

# A Community at the Heart of Europe



# A Community at the Heart of Europe:

*Slovenes in Italy and the  
Challenges of the Third  
Millennium*

Edited by

Norina Bogatec and Zaira Vidau

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## FOREWORD

The aim of this publication on the Slovene national community in Italy is to provide the general public with an opportunity to learn about the cultural, linguistic and national characteristics related to the history of the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (Furlanija - Julijska krajina). Our aim is to offer a systematic and detailed exposition and interpretation of the distinctive aspects of this region, which, due to its very unique position in the heart of Europe, represents a remarkable example of a multicultural and multilingual European society. Having evolved from a peripheral region and border area between western and eastern Europe into a region marked by positive European integration and cross-border cooperation, this area can also serve as a model of socio-political transformation.

As a historical national minority, the Slovenes in Italy are fully involved in this process of transition and development. The experiences and circumstances which had marked the minority until the end of the 1980s are described in *The Submerged Community. An A to Ž of the Slovenes in Italy*, a book by our colleague, researcher Pavel Stranj, who passed away in his prime. His work offers a general overview and a comprehensive and in-depth social analysis of the life of the Slovene national community in Italy during the mentioned period. In writing this monograph, we were driven by the desire to examine the position of the Slovenes in Italy following the great geopolitical changes that have taken place in Europe since the beginning of the 1990s.

This task required the joint efforts of the members of our editorial board, consisting of researchers of ethnic and border studies of the Slovenski raziskovalni inštitut (SLORI, Slovene Research Institute) in Trieste (Trst), the Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja (INV, Institute for Ethnic Studies) in Ljubljana, the Univerza na Primorskem (UP, University of Primorska) in Koper/Capodistria, and the Università di Udine (University of Udine), as well as publishing experts and representatives of the Italian majority and other national and linguistic historical minorities.

Our project came to fruition through the participation of renowned authors from various disciplines who have contributed their papers on various aspects of the Slovene national community in Italy. These following chapters provide their interpretations, personal views and

observations. The texts are based on recent and updated information referenced in the bibliography.

The aim of this book is thus to explore the developmental dynamics of the Slovene national community in Italy from the fall of the Berlin Wall, through the democratisation of the Republic of Slovenia and its subsequent accession to the European Union. Specific attention is devoted to the socio-economic changes seen by the Slovene national community in Italy over the past twenty-five years, i.e. the changes brought about by the new political circumstances related to local and international developments and by the new challenges facing the community within its social environment.

What emerges is an image of a lively and vibrant, although small in size, community experiencing the advantages and disadvantages of modern society and striving for political strategies and measures that would help solve specific issues related to its minority status.

In the introduction to this publication entitled “*The Unbearable Lightness*” of *Minority-ness and the Slovenes in Italy*, Milan Bufon offers his reflections on the geopolitical and socio-economic situation of the Slovene national community in Italy, which has been subject to continuous changes, especially in terms of social structure and inter-ethnic relations. The Slovenes in Italy live in a region of social and cultural contact. This is a community tending towards localism and bearing traditional cultural characteristics, while at the same time naturally developing in the direction of socio-cultural cross-border integration between the neighbouring countries: Italy and Slovenia. The author expounds on the evolution of this cross-border region from a potential conflict zone into a space characterised by a growing and harmonious social convergence.

Part I of the publication consists of five articles which provide the reader with a general insight into the subject matter and background information serving to introduce the articles in Part II of the publication.

In the chapter entitled *The Slovene Community in Italy Between the Past and the Future*, Sara Brezigar defines the concept of a national minority. The author presents an overview of the development of interethnic relations between the Slovene national community and the Italian population in the present-day territory of Friuli Venezia Giulia, which in particular following World War I, has been marked by several phases of conflict. Brezigar describes how it was not until after the accession of Slovenia to the European Union, the enlargement of the Schengen Area and the introduction of a single currency, that the relations between the two countries normalised and the Italian population began showing a growing interest in the language, culture and the community of Slovenes living in Italy.

In the chapter *Between Clear and Cloudy Skies. A Brief Overview of the History of Slovenes in Italy*, Gorazd Bajc presents a historical outline of the Slovene national community in Italy in the post-war period, focusing primarily on the most significant historical events affecting the socio-political, legal, economic and financial status of the community, particularly following Slovenia's declaration of independence in 1991.

In the chapter *Slovenes in Italy: Settlement Area and Demographic Trends*, Devan Jagodic focuses on the topic of historical settlement and demographic erosion of the Slovene national community in Italy. Although the demographic estimates refer to the previous century, they clearly reflect the gradual reduction of the Slovene population in Italy. The author highlights the need to thoroughly examine the ethno-demographic structure of the Slovene community in Italy. The reason why this makes for a complex analysis lies mainly in the changing nature of the traditional ethno-linguistic boundary on account of various factors, such as growing spatial and social mobility and the development of inter-ethnic relations with mixed, multifaceted and hybrid identities.

In the context of the legal protection of the Slovene national community in Italy, novelties emerged at the turn of the 21st century, which expanded and supplemented the provisions originating from the post-war period, as explicated in the chapter entitled *Legal Framework for the Protection of the Slovene National Community in Italy*, authored by Zaira Vidau. The current legal framework allows for cultural autonomy, public use of the Slovene language, a school system with Slovene as the language of instruction, bilingual instruction and an independent organisational structure in the fields of economy and culture. The implementation of these rights is still limited by a wide range of political, bureaucratic and socio-economic barriers.

The article by Bojan Brezigar, constituting the chapter *European Standards for the Protection of Minorities and the Slovene Minority in Italy*, is the final chapter of the introductory overview of the Slovene community in Italy. The author presents the policies of the European institutions for the protection of minorities and their (modest) effect on the Slovene minority in Italy and points to the specific role of the institutions of the Slovenian minority in the framework of European cross-border co-operation programmes conducted between Italy and Slovenia.

Part II of the publication comprises ten articles by different authors, who offer their analyses of the Slovene national community in Italy from various aspects of social, political and economic life, with a specific emphasis on the period of the past twenty-five years.

For each community, mother tongue is an indicator not only of its level of vitality, but also of the level of its integration or assimilation within the dominant community. This is the central topic of the article by Devan Jagodic, Majda Kaučič-Baša and Roberto Dapit, entitled *Linguistic Situation of the Slovenes in Italy*. The authors provide an outline of the socio-linguistic position of the Slovene national community in Italy and highlight the particularities distinguishing the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia (Gorica) from the province of Udine (Videm or Viden). Their exploration shows that the position of the Slovene language in Italy is rather weak as it is constantly exposed to intense pressures of the official language, Italian. Nevertheless, their study does reveal a certain degree of progress and the formation of new development perspectives on the position of the Slovene language and acquisition of new Slovene speakers as a result of the European integration processes.

In the article *Narratives of Identity of the Slovenes in Italy*, Susanna Pertot undertakes an analysis of how the Slovenes in Italy define themselves and how they are perceived by others, highlighting the changes in the perception of their collective identity occurring since the post-war period. The analysis shows how identity negotiation tends towards hybridisation and coexists with the identity of *zamejec* (lit. “a Slovene living beyond the border”, i.e., a Slovene living abroad) as an identity necessary for the very existence of a minority.

The Slovene national community in Italy possesses an intricate network of research centres, libraries, and institutions which conduct Slovene-language activities in education and training of various levels and areas of interest. This is the topic of the chapter entitled *Slovene-Language Education, Training and Research in Italy* by Norina Bogatec. The author emphasises that a growing interest in Slovene language and culture on the part of non-Slovene families has led to the creation of culturally and linguistically mixed classes in schools with Slovene as the language of instruction in Italy and has consequently also brought about new challenges for schooling and education in the minority language.

The chapter entitled *From Yesterday to Tomorrow: Slovene Creativity Through the Prism of Culture* by Nataša Sosič, Martina Kafol and Nives Cossutta provides an overview of the productive and diversified activities of the Slovenes in Italy, which span various domains of culture and arts ranging from theatre to cinema, from literature to music with particular emphasis on choral singing – from fine arts to the activity of preserving cultural heritage. These activities are conducted not only at the professional level, but also within amateur societies.

In his article entitled *Slovene Sports in Italy Since 1991. From a Uniform Whole to a Fragile Structure and Media Construct*, Peter Verč deals with a complex relationship between the desire for competitive success of Slovene sports associations in Italy on one hand, and their mission of promoting the use of the Slovene language on the other. As concluded by the author, that these two goals are not always compatible, also due to a growing number of non-Slovene athletes in sports societies active within the Slovene national community. Verč therefore concludes that the concept of Slovene sports in Italy is discussed almost exclusively in the Slovene media in Italy.

In the chapter entitled *Slovenes in Italy and the Catholic Church Since 1991*, Tomaž Simčič offers a reflection on the state of affairs and primary challenges pertaining to the Slovene Catholic community in Italy. Drawing on the connection between the Church and the Slovene identity throughout the period of national revival, the author analyses the process of secularisation in the 20th century and the ongoing decline in religious practice since 1990. Nevertheless, the relative vitality of education, press and choral singing can still be perceived and, moreover, most families of the Slovene national community in Italy still opt for religious education classes at school.

The chapter entitled *Slovene Media of Mass Communication in Italy* by Igor Tuta focuses on Slovene-language publications in Italy, the role and meaning of the daily newspaper of the Slovene minority, other periodicals and radio and television programmes in Slovene, broadcast by both the Italian national public broadcasting company RAI and other radio stations. The article concludes with an overview of new forms of Slovene-language online media

Zaira Vidau's chapter *Political Participation of the Slovene National Community in Italy* presents the various instruments of political participation held by the Slovene national community in Italy. It focuses on the community's political representatives elected at local, provincial and national levels, their activities in political parties, various institutional representative and consultative bodies at the state level in Italy and Slovenia, at the regional and local levels in Friuli Venezia Giulia. Finally, it also provides an overview of the organisations of political representation of the Slovene minority.

The chapter entitled *Social Welfare Organisations and Services of the Slovene National Community in Italy* by Annamaria Carli Kalc offers an overview of the Slovene institutions active in the field of social welfare and solidarity in Italy. It provides an analysis on the basis of the response of social services to the requests for such services by members of the

Slovene national community. The author claims that Slovenes in Italy experience the same socio-economic conditions as the majority population and therefore also have the same needs. The only discriminant between the two communities is the Slovene language, which plays a fundamental role in communications related to the provision of various forms of assistance.

The article by Sara Brezigar entitled *Slovene National Community in Italy: Economy and Finance* examines the channels of financing and the economic activity of the Slovene national community in Italy. The Slovene minority has two main sources of financing: the Republic of Italy and the Republic of Slovenia. The author points out that the socio-economic situation of the Slovene national community in Italy was significantly improved by the flourishing of the social economy in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, the economy of the Slovene minority is a fully integrated one and does not differ from that of the majority.

The publication is rounded off by the contributions of four authors, members of the historical national and linguistic communities living in close proximity to the Slovenes in Italy: the Italian majority community, the Slovene population in Slovenia, the Friulian linguistic community in Friuli Venezia Giulia and the Italian national community in Slovenia and Croatia.

The title of the contribution by Patrizia Vascotto, who learned to speak Slovene and became fully involved in the Slovene national community in Trieste, is *Majorities Know the Minorities*. Inspired by the project conducted by the Slovenski raziskovalni inštitut, this title effectively summarises her experience as an Italian-speaking resident of Trieste.

In his contribution entitled *An External Perspective on the Slovene Minority Reality*, Jernej Zupančič critically discusses the relations between Slovenia and the Slovene national community in Italy. In his view, these relations are often limited due to the traditional linguistic and cultural approaches which are not in line with the contemporary development-oriented definitions of the Slovene identity.

*The Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia – The Crossroads of Europe* by William Cisilino is a testimony of relations between the Friulian and Slovene national communities in Italy. The author highlights the importance of mutual recognition and cooperation so as to facilitate the development of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the region.

The contribution by Nives Zudič Antonič entitled *Interethnic Coexistence as an Added Value and Opportunity for the Future* builds on the notion that knowledge of different cultures and languages is a basic need of a modern individual. For an effective development of historically

mixed areas such as the cross-border zone between Italy and Slovenia, special attention must be paid to intercultural relations.

The structure and contents of this publication are highly diversified as a result of a close and intense collaboration on the part of a wide range of experts. We therefore wish to thank the editorial board for their scientific contribution in the design of this publication, its help in selecting the contributing authors and the analysis/review of their papers. We would also like to thank the authors for their expertise and the diversity of the topics covered. Special thanks go to the reviewers who have contributed their suggestions to further improve the contents of this book. Further, we wish to thank the translators, proofreaders and graphic designers, who managed the linguistic and design aspects of the publication. Special thanks go to the management and colleagues of the Slovenski raziskovalni inštitut for their support in the implementation of this successful publishing project.

### **Notes on terminology**

The authors of the articles use different terminology denoting the Slovene national community in Italy and its members: the Slovene minority, Slovenes in Italy, the linguistic community, the Slovene national community. Terminological variations arise mainly from the diversity of the professional domains within which particular topics are addressed and partly also from the need for a more personally involved and comprehensible style. The editors followed the choices of individual authors.

The names of municipalities are given by their official names: a bilingual Italian/Slovene name where there is an official bilingual denomination, or a monolingual Italian name accompanied with the Slovene name (within brackets) where there is no official denomination in Slovene, for example: San Dorligo della Valle/Dolina; Ronchi dei Legionari (Ronke). The names of other places are given in Italian accompanied (within brackets) by the Slovene name when they appear in each chapter for the first time.

The names of institutions, organisations, societies and associations operating within the Slovene national community in Italy are given in Slovene; when they appear for the first time in each chapter, they are accompanied by the acronym in Slovene, along with the English translation and the associated website (within brackets), for example: Slovenski raziskovalni inštitut (SLORI, Slovene Research Institute, [www.slori.org](http://www.slori.org)).

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## INTRODUCTION

# “UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS” OF MINORITY- NESS AND THE SLOVENES IN ITALY

MILAN BUFON

The editorial board of this publication has invited me to contribute my thoughts on the problematics of the Slovenes in Italy. This is one of the topics upon which I have written more frequently in the past – in my present work, I focus on minorities and the Slovenes in Italy in the context of the problematics of border and multicultural regions within which minorities are “emerging”, “evolving” and “dying”. This wider framework of the so-called social and cultural contact enables us to perceive individual minorities not as separate and closed constructs. In fact, they have a lot more in common than we normally imagine. To paraphrase Tolstoy, we can say that all minorities resemble one another not only in happy, but also in unhappy times, and that in fact there is nothing particularly exceptional or unusual about their specific position or dynamics.

As is the case in other similar places, the Slovene-Italian “contact” space represents a sort of conglomerate of various originally unified cultural spaces – in terms of the cultural landscape and way of life – in which different ethnic and linguistic communities coexisted in considerable harmony. It was the state-generating processes that later divided this area into several separate political entities, thus hindering the normal flow of communication and instigating numerous international and inter-ethnic conflict situations. Through subsequent social and economic developments, this area opened up to heavy international transit and local exchange, which, however, does not take place harmoniously between its individual parts. In its more peripheral and politically sensitive parts in particular, the “normalisation” of international relations (in this case, the “milestones” of such normalisation are the Osimo Treaty and the entry of Slovenia into the European Union) has not yet “gained ground” or activated all the necessary mechanisms of strengthening cross-border integration. This is

why individual localities differ in the intensity of the change in the Slovene minority's position as well as in the intensity of cross-border communication. This situation can best be explained by the fact that the area under consideration lacks adequate institutional and infrastructural measures that would facilitate and promote cross-border communication; for example, establishment of a local association of border municipalities or a joint centre for coordination, planning, information and promotion. Certainly, local and regional cross-border communication has also been suppressed by the centralist and standardisation-oriented focus of the states on both sides of the present "internal" Schengen border, which has in fact, since 1991, failed to develop any innovative cross-border development policies. However, the answer to the initial question could also lie in the fact that in the past, local and linguistic communities coexisting in peripheral environments managed to maintain their characteristics precisely because they had relatively little communication with each other, and that this characteristic of "self-preservation-oriented peripherality", which is otherwise quite typical of the Alpine space and of all border areas along the "old" or "closed" borders, will continue to mark at least a part of the area in question. After all, enhanced localism can also be one of the possible forms of maintaining social and cultural diversity and pluralism.

If in the 1970s and 1980s, the Slovene minority in Italy took on the important function of an economic mediator between two different socio-political states and systems, since the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the declaration of independence of Slovenia, and the unification of political and socio-economic conditions on both sides of the border, this role has certainly lost its meaning – as symbolised by the collapse of the Tržaška kreditna banka (TKB, Trieste Credit Bank) – and shifted from an international-transit to the regional and socio-cultural level more fitting to the minority. New perspectives and tasks in the field of cross-border social and cultural integration and networking are particularly important for the border areas characterised by long-standing social and cultural cohesion. In such places, the local reality has long been overtaking inter-governmental politics and has formed a sort of "spontaneous" and functionally interdependent cross-border area. Also characteristic of such places is the fact that such forms of cross-border cooperation were (and to a certain extent continue to be) largely upheld by minorities, although they receive no particular recognition or support for this "natural" but no less important function of theirs. On the contrary: border minorities and the Slovenes in Italy are often treated on the one hand as a kind of an "alien" within the majority social environment and therefore fail to gain the status

of an equal partner in the planning of regional social development, while on the other hand they are perceived by the kin state as a kind of a folkloric “remnant” at most worth an occasional visit and some moral support in preserving its “diligent patriotism”.

What is all too often forgotten in dealing with national and ethnic minorities as if they were completely static in their social and spatial situation and “sentenced” to the eternal reproduction of their own (past) images in future times, are the dynamic and complex changes brought about by far-reaching social transformations and interethnic relations. In fact, the situation is far different: just like any other living organism, minorities live in a constant process of transformation, especially in terms of their social structure and inter-ethnic relations. This is mainly brought about by the modernisation of the social structure, which presents minorities with the dilemma of whether they should become increasingly integrated into modern society or be mobilised within the context of their own cultural characteristics. In most cases, it seems that the modernisation of the minority society involves a sort of synthesis of the two possible extremes. The process of social modernisation has made a decisive contribution to an increase in the educational and socio-economic levels of the minority population, as well as to an increase in leisure time, the spread of communication resources and information exchange. In peripheral areas, these changes have often occurred so rapidly (in terms of the transition from an agrarian to a tertiary society) that they have not led to a pronounced acculturation of the minority population as is typical for ethnically mixed urban centres, but have even contributed to the minority population’s gaining certain additional elements for mobilisation in favour of its original culture.

Nonetheless, from the aspect of ethnicity, the phase of “modernisation” seems to be the most critical one, as it leads on one hand, to a demographic erosion of the autochthonous Slovene settlement area and consequently to a disintegration of the entire cultural landscape, and on the other hand, to the spread of the minority population into the non-autochthonous territory, which in itself comes with various consequences. Depopulation of the autochthonous Slovene territory is particularly alarming also due to the fact that the normative protective measures taken by the state authorities in favour of national minorities are often based on the principle of territoriality; moreover, they are often valid only for the part of the historical settlement area where the minority shows sufficient consistency. Even for expatriate members of the minority, this territory certainly maintains the important role of identification, even though withdrawal from one’s autochthonous territory often means the loss of

one's own cultural background and a step towards assimilation. However, the emigrant experience, along with the discovery of ethnic "pluralism", can contribute to the emigrant's recognition of their own ethnic and cultural "diversity" and thus to the strengthening of their national awareness.

The growth of social and spatial mobility also brings about a significant change in the appearance of the formerly clear ethnic boundary around which a new social phenomenon of the so-called "ethnic continuum" is now being formed. In the course of its history, this ethnic boundary has undeniably experienced continual changes and corrections, but had remained fairly constant in its basic contours until the rise of "modernisation", which significantly reduced the social "distance" between the majority and minority groups. Clearly, the notion of an autochthonous minority settlement area has remained more or less unchanged, but this territory is no longer delimited by an "actual" ethnic line. Instead, it exists merely as a "cultural dimension", within which the most diverse new problems related to ethnic definition and self-determination are emerging. These new conditions therefore increasingly call for an exploration of the reality facing the minority in terms of studying the socio-cultural and economic-spatial integration processes and their simultaneous monitoring and regulation. For minorities, all this opens up not only new opportunities, but also new challenges, especially in the reorganisation of their traditional forms of operation and in their adaptation so as to serve new functions. Experiences from this and other similar border areas across Europe show that the actual intensity of cross-border relations depends not only on general international conditions but mainly on two local factors:

- the functional organisation of the border area itself or its adaptability to the needs of the border population in terms of providing basic functions in the field of supply, employment, education, community living and leisure activities, and
- the level of social and cultural integration of the border population.

In this respect, ethnically mixed border areas play a unique role: unlike in the past, when they represented a potential conflict zone between individual countries, today they are being recognised as areas of harmonious social intertwining and spill-over, thus bringing precious elements of inter-ethnic and international coexistence also into the eastern part of Central Europe, where the abolishment of political boundaries is still rather problematic. This situation has triggered some almost paradoxical tendencies:

- in multicultural border areas, those social environments which have in recent past experienced the worst traumas due to the separation of stable functional units are given the greatest opportunities for developing into integrated cross-border regions;
- due to various still open political issues arising from past war and post-war events, the local functional socio-economic and socio-cultural cross-border integration is attained more quickly and more easily than the institutional socio-political cross-border integration;
- the peripheral and less urbanised contact areas which in the past maintained relations of a certain “commonplace coexistence” with their neighbours through modest interactions are now the ones which on the one hand, are most interested in increasing the institutional cross-border integration in order to attract additional socio-economic development potential; while on the other hand, in these contact zones, the growing socio-cultural contacts with the neighbourhood, which necessarily arise from these processes, are also the ones causing the greatest resistance.

While it is true that the majority or dominant groups, irrespective of their political attitude towards the local and minority groups, cannot deprive these groups of their potential integration role, it is also true that the possibility of actual implementation of this role is still heavily dependent on the institutional and general social recognition of the local reality and the development of state-supported (re)integration policies. Even though tertiarisation and globalisation of social relations have provided the environments of smaller/minor traditional cultures with new development opportunities in the economic sphere – and often it is precisely the once marginal European areas which today show an above-average gross domestic product per capita – it is undoubtedly also a fact that the “opening up” of these minority and once closed and “safe” socio-cultural and socio-economic “mini-systems” brings about new challenges and potential risks. The process of industrialisation unilaterally forced minority communities to modernise, however it was precisely the selective and hierarchical socio-spatial nature characteristic of industrial societies that “cut” the peripheral areas “off” from developmental currents, thus transforming them into safe “shelters” for minority cultural communities. On the other hand, the contemporary open and non-hierarchical tertiarised socio-spatial organisation no longer provides traditional cultural landscapes and minorities with such “security”. Reducing the social distance between dominant and minority groups results in the expansion of ethnically and linguistically mixed structures, and radically changes the traditional

concepts of “closed” identity and affiliation which were the goal for both majority or dominant and minority societies.

Just like other minorities, during the period of the formation of modern unitary states and classical nationalism (1789-1945), the Slovenes in Italy were a potential factor for an interstate conflict; then in the period of the European integration processes (1945-2005) they became a potential factor of interstate integration; and finally, in the period of the concurrent establishment of global and local tendencies/aspirations (after 2005), they became a factor of regional social integration. The “unbearable lightness” of minority-ness originates from the simple fact that in their main contours and developmental dynamics, all minorities are related, but due to their individual internal and external relations and structural discrepancies, each of them has become so complex that its boundaries or its specific numerical dimensions can no longer be clearly delineated. The elimination of social and political divisions, which they themselves strived for, has led to a perhaps unexpected “side effect”: it has eliminated the very concept of “minorities” and thus also their “special” situation. What is most worrying, however, is that both external (national) and internal (minority) factors tend to simply dismiss this transformed situation with “unbearable ease”, and, for example, still behave as if the Osimo Treaty was to be signed once more and as if the agreement on the equivalent division between “the white” and “the red” reached (in the kin state) at end of the 1980s was a permanent achievement. In the international context, the matter may be comparable to the 1976 Helsinki Accords between the then Eastern and Western Blocs. Who should allow themselves to be consumed by this vacant gaze fixed on the past?

# **PART I**

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE SLOVENE COMMUNITY IN ITALY BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

SARA BREZIGAR

### **Abstract**

The Slovene community in Italy is a national minority formed as a result of the historical processes of shifting state borders and represents a part of the Slovene nation living in the neighbouring Italian state. In the first half of the 20th century, the relations between the Slovene community and the Italian population in the present-day region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (Furlanija - Julijska krajina) were severely strained. This was a direct consequence of the rise of fascism. Even after the Second World War, normalisation of the relations between the two communities remained an impossible undertaking due to ideological differences between Yugoslavia and Italy. At the same time, the establishment of the state border began sharpening the differences between the Slovenes living in Yugoslavia and those living in Friuli Venezia Giulia. It was not until Slovenia's entry into the European Union, the establishment of the Schengen Area and adoption of a common currency that the preconditions for normalising the relations between Slovenia and Italy, as well as between the two aforementioned communities, were finally created. Today, the Slovene community in Italy experiences an increased interest on the part of the Italian population with regards to the Slovene language, culture and the Slovene community, which in itself poses new challenges.

**Keywords:** Slovene community in Italy, interethnic relations, European Union, Schengen Area, Second World War, fascism, language



## **Introduction: Slovenes in Italy – a National Minority**

The Slovene community in Friuli Venezia Giulia (Furlanija - Julijska krajina) can be defined as a national minority, which is characterised by being smaller in number than the rest of the population of the country, by assuming a non-dominant position, by possessing ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics different from those of the rest of the population and by, even implicitly, maintaining a shared concern to preserve their culture, traditions, religion or language (Capotorti c. by Cofelice 2016).<sup>1</sup> The Slovene community in Italy is numerically smaller than the majority population of Italian origin, not only on the national but also on the regional, provincial, and partly on the municipal level.<sup>2</sup> Slovenes therefore represent a minority population also within local communities of the territory they inhabit. This means that as a community, Slovenes in Italy are in a minority position in most of the decision-making processes in this area – in politics, economy, culture, and regional development in general. In this respect, the Slovene community in Italy differs from certain similar minorities, such as, for example, the Germans in South Tyrol, who are the majority population in the part of the territory they inhabit, and thus in fact hold a dominant position. Thus, the Slovene community in Italy is a minority in three respects: at the regional, provincial and local, i.e. the municipal level.

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<sup>1</sup> A similar attempt at defining the concept of minority was made by Deschênes (1985, par. 181 c. by Roter 2008, 46) in the study entitled “Promotion, Protection and Restoration of Human Rights at the National, Regional and International Levels”. He defines a minority as a “group of citizens of a State, constituting a numerical minority and in a non-dominant position in that State, endowed with ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which differ from those of the majority of the population, having a sense of solidarity with one another, motivated, if only implicitly, by a collective will to survive, and whose aim is to achieve equality with the majority in fact and in law” (Deschênes 1985, par. 181 c. by Roter 2008, 46). For a more detailed explanation of individual segments of definitions or criteria (number, non-dominance, etc.), cf. Roter (2007).

<sup>2</sup> In some municipalities, Slovenes form the majority population. Such municipalities include, for example, Savogna d’Isonzo/Sovodnje ob Soči, San Floriano del Collio/Števerjan and Doberdò del Lago/Doberdob in the province of Gorizia (Gorica); and Monrupino/Repentabor and Sgonico/Zgonik in the province of Trieste (Trst). It should also be noted that population censuses in Italy do not contain data on the national affiliation of individuals, which is why the ethnicity of the majority population in a particular municipality can only be deduced indirectly on the basis of the language used by the municipal administration and the nationality of the elected representatives in municipal councils.

The Slovene community in Italy is one of the classic national minorities that can be defined as those parts of nations which, due to particular circumstances of historical development, live outside the borders of their national state as special communities in a predominantly compact territory (Petrič 1977, 91). Such communities were formed as a result of interethnic conflicts in Europe. The border between Slovenia and Italy is a result of the historical processes that shaped the border so that a part of the Slovene nation remained in the neighbouring country.<sup>3</sup> One must emphasise that in the past, the Italian majority population in fact perceived the Slovene community as part of the neighbouring nation which “had remained” in its own country, and that to a certain extent such belief is still held today.

### **Perceptions of Slovene-Italian Relations**

Ever since the beginning of the twentieth century, the gap between the Slovene community in Italy and the majority population has been steadily increasing. The first half of the 20th century was marked by the rapid deterioration of relations between the Slovene community and the majority population of Italian descent. The two-decades-long policy of fascist denationalisation had significantly reduced the scope, size and influence of the Slovene community in this area, and became deeply entrenched in its collective memory. This policy resulted in “Italians” remaining etched as enemies of the Slovene nation in the historical memory of the Slovene national community. If fascism created a negative perception of “Italians” by the Slovene community, the Slovene community itself in turn tried to ward off the negative connotations equating Slovenes with “uneducated peasants” throughout most of the twentieth century (Fonda 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b). After World War II, the Slovene community, like many other minorities in Central Europe, e.g., the Hungarians in Austria or the Germans in Slovakia and Hungary – had to face an additional negative connotation: when Central Europe was divided by the Iron Curtain and a large part of the population still remembered the horrors of World War II, the Italian majority perceived the Slovene community as part of the nation

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<sup>3</sup> It should be added that a part of the Italian nation also remained in the neighbouring country of Yugoslavia, and later in Slovenia and Croatia. When focusing on the coinciding of the ethnic and political borders in the Upper Adriatic, Bufon (2010, 21) states that the historical destiny of the Upper Adriatic was essentially determined by the relationship between the ethnic border and the political border, which do not overlap in this area and have in different periods run either perpendicular or parallel to each other.

belonging to the second block, i.e. to the enemy camp. The Italian majority thus looked upon the Slovene community with mistrust and fear, which did not change much even after Yugoslavia adopted a policy of nonalignment. There are several studies (Fonda 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b; Komac 1987; Jurić Pahor 2000) which confirm the problematic nature of the relationship between the two communities in the second half of the 20th century.

Research studies from the 1980s (Fonda 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b; Komac 1987) thus show that members of the Slovene community tended to adopt a negative self-perception, one reinforced by a sense of endangerment due to the numerical inferiority of their community. Members of the Slovene minority even tended to take on the “identity” of the victim persecuted by the “evil” Italians (Fonda 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b). Komac (1987, 38) finds a mentality of defence one of the basic characteristics of the Slovene community in Italy. The collective mentality of defence of the Slovene community was examined in more detail by Jurić Pahor (2000, 284-332), who describes it as symmetrical and external. Such a defensive stance is characterised by an externalisation of one's own powerlessness in the face of an outside enemy: through black-and-white dualism, members of one group see themselves as “good” while perceiving the members of the other group as a threat. The Slovene community thus denies and hides its own negative aspects and redirects them to a common, actual or imaginary, enemy (Jurić Pahor 2000, 284-332). Such a defensive stance on the part of the Slovene community is symmetrical in that it suppresses individuality and differentiation, represses opposition and conflict, and recognises only an absolute collective identity (Jurić Pahor 2000, 284-332).

Much like the Slovene community, the Italian majority population, too, tends to use this black-and-white imagery by taking the credit for all that is good and ascribing to the Slovene national minority all that is bad (Fonda 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b). In this way, the majority population fulfils its need for superiority, as it cannot, under the given conditions, seem to form a solid national identity and escape the feeling of being endangered (Fonda 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b).

### **Increasing and Reducing the Differences**

The effect of fascism on the Slovene community and that of the post-war period and communism on the majority population of Italian origin was what prevented the normalisation of relations between the two communities throughout the greater part of the 20th century. Due to the mentioned

historical circumstances, a greater part of the 20th century witnessed an “artificial” deepening of the differences between the majority and minority populations, albeit only in terms of strengthening the perception of these differences, also due to ties kept between the minority and the Slovene nation living in Yugoslavia. The post-war period saw a widening of the gap not only between the minority and the majority population in Italy, but also between the Slovenes living in Italy and those living within the borders of their kin state.

Since the Slovene community in Italy experienced a different economic, political and administrative system compared to that of their kin state, the differences between the Slovenes in Trieste (Trst) and the Slovenes in Ljubljana increased throughout the entire post-war era, regardless of the fact that these two communities spoke the same language and celebrated the same day of culture. These differences are most clearly evident in the development of language, as, in its adaptation to the political and administrative environment, the Slovene community in Italy had to enrich their mother tongue with terms not known or used in their kin state. Through the processes of socialisation and acculturation, the difference in the economic, political and administrative systems affected not only the language, but also the cognitive models, values and other characteristics of the members of the Slovene community in Italy. Therefore, the moment of the establishment of the border between Yugoslavia and Italy triggered specific processes which would increase the differences and gap between the minority population and its kin state.

At the end of the 20th century, both trends – i.e., the increasing distance between the majority and the minority populations in Italy, and between the Slovene minority and Slovenes in Slovenia – experienced a radical turn in the opposite direction. What followed was the start of a process of convergence between all three populations, with the differences between them beginning to fade. In the late 1980s, Europe witnessed the commencement of processes which began to slowly but tirelessly transform the appearance of the Slovene minority in Italy, its role and position, both in relation to the kin nation and the majority population of Italian descent.

Today, due to greater cross-border mobility of the population, a Slovene from Gorizia (Gorica) is much less different to a Slovene from Kranj than they were 30, 40 or 50 years ago. Despite the fact that for decades the development of the Slovene language in Friuli Venezia Giulia was different than that spoken in the central part of the kin state, they both

speak the same mother tongue<sup>4</sup> and find it easy to communicate in Slovene. They both live in the same political system – in a democratic republic. Both are citizens of a European Union member state as well as European citizens, voting for the same European Parliament and being represented by the same European Commission. As the policies of the European Union promote the reduction of economic and social differences of the population between individual European regions, their social and economic situation is becoming more and more similar. Also contributing greatly to the reduction of such differences are the (European) policies and programs of cross-border cooperation.<sup>5</sup> After the fall of communism and Slovenia's declaration of independence, the Slovene community in Italy was no longer an amputated part of the "hostile" political system, the distance between the Slovene community and the majority population of Italian origin began to lessen. With the previous elements of differentiation having disappeared, today, a member of the Slovene community is distinguished from a member of the majority Italian population primarily by language and culture. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in terms of culture, creolisation is taking place, as the processes of adaptation to the environment and socialisation of the younger generations of the Slovene community have created a new culture, where the traditional Slovene cultural elements are mixed with the cultural elements of the Italian environment.

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<sup>4</sup> Although they both speak their mother tongue, it should be noted that due to the different administrative and political systems in Yugoslavia and Italy and due to the very existence of the border between the kin nation and the minority, the development of language (in terms of linguistic code) in the kin state and in the minority has become increasingly differentiated. The processes of bringing the kin nation and minority communities closer after Slovenia's declaration of independence could not stop this development, while the processes of reducing the differences between the minority (Slovene) and the majority (Italian) populations have increased the influence of Italian on the Slovene language in the border area and, in some respects, may even have strengthened the assimilation of the Slovene minority, especially by continuously lowering the standards of the expected knowledge of the Slovene language in Italy, for example, in schools with Slovene as the language of instruction. It is true that today a Slovene from Gorizia differs less from a Slovene from Kranj than 30, 40 or 50 years ago, but their Slovene language differs more than it did 30, 40 or 50 years ago. This situation was also revealed by the study focusing on the evaluation of the state and development perspectives of the Slovene national minority in Italy (Brezigar 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. chapter "*The Unbearable Lightness*" of *Minority-ness and the Slovenes in Italy*.

The entry of Slovenia into the European Union, adoption of the common currency and later the entry into the common Schengen Area all contributed to the “normalisation” of the relations between Slovenia and Italy (Bufon 2008, 9)<sup>6</sup> and further accelerated the process of convergence of the three communities – the Slovene minority, the Italian majority in Italy, and the Slovene majority in Slovenia.<sup>7</sup> These processes also fast-tracked the bringing together of all three of the aforementioned communities with the Italian minority in Slovenia.<sup>8</sup> It was the establishment of the Schengen Area and the subsequent abolition of the (internal) border between Slovenia and Italy that had a significant psychological effect in terms of creating a single or common border area. The changing appearance of the border area thus demonstrates that the abolition of the border did not only serve a bureaucratic function, but has triggered many consequences of spatial and sociological dimensions. The streamlined movement of goods and people between the two countries is at the heart of the phenomenon of cross-border residential mobility – a process in which people living by the border decide to buy real estate and move to the other side of the border while maintaining strong and lasting ties with the previous environment (Jagodici 2011). According to Jagodici (Jagodici 2011, 61), such a process is taking place also along the Italian-Slovene border, as a result of the suburbanisation of Trieste, i.e. a gradual expansion of this Italian city into the rural hinterland of the Karst (Kras in Slovene, Carso in Italian) in the Republic of Slovenia (Jagodici 2011, 61). It is a process which changes not only the appearance of the Karst, but also pushes the ethnic boundary between the Slovene and Italian components into the Slovene part of the Karst, which was not traditionally inhabited by the Italian population.

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<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Bufon (2010, 21) points out that neither of the two states has managed to develop any new initiatives in the field of institutional integration, they have both failed to promote the integration of border territories through their foreign policies, and are therefore lagging behind social changes at the political and institutional levels.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that these historical factors have accelerated the convergence of the Italian minority in Slovenia with all three mentioned communities and thus, of course, transformed the relations not only between the majority and minority populations, but also between the two minorities.

<sup>8</sup> This process of convergence between all four communities is mainly reflected in the changed nature of relations between communities themselves and between individual members of different ethnic communities. For a more in-depth explanation of the change in the role of the border between Slovenia and Italy and the dynamics of European integration processes in this area, cf. Bufon (2008).