CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A ‘MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY’: THE SPECIAL STATUS OF THE LADIN VALLEYS

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I. Introduction

Being a ‘minority within a minority’ could be an advantage for the smallest ethnic group in South Tyrol but also a disadvantage if they are not able to obtain the same recognition as the ‘host minority’. The Ladins in South Tyrol, in comparison with Ladins living in other Italian provinces, have obtained some real advantages, owing to the fact that the numerically stronger host minority has considerable political influence and regulative powers in its hands.

Ladin is a neo-Latin or Rhaeto-Romance language spoken in the Central and Eastern Alpine Regions. It is divided into Romansh, spoken in the Canton of Grisons (Switzerland), Ladin, spoken in the Italian Dolomite Valleys, and Friulian, spoken in the Provinces of Gorizia, Pordenone and Udine (Region Friuli-Venezia Giulia) as well as in the Region of Veneto. In the Dolomite Valleys, the Val Badia and the Gardena Valley belong to the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen and therefore enjoy more rights than Livinallongo and Cortina d’Ampezzo, which come under the Province of Belluno in Veneto (Region with Ordinary Statute), or the Fassa Valley, which belongs to the Autonomous Province of Trento. The legal status of the Ladins differs considerably from each other depending on the province they live in. Out of a total population of some 38,000 people in all five Ladin Valleys, approximately 30,000 speak Ladin. The majority of them live in the Province of Bolzano/Bozen, where the Ladin population in eight municipalities has been increasing steadily over the last 40 years.¹

Already with the first Autonomy Statute for Trentino-South Tyrol in 1948, the Ladins of the Provinces of Bolzano/Bozen and Trento were given rights, although different from the German-speaking minority, such as the teaching of Ladin in primary schools, Ladin place names and the enhancement of Ladin culture in

¹ See <http://www.regione.taa.it/giunta/enti_locali/index_enti_locali.htm>. The relevant municipalities are St. Ulrich/Ortisei/Ultižej, St. Christina in Gröden/S. Cristina Valgardena/S. Cristina Gherdeina, Wolkenstein/Selva/Sëlva, Abtei/Badia/Badia, Corvara, Wengen/La Valle/La Val, Enneberg/Marebbe/Mareo and St. Martin in Thurn/San Martino Badia/St. Martin de Tor. In the Province of Trento, Ladins live in Campitello di Fassa, Canazei, Mazzin, Moena, Pozza di Fasa, Soraga and Vigo di Fassa. In the Province of Belluno, the municipalities of Livinallongo, Colle Santa Lucia and, historically, Rocca Pietore and Selva di Cadore are counted as part of the Ladin community.
general. With the reform of the Autonomy Statute in 1972 and 2001, a considerable enlargement of competences was ascribed. The use of the Ladin language in education and in public life is secured, as is the preservation and promotion of the language in the media and through cultural activities. The principle of ethnic representation is implemented in accordance with the ethnic proportionality system and representation in legislative and executive political bodies.

II. HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE LADINS IN ITALY

The Ladin-speaking area became part of the Roman Empire in the year 15 BC, when the Roman legions of Drusus and Tiberius conquered the Dolomites. Before the Romans conquered the area, the entire Alpine region had been under the influence of Celtic tribes such as the *Rhaeti*. The Romans introduced Latin, which started a process of radical language shift and mixture with the idioms spoken by the local population, which, by that time, was called Ladin or Rhaeto-Romance. It is possible that Ladin is the name that was given by their neighbours who heard them speak the language of the Romans. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the movements of Germanic peoples from north to south and *Veneti* from south to north changed the linguistic and geographical landscape of the Central and Eastern Alpine Region. After the process of Italianization and Germanization of these Alpine valleys, three language groups were left isolated from one another, namely the Romansh, Ladins and Friulians.

For more than 500 years, the Ladins and Friulians were ruled by the Habsburg Empire. In the period of Italian state-building, the Austro-Hungarian Empire lost Veneto (1866). The Ladin-speaking area remained part of Austria—with a short break between 1806 and 1813 when the territory fell to Bavaria—until the end of World War I. With the 1919 Peace Treaty of St. Germain and the annexation by Italy of South Tyrol and Trentino, a period of forced Italianization began, not only for the German-speaking population but also for the Ladins, especially when the democratic Italian government was replaced by the fascist regime in 1922. As a way of weakening the Ladin minority, Livinallongo and Cortina d’Ampezzo was placed within the Province of Belluno in 1923. In 1927, the partition of the Ladins was finalized, when the Ladin-speaking valleys were allocated to three provinces. Val Badia and the Gardena Valley were made part of the new founded Province of Bolzano, while the Fassa Valley remained in Trentino.

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3 For more details about historical milestones see the contribution on the history of the South Tyrol conflict by Emma Lantschner in this volume.

4 Royal Decree, No. 93, 21 January 1923.

5 Royal Decree, No. 1, 2 January 1927.