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Unresolved Questions concerning the Public Use of Minority and Regional Languages in Interactions between Municipal and Provincial Administrations and the Public in the Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia in Italy

I. Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, an asymmetric system of legal protection of national and linguistic minorities began developing in the Italian Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia (FVG). This system manifests the strategies and policies of national legislation in this area, specifically those covered by Law 482/1999, Norms Concerning the Protection of Historical Linguistic Minorities in Italy,¹ and Law 38/2001² for the protection of the Slovene linguistic minority. These national laws are complemented by three regional laws governing the protection of the Slovene national minority (Regional Law 26/2007),³ the protection of the Friulian language (Regional Law 29/2007)⁴ and the protection of German-speaking minorities (Regional Law 20/2009).⁵ The aforementioned asymmetry emanates from the different political–social and cultural–linguistic circumstances

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of the three national and linguistic minorities that had led to the development of a regional legislation which is structurally similar but has been introduced separately for each minority. This legal framework presents a turning point for the Region of FVG as it shapes the policies of diversity management for the three recognized national and linguistic minorities and as these policies are being implemented by different public administrations.

The present article focuses specifically on the system of managing the public use of minority and regional languages in interactions between municipal and provincial offices and the public of FVG, with the term “public use of languages” referring to spoken and written communication in regional or minority languages between individuals and public institutions taking place through various forms of communication (notifications, publications, notices, etc.), as well as to various documents and forms written in these languages. The potential users of the language services provided are primarily the members of the three minorities, or more specifically, the speakers of the protected minority and regional languages, their associations, organizations and the media.

In FVG, some of the legal provisions facilitating the use of minority and regional languages in the operation of municipalities and provinces are currently in the implementation phase and they also stipulate certain forms of funding. Some of these provisions are of a planning nature and as such, delineate the strategies for future development. Considering that these legal provisions have been introduced only recently, few studies have been reported that would empirically monitor their implementation. The studies that have been conducted to date deal mainly with an individual minority.

6 The legislation stipulates the public use of minority and regional languages also in other typologies of public institutions located in protected areas, such as the Autonomous Region of FVG, state public administration, judicial authorities, and medical institutions.