols such as the Victory Monument in Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan or the Alpini Monument in Bruneck/Brunico/Bornech, which were strongly defended as identity markers. The German-speaking group, by contrast, was more unified and formed the majority in the province. The history of Tyrol, still influenced by scholars from the Nazi-era historiographical tradition, sought to assert itself everywhere, often emphasizing the narrative of being a “victim” of Fascism and post-fascism. However, the second Autonomy Statute also helped shape South Tyrol politically, culturally, and economically. Thanks to increased funding from the late 1980s onward, and especially in the 1990s, along with a shift in mentality, the complex historical experiences of South Tyrol began to be explored more critically and across language boundaries. Recent local history has become more conciliatory, aiming to think about the different cultures of memory together and seeking to overcome what divides them.

### Who Remembers What?

The German- and Ladin-speaking groups mainly remember the period from 1918 to 1943 –the era of the “division of Tyrol,” of Fascism, Italianization, oppression, and forced assimilation. They recall the traumas of the Option Agreement period, and the continued lack of sensitivity shown by Italy even after 1945 regarding minority issues, as well as the unsatisfactory autonomy granted by the first Statute, which lasted until the 1960s.

The Italian-speaking group, by contrast, focuses primarily on the years 1943–1945, during the Nazi occupation and the collaboration of part of the German-speaking population, the repression of the Italian-speaking group, the persecution of dissidents, *Dableiber* (those who chose to stay), resistance fighters, and the Jewish minority. This

group still vividly remembers the bomb attacks of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the shock of the second Autonomy Statute after 1972, when there was fear it would disproportionately benefit the German-speaking group and institutionalize ethnic division.

### The Example of Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan's Architectural Monuments

South Tyrol, especially Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan, is a space where conflicting and multifaceted memories converge. In the last two decades, the relationship with its architectural heritage has been shaped by three key aspects:

1

A deep separation of collective memory along linguistic lines.

—

Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan's urban landscape includes fascist-era monuments, most notably the *Monument to Victory*, inaugurated in 1928 and designed by Marcello Piacentini, and the monumental bas-relief *Triumph of Fascism* by Hans Piffdrader, which still looms over the facade of today's Provincial Revenue Agency, formerly the headquarters of the National Fascist Party. These works were created as part of extensive urban expansion between 1925 and 1942. These fascist-era symbols stand in contrast to older local monuments of memory, such as the statue of *Walther von der Vogelweide*, erected in 1889 in Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan's main square, and the Civic Museum from 1907. These earlier architectural works express the cultural values of national identity invoked by German liberalism during the final period of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

2

The growing significance of memory spaces: Places, squares, and monuments, along with efforts to contextualize them historically, are increasingly shaping collective awareness, helped in part by attention from national and international media.

The Victory Monument and fascist frieze remain the most prominent symbols of the fascist period, but they exist in contrast to more recently revalued anti-fascist landmarks. Examples include the memorial for the Nazi transit camp that operated in Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan in 1944–45, the Stolpersteine (stumbling stones) installed in 2015, and the Holocaust victims' memorial inaugurated in 2002 in the city's cemetery.



📷 Away from Trento!"

In 1975, led by the newly elected SVP president Silvius Magnago, 35,000 people took part in a major demonstration at Castel Firmiano/Schloss Sigmundskron to demand provincial autonomy for South Tyrol, separate from Trentino. The 1948 Autonomy Statute had granted most autonomous powers to the region of Trentino-Alto Adige, but the interests of the German- and Ladin-speaking minorities could not outweigh those of the Italian-speaking majority. With the rally at Castel Firmiano/Schloss Sigmundskron, Magnago became a symbolic figure.



### 3 Bringing Together Different Cultures of Memory, Especially Through Difficult Public Efforts

#### Historicization of the Victory Monument

For decades, the monument and the square of the same name were the subject of controversy, with demonstrations by extremist groups both in favor of and against preserving the monument. One particularly contentious issue was the renaming of Piazza della Vittoria (Victory Square) to Piazza della Pace (Peace Square) by the Municipality of Bozen/Bolzano in 2001, a change that was later reversed following a referendum. Finally, in 2012, the Italian Ministry of Culture (which owns the protected monument), the Provincial Administration of Bozen/Bolzano–South Tyrol, and the City of Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan agreed to use the opportunity presented by planned maintenance work to install a permanent exhibition in the monument's underground spaces. On the outer and inner perimeter of the base, an interlinguistic team of historians created the exhibition path "BZ 18–45: One Monument, One City, Two Dictatorships", which was inaugurated in the summer of 2014. The exhibition, open to the public free of charge, received positive responses both in Italy and abroad, earning a special mention from the jury of the "European Museum of the Year Award" in 2016.

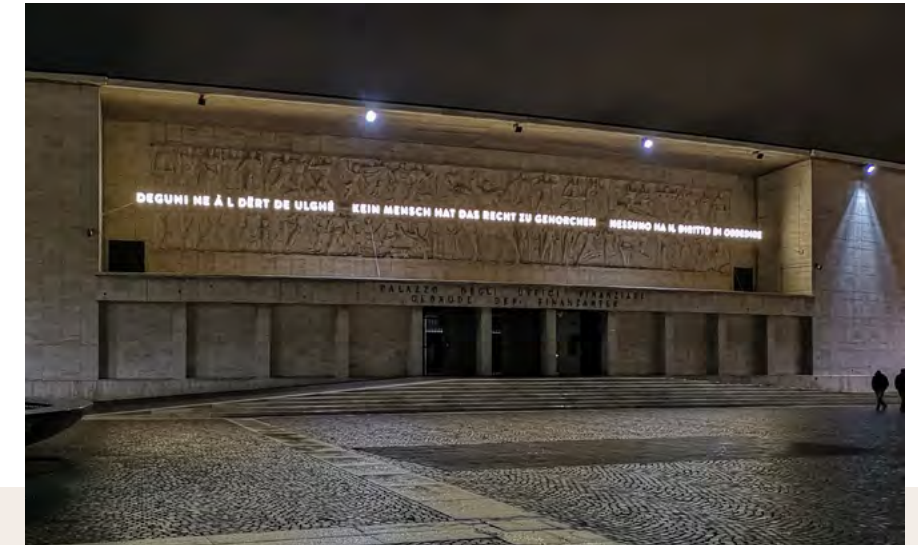


📷 A permanent exhibition in the basement of the Victory Monument in Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan documents the history of this controversial work and the history of South Tyrol during Fascism and the Nazi occupation.

#### Bas-relief of Mussolini

In 2017, the Provincial Revenue Agency approved the installation of a large illuminated sign on its building featuring a quote by Hannah Arendt, placed over the monumental bas-relief by Hans Piffrader that glorifies the fascist empire. Opposite the image of dictator Mussolini, positioned at the center of the frieze with his motto "Believe, obey, fight," is now the trilingual phrase by Hannah Arendt: "No one has the right to obey". This aims not only to vigorously criticize the original message but also to highlight the reflection that civil society has since undertaken.

📷 Luminous Contrast: Hannah Arendt's phrase "No one has the right to obey" stands in opposition to the large relief of Mussolini in Piazza del Tribunale in Bozen/Bolzano/Balsan, where the fascist motto "Believe, obey, fight" is inscribed beneath the image of the Duce on horseback.



#### CONCLUSIONS

The second Statute of Autonomy provides for separation by linguistic groups according to the principle of consociational democracy (Autonomy and Political Participation > page 24); after decades of antagonism, the current coexistence of the three linguistic groups truly represents progress. This statement also applies to the various narratives of the past of this land. It was only in the late 1980s and 1990s that the strongly rigid positions of the linguistic groups began to soften. The reasons, as already mentioned, lie in the growing prosperity of broad sectors of the population and the increasing confidence in a more pragmatic use of the legal instruments of autonomy. From a historical perspective, significant efforts were made at that time to establish an interlinguistic vision of the difficult past. However, these attempts have not yet had widespread effects on society; the cultures of memory remain too different. Since the various and conflicting narratives of South Tyrol's past have not yet been fully reconciled, it cannot be

ruled out that, if reactivated by political forces and set against one another, these memories could resonate strongly in public debate and the media scene, even if their effects on everyday reality remain barely perceptible. An example might be the limitation of provincial powers initiated with the constitutional reform of 2001, repeatedly criticized by the academic world (Autonomy and Institutions > page 18) and consequently identified by various political factions as a new dangerous development. This circumstance relates to the deep fears nurtured by the German- and Ladin-speaking populations, rooted also in historically transmitted narratives, which consistently perceive external control threats coming from Rome.

However, the increase in migration and the growing diversity of the South Tyrolean population will ultimately bring with them the positions and narratives of social groups entirely new compared to the past.





# Autonomy and Diplomacy

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# Autonomy and Diplomacy

In public perception, diplomacy is usually identified with the foreign policy of states. One can speak of “France” engaging in dialogue with “Germany,” or of “Italy” requesting a different approach from Brussels regarding the refugee politics. However, since the 1980s, increasing attention has been paid to non-state actors defending national interests. Diplomatic counterparts can include institutions, public or private, based abroad; sub-state territorial entities, such as regions, municipalities, or provinces; as well as non-governmental organizations or representatives of religious, ethnic, or social minorities. This form of diplomatic engagement is known as parallel diplomacy, second-track diplomacy, or para-diplomacy.

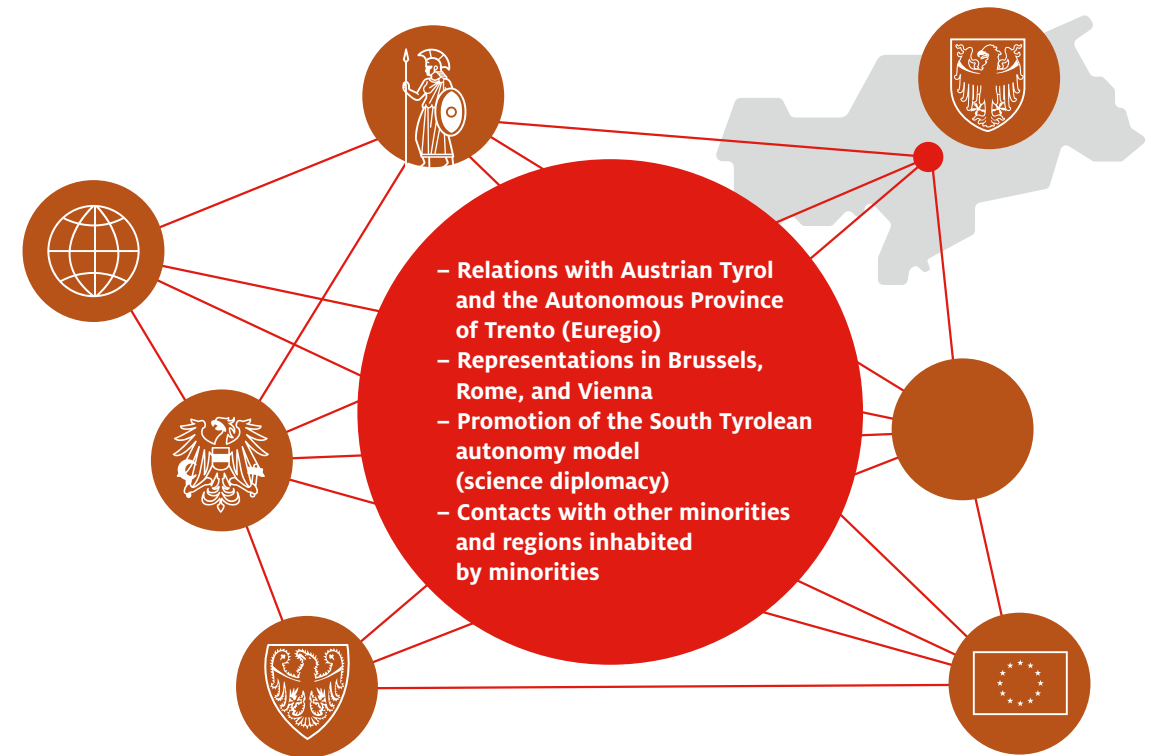
The first para-diplomatic activities in South Tyrol date back to the years 1918–1920, when members of the elite maintained political and media relations with Paris/Saint-Germain, where the peace negotiations were taking place, and with Geneva, home to the newly founded League of Nations, as well as with London, Vienna, Munich, and Berlin. The goal was to draw attention to the precarious situation faced by this newly formed minority community.

With the end of World War II, the nature of para-diplomatic activity changed completely. Whereas during the Paris peace talks, efforts were made to secure the possible return of South Tyrol to Austria, after the signing of the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement (1946), attention shifted to the Autonomy Statute, whose implementation was slow and unsatisfactory for the South Tyrolean side. In its role as kin-state and “protecting power,” Austria managed

to intervene in negotiations with Rome in the following years. During the Paris peace talks, contacts were established with delegations from South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Yugoslavia. In the subsequent negotiations conducted between Bozen/Bolzano, Innsbruck/Vienna, and Rome/Trento, South Tyrol also carried out para-diplomatic activities. These efforts culminated<sup>1</sup> for the second Autonomy Statute of 1972. In 1960, Austria raised the “South Tyrol issue” at the United Nations General Assembly. In this context, Austrian Foreign Minister Bruno Kreisky, together with representatives of the South Tyrolean delegation, sought to gain the support of non-aligned countries for South Tyrol. Particularly sympathetic were countries in the Global South undergoing decolonization, as well as other states such as the Republic of Ireland. These nations generally viewed South Tyrol’s autonomy favorably. Ultimately, Italy and Austria were invited to resume negotiations to find a conciliatory solution for implementing the 1946 Paris Agreement.

While the initial goal was to use diplomacy to negotiate and achieve autonomy, after the declaration of dispute settlement in 1992, diplomacy became a key element in consolidating, strengthening, and promoting autonomy. Today, South Tyrol maintains contacts not only with its closest neighbors, such as Rome, Vienna, and Brussels, but also with the rest of the world. South Tyrol engages diplomatically both on a global scale and locally, particularly in border areas, to protect its interests and build relationships, as shown in the following chart and examples referenced in the chapter.

## OBJECTIVES OF SOUTH TYROL'S NETWORKING



## Ties with Austria

South Tyrol maintains close ties with the Austrian state, which continues to take an active interest in its affairs. The Austrian National Council (*Nationalrat*), particularly its Subcommittee for South Tyrol, regularly addresses issues concerning the region. This is reflected in the numerous written parliamentary questions submitted even after the resolution of the dispute and the issuance of the declaration of dispute settlement. Between 1992 and 2022, around 90 written questions were submitted that addressed, in whole or in part, issues related to South Tyrol. A quarter of these concerned topics connected to autonomy, such as Austria’s protective role or place names (toponymy). During 1992–1993, many questions focused on transport policy, especially the extension of the A27, also known as the Alemagna highway. In 2011, the issue of dual citizenship emerged. Until just a few years

ago, written questions about those responsible for bomb attacks in South Tyrol were regularly on the agenda. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Austrian Minister of Health became the subject of various written questions. Other topics raised included judicial affairs and university matters. Exchanges of diplomatic notes regarding the financial agreement with Rome – such as those between Prime Minister Renzi and Austrian Chancellor Faymann in 2014/15, or on the language rights of Ladins in 2017 between Gentiloni and Kern – highlight the Austrian government's sustained interest in South Tyrol. These exchanges can be seen as a delayed implementation of aspects addressed in the Paris Agreement, reinforcing the international foundation of South Tyrolean autonomy. From a legal standpoint, the 1946 Paris Agreement forms the basis for Austria's protective role. According to the provisions established, Austria, as a last resort, may appeal to the International Court of Justice in the event of violations of international obligations related to the protection of minorities and autonomy. This legal avenue ensures, through instruments of international law, the enforcement of existing obligations.



Helmut Tichy

## AUSTRIA'S PROTECTIVE ROLE

**Brief interview with Helmut Tichy, senior diplomat of the Republic of Austria, former director of the Office for International Law at the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.**

### Is Austria's protective role toward South Tyrol a legacy of its imperial past? How do you explain Austria's cautious approach in exercising this role?

Austria's special closeness to South Tyrol has nothing to do with its imperial past. Over the past decades, Austria has come to terms with even the most painful chapters of its history while maintaining a focus on building a united Europe. The protective role toward the German- and Ladin-speaking groups of South Tyrol, and toward its autonomy, represents a constructive contribution to this broader development. Only through a thoughtful approach and ongoing dialogue with Italy can joint progress between South Tyrol and Austrian Tyrol be achieved within the larger context of the European Union.

### Can this protective role serve as a model at the international level?

We need to distinguish between a model as an example to follow and the *South Tyrolean model* as something that can be replicated elsewhere. The minority protection system developed in South Tyrol, while still open to improvement, is indeed exemplary. However, if the specific political, cultural, and economic conditions found in South Tyrol, as well as the well-established relationship between Italy and Austria, were absent, it would be quite difficult to export the South Tyrolean model to other parts of the world.

## The “Micro Foreign Policy” of Cross-Border Cooperation

Cross-border cooperation, which means the collaboration among municipalities, territorial bodies, authorities, associations, and other actors operating in border areas, can be described as a form of diplomacy. It is common for border regions to establish relations with neighboring or adjacent areas to defend their interests, strengthen territorial identity, and, in some cases, enhance their autonomy. Regions inhabited by minorities often maintain active cross-border ties with other minority groups and with their kin-state as a way to “escape” the narrow confines of national borders. Within the European Union, such connections between municipalities and regions have become an integral part of European cooperation.

These cooperation networks at the municipal and regional level operate within the delicate space between state foreign policy and European regional policy. Foreign policy is typically considered the exclusive domain of nation-states. However, municipalities and regions are allowed to conduct a “mini foreign policy”, meaning that where permitted, they can engage with other local entities through alliances, diplomatic conferences, and cooperation agreements. Under EU regional policy, border regions in different countries are encouraged to collaborate, especially if they wish to access specific funding. To that end, they can jointly plan and implement projects of common interest. Within the EU's regional policy framework, the “mini foreign policy” of municipal

and regional bodies is increasingly becoming an important pillar of European integration.

South Tyrol, for example, is actively committed to expanding its cooperation with neighboring regions, a process that gained further momentum after Austria joined the European Union in 1995. Municipalities and other sub-state bodies and organizations in Tyrol, South Tyrol, Switzerland, Trentino, and the Belluno area systematically cooperate through various forms of cross-border partnerships. For instance, the universities of Trento, Bozen/Bolzano, and Innsbruck signed a cooperation agreement in 2013. There is also an active and ongoing exchange between the chambers of commerce.

Another example of cross-border cooperation in South Tyrol is the Euregio Tyrol–South Tyrol–Trentino. The idea of creating such a Euroregion emerged in the 1980s, during a period when relationships among different border areas were intensifying. Through the establishment of a European region, South Tyrol primarily aimed to strengthen its bond with Austrian Tyrol and, later, with Trentino. The first concrete steps in this direction were taken in the mid-1990s, when the three territories jointly set up a representative office in Brussels and began working on a statute that could serve as a model for creating a Euroregion. However, both initiatives faced significant political resistance and legal obstacles. The Italian Public Prosecutor's Office even launched investigations into the Brussels office. The concept of a European Tyrol region was viewed with suspicion by Italian authorities, who questioned its constitutionality. While the joint Brussels office continued to operate, the Euregio statute was initially shelved.





By promoting regional policy, the European Union ultimately paved the way for stronger cooperation between Tyrol, South Tyrol, and Trentino – initially through European funding for cross-border projects and, since 2006, through the **European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation** (EGTC), a legal instrument designed to create officially recognized cross-border alliances.

With the help of this tool, Tyrol, South Tyrol, and Trentino established the EGTC "Euregio Tyrol–South Tyrol–Trentino" in 2011. Since then, utilizing this legal framework, the three territories have collaborated even more closely and undertaken joint projects in areas such as mobility, education, culture, and civil protection.

In addition to the EGTC "Euregio Tyrol–South Tyrol–Trentino", there are currently 89 other EGTCs across Europe (as of December 2024). Three of these include partners from South Tyrol.

EXISTING EGTCs

Type of Cooperation

Cross-border

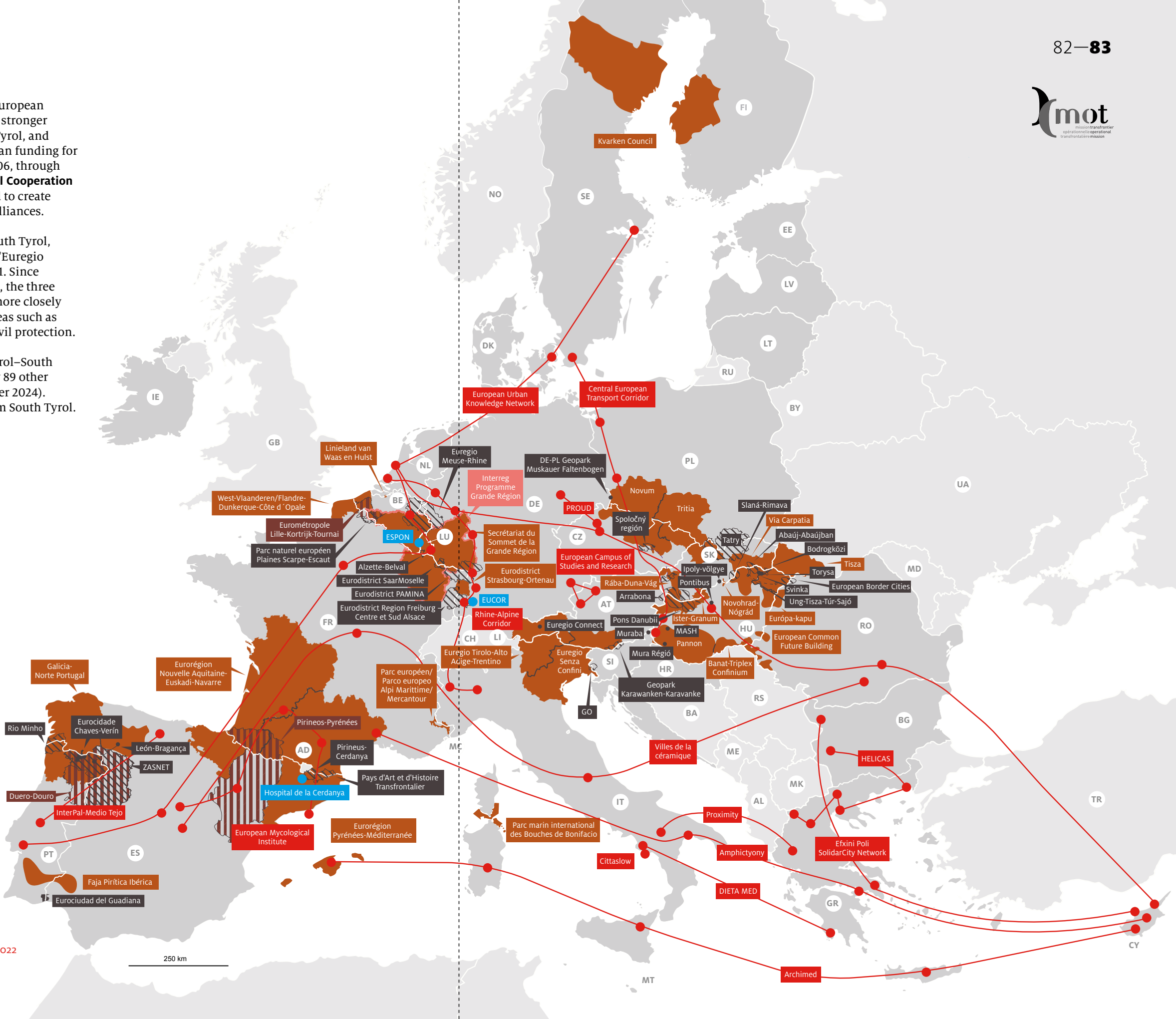
Governance

Managing Authority





Operational Project

Transnational and International

Network



EXAMPLES OF EGTCs

...with South Tyrolean partners	...in other border regions
<div></div> <div><b>EGTC Euregio Connect</b> Euregio Connect is composed of the regional/provincial tourism promotion agencies: Trentino Marketing, IDM South Tyrol, and Tirol Werbung. It has existed since October 2021. Its goal is to facilitate and strengthen cooperation in the tourism and sports sectors. Euregio Connect is based in Innsbruck (AT).</div>	<div></div> <div><b>EGTC Eucor</b> The EGTC Eucor brings together five universities and institutions from the French-German-Swiss border area: University of Basel, Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, University of Upper Alsace, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, and University of Strasbourg. It has existed since December 2015. Its goal is to strengthen and expand cross-border cooperation in research and teaching. The EGTC Eucor is based in Freiburg (DE).</div>
<div></div> <div><b>EGTC Alpine Pearls</b> The Alpine Pearls group brings together 27 municipalities from six Alpine countries (Germany, France, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, and Switzerland). It has existed since February 2022. Its goal is to promote sustainable tourism, environmental protection, and eco-friendly mobility. The EGTC Alpine Pearls is based in the municipality of Weißensee (AT).</div>	<div></div> <div><b>EGTC Hôpital de Cerdanya / Hospital de Cerdanya</b> The EGTC Hôpital de Cerdagne / Hospital de Cerdanya is a cross-border hospital operating in the French-Spanish border area. It includes the French Ministry of Health and Solidarity, the Hospital Group of the Languedoc-Roussillon Region, the Municipal Council of Puigcerdà, the District Council of Cerdanya, the Catalan Health Service, and the Spanish Ministry of Health. It has existed since April 2010. The EGTC is based in Puigcerdà (ES).</div>

Ties with the European Union

Italy is one of the founding states of the European Union, whose goal is to promote greater cohesion among European peoples by creating a pluralistic, democratic Europe that is close to its citizens. Initially, it was mainly the economies of the various countries that came closer together, through the removal of border controls and the introduction of EU-wide regulations. Later developments led the European Union to adopt a common political system. South Tyrol also views itself as a key player in this political context. But what is the scope of action of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano compared to the more politically and economically powerful players on the European stage?

Regions or Länder are considered guarantors of efficient public action close to citizens, which is why the Treaty on European Union states that local administrative autonomy is part of each member state's national identity. These are, at least, the European aspirations. What is lacking, however, are the implementation rules: how exactly can these sub-state entities participate in the European integration process? The EU leaves this decision to each individual member state.

While the German Länder, through their Federal Council (Bundesrat), have a voice, Italian regions play only a subordinate role to the State in European policy. Although the Italian Constitution has stated since 2001 that all regions may maintain their own relations with the European Union, actual steps in this direction remain limited: regions may independently implement and enforce EU law, but they remain marginal figures in the drafting of new regulations.

Within the Committee of the Regions, South Tyrol is represented by the president of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano. However, this is not a guaranteed representation, it must be negotiated with Rome and with other Italian regions for each new five-year term of the Committee's membership. Moreover, the Committee of the Regions is an advisory body within the European framework; its opinions are not binding.

South Tyrol's direct voices in Europe are the liaison office in Brussels and South Tyrolean representatives in the European Parliament. The lobbying activities carried out there by various associations and economic representatives are the tools for highlighting specific interests and gathering useful information in the early stages of the European decision-making process.

Any domestic route to South Tyrol's representation in Brussels always goes through Rome. For example, South Tyrolean representatives may take part in the national delegation representing Italy within the European Commission or the Council of Ministers when South Tyrolean interests and competences are at stake. However, inclusion in the delegation is decided by the State-Regions Conference, where regional interests are generally not given much consideration (Autonomy and Institutions > page 16). South Tyrol has requested a greater role within the delegation, invoking its special autonomy, and has called for permanent representation within the EU. However, in 2004, the Italian Constitutional Court rejected this request, stating that a single representation for all five special statute regions would be sufficient.

This shows how difficult it is to make South Tyrolean concerns heard in Brussels. Since then, efforts have focused on building relationships between officials, regularly seconding administrative staff to European institutions. In this regard, the European Affairs Division and the Office for European Integration play a key role.

Beyond legislative aspects, European policy planning and the concrete drafting of the European Commission's annual programs are particularly important for South Tyrol. In this stage of the EU process, South Tyrol gains insight into legislative initiatives conceived by the Commission, enabling it to align with the EU and prepare its own medium-term legislative projects.



**30 years**  
Autonomy, Minority and  
Federalism Studies at Eurac  
Research 1992-2022



DELEGATIONS  
VISITING  
SOUTH TYROL

- 1. Albania
- 2. Armenia
- 3. Australia
- 4. Austria
- 5. Azerbaijan
- 6. Bangladesh
- 7. Belgium
- 8. Benin
- 9. Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 10. Bulgaria
- 11. Burundi
- 12. Canada
- 13. Chechnya (Russia)
- 14. Colombia
- 15. Croatia
- 16. Denmark
- 17. Estonia
- 18. Ethiopia
- 19. Philippines

- 20. Finland
- 21. France
- 22. Wales (United Kingdom)
- 23. Georgia
- 24. Germany
- 25. Greece
- 26. Indonesia
- 27. Iraq
- 28. Northern Ireland (United Kingdom)
- 29. Israel
- 30. Italy
- 31. Kazakhstan
- 32. Kenya
- 33. Kyrgyzstan
- 34. Kosovo
- 35. Latvia
- 36. Lithuania
- 37. Moldova
- 38. Montenegro

- 39. Myanmar
- 40. Papua New Guinea
- 41. Netherlands
- 42. Poland
- 43. United Kingdom
- 44. Czech Republic
- 45. People's Republic of China
- 46. Republic of Ireland
- 47. Romania
- 48. Russia
- 49. Serbia
- 50. Slovakia
- 51. Slovenia
- 52. Spain
- 53. United States of America
- 54. South Africa
- 55. South Korea
- 56. Sri Lanka
- 57. Sweden

- 58. Switzerland
- 59. Syria (Kurdish Autonomous Region)
- 60. Thailand
- 61. Tibet, Government-in-exile, Northern India
- 62. Turkey
- 63. Ukraine
- 64. Hungary
- 65. Venezuela

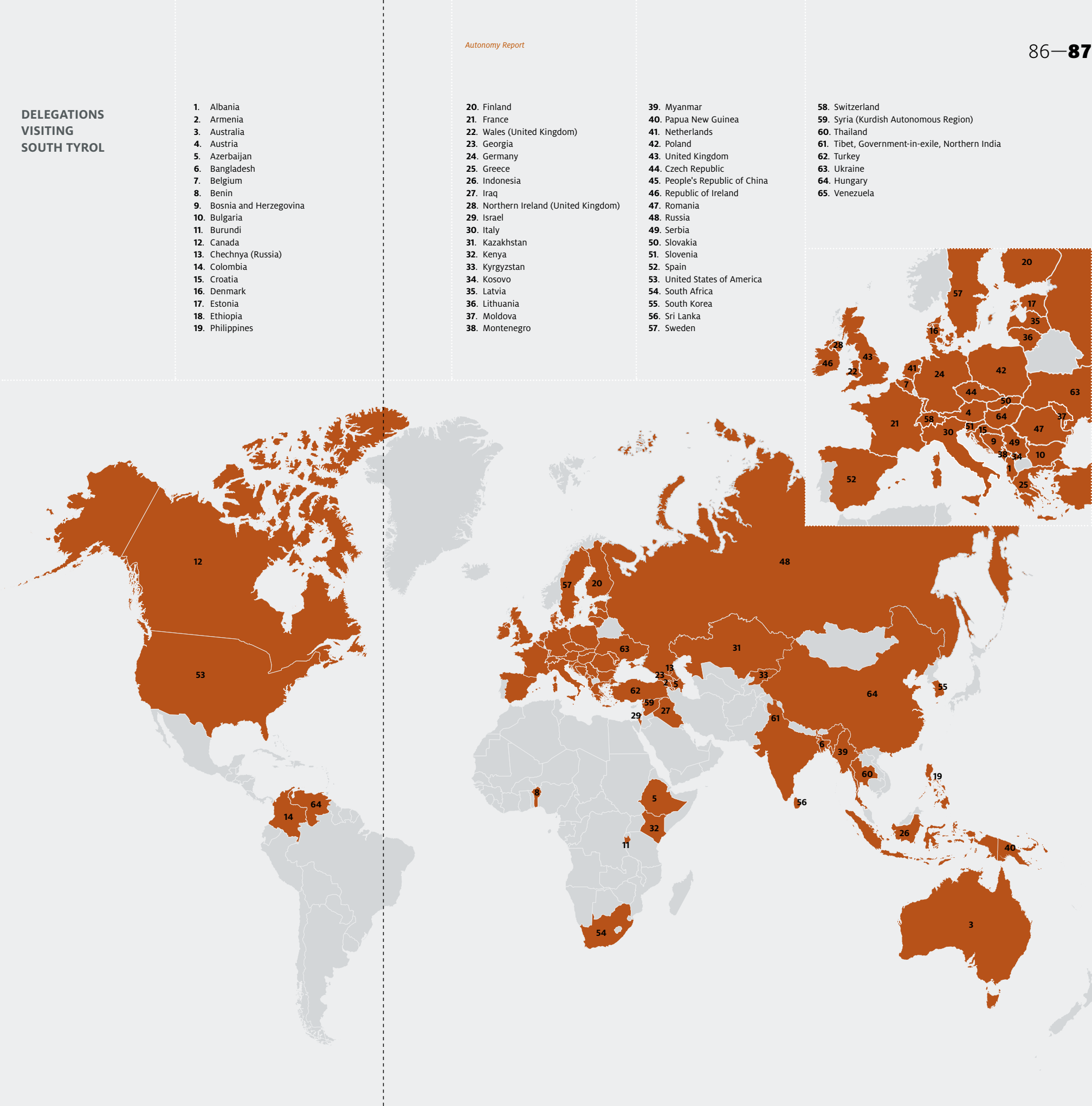
Relations with the World

Science Diplomacy  
and the Role of  
Research on Autonomy  
and Minorities

South Tyrol's autonomy is one of the most successful autonomy models in Europe. This outstanding example of conflict resolution is also of great interest to the scientific community.

Scientific research began to grow in South Tyrol starting in the 1990s. Alongside this research, scientific cooperation and the concept of science diplomacy have developed. While scientific cooperation primarily focuses on joint research, science diplomacy is a process through which actors define themselves by conducting research and disseminating their findings – thereby enhancing their international image and prestige. Science diplomacy is therefore a means of utilizing science to advance the foreign policy objectives of a state or region. For this reason, many delegations visit South Tyrol.

The Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano has thus found a way to contribute to conflict resolution and the protection of minorities through research and advisory activities, and to take on a leading role through science diplomacy. By investing in the study of autonomy and minorities, South Tyrol not only strengthens its international standing and supports peaceful conflict resolution but also promotes important domestic policy goals, namely, the protection of its autonomy and the peaceful coexistence of its three linguistic groups.





The Future of South Tyrol’s Diplomatic Relations

As outlined above, South Tyrol maintains para-diplomatic relations on many levels. This form of parallel diplomacy or para-diplomacy requires a careful and delicate approach: in its “foreign policy” efforts, South Tyrol must respect certain limits and cannot exceed them.

**South Tyrol’s ties with Austria** remain strong. However, in **cross-border cooperation**, legal divergences and asymmetries still persist. These issues could be alleviated through the signing of additional international agreements between Italy and Austria, as well as through broader European legal instruments that support cooperation. An important step toward recognizing **South Tyrol’s right to co-decision-making at the European Union level** could come in the form of a new enactment decree, in which the Italian state and South Tyrol jointly define a more formal role for the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano.

The initiatives launched by South Tyrol in the field of **science diplomacy** hold great potential. However, to increase the Province’s visibility as a successful example of conflict resolution, it is necessary to adopt a neutral stance and exercise appropriate political sensitivity toward other contexts involving minorities.

That South Tyrol’s example is known in prominent international circles was demonstrated during the visit to Bozen/Bolzano/ Balsan in June 2022 by the then-United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Fernand de Varennes. He took part in the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the declaration of dispute settlement and praised South Tyrol’s autonomy as an international model.

In September 2022, during the celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the President of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano, Arno Kompatscher, spoke in New York. During that UN event, the South Tyrolean example was repeatedly cited as a model for resolving conflicts involving minorities.

The 1990s: The “Golden Decade” for Minorities



In 1989, the so-called Iron Curtain fell, and in Central and Eastern Europe, new states emerged, many of which included significant minority populations as a consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet bloc. The re-emergence of the so-called “national minority question”, for example in the Balkans, in Georgia, in Moldova, and in the newly formed Russian Federation, revived interest in autonomy-based solutions, which were seen as an antidote to separatist aspirations. At the same time, significant developments occurred at the European Union level: the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 provided a strong boost to European integration. The EU’s Copenhagen Criteria of 1993 and the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of 1995 each established new standards for minority protection in Europe.

All of this led to growing interest in effective and functioning autonomy and minority protection mechanisms, such as those in place in South Tyrol. In parallel with this global turning point, significant socio-political developments occurred in South Tyrol. With the establishment of Eurac Research in 1992 (then known as the “European Academy of Bozen/Bolzano”), the Province gained its first institution dedicated exclusively to applied research. Before that, there were virtually no research institutes in South Tyrol.

From the beginning, one of Eurac Research’s central pillars has been the study, documentation, and dissemination of South Tyrolean autonomy, autonomy in general, and the protection of minorities.

Note

1 The term “Package” refers to the set of ideas and proposals developed to reform the 1948 Autonomy Statute..



# Challenges and Perspectives

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# Challenges and Perspectives

In both national and international comparisons, South Tyrol could rank among the top performers in many areas: efficient self-government, coexistence of different language groups and cultures, and sustainability from various perspectives. But where is improvement needed? To which social changes must autonomy adapt? The following section identifies some key challenges across various thematic areas.

## Institutions

### Testing Autonomy

South Tyrol’s autonomy, fifty years after the Second Statute, can be compared to some people in their fifties: still in good shape, quite elegant, well-off, and with a certain charm. But its age is showing and this calls for attention and intervention. Small efforts today can prevent more drastic measures in the future. The challenge lies in adapting to what age requires.

In the case of autonomy, this mainly means updating institutional tools. The part in most need of maintenance is the system of governance; somewhat paradoxically, the aspects related to the protection of minorities are less problematic, as they have been more consistently updated over time, sometimes even unintentionally, through external interventions like certain rulings from the EU Court of Justice.

A more effective system of autonomous governance particularly requires higher-quality provincial legislation and the ability to assess its impact; formal channels of cooperation with other levels of government (municipalities, the Province of Trento, cross-border cooperation, the State, and the European Union – which currently rely too heavily on political dynamics); and new, expanded forms of public participation. It is also necessary to more precisely define the scope of provincial competences to curb the erosion of autonomy caused by the State’s gradual tendency toward centralization.

The much-needed reform of the Statute is currently under development (A look to the Future > page 105).



Guido Denicolò



### “IMPOSSIBLE TO PLAY WITHOUT A REFEREE” – THE ROLE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

Since the 2001 constitutional reform, the Constitutional Court has generally interpreted the limits of autonomous legislation more restrictively (Autonomy and Institutions > page 18), an approach repeatedly criticized by South Tyrolean politicians. Guido Denicolò, State Attorney based in Trento, believes the Court is simply fulfilling its role as guardian of the Constitution.

#### Is the Italian Constitutional Court hostile to autonomy?

In Italy, there has been talk for many years, confused and rather unproductive, about centralism, autonomy, regionalism, and federalism. Amid this chaotic noise, the Constitutional Court is inevitably called upon to act as guardian of the Constitution. Concepts such as sympathy or hostility toward autonomy are not valid categories of judgment in this context and serve only as propaganda for a certain political clientele. Among other things, since 2001, the number of cases brought by the State against the Province and vice versa has been roughly balanced.

#### In other words: is the Court’s supposed hostility toward autonomy a result of flaws in South Tyrol’s legislation?

The alleged “hostility to autonomy” of the Constitutional Court has nothing to do with whether South Tyrol’s laws are of high or low quality (in truth, more low than high). Rather, the rulings are tied to the fact that, starting with the 2001 reform, local politics – much like in other Italian regions – has repeatedly tried to claim powers it does not have, or never had, according to the Constitution and the Statute. This inevitably leads to frequent disputes before the Constitutional Court.

#### Should South Tyrol perhaps request a filter for appeals to the Constitutional Court and/or the addition of a judge in cases involving it?

It is certainly worth considering the possibility of involving the regions and autonomous provinces in the appointment of Constitutional Court judges and adapting the Court’s functioning in light of the specific nature of disputes over competences. But demanding a “special treatment” for South Tyrol would be illegitimate.

The real challenge lies in being able to give autonomy a future, while also ensuring legal certainty and strengthening citizens’ trust in institutions.





Socio-Demographic Developments

Statistical forecasts (> Fig. 2) indicate that South Tyrol’s population will continue to grow in the near future, partly due to migratory flows. In the long term, however, similar to other European societies, a demographic decline is likely. One possible trend in this context is the increasing aging of the population, accompanied by a decrease in the number of people of working age. Demographic changes bring new challenges, such as managing the new diversity or, in the social and healthcare sectors, the rising demand for care and the shortage of qualified personnel.

Resident population development

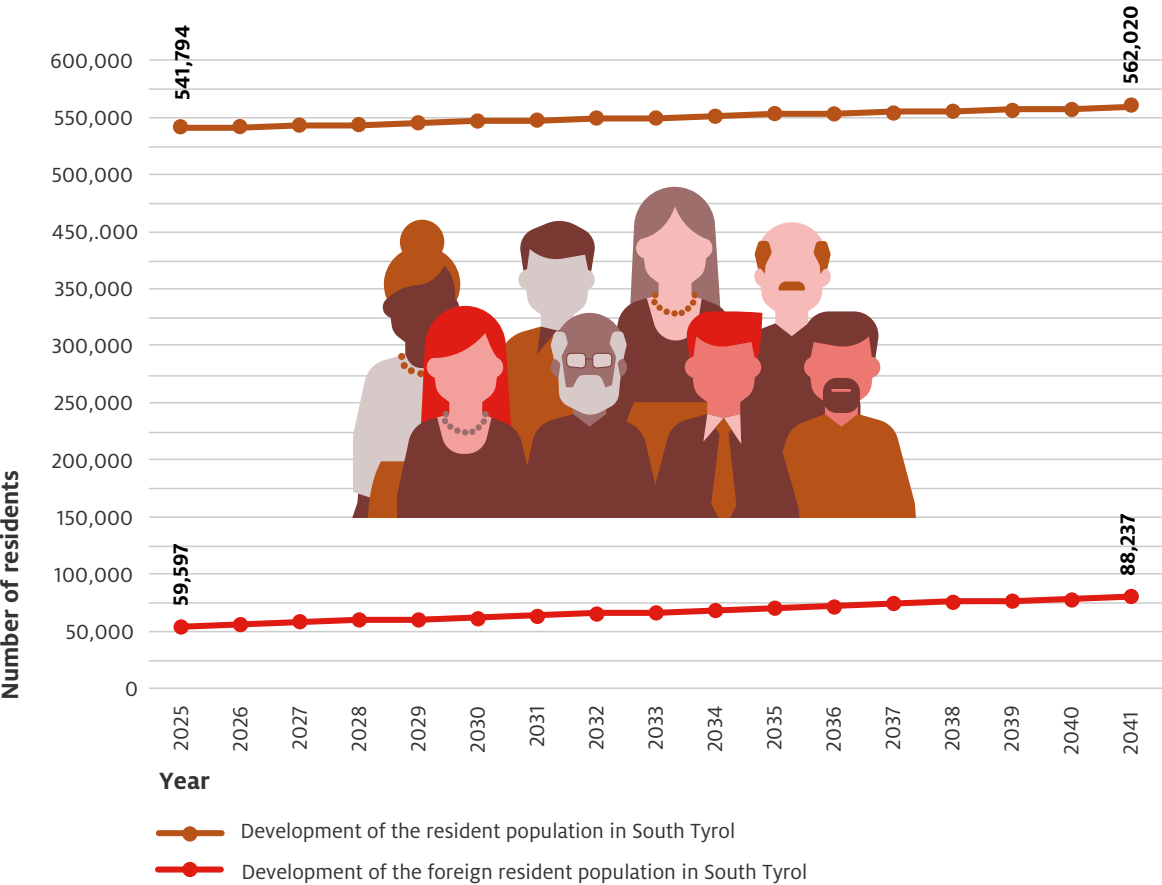


Fig. 2: ASTAT, Atlante statistico 2024 (provincia.bz.it)  
<https://astat.provincia.bz.it/barometro/upload/statistikatlas/de/atlas.html>

Slow Convergence of Language Groups and Demographic Change

Looking at developments since 1945, few regions in Europe have changed as profoundly as South Tyrol. The percentage of people employed in agriculture (about 6 percent) is still relatively high, but South Tyrol has long since become a society primarily active in the service sector. Differences remain between the language groups in terms of education levels and occupations, but these do not result in significant social divergence.<sup>1</sup>

On average, the Italian-speaking population has higher educational qualifications than the German- and Ladin-speaking groups; however, German- and Ladin-speakers often enjoy higher income levels. In high-growth, high-income sectors (such as hospitality, crafts, and industry), small to medium-sized enterprises predominantly operated by German- and Ladin-speakers are the norm. The ethnic division by economic sector – once very pronounced (with German- and Ladin-speakers concentrated in agriculture and crafts/industry, and Italian-speakers in public administration and state-owned companies) – no longer exists. Only agriculture remains predominantly in the hands of the German-speaking group.

Inequality in income and wealth distribution is now less a matter of language group affiliation and increasingly the result of educational paths, career choices, sectors of employment, and inherited wealth. In the future, it will be essential to reduce social disparities not only between language groups but also within them, as well as between the native population and new fellow citizens.

Managing Multilingualism in Education

The use of language in schools is regulated by Article 19 of the Autonomy Statute. Over the past 50 years, few other articles have been as widely discussed. It stipulates that schools in South Tyrol must guarantee instruction “in the mother tongue, either Italian or German, of the pupils,” and that “the teaching of the second language” is compulsory. The article also governs the use of Ladin in areas where that language is present. The growing linguistic and cultural diversity in South Tyrol since the 1990s is now challenging this school model, which is fundamentally monolingual and based on the division into three language groups. “Mother tongues” have long ceased to mean only German and Italian: it is estimated that more than a hundred different native languages are now spoken. Many young people grow up in complex multilingual settings.

The school system as a whole, as well as individual teachers in their daily practice, must now respond to the increasingly multilingual needs of the school community. For years, there has been ongoing debate over bilingual schooling, now increasingly accompanied by discussions about multilingual education. Opinions differ on both the feasibility of implementing such a model and its compatibility with legal constraints.

What unites these proposals is a strong focus on German, Italian, and, to some extent, English. Whether such models are still adequate in light of growing linguistic heterogeneity will remain a topic of discussion and debate. Likewise, questions will persist about how the school system can evolve to provide all students with the tools they need to navigate a linguistically diverse life and ensure equal opportunities for personal development.



Michela Morandini



**AUTONOMY FOR EVERYONE?  
GENDER EQUALITY IN SOUTH TYROL**

**Brief interview with Michela Morandini, former Equality Counsellor**  
The Equality Counsellor provides information and advice to employees who experience gender discrimination in the workplace; she can also represent them in court, mediate disputes, and participates in various commissions and working groups to ensure equal opportunities at work. At the time of the interview, Michela Morandini was serving as Equality Counsellor; in April 2024, she was succeeded by Brigitte Hofer.

**What role does autonomy play in gender equality in South Tyrol?**

The primary competences granted by the Autonomy Statute provide useful tools in this area as well, allowing us to improve conditions and take different paths from those decided at the national level regarding equality. But much remains to be done: the Gender Equality Index of the European Institute for Gender Equality measures the need for action in six areas – work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health. The index also includes two additional aspects: violence against women and intersectional inequalities. In South Tyrol, it is clear that in key areas, equality has not yet been achieved. For example, in the labor market: women are underrepresented in leadership positions, the gender pay gap in full-time private sector employment stands

at 16.3%, and the pension gap is around 45%. Women still perform the majority of unpaid family work, which negatively affects their career and employment opportunities, despite the fact that there are now more South Tyrolean women than men with a university degree. Moreover, women remain significantly underrepresented in political participation in our Province.

**Let’s imagine South Tyrol in 2050: what is the best-case scenario for gender equality?**

The most obvious answer would be 50:50, a true balance between men and women. However, I'm not sure that in 2050 we will still be thinking in binary gender terms. I hope that by then, recognizing and valuing diversity will be a central aspect of our society.

The **main challenge** lies in preparing for demographic changes, while also adapting to the linguistic and cultural diversity that lies ahead. This means reducing social inequalities – not only between language groups but also between long-established and newly arrived communities. It also requires the development of new didactic and pedagogical approaches in




a school system that is currently organized around three language groups. We expect that autonomy, too, can serve as a tool to further promote gender equality. Significant disparities still persist in key areas such as the division of domestic and family responsibilities, salary, and political participation.


**Sustainability**

**The Sustainability of Autonomy Lies in Its Futures**

Autonomy should not be viewed in terms of a single future, but rather multiple futures. In a world marked by dynamic changes at the economic, social, and political levels, it is essential to allow for an equally dynamic development of autonomy. In 2020, right in the midst of one of the greatest global crises, four future sustainability scenarios were identified for South Tyrol 2030+, each with its own challenges and opportunities. In which of these future frameworks does autonomy have the best chance to develop?



**Future Scenarios  
South Tyrol 2030**




**Everyday for Future?  
The Role of Autonomy  
in Achieving Climate Neutrality**


Reaching the European Union’s goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% and ensure climate resilience by 2030, and to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, requires not only the commitment and coordination of member states but also the active involvement of regional and local authorities. The climate emergency presents itself as a multilevel challenge that cuts across the responsibilities and actions of national and sub-state governments and affects all policies, particularly those concerning energy, water, agriculture, infrastructure and transport, urban planning, and the environment.

The Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano can play an important role in this multilevel and cross-sectoral climate challenge, thanks to the broad scope of its legislative (primary, secondary, and residual) and administrative powers granted by the Autonomy Statute and the Italian Constitution, as well as the fiscal tools at its disposal (see Financial Autonomy and Economy > page 52).

In this context, the Province approved the South Tyrol Climate Plan 2040 in 2022. The new Plan sets and anticipates many of the commitments and deadlines of the previous plan and aims for South Tyrol to achieve climate neutrality by 2040. The Plan identifies 17 areas of action designed to provide an overall framework for identifying specific measures and interventions at the provincial level. The real climate response of South Tyrol will consist in defining and implementing these specific actions through regulations, prohibitions, and incentives. This effort should be monitored and shared not only by the public administration but also by the entire South Tyrolean community.



In agreement with the Provincial Government of South Tyrol, Eurac Research has developed an **emissions monitoring system** that documents the development of greenhouse gas emissions across four key sectors, as well as total emissions.





Gabriel N. Toggenburg



SOUTH TYROL: A PIONEER OF SUSTAINABILITY

Brief interview with Gabriel N. Toggenburg, expert in European law. Gabriel N. Toggenburg, Honorary Professor of European Law and Human Rights at the University of Graz, works for European institutions in the field of human rights protection. On his blog “All EU-r Rights” and in his column “Europasplitter”, he shares updates on matters concerning the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Union. Among other topics, he explores the connections between sustainability, human rights, and minority rights.

**Is it time for South Tyrol to adopt sustainability as a new element of its identity?**  
Autonomy creates room for action when it comes to sustainability. Consider the province’s ability to act in economic, social, and environmental policy. In this sense, South Tyrol has the opportunity to shape and implement sustainability under its own responsibility and to take a leading role, ideally through flagship projects and key themes that should be developed in consultation with the population.

**But unlike autonomy, sustainability isn’t legally enshrined, is it?**  
Indeed, issues of autonomy have always been understood and debated as matters of constitutional and international law. In contrast, sustainability is often seen as a vague domain of soft politics. But that is changing. The criteria and requirements for sustainability are multiplying. It’s also important to note that many seemingly “soft” sustainability goals actually contain strict obligations concerning human rights.  
And sustainability is about more than just protecting the environment. A hotel that practices rigorous waste separation, uses cutting-edge solar heating, and serves delicious organic honey, but is inaccessible to people with disabilities, is not sustainable. South Tyrol could, and should, insist on highlighting and addressing these often-overlooked aspects of sustainability.

The **major challenge** will be meeting the climate goals set by the Province itself and those defined by the European Union. Thanks to its autonomy, South Tyrol has the ability to carve out its own independent path toward sustainability, potentially even becoming a pioneer in this field. With its Citizens’ Climate Council, it also has a valuable participatory tool at its disposal for implementing the socio-ecological transformation. (Autonomy and Political Participation > page 34).



**Note**  
1 Hermann Atz, Max Haller, Günther Pallaver, eds, *Ethnische Differenzierung und soziale Schichtung in der Südtiroler Gesellschaft* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016), 336-337



SURVEY

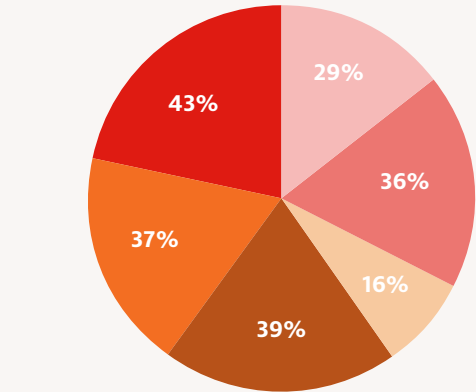
How Important Is Autonomy to Young People?

In 2021, the Provincial Institute of Statistics (ASTAT) conducted a survey among young people in South Tyrol and published the results in its study “Valori, stili di vita e progetti per il futuro dei giovani altoatesini/ Werthaltungen, Lebensformen und Lebensentwürfe der Südtiroler Jugend” (Values, Lifestyles, and Future Plans of Young South Tyroleans). Some of the questions also addressed political interests and young people’s opinions on autonomy. Below are a few excerpts from the study. For comparison, some results from the 2016 survey are also included.

As of January 1, 2021 – the time of the survey – there were 71,482 residents aged 14 to 25 living in the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano, accounting for 13.4% of the South Tyrolean population.






ARE YOU INTERESTED IN POLITICS?

Very or fairly interested



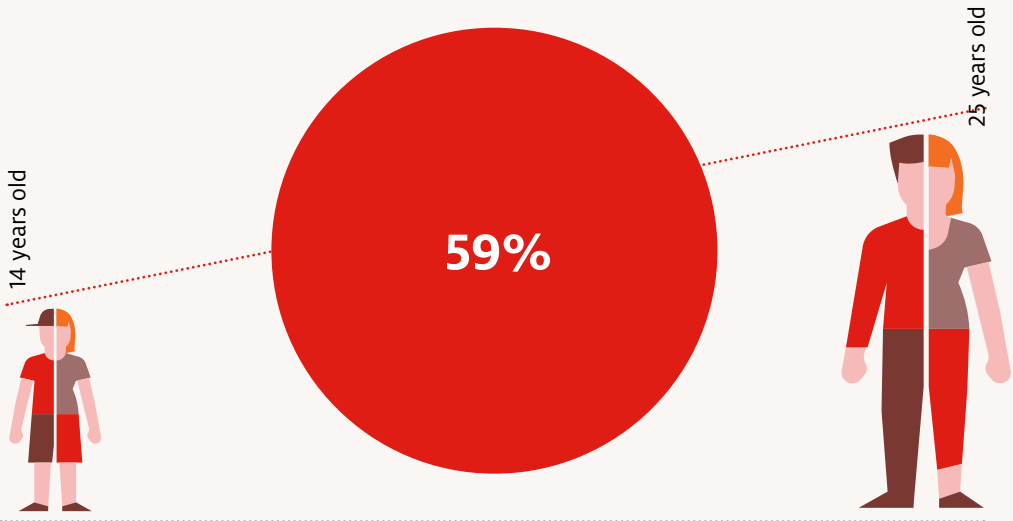
- Municipal politics
- Provincial politics
- Euregio politics
- National politics
- European politics
- International politics

IN WHICH AREAS SHOULD THE PROVINCE DO MORE?

	2016	2021
 Youth:	48%	60%
 Environmental and nature protection:	26%	44%
 Healthcare:	40%	40%
 Housing policy:	28%	36%
 Culture, education, and research:	30%	35%

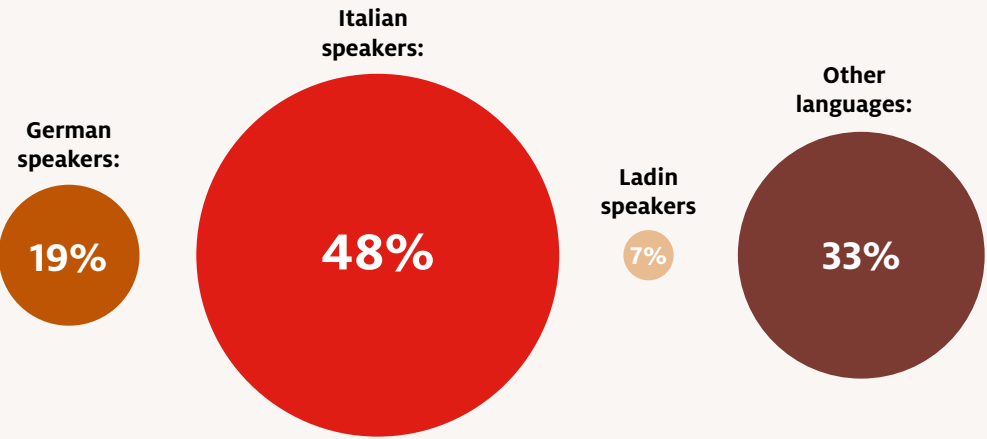


WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT  
TEACHING SUBJECTS IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE?



59 percent of young people aged 14 to 25 believe that teaching one or more subjects in the second language is useful.

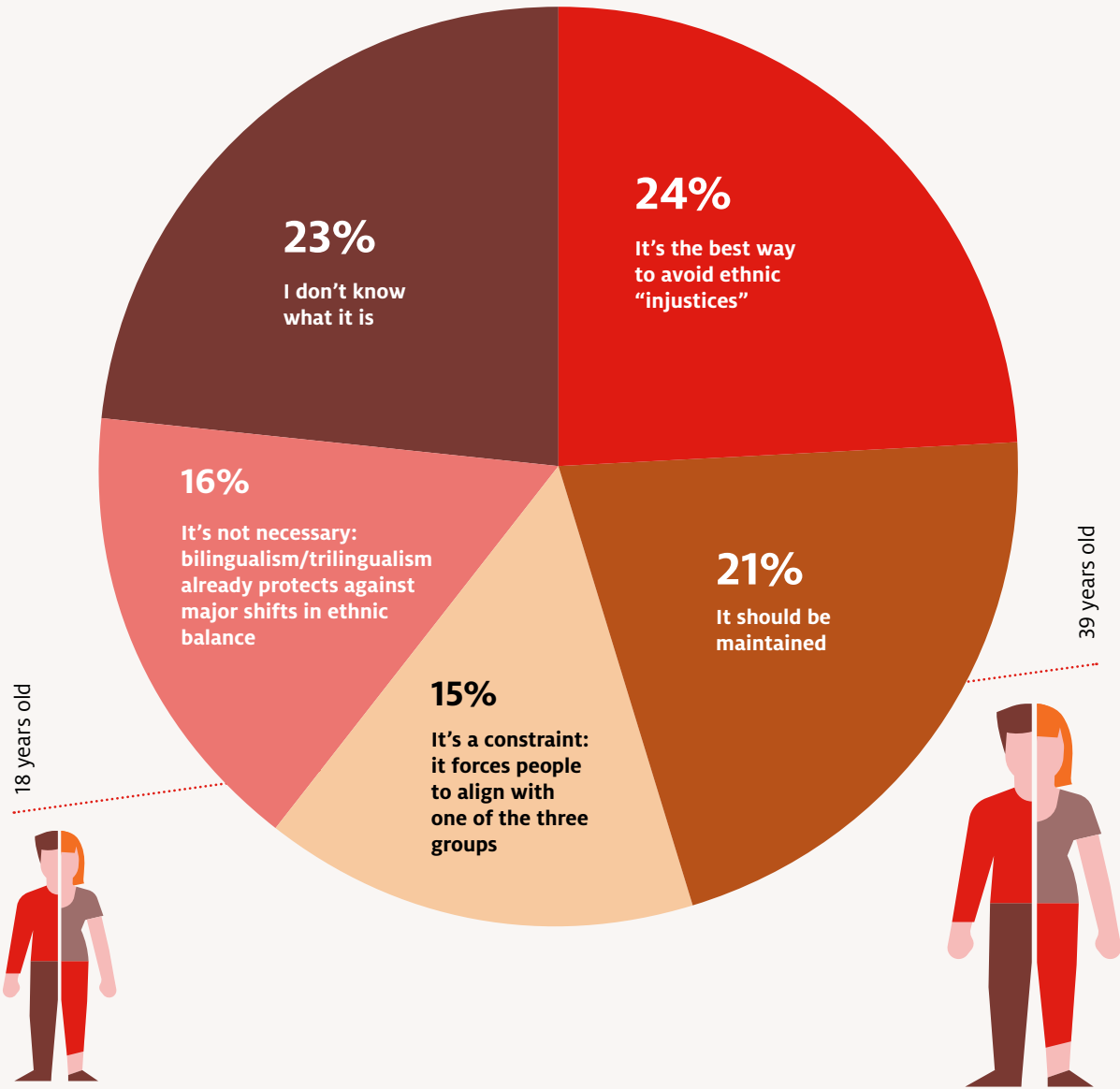
IS THE SEPARATION BETWEEN LANGUAGE GROUPS  
ONE OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS WHERE YOU LIVE?





25 percent of young people see the separation of language groups as one of the most important problems. However, there are differences among the various language groups. In particular, young people who speak Italian or other languages consider the separation between language groups to be one of the main issues in their place of residence.


From the ASTAT 2022 Study:  
**Opinions on the Proportional System**  
Results from the 18–39 age group


WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE “PROPORTIONAL SYSTEM”?



 Youth and autonomy are also discussed in one of the episodes of the podcast “**Understanding Autonomy**” by the Center for Autonomy Experience.



 The **GaYA project** (*Governance and Youth in the Alps*), funded by the European Union, aims to actively involve young people in political life.





## VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

### What kind of South Tyrol do I want to live in?

In preparation for this report, several young people from all language groups and various areas of the Province were asked what autonomy means to them, what kind of South Tyrol they would like to live in in the future, and how they envision the future of the Autonomous Province. The responses show that autonomy and the protection of language groups have increasingly taken on an identity-shaping role, regardless of spoken language or migration background:

“

“I would like to live in a South Tyrol where the two main language communities, Italian and German, have equal opportunities and neither is favored or disadvantaged when it comes to important issues, especially a high standard of living.”  
(Student, 19 years old, Branzolo/Branzoll)

“For me, autonomy also means the advantage of being able to keep a good share of tax revenues in the Province and reinvest it in South Tyrol.”  
(Employee, 23 years old, St. Lorenzen/San Lorenzo di Sebato/San Laurënz)

“Autonomy means not depending on Italy and being able to make our own decisions with laws tailored specifically for South Tyroleans that can therefore be better applied.”  
(Student, 19 years old, Lana)

“It's important to live in a South Tyrol with a forward-looking vision, not the backward one we have today. A South Tyrol that is attractive to young people and capable of offering them something.”  
(Student, 19 years old, Freienfeld/Campo di Trens)

“I'd like to live in the South Tyrol we have now, with our history and our culture. For me, autonomy means being able to live out one's own culture and, above all, one's own language.”  
(Teacher, 25 years old, Brixen/Bressanone/Porsenù)

“To me, autonomy means being independent but still participating in Italy in principle. It means being able to protect various minorities – in this case the German and Ladin minorities – and therefore protecting all people without restrictions.”  
(Student, 18 years old, Meran/Merano/Maran)

“What matters to me is variety – linguistic diversity and also multiculturalism – which makes it possible to exchange languages, people, and opinions.”  
(Student, 22 years old, Stilfs/Stelvio)

“For the future, I would like a South Tyrol where “different” people are more easily accepted, where there's no more racism or homophobia. I also hope that there will no longer be violence against women, or violence at all. I'd like to see new and more modern schools being built, so that there are more educational opportunities. And it would be nice if hospitals and care homes had more staff and more space.”  
(Student, 14 years old, Algund/Lagundo)

”



# A Look to the Future



The reform of the Autonomy

At the time this report was finalized, the South Tyrolean Provincial Government was negotiating an autonomy statute reform with the Italian government in Rome. An agreement was reached in April 2025 after intense negotiations. This reform has become necessary to align the Statute with the national constitutional framework and in response to rulings by the Constitutional Court. Since the constitutional reform of 2001, the Court has interpreted the legislative powers of South Tyrol and other regions more restrictively. The negotiations began with a statement by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in her 2022 policy speech to Parliament, where she pledged to "restore the autonomy standards of 1992" (The Road to South Tyrolean Autonomy > page 9).

In summary, the proposed reform includes the following changes to the Autonomy Statute:

- The only limits to provincial and regional legislative powers will be the Italian Constitution, EU law, and international obligations. The current additional limits, namely the “principles of the Republic's legal system” and the “fundamental norms of the Republic's economic and social reforms”, will be removed.
- The Province's current powers (e.g., over commerce) will be defined more precisely, and new exclusive competences will be added (e.g., environmental protection). A more detailed definition of provincial responsibilities is intended to reduce the risk of legal conflicts and limit the Constitutional Court's interpretive discretion. For example, “the organization of offices and their personnel” would also explicitly include “employment relations and relevant collective bargaining” at the regional and provincial levels. Similarly, the subject “urban planning and zoning” would be revised to “land management, construction, urban planning, and zoning plans” and so on.
- The protection of local linguistic minorities would no longer be listed under national interests, but instead recognized as an obligation stemming from EU law and international treaties. According to the proposal, specific rules protecting minorities (e.g., language use, ethnic proportionality, school system) will not be affected by the reform – although they remain a topic of political debate. International legal obligations stemming from the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement (The Road to South Tyrolean Autonomy > page 7) remain unchanged. The proposal, however, reduces the current four-year residency requirement for active voting rights. Under the new rules, two years of uninterrupted residence in the Region will be sufficient to vote in the Province of Bozen/Bolzano. Furthermore, it includes measures to facilitate the representation of the Italian linguistic group in government bodies at the provincial and municipal level
- Future amendments to the Autonomy Statute are now subject to mutual agreement, requiring approval by an absolute majority in the Regional Council as well as in both Provincial Councils. This procedure is based on the text first approved in the Italian Parliament. If an amendment is rejected by either the Provincial Council or the Regional Council, the Italian Parliament may still adopt it in a second reading with an absolute majority of its members, provided that the existing autonomy provisions remain unaffected.

- The role of the Commissions of Six and Commissions of Twelve (Autonomy and Institutions > page 12) in State–Province relations should be strengthened.

A technical working group on the reform of the Trentino–South Tyrol Special Statute worked on the proposal between October and December 2024. The result was forwarded to the Prime Minister's Office for further review. Outstanding issues were clarified through direct dialogue between the Italian government and representatives of the autonomous provinces. Subsequently, the Region and the Provincial Councils provided opinions on the proposed amendments, and Austria was informed. In June 2025, the Italian government unanimously approved the draft constitutional law to reform the Autonomy Statute of the Region of Trentino-South Tyrol. Adoption of the constitutional law by the Italian Parliament is expected, presumably in 2026, following two votes in both chambers, requiring at least an absolute majority. A national referendum is excluded in any case.

The Protection of Minorities

The instruments for the protection of minorities – such as ethnic proportionality, the linguistic census, the composition of the Provincial Government, and the school system – are repeatedly the subject of political debate in South Tyrol. Over recent decades, the trend has been to revise certain aspects of how these instruments are used in order to ensure good governance and comply with European law. These changes have primarily been implemented through enactment decrees, without amending the Autonomy Statute itself. Since the experience of the Autonomy Convention of 2015–2017 (Autonomy and Political Participation > page 35), no further proposals for structural reform on these topics have been brought forward, apart those few recently foreseen by the current reform of the autonomy. Except for a few specific elements, the system for protecting minorities has proven to be overall effective and partially adaptable, as demonstrated by the developments in the proportionality system and the declaration of affiliation to a linguistic group (Living in the Land of Autonomy > page 45). Even the rulings of the Constitutional Court, which led to the current negotiations on autonomy reform, have neither restricted nor questioned the rules concerning minority protection.

South Tyrol in the World

Since 1992, South Tyrol's autonomy and the protection of minorities it guarantees have not only turned the Province into an international model but also enabled the creation of a dense network of contacts with other regions and minority communities. In recent times, minority rights and the decentralization of power have come under increasing threat globally due to the resurgence of nationalism. South Tyrol is therefore expected to play an increasingly important role in the future as a model of embracing diversity and as a place where autonomy and peaceful coexistence are lived out in practice.

# Who Wrote This Report



**Abel Andrea**  
Linguist

For me, as a linguist and language enthusiast, autonomy in South Tyrol takes shape through multilingualism that can be read, heard, and lived – always and everywhere. It's my research lab just outside my front door. And recently, I've increasingly associated autonomy with the gratitude of living in a peaceful environment.



**Alber Elisabeth**  
Political Scientist

Autonomous, therefore self-determined – I am never truly alone. I can only test my autonomy within a social environment. The same applies to political autonomy within federalism and regionalism: it is defined by the autonomy of others and the cooperation of all. It is not a democratic value in itself but must be measured by its democratic quality.



**Alberton Mariachiara**  
Legal Scholar

As a legal expert, I believe that autonomy is the real possibility for local public bodies to enhance the unique characteristics of their own territory.



**Benedikter Ariane**  
Studies in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics; former intern at the Institute for Minority Rights

To me, autonomy means the right and opportunity for self-determination, both on an individual level and as a community. Autonomy therefore means both freedom and cohesion.



**Corradini Philipp**  
Tourism Researcher

Autonomy helped our ancestors in the positive development of our province and today represents a model for other culturally diverse areas in Europe and beyond.



**Crepaz Katharina**  
Political Scientist

For me, autonomy means having the opportunity to help shape, develop, and reshape something – both in the political and social spheres and in private life.



**Engl Alice**  
Political Scientist

To me, autonomy means responsibility. Responsibility toward myself, responsibility toward others, and responsibility toward society.



**Grote Georg**  
Historian

Personally, autonomy means the freedom to move as I wish in Europe. Professionally, I think of it as a model of peace among European nations.



**Bottino Mattia**  
Political Scientist

Italian-Brazilian, or more precisely, Piedmontese-Paulista. I see autonomy as the recognition of contexts and forms of belonging, understood as spaces for individual and collective self-determination, through which one can give meaning to their experience in the world.



**Carlà Andrea**  
Political Scientist

Autonomy reminds me of many things. When I played sports as a teenager, my body didn't have much "autonomy"; over time, I built up more endurance. Now that I work, I enjoy the possibility of working independently, without having to depend on others.



**Cittadino Federica**  
Legal Scholar

Who has the authority to regulate environmental protection? That's the main question I deal with when it comes to autonomy. For me, autonomy is a way to value differences without forgetting unity, and to strengthen a key decision-making level.



**Constantin Sergiu**  
Legal Scholar

I come from Romania, where people see autonomy as a mythological creature: for the Hungarian minority it's a pure and wonderful unicorn, while for the Romanian majority it's as dangerous as a hungry dragon.



**Hoffmann Christian**  
Forestry Scientist

For me, the autonomous status of the Province of Bozen/Bolzano–South Tyrol is like a separate chapter in a great book about freedom, self-determination, democracy, and economic independence. It tells how diversity ensures prosperity and strengthens the common good.



**Klotz Greta**  
Political Scientist

For me, autonomy is the ability to meet local needs more efficiently, thereby allowing for greater diversity.



**Kössler Karl**  
Legal Scholar and Political Scientist

Sometimes I enjoy doing sports completely autonomously (cycling), but often I like doing them with others too (football).



**Obermair Hannes**  
Historian

In my view, autonomy is individual self-determination – which is always at risk – rather than a collective mechanism, whose ethnocentric and essentialist dangers have always seemed suspicious to me.



 **Palermo Francesco**  
Legal Scholar

Raised on bread and autonomies (strictly plural), I consider autonomy an existential factor: in work, in life, in education. To be autonomous, to think autonomously. Like democracy, autonomy is the worst form of governance – except for all the others.



 **Pallaver Günther**  
Political Scientist and Historian

Autonomy means cultivating your own garden. But it takes many hardworking hands to make it bloom. Everyone, near and far, is invited to help with the gardening.



 **Parolari Sara**  
Legal Scholar

For me, autonomy is the ability to act independently, and also the ability to act together... each in their own way.



 **Pechlaner Harald**  
Economist

Autonomy means freedom only if the agreed rules of the game are managed responsibly and without denying reality.



 **Valdesalici Alice**  
Legal Scholar

(Financial) autonomy is the freedom to decide, but also the pursuit of balance with solidarity.



 **Vettori Chiara**  
Linguist

In a conformist society, autonomy – of thought, judgment, and action – is a tool of freedom and an essential condition for achieving personal and social balance.



 **Volgger Jakob**  
Political Scientist

From a legal standpoint, South Tyrolean autonomy is firmly anchored in Paris. However, its social foundation lies in coexistence within society, in minority rights, in knowledge, and in awareness of autonomy.



 **Wisthaler Verena**  
Political Scientist


For me, autonomy means participation and the freedom to make decisions.



 **Prackwieser Josef**  
Historian

Philosophically, autonomy is often understood as the “property of the will to be a law unto itself”. What at first glance seems like a limitation of one’s freedom is, to me, rather the awareness that freedom and law are mutually dependent: autonomy shows that true freedom doesn’t exist without laws, but is realized through them.



 **Rautz Günther**  
Legal Scholar and Philosopher

Only those who are autonomous can defend their actions and live independently and self-determined. Autonomy grants a person maturity, freedom, responsibility, and ultimately, dignity. What holds true for the individual must also apply at the political level.



 **Röggla Marc**  
Legal Scholar

Autonomy is the best journey of my life: freedom, adventure, and unexpected discoveries.



 **Romero Caro Francisco Javier**  
Legal Scholar

I come from Spain, and the subject of autonomy really intrigues me. Now that I live very close to the Provincial Council in Bozen/Bolzano, I always try to stay informed on the topic.



 **Zeba Mattia**  
Sociolinguist

I wish I could feel as autonomous as I feel autonomist.



 **Zebisch Marc**  
Geocologist

For me, autonomy means the freedom to shape things. And that excuses like “we can’t because...” don’t hold. Thanks to its autonomy and its ecological, cultural, and entrepreneurial wealth, South Tyrol has extraordinary opportunities to shape a climate-neutral, resilient, socially just province that respects future generations.



 **Zwilling Carolin**  
Legal Scholar

For me, autonomy means the freedom to act in a self-determined way.



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