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Particularities of the linguistic minorities' protection and functioning in the Province of Bolzano and the Region Valle d'Aosta in Italy

UDC 323.15

DOI <https://doi.org/10.24195/2414-9616.2024-5.11>

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Italian regions with special status, notably the Province of Bolzano in the Autonomous Region of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol and the Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta, are regarded by European scholars as exemplary models for managing interlinguistic and ethnic challenges. These regions represent successful frameworks for fostering reconciliation between diverse linguistic groups, leading to enhanced mutual understanding, respect, and overall prosperity. This study explores the unique operational characteristics of linguistic minorities in these regions, focusing particularly on legislative frameworks enacted by the Republic of Italy for the protection of German, Ladin, and French linguistic minorities. It delves into the historical contexts that necessitated these protections and examines the political processes that have advanced minority status in these regions.

This paper reviews key legislative mandates that empower these regions to protect linguistic minorities and address interethnic issues. It also analyzes the specific forms of minority engagement within the regions, discussing the political dynamics around decentralization and current political climates.

This research was supported by the «Fellowship Grant for Visiting Professors and Visiting Researchers from Ukraine» from the University of Milano-Bicocca and conducted within its Department of Sociology and Social Science. Notable guidance was provided by Professor Marina Calloni, who supervised the fellowship, with additional assistance from Professor Jens Woelk of the University of Trento in the article's development.

Key words: linguistic minorities, linguistic minorities' protection, Italy, autonomous regions, Autonomous Province of Bolzano, Aosta Valley Autonomous Region.

The Italian regions like South Tyrol and Aosta Valley have maintained strong ethno-linguistic distinctiveness [26]. Additionally, from a structural and socio-economic point of view, the two Alpine regions boast diffuse economic wealth based on their abundant natural resources, their strategic position within Europe, the development of a very successful service economy (especially tourism), and the persistence of a strong primary sector which entails a comparatively lower level of industrialization and, in turn, a comparatively lower level of urbanization [13, p. 504]. Additionally, the geographical, cultural, and economic characteristics of the Alpine region have also preserved (or developed) a distinctively conservative political culture, based on a strong attachment to the local community, territory, wider ethnic community, and work ethics [19, p. 287]. The Alpine identity, as defined by the political culture of community, territory, and the wider ethnic community belongs predominantly to the Germanic area of the Alps, with some spill-over effects on the Italian-speaking regions [13, p. 503].

The objectives of the study are to examine the peculiarities of the functioning and protection of linguistic minorities in the autonomous regions of Northern Italy, in particular, in the province of Bolzano of the autonomous region of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol and in the autonomous region of Valle d'Aosta. The study aims to show the effectiveness of Italian legislative, administrative, and economic measures aimed at preserving linguistic and ethnic diversity in two particular regions of Italy. For this pur-

pose, research was conducted on the historical background of language protection for German-speaking, Ladino-speaking, and French-speaking regions in Italy, as well as examining the main legislative acts of the Republic of Italy that ensure the rights of these minorities in two autonomous regions of Italy. The economic environment of those particular regions was also taken into account to show how economic decentralization influenced the autonomous region of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol and the autonomous region of Valle d'Aosta

Research methods. The article uses interdisciplinary methods of analysis: The historical method was used to investigate the preconditions for the formation of the legal status of linguistic minorities in the regions of Bolzano and Valle d'Aosta. A comparative method was used to analyze the differences between the autonomous regions in legal approaches to the protection of linguistic minorities. Documentary analysis using the main legislative acts of Italy, including the Constitution of Italy, special statutes of the autonomous regions, and relevant laws of the central government. The case study method for an in-depth study of the specifics of the functioning of linguistic minorities in each of the regions, with an emphasis on decentralization and political autonomy.

There is an immense volume of literature concerning the functioning of the linguistic minorities in Italy, in particular, related to the Trentino–Alto Adige/South Tyrol region, which is the focus of research of many

Italian, Austrian, and European scholars and policymakers. The case of the French linguistic minority within the Valle d'Aosta region has been widely neglected by scholars, mainly because of the limited territory and small population of the region where the minority is located, i.e. the Aosta Valley Region, which has only 125,000 inhabitants. Nevertheless, such a study was never done by Ukrainian research centers and universities due to the decentralization reform in Ukraine, which did not take into consideration the best European patterns. That is why such a study might be an interesting source and trigger for an investigation of the status and functioning of minorities in Italy that could be implemented in the East-Central European countries to mitigate the ethnolinguistic conflicts that often occur in the region. The study used different sources such as the main legislature of Italy – Italian Constitution, Regional Special Status Acts, Legislative acts of the Central Government in Rome etc. Furthermore, the literature of research is reached of the investigations of think tanks like EURAC, and scholars of different Italian, Austrian, and French research institutions.

The first part of the research paper is dedicated to a brief description of the history of the Trentino–Alto Adige/South Tyrol region and Valle d'Aosta region in Italy after their including those territories to the Kingdom of Italy after WWI in case of South Tyrol and since the mid-19 century in case of the Valle d'Aosta region.

Brief History of Alto Adige (Province of Bolzano, South Tyrol) Province and current population by language, legislation of the German and Ladin language protection.

After the First World War, the territory south of the Brenner Pass was granted to Italy [9 p. 167]. With the Peace Treaty of Saint-Germain signed on 10 September 1919, the annexation of South Tyrol to Italy was accepted. On 10 October 1920, South Tyrol was—without a referendum and against the wishes of its majority German-speaking population—formally ceded to Italy [11].

Initially, Italy's post-war governments demonstrated some sensitivity toward the German-speaking population. However, this policy shifted dramatically under Mussolini's rule during the interwar period, from 1922 to 1943. Mussolini's government pursued a deliberate Italianization program aimed at dismantling the Austro-German cultural identity of the local populace [10p. 19]. Despite these repressive measures, which included attempts to supplant the German language and Tyrolean culture, the local population preserved their cultural heritage and aspirations for self-determination, even amidst the disruptive relocation program of 1939, known as the *Option*. This program sought to alter the demographic landscape in favor of Italian speakers, relocating Germans to the German Reich while bringing Italians into South Tyrol. Although 86% of approximately 250,000 South

Tyroleans initially chose relocation, only around 75,000 (37%) left by 1943, with many subsequently returning after the Second World War [10, p. 67]. Ultimately, the *Option* policy was unsuccessful in achieving its demographic aims but significantly influenced South Tyrolean collective identity, creating divisions between those who stayed and sought self-government and those willing to leave.

In 1943, fascist rule in Italy ended, and in the post-war period, the 1946 Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement, annexed to the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, enshrined protections for German speakers in South Tyrol [12, p. 70]. The Agreement affirmed the «complete equality of rights with the Italian-speaking inhabitants» and safeguarded «the ethnic character and the cultural and economic development of the German-speaking element». The Agreement had a threefold impact on South Tyrol: it cemented the Brenner border, elevated the South Tyrolean issue to an international concern, and designated Austria as a kin-state protector, urging Italy to adopt special measures granting German parity with Italian in public life and permitting cultural autonomy [10, pp. 87–88]. Nevertheless, the Agreement lacked specificity concerning the geographical scope of these protections, with Alcide De Gasperi, then Italy's Prime Minister, proposing that any negotiated autonomy should encompass both South Tyrol and Trentino [11].

The Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement stipulated a comprehensive range of rights for German-speaking citizens, including (a) primary and secondary education in their native language, (b) equal status for German in public offices and official documents, (c) the reinstatement of original German surnames, and (d) equitable access to public employment, aiming to achieve balanced representation between ethnic groups. Additionally, the Agreement proposed granting the population autonomous legislative and executive powers within defined areas, though the specifics were to be determined in consultation with local representatives of the German-speaking community [11].

While the Agreement aimed to protect minority rights, the distribution of powers favored the regional and state levels over the provincial, leaving the aspirations of the South Tyrolean population partially unmet, especially in the realms of German and Ladin language use [2, p.172]. Frustration with inadequate autonomy implementation and disputes over housing programs for incoming Italian residents triggered widespread protests in Bolzano, which escalated to violent incidents in 1956–1957. South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP) leader Silvio Magnago successfully rallied popular support with the slogan «Get rid of Trent», advocating for greater autonomy for South Tyrol alone [20]. Following further tensions and bomb attacks, the SVP withdrew from the regional government in 1959 in protest, signaling a pivotal moment in South Tyrol's quest for self-determination [14, p. 145].

The dissatisfaction with this implementation of autonomy led to further explosive attacks and attacks on the Italian state power and its symbols by members of the minority in the 1960s, who were concentrated in the «Liberation Committee of South Tyrol (BAS)» [10, p. 149]. The Commission of 19 was set up to develop proposals for resolving the tense situation based on the Gruber-De Gasperi agreement. A commission set up in 1961 by the Italian authority. Grote locates a basis for this breakthrough in a transition from nationalism to regionalism, which explosive bombers articulated in trials - known as the Milan trials - as early as after the attacks in 1961, since they no longer directed their efforts towards self-determination through secession from Italy, but, like the SVP, Vienna and Rome, on shaping autonomy in Italy [17, p. 377]. It was gradually implemented in 18 stages after the establishment of the Commission «of Six» in 1972. The distribution of competencies was shifting in primary agendas from the region «Trentino-South Tyrol/Alto Adige» to the province of Bolzano-South Tyrol, which is now an autonomous Province within the region with special competencies on various issues of self-government and public life; the principles of ethnic proportionality and linguistic parity apply to all public entities in South Tyrol (except the military and police) and the Constitutional status ensures the existence of the language groups. However, it takes 20 years to issue the implementing regulations [2, p.194].

In 1992, Austria and Italy made an official declaration of dispute settlement at the United Nations and both states declared the full implementation of this second statute («South Tyrol Package») [2, p. 179].

For German speakers and Ladins, the autonomy of the Bolzano Autonomous Province ensures a range of special rights, the core of which is ethnic proportionality [27, p. 133]. It was possible due to the proper implementation of the Special Status of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano [21], the South Tyrolean model is considered to be one of the most successful regulations for the coexistence of minorities in Europe [12, p. 75]. How accurate is this assessment of the «power-sharing model», which is based on the institutionalized separation of the groups and their obligation to work together?

Historically, success factors in recent history include the determined commitment of the «mother country» Austria for the German-speaking population of South Tyrol and the enshrinement of its «protective function» in the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement and the Paris Treaty - a function that all political parties in Austria have predominated ever since exercise uniformly and which is appreciated by the South Tyrolean population [3, p. 289]. Locally, there is a broad consensus among politicians and the population for an active autonomy policy instead of secession, to which the Italian government is largely positive.

Additionally, all parties of the conflict are included in the negotiation processes - through the Commission, negotiations at the international level, and the approval of both national parliaments.

«The German language is on an equal footing in the region with the Italian language, which is the official state language» (South Tyrolean Statute of Autonomy) [29]. The administrative and court staff must speak both languages; both languages can be used during court hearings, depending on the wishes of those affected. According to the decree, official communications must be conducted in the language in which the citizen addresses the office. This means that officials and judges must also be competent in both languages [28, p. 345]. To enter the public service, applicants must complete a bilingual proficiency test, which has four levels of difficulty [22, p. 309].

The Statute of Autonomy also contains special regulations for the allocation of budget funds, public bodies, and social housing. According to ethnic proportion, they should be distributed according to the numerical ratio of the three South Tyrolean language groups. These regulations «take into account the relative strengths of the three language groups living in the country and are intended to guarantee their inclusion in decision-making processes» [17, p. 393].

The aim of the established regulations in 1972 was to create a basis for citizens of every language group to identify with the state, whose administration had been Italianized from above during the time of fascism [14, p. 145]

Such a policy of purely numerical justice may, on the one hand, prevent conflicts; after all, every language group has its representation in the administration and no group is worse off than another. On the other hand, however, it contributes to maintaining a large degree of separation between the language groups, since the language group represents an essential entry criterion. Simply collecting the numbers to calculate the ethical proportion requires a clear decision for a language group: every ten years since 1971, South Tyroleans have been asked in a census which language they use. In the surveys up to 1981, Italians couldn't declare themselves as others in the language declaration without thereby escaping the negative legal consequences (no right to social housing, no consideration when allocating jobs in the public service). The offspring of mixed marriages had to assign themselves to a single group, even if this did not correspond to their language skills or their sense of identity.

Since 1991, South Tyroleans have had the opportunity to submit a declaration of affiliation to one of the three groups as those declaring otherwise. In this case, the declaration of affiliation is omitted, but the proportional share is still collected from the declarations. Only those who do not submit the declaration of affiliation of inhabitants of the Autonomous Prov-

ince of Bolzano are excluded from claims to housing and public positions [2, p. 187]

Since 1972, a bilingualism test has been a prerequisite for civil service and ethnic proportionality ensures the distribution of public positions according to the numerical strength of the language groups, to ensure administration by officials from one's group and traffic in their language (Articles 62 and 89 Statute of Autonomy 1972). The state government also has to correspond to the relationship between the groups in the state parliament, in which one seat is reserved for one Ladin citizen (Articles 50 and 62 of the Statute of Autonomy 1972) [14, p. 153]. Thus, since 1981, the basis of this system has been a declaration of language group affiliation, which is included in censuses and, since 1991, has also allowed people not to make a declaration, but then requires at least a declaration of affiliation in the event of an application for public positions.

Of interest for consideration is the South Tyrolean system of census, declaration of language group membership, and proportional representation, which finds its basis in the Statute of Autonomy 1972 (Part 1.A.III.) [21], whose regulations for the protection of language groups enjoy constitutional status. This system is a cornerstone of minority protection in South Tyrol. The original basis of proportional representation is laid down in Art 1 (2) d of the Treaty of Paris, which obliges Italy to ensure the equal rights of German-speaking citizens when admitted to public office to achieve an appropriate distribution. According to Art 89 (3) Statute of Autonomy Proportionality applies to all citizens who belong to one of the three language groups. The system has a direct effect on the members of these groups: the declaration of language group membership serves to determine the existence of the groups, which then forms the basis for the management and allocation of public resources and positions [2, p. 178].

It applies in particular to the allocation of positions in the area of administration and public service, to the composition of public bodies, and also to the distribution of budget funds. According to Art 89 (3) Statute of Autonomy, all state bodies are vested in the citizens in relation to the reserved for each of the language groups, as revealed by the censuses. Article 15 (2) Statute of Autonomy provides for the use of funds for welfare, social, and cultural purposes of the province according to the group relationship and their needs. The proportional representation is also flanked by the Bilingual or trilingual requirement for civil servants (for the effect of the examination, part 1.C.III.).[21] Originally, proportional representation serves to ensure that the strength of the ethnic group is taken into account in the public sector and thus to make reparations. This purpose was already achieved in 2006, which means that its abolition would at least be worth considering. In connection with privatizations. There

has also been a tendency in the past for these to be used to circumvent the proportional representation in favour of the German group, while the quota filling of public positions, has resulted in proportional representation increasingly becoming a protective mechanism for the Italian group [2, p. 179].

Also, it is worth indicating that besides the German-speaking population in South Tyrol, a minor role plays the Ladin language minority. According to the World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, the Ladin Linguistic minority has the right to obtain some government posts in Bolzano province, but only around 4 percent. Since 1989, Ladin has been an administrative language in the valleys of Badia and Gardena. In other areas of the Province, the administration mostly uses Ladin only when dealing with Ladin matters. The exception is election campaign literature, which is put out in German, Italian, and Ladin. Ladins have the right to use their language in court proceedings, but they must provide interpretation or translation at their own cost. As court documents and judgments are in Italian only, this right is rarely used. Furthermore, the abovementioned 1972 Autonomy Statute of the Trentino- Alto Agile Autonomous region strengthened the legal protection of the Ladin minority in Bolzano and Trento Provinces. In South Tyrol (Province of Bolzano) Ladin's linguistic minority obtained the right to proportional representation in public administration in 4% of the Province of Bolzano and such Ladin-speaking public administration is obviously maintained in Valleys with predominant Ladin speakers. In 1975 the regional government bodies established the Institute Cultural Ladin in the Fassa Valley of Trento Province. The institute contains a museum and library to promote and disseminate the Ladin language and culture [29].

Today's statistics from 1 January of 2023 give the picture of the current state of the population in the Province of Bolzano 2021 - 533 267, Trentino Autonomous Province 542 050, Aosta Valley Region- 122 955.

Ethnic proportional representation serves as a protective mechanism for all linguistic minorities in South Tyrol. According to the statute, it is essentially to be used when filling positions in the public service and when distributing budget resources in the country. In these areas, the positions and resources are distributed fairly in proportion to the respective numerical strength of the language groups [4]. The prerequisites for the application of the proportional rule are censuses in which the numerical strength of the language groups and the membership of individual citizens in each language group are determined. According to the status of language group membership (2011 census), 314,604 (69.41%) belong to the German language group, 118,120 (26.06%) to the Italian language group and 20,548 (4.53%) to the Ladin language group [2, p. 172]. Since the Ladin

ethnic group is concentrated in a few valleys and towns in the southeast of the country, Ladins in these towns are legally allowed to use their language in public offices. Otherwise, German and Italian are the official languages throughout the Province of Bolzano [29].

From a historical-cultural point of view, the «youngest» group in the Province of Bolzano is the Italian linguistic minority, which experienced its moment of greatest increase during the era of fascism, in the 1920s and 1930s, when Mussolini's regime sought to strengthen the «Italian character» of Alto Adige (South Tyrol) through massive immigration from other regions. The nationalization policy is demonstrated by the numbers: in the 1910 census, South Tyrol had 7,339 Italians, in 1961 they had become 128,271. The percentage of the Italian linguistic group in the overall population had risen from 2.9% to 34.3% in half a century [10].

Brief History of Valle d'Aosta and current population by language, legislation of the French language protection.

The period 1860-1861, corresponding to the complete cession of Savoy to France and the Unification of Italy, is usually considered the pivotal date marking the beginning of the process which quickly determined the change in the Aosta Valley linguistic panorama. A change which takes place, of course, within the framework of a confrontation between French and Italian and through the dynamics of linguistic competition, triggered by the change in political situation, between the language of culture historically rooted in the territory of the Duchy of Aosta and that of the young unitary State of Italy [18, p.24]. Following the Unity of Italy, the demand born from the Risorgimento for the creation of a unitary cultural fabric at the national level is translated in the Aosta Valley by a series of unilateral acts of the Italian State, which pass through the introduction of Italian in the courts (1880) and especially in primary education; the latter is the subject of as many trials of strength between the central school administration and the political representatives of Aosta Valley regarding the space to

be dedicated to the two languages, on the occasion of the promulgation of laws concerning elementary education compulsory and the creation of the state school [18, p.25].

The discontent of public opinion in Valle d'Aosta was manifested by the founding in 1909 of the League of Valle d'Aosta («Italian Committee for the Protection of the French Language in the Aosta Valley»), and reached its height in 1923, with the pamphlet of the Abbot Joseph Trèves and with the action of the president of the League, Anselme Réan, who, in 1925, addressed directly to Benito Mussolini to advocate the cause of French in the Aosta Valley. As the war approached, the regime's intransigent attitude towards the particularities of the region hardened and in 1927 a project for the Italianization of Aosta Valley toponyms was presented which was only finally realized in 1939, to symbolically establish the definitive separation between the Aosta Valley and its cultural and linguistic hinterland. At the same time and following this hardening, the defence of the French in the Aosta Valley strengthened its links with the autonomist political tendencies of the region and even united with anti-fascism. In 1925, the Aosta Valley League was replaced by the small movement of the Young Aosta Valley, promoted by Abbot Joseph Trèves, and then went into semi-clandestinely [18, p.26]. Later, during the last years of the Second World War, the Dichiarazione dei rappresentanti delle popolazioni alpine (eng. Declaration of the representatives of the Alpine populations), promoted by a group of Piedmont and Aosta Valley resistance fighters and known as the Carta di Chivasso (1943), includes, alongside general federalist demands to be implemented within the framework of a new Italian constitution [23], an explicit reminder of the right for Alpine populations to use and teach their «local language». And it is precisely through the reception of this body that political autonomy and joint Italian-French «bilingualism» (because for the Aosta Valley, it is the French language, as a language of culture, and not the original Franco-Provençal which is designated to embody

Table 1

Population development in South Tyrol (1900–2011) according to language groups (%)

Year	German Speakers	Italian Speakers	Ladin Speakers
1900	88.8	4.0	4.0
1910	89.0	2.9	3.8
1921	75.9	10.6	3.9
1961	62.2	34.3	3.4
1971	62.9	33.3	3.7
1981	64.9	28.7	4.1
1991	67.9	27.6	4.3
2001	69.1	26.4	4.3
2011	69.4	26.0	4.5

Source: [17, p. 377, 4, 15, 16]

the generic expression of «local language» contained in the text of the Carta) find their application in the Special Statute of 1948 [18, p.26].

Regarding the language population developments and demography after WWII in the Aosta Valley a migratory flow that affected Aosta Valley's demography was the internal migration of workers from Calabria which was particularly encouraged during the 60s and 70s for political reasons according to N. Alessi from EURAC Research Center. The scholar stated, that «the expansion of the Italian language has not produced a sharp contrast between ethno-linguistic groups but has rather facilitated the increase of bi-and multilingual speakers. This is especially the case with the people who speak Patois: the latter idiom is widely employed in family and with friends, while preference is generally given to Italian or (to a very limited extent) French in the workplace or in other more formal contexts (like in public offices)» [1].

While regional elites spoke standard French throughout the last five centuries, ordinary people historically spoke Franco-Provençal, a Francophone idiom, but generally also spoke or at least understood French [24].

Languages and Population of the Autonomous regions of Alto-Adige and Aosta Valley.

Nowadays we can rely on the precision measures of the language groups by the Province of Bolzano, because of mandatory differentiation of the population by language axis. In comparison to Province of Bolzano/South Tyrol, Autonomous Region of Aosta Valley didn't possess such a reliable date because of lack of the obligatory statement of belonging to particular language group. That is why the research rely to the recent survey by the Fondation Émile Chanoux, according to which, Italian is spoken as a native and second language by 68,000 inhabitants, about 58% of the population. The survey found that Italian is the native language spoken by 77.29% of respondents, 17.91% Franco-Provençal and 1.25% French. The inhabitants of the villages of Gressoney-Saint-Jean, Gressoney-la-Trinite and Isime in the Lys Valley speak two dialects of Walser German: Tisch and Toich respectively. According to the survey, 207 people, or 17.78%, speak Walser German as their mother tongue in these three villages. Nevertheless, it was known to 56.38% of the population [24, p. 98].

According to the linguistic census of the Italian population, carried out in 1921, 88% of Aosta Valley people were classified as French-speaking. According to a survey conducted between 1980 and 1983 on a group of teachers, at home 48.4% of those interviewed mainly used Italian, 48.1% Franco-Provençal and 3.5% French. In lessons, however, all of the interviewees habitually used Italian, 80% French and 24% Franco-Provençal. Another survey conducted in 1967 on a sample of 7,707 primary school pupils found that 44.8% used Italian at home, 43% Fran-

co-Provençal, 0.5% French, while the remaining 11.7% spoke various other languages [24, p. 100].

The survey by the Fondation Émile Chanoux carried out on 7,500 questionnaires in 2001, highlighted the dominance of Italian in all contexts, the use of French in institutional and cultural settings, and the stability of Franco-Provençal in intra-family and local communication, especially in rural areas [24, p. 46].

By virtue of the fact that education is predominantly given in Italian, contrary to the provisions of the special Statute of the Region, the data regarding the mother tongue are largely in favour of this language [13 p. 514].

The main factor behind this drastic change in the dimensions of the two linguistic communities (the Italian and the French/Franco-Provençal) is the transformation of the Aosta Valley societal groups from an emigration region to an immigration-driven society [19, p. 309]. Owing to major economic developments and the massive financial intervention of the central state in the Aosta Valley's economic structure, the region attracted increasing immigration waves, initially from other Italian regions and since the end of the 1980s also from foreign countries. This phenomenon triggered a radical change in the linguistic composition of the Aosta Valley population.

Legislature regarding the status of the French language in the Statute of the Aosta Valley from 1948 with amendments regulate the functioning of the minority language [8]. According to the Autonomous statute of the Aosta Valley region, the French language is equal to the Italian one. Public documents can be drawn up in one or the other language, except the provisions of the judicial authority, which are drawn up in Italian. The state administrations possibly hire officials from the Region or who know the French language to serve in the Valley. Article 39 of the Regional Statute stipulates that in schools of all levels, dependent on the Region, several hours per week equal to those of the Italian language are dedicated to teaching the French language. Some subjects may be taught in French [8].

Regarding the German-speaking minority in Aosta Valley, the Autonomous Statute allows the German-speaking populations of the municipalities of the Lys Valley to protect their linguistic and cultural characteristics and traditions. The population is guaranteed the teaching of the German language in schools through appropriate adaptations to local needs [8].

Presidential Decree n°861 of 31 October 1975 (art.5) specifies that to teach in Valle d'Aosta it is necessary to have passed an exam for full knowledge of French, if one's mother tongue is Italian, or vice versa, Italian, if your mother tongue is French. Italian law n°196 of 16 May 1978 indicates the methods for adapting national programs to the teaching

of subjects in the French language and specifies that the members of the State judging commissions must know the French language [14, p. 147].

Contrary to the Trentino-Alto Adige Autonomous Statute, the Statute of the Region of Aosta Valley predicts just more protection of the French language and bilingual functioning of the region [7]. It should be emphasized that in Aosta Valley there were no deep divisions inside the regional society because the Italian language as it was mentioned before, started to dominate the regional language landscape. The French language lost its position as the dominant language of the region. That is why, it was not so harsh a struggle for language minority protection in comparison to the South Tyrolean case, where the Special status of the region and simultaneously special status of the language were obtained due to the active involvement of the ordinary South Tyrolians in the political process.

Furthermore, in Italian legislation, there is Article 6 of the Public Radio and Television Broadcasting Service Act n. 103/1975 which states that a certain percentage of television and radio broadcasting time must be reserved for ethnic and linguistic groups. [19, p.308].

There were also implemented the constitutional provisions of Framework Law 482/99 in 1999 [12, p. 62] that recognize twelve minority languages in Italy, and stipulates that the language and culture of twelve linguistic minorities are safeguarded, namely the Albanian, Catalan, Germanic, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan, and Sardinian minorities [22, p. 309].

The speakers of the Ladin language closely related to the Swiss Rhaeto-Romance mainly live in five valleys of the Dolomite Alps in the north of Italy [26, p. 92], in particular in the Trentino-Alto Agile region. There are approximately 30000 members of the Ladin-speaking community, who speak six (according to some, seven) distinct varieties of the language. Since 1989, Ladin has been the official language in the Bozen/Bolzano province, alongside standard Italian and German [26, p. 92]. In 2001, Ladin speakers' new rights were implemented in Trento province following Law 482/99. Furthermore, in the South Tyrol Province of the region Ladin language minority is represented mainly by SVP (South Tyrolean Peoples party) on the provincial level, that makes possible to protect Ladin minority on the provincial and simultaneously on the regional level [12, p.69].

The French-speaking (and Franco-Provençal-speaking) community decreased from 96% in 1900 to c% in 1980 to 17% in 2001 [24. p. 99].

The Province of Bolzano's autonomy has conferred substantial economic advantages relative to other Italian regions. The Second Autonomy Statute for the Trentino-Alto Adige region, enacted in 1972, facilitated the extensive transfer of competencies from the central government in Rome to the provincial

level. This transition was accompanied by significant financial allocations that have transformed Bolzano into a net beneficiary of state funding, ensuring long-term fiscal stability and enhanced economic capacity [6 p. 341].

Under the framework of this autonomy, the Province of Bolzano retains over 90% of tax revenues generated within its jurisdiction and is eligible for additional financial transfers from the central government, enabling near-complete control over local tax revenues [5. P. 114]. This arrangement, operational since the early 1990s, provides Bolzano with substantial fiscal autonomy, allowing the province to channel resources into local development more effectively than other Italian regions. While the 2010 Milan Agreement introduced minor adjustments to favor the central government in Italy's tax federalism reform, South Tyrol's special status insulated it from the broader austerity measures that affected much of Italy [6 p. 343]. The Province of Bolzano's high tax revenues, coupled with its corresponding provincial budget, have allowed the provincial government to function as a primary distribution agency, significantly exceeding the volume of public contracts afforded by other Italian regions. This fiscal capacity has enabled sustained investment in infrastructure and public services, which further reinforces the province's economic development of Italy [6 p. 344].

The Province of Bolzano's subsidy levels for the industrial sector substantially exceed those of other Italian regions, while social spending remains high, supported by an influx of skilled laborers and entrepreneurs into the area. This trend, combined with employment rates that outperform national averages, has contributed to an exceptionally low unemployment rate of 4.5%. Local and provincial authorities in South Tyrol allocate a greater budget share than the average Italian province, bolstering quality of life and enhancing the business climate through robust infrastructure investments [6 p. 345].

Moreover, the Province of Bolzano maintains lower tax rates for businesses and the workforce compared to the rest of Italy, attracting entrepreneurs from across the country and internationally. These fiscal policies, coupled with provincial programs supporting agriculture and tourism, particularly benefit the rural population by redistributing revenue to strengthen local economies. This influx of public funds further stimulates demand within public institutions, thereby indirectly fueling economic growth. High revenues in Bolzano enable significant public investments, driving economic expansion and further reducing unemployment. In competition with neighboring regions, Bolzano stands out not only for its elevated levels of public spending—characterized by substantial subsidies, enhanced social benefits, and advanced infrastructure—but also for its favorable provincial tax policies [6 p. 357].

Table 2

Population by language distribution (Native speaker) in the Region of Aosta Valley

Language	Percentage of the population
Italian	71.50%
Franco-Provençal	16.20%
French	0.99%

Source: [24, p. 99].

Table 3

The data regarding Language skills of the population of the Aosta Valley Autonomous Region

Language	Percentage of all population
Italian	96.01%
French	75.41%
Franco-Provençal from Aosta Valley	55.77%
The three languages	50.53%

Source: [18, p. 27]

The economic autonomy exercised by South Tyrol's government, functioning as a key financial distribution entity, enjoys robust support from regional economic elites. Cooperation across linguistic groups has been a hallmark of the autonomous economic sectors, facilitated by professional associations that mandate cross-ethnic membership due to state regulations. While most political organizations and parties in Bolzano are organized along ethnic lines, professional associations such as the chambers of commerce, industrial, and trade associations transcend linguistic divisions, emphasizing economic interests over ethnic identities. Within these associations, cooperation among language groups is seamless, with leadership roles often rotating between ethnicities on a voluntary basis, promoting equitable representation [6 p. 35]. While economic elites lead in fostering cross-linguistic collaboration, the dependence of political elites on the public administration's role as a distributor of resources has, to some extent, hindered further societal integration in Bolzano [17 p. 385].

The framework for economic development in both Bolzano and the Aosta Valley is enshrined in their Special Statutes, which devolve specific powers from the central government. Notably, Articles 69–75 of the Trentino-Alto Adige Autonomous Statute delineate the provincial government's economic and administrative rights, affirming its authority to allocate resources and implement localized economic policies [21].

Asimilar economic development pattern is observed in the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley, where post-World War II reforms under its Special Statute have conferred considerable economic benefits through the decentralization of powers. Despite its relatively small population of approximately 120,000, the Aosta Valley enjoys a robust budget, enabled by its natural resources and geographic position bordering Switzerland and France. Unlike South Tyrol, the Aosta

Valley has experienced fewer sociopolitical divisions rooted in language differences. Although the proportion of French speakers has gradually declined, economic development—particularly in tourism and small-scale industries—has significantly enhanced regional prosperity. This growth has enabled local authorities to effectively reallocate resources to municipalities, thereby improving the welfare of residents [14, p. 145].

The effective implementation of autonomy in the Province of Bolzano and the Aosta Valley has played a critical role in the economic development of these regions, which host significant linguistic minority populations. Retaining a substantial portion of locally collected taxes allows these regional governments to independently fund essential programs and services, enhancing their economic resilience and development.

To address ongoing discussions around expanding autonomous powers, recent Italian government decisions have mandated that 90% of tax revenue in South Tyrol be allocated directly to the province's accounts, rather than being routed through the Ministry of Finance and then redistributed. This change enables more efficient financial management and enhances the region's self-sufficiency. Unlike other regions—including those with special status, which are required to allocate any budget surplus to deficit regions—both South Tyrol and the Aosta Valley are permitted to retain surplus funds, strengthening their financial autonomy. As a result, these two regions not only rank among Italy's wealthiest but are also among the most prosperous self-governing territories in Europe.

Conclusions. This study highlights key mechanisms for the preservation of linguistic minorities in the Province of Bolzano and the Aosta Valley. It examines historical demographic shifts, the impact of changing regimes, and legislative developments affecting these communities. Moreover,

it investigates economic policies that support regional stability. The cases of Bolzano and Aosta Valley illustrate a successful model of balancing autonomy with integration, where comprehensive legislative frameworks and systems of proportional representation have fostered both linguistic diversity and economic vitality. This model offers valuable insights into how protecting minority languages can promote social cohesion and prosperity, providing a replicable framework for other multiethnic societies. The Autonomous Statute of the Province of Bolzano/South Tyrol (1972) and the Autonomous Statute of the Aosta Valley (1948) provided a comprehensive framework for safeguarding and promoting the unique linguistic and cultural identities of these regions. Additionally, Italy's legislative advancements in the 1990s and early 2000s, focused on the protection of linguistic minorities, expanded the opportunities and rights for minority groups in these two regions, further reinforcing their distinct cultural and linguistic heritage. The autonomy granted to the Province of Bolzano and the Aosta Valley under their respective Special Statutes has significantly bolstered their economic development, setting these regions apart as models of self-governance and fiscal management in Italy. By retaining a substantial proportion of locally collected tax revenues and receiving additional financial transfers from the central government, these provinces have achieved a high degree of fiscal autonomy.

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Особливості захисту та функціонування мовних меншин у провінції Больцано та регіоні Валле-д'Аоста в Італії

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Італійські регіони зі спеціальним статусом, зокрема, провінція Больцано Автономного регіону Трентіно-Альто-Адідже/Южно-Сіцилія та Автономний регіон Валле-д'Аоста в Італії, сприймаються європейськими науковцями як найбільш ефективна модель вирішення міжмовних та етнічних питань та найкращий приклад примирення між різними мовними групами, що в кінцевому підсумку призводить населення регіонів до кращого та взаєморозуміння, поваги та подальшого процвітання регіонів. У дослідженні розглядаються особливості функціонування мовних меншин у провінції Больцано регіону Трентіно-Альто-Адідже/Південний Тироль та регіоні Валле-д'Аоста. У фокусі дослідження - основні законодавчі акти Італійської Республіки щодо захисту німецької, ладинської та французької мовних меншин Італії, історичні передумови такого захисту, а також політичний процес покращення статусу меншин у цих регіонах. У статті описано основні законодавчі гарантії, надані регіонам для сприяння захисту мовних меншин та пом'якшення міжетнічних проблем. Дослідження охоплює основні форми функціонування німецької, ладинської та французької мовних меншин у регіонах, основні політичні суперечки щодо процесу децентралізації.

Це дослідження було підтримане «Стипендіальним грантом для запрошених професорів та дослідників з України» від Університету Мілано-Біокка і проводилося на факультеті соціології та соціальних наук. Значну допомогу в написанні статті надала професор Марина Каллоні, яка керувала стипендією, а також професор Дженс Воелк з Університету Тренто, який допомагав у написанні статті.

Ключові слова: мовні меншини, захист мовних меншин, Італія, автономні регіони, Автономна провінція Больцано, Автономний регіон Валле-д'Аоста.