

# **Regions, Minorities and European Integration: A Comparative Analysis at the Italo-Slovene Border**

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**January 2007**

Comparative report - INTEREG

Deliverable D7

EUROREG project FP6-506019

## **1. Introduction**

This report investigates the effects of European integration on the mobilization of ethnic minorities and national majorities at the Italo-Slovene border. It compares case studies of Slovenophones living in Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) and Italophones living in Slovenia. The two case-studies were based on extensive fieldwork which included more than 60 interviews with majorities' and minorities' representatives on either side of the Italo-Slovene border. Their aim was to investigate major changes which have occurred since the 1990s in majority/minority relations and in minority interests and constraints. Although the focus of the research is mainly on the European integration process, both case studies analyze patterns of changes in a wider context related to the fall of Yugoslavia and the following redefinition of border relations as major turning points for both minorities.

The main reason it was decided to compare the Italian and the Slovenian case-studies is that they constitute paradigmatic "bridge-cases" between Eastern and Western Europe within the context of the European integration and the European enlargement process. On the one hand, the changes that have occurred with regard to the interests the mobilization process of the Slovenophones in FVG have been deeply influenced by events taking place "on the other side" of the former Iron Curtain. On the other hand, and in contrast with other central and eastern European countries, in Slovenia the "conditionality principle" imposed by the European enlargement agenda has not been a major changing factor for the minority conditions.

In addition, both Slovenia and Italy (and the Italo-Slovene border area) are included in the Interreg programming areas. The impact of Interreg programmes was chosen as a specific field of investigation in order to evaluate the European integration process at the micro-level of the communities' interests.

Section two of the report describes the key features of the two case studies which have been compared. It focuses on the size, presence and distribution of the minorities as factors which have influenced their socio economic condition. The analysis of the historical background and institutional framework are also taken into account. With regard to this, one specific focus of the comparison is the relations between the legal protection of the minorities and their participation in the public sphere. Section three of the report compares major changes which have occurred since

the 1990s focusing on the European integration and enlargement processes and on minorities' affiliation perception. This comparative analysis does not only aim to describe the two different cases. It will also be used as an instrument to address central issues related to minorities, as well as to investigate and reinterpret majority/minority relations in the whole border area.

## **2. Description of the case studies**

### *2.1. Presence and distribution of the Slovenophones in FVG and of the Italoophones in Slovenia.*

Both the Slovenophones in Italy and the Italoophones in Slovenia are very small communities compared with other minorities in Eastern and Western European countries. Official estimations of the Slovenian presence in FVG vary between 60.000 and 100.000 people; at the same time according to a 2002 census, 2.258 Italians are currently living in Slovenia. Both communities have suffered a considerable fall of population during the last decades. Moreover, the Italoophone community living in the region of Istria was divided between Slovenia and Croatia after Slovenia's independence in 1991. As a result of the split of Istria most of the Italian community's members found themselves on "the other side of the border". According to the 1991 census, 21.303 Italians were living in Croatia (19.636 in 2002). In spite of the relatively small size, both the Italian community in Slovenia and the Slovenian minority in Italy deserve special attention due to the peculiar history of the Italo-Slovene border area (which will be dealt with in the next section). One should also note that as a result of World War II – after which the entire German minority community left the former Yugoslavia – the Italian minority in former Yugoslavia remained the only Western European ethnic minority in the country.

Both case studies highlighted the existence of internal differences and some degree of heterogeneity within Italoophones in Slovenia and Slovenophones in Italy. These differences and heterogeneities have played a significant role in influencing patterns of mobilization and majority/minority relations. For this reason, it is important to briefly describe each minority group's main peculiarities.

Most of the Italians in Slovenia and Croatia are partially autochthonous and partially resettled groups that repopulated the region during 1918-1943 when Primorska, Istria, Rijeka, parts of Dalmatia and the islands of Cres, Krk, Lastovo and Palagruža were part of Italy. During this period, the Italian Fascist regime forcefully assimilated Slovenes and Croats and forced part of the community to leave. This historical legacy still influence the self-perception of community members (Šabec 2006), as the community is divided among so-called “autochthonous” Italians or “internal” Italians (those who have lived in Slovenia for centuries) and “external” Italians (those who immigrated to this area, mainly from Croatia). This internal division has become sharper after the independence of Slovenia, as the great majority of the Italophones in Slovenia are not autochthones (or “internal” Italians) but had immigrated from the Croatian part of Istria during 1954, 1955, and 1956. According to some respondents (for example, R8-S) the different origin of Italians in Slovenia (locals versus those from Croatian or southern Istria, Pula, Poreč, Rovinj) might explain the ongoing internecine conflicts within the Italian community in Izola, Koper and Piran. These conflicts have further weakened the community’s political strength<sup>1</sup> and well being which had already been jeopardized by the fact that the community become divided among two independent territories.

The Italoophone community in Slovenia is concentrated in three main bilingual municipalities in the Littoral-Karst region: Koper, Izola and Piran. This area is among the most economically developed regions in Slovenia. Historically, autochthonous Italians who were living in Istria, Dalmatia and in the Kvarner Islands of Cres and Lošinj tended to settle in cities and were historically employed in the non-agrarian sector. The massive emigration of *optanti* after WWII (see the next section) altered the ethnic structure of the whole region and the social-economic conditions of the Italian

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<sup>1</sup> Conflicts arose in Izola are an example. There are three Italian organizations in the Manzioli Palace in Izola. This causes tensions, conflicts and internal disputes between the Pasqual Besenghi Italian Association (approximately 400 or 500 members), the Dante Alighieri Italians Association (180 members), and the Self-governing Community of the Italian Ethnic Minority in Izola. When the latter tries to compensate for the lack of coordination (and hence of activities), it is attacked by both associations. The Dante Alighieri Italians Association was originally founded because of disputes about allocation of money that took place between the members of the only association at that time. As the disputes continued for years, a breakaway group formed their own organization (first called the Giordano Bruno Italians Association and then Dante Alighieri). The latter was registered in October 1998, and as such is formally distinct from the other Italian association Izola - the Pasqual Besenghi Italian Association.

Community. In fact, as it is underlined in the Slovenian case study, the majority of Italians who remained in Yugoslavia were farmers dependent upon their land and their cattle, older people, fishermen and other individuals “who had nothing to lose in the new system” (Šabec 2006).

The differences existing within the Slovenophones living in Italy, though not leading to internecine conflicts within the community as in the case with the Italian minority in Slovenia, have also considerably influenced majority/minority relations. Though Slovenophones living in Italy are present within 36 communities in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the Slovenophones of the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia have been the longest and best protected. This is due to the fact that, unlike the province of Udine, they were subject to the post-war negotiations over the Free Territory of Trieste. In the province of Udine the Slovenophone community, which has resided within Italy’s borders since 1866, is scattered across dozens of mainly sparsely-populated municipalities. Only in 2001 the Italian law officially recognised the Slovenophone community in 32 municipalities in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and among them in several municipalities in the province of Udine, thus in principle making the latter equal in terms of rights with those resident of the provinces of Gorizia and Trieste for the first time. Previously, the Slovenophones of Udine had no clearly defined linguistic rights, and their belonging to an abstract slovenophone dimension was denied by almost a century of forced Italian nationalization.

With the exception of the two urban agglomerates of Trieste and Gorizia, the Slovenophones in Italy mainly reside in rural and mountain areas. This has significantly influenced the perception held by the community of their economic needs and social condition. According to the classification criteria used in the Italian case study (which mainly refer to the historical background and to the characteristics of the territories inhabited by the Slovenophoes, as well as to a more general distinction between the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia, on the one side, and the Province of Udine - *Slavia Friulana*- on the other side) the Slovenian community in FVG can be divided into the following groups: a) the *Slavia Friulana* in the Province of Udine, mainly a mountain area distributed in three valleys: the Natisone, the valley and the Canale valleys (the vast majority of the population living in the first two valleys speak a Slovenian dialect); b) The Collio area in the Province of Gorizia: a rural/mountain area which include at least 3 municipalities inhabited by a majority of Slovenophones; c) the Carso area in the

Province of Trieste which is inhabited by a majority of Slovenophones (a large part of Carso lies within the administrative municipality of Trieste itself); d) the urban agglomerates of Trieste and Gorizia where Slovenophones represent 10-12 % of the total population.

Slovenophones living in the *Slavia Friulana* did not begin to raise cultural mobilization process and to politically organize until the 1970s and 1980s (much later than Slovenophones in the Provinces of Trieste and Gorizia). Moreover, these processes present peculiar characteristics when compared to those undergone by the rest of the minority as, for example, they have never led to the formation of an “ethnic” political party.

## *2.2. The common history of the Italo-Slovene frontier*

As it has been underlined in both case studies, the historical background of the region has long played a crucial role in shaping majority/minority relations at the Italo-Slovene border. The Italo-Slovene frontier—which, from its origin at the two nations’ mutual border with Austria, describes what many have deemed the meeting-point of Europe’s three great, historic civilisations and ethno-linguistic groups, the Romance, Germanic, and Slavonic—has also been one of European history’s most violently fraught, famously so in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, the degeneration of that frontier at the end of the Second World War into a genocide area was not due to the region’s historic and enduring multicultural composition, but rather the impossibility of dividing it along ethnic lines (Gross 1978).

In the aftermath of World War One, Italy had acquired in accordance with the secret Treaty of London (1915) extensive territories of what is today western Slovenia. These territories included the Primorska region, Istria, and parts of Dalmatia in what is today Croatia. After World War Two, Italy was compelled to give up these territories. The Italian census of 1936 indicated that some 230,000 people listed Italian as their main language of communication in the territory of contemporary Slovenia and Croatia. Out of this figure 194,000 resided in what is today Croatia and some 36,000 in what is today Slovenia. From the end of World War II to 1953, between 250,000 and 350,000 people emigrated from these regions. Approximately, two-thirds were ethnic Italians and one-third Slovenes and Croats who opposed the Communist regime in Yugoslavia. Some 15% of the total left without migration permits, though most left with the

approval of the authorities. The latter were the so-called *optanti* emigrants: persons who were permanent residents of this region and on June 10, 1940 opted to emigrate to Italy where they would obtain Italian citizenship. After this “exodus” only 36,000 Italians lived in Yugoslavia, 16% of the pre-World War II population.

It is the memory of Italian Fascism’s brutal oppression of the region’s Slovenes and Croats, and the subsequent ‘retribution’ that saw the deportation, execution, and exodus of the bulk of the Istrian Italoophone population, which continues to fuel contemporary reciprocal distrust on both sides of the border. The history of this frontier is also mirrored in the stigmatization that both the Italoophone community living in Slovenia (and earlier in Yugoslavia) and the Slovenophone community living in Italy have suffered in majority/minority relations, as well as in relations with the kin State. Italians residing in the former Yugoslavia were considered traitors in the kin State because they had not chosen to emigrate to Italy, while in Yugoslavia they were perceived as connected to Italian fascism’s brutal oppression. In contrast, Slovenophones residing in Italy were perceived as a pro-communist community. The case of the *Slavia Friulana* is paradigmatic: the Fascist regime had always denied and violently repressed the Slovenophone identity’s claims in the area. After WWII, the expectations raised by the end of the Fascist regime have not been fulfilled, as the conditions of the Slovenophones living in the area have been destabilized by the political context of the Cold War and exacerbated by their depiction as a pro-communist and pro-Slav population.

Only in the latter half of the 1950s, political relations between Italy and Yugoslavia began to normalize leading to the beginning of regional and borderland economic re-integration. Citizens of both countries began to cross the local border to visit relatives and on errands—Slovenes to shop for household goods unavailable in Yugoslavia and Italians to purchase cheaper petrol—with increasing frequency following the signing of bilateral agreements on the movement of borderland residents in 1955. Indeed, Slovenia’s burgeoning economic success – when compared to the other republics of Yugoslavia - provided ever-increasing opportunities for heightened economic relations with Italy.

Within Yugoslavia, Slovenia had placed special emphasis on the protection of its autochthonous communities. This was partly due to its obligations after World War II, but also to the process of decentralization and democratisation of the Yugoslav federation and the "opening of frontiers" that took place at the end of the 1950s and

beginning of the 1960s allowed tourism to become one of the most important Yugoslav industries. Slovenes began to perceive ethnic minorities on both sides of the frontier as a sort of connecting element. At the same time, also relations between the Slovenophone minority in Italy with Slovenia (within Yugoslavia) began to normalize, and, in some ways, to ‘institutionalise’ through economic and cultural support mechanisms (Bratina 1997:130). The era saw the formation of the first, post-war Slovene community association in Italy, the *Slovensko kulturno gospodarska zveza* (SKGZ, ‘Slovene cultural-economic union’), which maintained ties with the Slovenian socialist party, and, in the 1970s, Italy’s first Slovene political party, the Catholic/Liberal *Slovenska skupnost* (SSk, ‘Slovene Union’) (Bratina 1997:130).

One of the main divergences which becomes clear when comparing the Italian and the Slovenian case studies, is the different relationships between the Slovenophone and Italoophone minority communities in each countries and the “bulk” of their cultures in the kin states. This difference is mainly due to the historical legacy which has been briefly described. While the Slovenophone community in Italy – or at least the major part of it – had maintained and even strengthened (from the 1950s onwards) tight social and political connections with the Yugoslav federation, the Italoophone community in the former Yugoslavia had not maintained similar connections to Italy. As a consequence, the prevailing sense of affiliation of Italophones in the former Yugoslavia was not with Italy, but rather with the peculiar Istrian identity (Šabec 2006). This asymmetry especially affected the social and economical conditions of the two minority communities. Slovenophones in Italy were strongly supported by Yugoslavia. Although only the part of the Slovenophone community linked to organisations such as SKGZ (which identified themselves with the politics of Tito’s Yugoslavia and with the Italian left-wing parties PCI and PSI) benefited directly from economic support, their economic and political strength was beneficial to the community as a whole. On the contrary, Italophones in Yugoslavia had to mainly rely on the system of benefits guaranteed in the framework of the social-collective economy of the Yugoslav federation, and the community has never reached economic independence. This discrepancy has become even sharper with Slovenia’s independence and the transition to a market economy, as the Italophones in Slovenia have found themselves increasingly sidelined.

### *2.3. Institutional context of minorities protection in Italy and in Slovenia.*

Italy and Slovenia have pursued two different paths with regard to the protection of minorities. In the transition from Yugoslavia to Slovenia, the constitutional/institutional framework changed from a federal system with a high degree of de-centralization and autonomy into a unitary/State system (see also paragraph 2.4.). In contrast, Italy is a unitary State where a certain degree of decentralization has only been gradually developed (for instance, with the creation of the autonomous region of FVG) and the constitutional framework of civil and social rights regarding minorities have only recently been implemented.

From 1945 to 1991, the equality of ethno-nations and national minorities and the policies for handling inter-ethnic relations were crucial matters of Yugoslav domestic politics. In November 1943, the federation of Yugoslavia was proclaimed by the second assembly of the Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) and two multi-ethnic autonomous regions within Serbia (Kosovo and Vojvodina) were created. The fourth paragraph of the proclamation stated that: "Ethnic minorities in Yugoslavia shall be granted all national rights." As far as terminology is concerned, Yugoslavia was made up of Republics, each of which was comprised of a dominant ethnic group (*narod*) and ethnic minorities (*narodnost*). Bosnia was an exception, having three ethnic groups all considered equal. The above principle regarding the rights of ethnic minorities was codified in the 1946 and 1963 constitutions and reaffirmed again in the last federal constitution of 1974, which gave even greater power and independence to the Republics. It declared that all republics and ethnic minorities would have equal rights (Article 245) and that "each ethnic minority has the sovereign right to freely use its own language and script, to foster its own culture, to establish organizations for this purpose, and to enjoy other constitutionally guaranteed rights" (Article 274). Yugoslav standards were even higher than the standards of Western European states (Klemencic and Zupancic, 2004) and with the creation of the new Slovene state in 1991, the protection of minority communities needed only to be adapted and upgraded into the newly pluralistic political system. Yet, the Slovenian case study highlights a discrepancy between the formally stated legal framework and the law implementation which still persists in independent democratic Slovenia.

Despite this gap between the “law in books” and its practical application, in a comparative perspective the minority rights protection that the Italoophone community could enjoy in Slovenia (within the former Yugoslavia) was much higher than the one guaranteed to the Slovenophones residing in Italy. Negotiations over border disputes after WWII – which ended only in 1975 with the signing of the Osimo Treaty– resulted in Italy committing itself to minority protection only in the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia. The Osimo Treaty provided a number of rights to Slovenophones, which included education in the Slovene language at the nursery, primary and lower- and upper-secondary levels, the right to address the local and provincial public administration in Slovene, bilingual identity cards, and bilingual toponymical signs in the municipalities inhabited by Slovenophones (though the latter has been implemented at a painfully slow rate). The Italian Parliament finally ratified the Osimo-era legislation on the protection of its Slovenophone minority only in February 2001—with a delay of three decades. This delay was due both to the resistance posed by some Italian right-wing parties, such as *Alleanza Nazionale*, which have long been electorally strong in a number of Friuli-Venezia Giulia’s municipalities. Another major factor to consider is the dispute on which geographical area minority protection should be applied within the province of Udine. In fact, Italian Law 38 of 2001 officially recognised the Slovenophone community in 32 communities in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, but the law applies only to those municipalities of the province where 1/3 of the local council specifically requests it. As such, state funds destined for its fulfillment remain at present unassigned and/or unavailable in several municipalities.

One of the most interesting aspects one can note when comparing the two case studies is the difference between minority rights protected either as individual or as collective rights. As a legacy of the former Yugoslav system, minority protection in Slovenia is based on two principles: the principle of territoriality and the principle of collectivity. The first determines territories of autochthonous settlements, which includes all the settlements where Italians (and Hungarians) have been settled for centuries. The second emphasises the collective nature of minorities and their needs, in addition to general and special individual rights. These designated territories have two official languages: Slovene and Italian (or Hungarian). Visible bilingualism is not restricted to signs on streets and official buildings such as courts, county and municipal buildings, but is also guaranteed on private buildings and other state-owned enterprises.

Bilingual documents (identity cards, passports, driving licences, vehicle registration documents, medical insurance booklets, etc) are compulsory for all inhabitants of ethnically mixed areas, irrespectively of ethnic affiliation. Bilingual procedures are also prescribed for judiciary and other administrative procedures. The concept of “ethnically mixed territories” and the system of collective rights implies that State protection is granted irrespectively of absolute numerical strength or the proportion of members of an ethnic minority in an ethnically mixed territory (the absence of a numerical clause). Representatives of the Italian (and Hungarian) ethnic community actively participated in formulation of the legal norms that apply to all aspects of the ethnic community’s life and protection. Representatives of the ethnic communities have the right to veto in all decisions of the legislative body (from the state to the local level) in matters that relate to the special rights of the ethnic communities. According to Šabec (2005; 2006) «this is the highest guarantee against possible attempts by representatives of the national majority to force directives on the ethnic communities to which they do not consent».

The difference between minority rights protected as individual or collective rights can be seen clearly by comparing the above situation with the system adopted by the Italian law. Law 38/2001 only applies to those municipalities which request it through a procedure approved by one third of the local council, a system which entails a numerical clause. Moreover, there is not compulsory representation of the minority community in any elected body: minority representatives are elected through the ordinary political system. As a consequence, the political strength of the community varies considerably depending on the contingent Italian political situation and the different alliances with Italian political parties. After the transition to a post-communist legal system, the “collective right protection” has, *de facto*, lost importance in Slovenia too, as it is not supported by consistent social and economic policies. According to Šabec (2006) «minority rights in democratic Slovenia have become no different from individual rights». In the former Yugoslav state, the community was treated as collective body in the first place, and as a group of individual citizens in the second. Today it is the individual right of each citizen to declare (or not) himself or herself as a member of a minority group and not all community members are willing to do it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A practical example can be found in the current forms for assessment of income tax that are in Slovene. If a minority member wants this form in his/her native language (Italian or Hungarian), he or she must ask for it individually. A similar situation exists with electronic forms available on the state administration web site. They used to appear in Italian language but do not any longer.

#### 2.4. Cross border cooperation policies and the redefinition of regional context

Conventionally, the starting point of inter-regional planning collaboration related to the frontier dates back to the formation of *Trigon* by Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Austrian Carinthia, and Slovenia in 1965. This informal, sub-national arrangement became the *Alpe-Adria Working Community* in 1978, and gradually increased its number of member regions, technical capacities, and level of institutionalisation throughout the 1980s. Indeed, in its day, Alpe Adria provided one of the ‘most compelling examples of the relative unimportance of the EC/EU as the essential impetus of transfrontier co-operation’ (Anderson and Bort 2001:70). Decentralisation, increasing economic liberalisation, and rapprochement with its south-eastern neighbours within the Yugoslav federation during this decade – with substantial implications for Slovenia – further contributed to the circulation of people, publications, and ideas in the decades before Slovenia’s secession. Furthermore, the Italo-Slovene cooperation following the disastrous 1976 earthquake in Friuli allowed to sensibly improve both interregional and international relations. This contributed in reducing significantly the gulf of distrust existing between the population on the two sides of the border that the political divide had long determined, thus marking a turning point in the development (indeed “from below”) of regional integration and cross-border relations.

It is in continuity with the context described above that Europe’s efforts to enhance the regional integration over the Italo-Slovene border area by a succession of investments starting from the beginning of the 1990s have to be placed. The first Interreg programming period, which ended in 1995, was an experimental ‘familiarisation’ exercise for this new Community Initiative financed through the Structural Funds, and, as such, the initial programming period saw little cross-border impact or participation from the Slovenian side of the borderland. The EU’s Phare external assistance programme began operating in Slovenia in 1992, and a cross-border cooperation (CBC) component was inserted in 1994, though its interventions also took place entirely in the Slovene territory. In the second phase of EU-led borderland integration, Interreg II Italy-Slovenia was finally approved in 1997. From the outset, the Interreg II programme was aimed at enhancing the cross-border nature of its actions when compared to the earlier Interreg programme. Interreg II programme had three main objectives: upgrading the region’s local resources and environmental protection, improving the institutional cooperation and communication, and promoting

entrepreneurial cooperation. The specific objective of the loosely coordinated Phare CBC Slovenia-Italy programme was stated simply as to assist 'Phare areas bordering the EU to overcome their developmental problems' whilst promoting cross-border co-operation 'according to the Interreg programme principles,' (Faro 2005). Interventions through Phare were particularly necessary on Slovenia's border with Italy, as substantial delays to cross-border traffic were occurring due to outmoded border crossings, and were further exacerbated by the transport disruption brought about by the Yugoslav wars.

The actual functioning of the CBC funding system should also be seen in connection to the Italian and Slovenian regional structures. With regard to Slovenia, its entrance into the European integration process has not yet had a substantial impact on the reduction of centralist regulation. Since European regional policy refers not to small territories but to economically encircled areas, Slovenia is registered as one region in accordance with European criteria. Because of this definition, Slovenia as a whole lags behind the EU average and receives the maximum amount of EU aid. However, the state organs of Slovenia are authorized to decide (independently of the EU) whether EU development funds will be regionally directed to particularly disadvantaged regions or whether the aid will be invested in augmenting GDP and the competitive position of all of Slovenia (which some argue would result in strong development for all regions). Thus far, the Slovene government has opted for the second solution, though there is an internal agreement that 60% of all EU funds will be directed to underdeveloped regions within Slovenia. The Littoral-Karst region, where most of the Italian community is settled, is defined as an (over)developed region, second only to the Central Slovene region with Ljubljana as its centre. Therefore it is not entitled to regional development assistance.<sup>3</sup> It should also be noted that the whole issue of regional development opportunities in Slovenia is part of a broader problem that has to do with the Slovene regional structure and the size of separate regions. Currently, Slovene regions are so-called "statistical regions" and therefore do not accurately represent the regional structure. There are currently twelve statistical regions that are too small in size to have

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<sup>3</sup> Since the Littoral-Karst region is among the most developed regions in Slovenia, it has not significantly benefited from state subsidies. For two years, it received only about EUR 200,000 annually. These funds were earmarked as stimulation funds for the eight municipalities of the Littoral-Karst region. Considering that the annual municipal budget of Koper alone is approximately EUR 42 million, this sum is almost inconsequential (R15-S).

any functional validity. According to Šabec (2006), if Slovenia were divided into two regions they could feasibly exercise an influence on centralised state organs. To the contrary, the process of increasing state centralisation continues with the establishment of even smaller municipalities within Slovene regions.

With regard to Italy, Friuli Venezia Giulia enjoys a special status and a higher degree of autonomy within the national regional system. Although the decision to grant FVG with a special status was not directly related to the presence of national minorities, it allowed for a higher degree of autonomy in cross-border cooperation, both with Slovenia and Austria. Indeed, since the 1980s the FVG regional and sub-regional institutions have played a central role in promoting cross-border cooperation. Among sub-regional institutions, it is worth mentioning the *Comunità Montane* (association of municipalities in the mountain area) some of which included areas inhabited by a high majority of Slovenophones (for example the Natisone Valley). During the 1980s and the 1990s, the *Comunità Montane* were key actors in the development of the “Euroregion” concept and their central role continues today in the access to CBC fundings (Rigo e Rahola).

In Interreg IIIA (2000-2006 programming period), the Italo-Slovene border has been defined as both a land and a maritime border. As far as Italy is concerned, it includes the provinces of Udine, Gorizia, and Trieste (region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia), as well as the province of Venice (region of the Veneto). With regard to Slovenia it includes the regions of Obalno-kraska and Goriska, as well as the municipality of Kranjska Gora. The 232 km-long land border connects 24 Italian municipalities with 13 Slovenian ones; the maritime border, meanwhile, connects Venice with Slovenia’s Italoophone municipalities. Moreover, the programme is the first of its kind to have a truly joint programming document – created and approved by regional actors and local experts from both sides of the border – as well as a joint steering committee. Nevertheless, several factors have weakened institutional cooperation. In Slovenia the centralised system militated against cooperation effectiveness in the border area. In Italy, the political environment in both the Trieste municipality and the FVG region (which at the time of the launch of the program was still governed by a center-right coalition) encompassed several nationalist factions which opposed any policy “potentially” threatening the internal “border regime”. Furthermore, one major

constraint acting against borderland cooperation in this region resulted from the fact that Slovenia, along with the rest of the newly acceded states, will not enjoy free movement of workforce within the EU until 2010 – the different status among the two populations of the border probably being the strongest obstacle towards a thorough regional integration.

### **3. Major changes in majority/minority relations and in minorities' interests and constraints**

#### *3.1. European integration as a factor of change*

Both case studies clearly show the extent to which major changes in minority/majority relations and in minorities' interests and constraints have occurred over the last two decades at the Italo-Slovene border. In order to discuss the causes and origins, of changes the European integration and enlargement process has to be placed in a broader context and factors such as the collapse of the Yugoslav federation and the fall of the Iron Curtain. These were major turning points and played a crucial role on the conditions of the Slovenophone community in Italy and the Italoophone community in Slovenia.

#### *3.1.2 Cross border cooperation*

Focusing on the 1990s, CBC funds are among the few factors which can be isolated within the European integration process as autonomous elements to for analysis. While the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and the fall of the Iron Curtain have deeply affected majority/minority relations within Italy and within Slovenia, CBC funds have played an important role in the redefinition of the cross border relations in the area when considered as a whole. In fact, the comparison of the two case studies sheds light on new sets of social, economic and cooperative relations between the Slovenophone minority in Italy and the Italoophone minority in Slovenia which, prior to the 1990s, had been very loose or had not existed. As far as Interreg programmes are concerned, their impact should thus be considered at two different levels: with regard to majority/minority relations within each country, and with regard “minority/minority” cross border relations.

The main reasons why Interreg programs are not perceived as factors able to consistently affect majority/minority relations within Italy (FVG) and Slovenia are the following: the limited budget allocated to them by the EU (0.3% of Slovene GDP); the complexity and technicalities of the funding procedures; the short-term investments of the projects; their priorities which mainly concern the fields of culture and communication, rather than long-term economic investments. One should also consider that Interreg programs do not specifically target minorities. Nevertheless, some objectives within the programs have an implicit minority 'focus' (e.g. those geared toward cross-border cultural and vocational cooperation), and minority organisations are among the many eligible to apply for funding. As a matter of fact, several projects financed by Interreg programmes have directly or indirectly addressed minority communities.

As the Italian case study underlines, the actual impact of Interreg in fostering mutual knowledge from both sides of the border varies significantly. In some cases Interreg projects have simply ratified the already existing network of relations without inducing any real change in minority's opportunities. In other cases, they have been able to address real local needs and to develop the existing cross border relations, as well as to create new opportunities. Actually, the main risk perceived by local actors (both in Italy and Slovenia) is that the projects simply support formal and "decorative" initiatives, mainly promoted 'from above' and aimed at spending the funds. Nevertheless, when the projects have been based upon locally embedded actors and public institutions, directly addressing economic, cultural or environmental real needs, they have proved quite successful both in engaging local communities and in improving cross-border integration (for example, projects addressing the integrated management of cultural heritage and environment)

As already noted, Interreg programmes have had a considerable impact in enhancing cross-border relations between the Italophone community in Slovenia and the Slovenophone community in Italy. This specific outcome is particularly evident in the Slovenian case study as it represents the only considerable set of relations built by the Italophone minority with the other side of the border. The collaboration between the two minorities began in the 1970s with sports activities, and namely with the Minority Sports Competition. Nowadays, not only the Slovene minority in Italy and the Italian

minority in Slovenia compete, but also the Slovene minority living in Austria and other minority groups from Croatia. With regard to CBC programmes funded by the EU, the Italian minority community in Slovenia started becoming more active in using these funds since 2000. This was thanks to the initiative taken by the Slovene community in Italy to establish an entrepreneurial team called Euroservis. Euroservis was initially created as a satellite organization of Ures (Slovene Regional Economic Union in FVG) and it specialized in building intensive transborder cooperation and giving support to EU funding applicants. The Euroservis team is able locate partners for crossborder cooperation (among majority and minority members) thanks to its knowledge of the territory and the long established set of relationships that it has built over the years.

According to Šabec (2006), the most important consequence of the “minority/minority” collaboration is that the relationship between the Slovene minority in Italy and the Italian minority in Slovenia has become more intense and fruitful. Cooperation between the Italian community and the Slovene minority in Italy was very much the result of practical mutual interests and of the awareness that certain goals such as new economic opportunities would be achieved only through cooperation. A unified commission with members from Slovenia and from the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, including special minority board members from both Italian and Slovene minority communities, was established, which signaled the beginning of the systematic inclusion of both the Slovene and Italian minority groups in EU projects.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The following are some major CBC projects:

*INTERREG 3A SLOVENIA-ITALY 2000-2006*: 1. AGROMIN: agricultural products of minority communities, typical produce, food products, and old recipes in the territory of Slovene Istria and Slovene Karst in Italy. The main goal of the project is to establish cross-border trade in typical local products, notably farming products such as olive oil, honey, and wine. A special book in connection with the project will be published. AGROMIN will be carried out by the Slovene Regional Rural Association (an organization of the Slovene minority in Italy) in Trieste and the Coastal Self-governing Community of the Italian minority in Slovenia. 2. MIN-TOUR: minority tourism. The objective of MIN-TOUR is the restructuring and expansion of tourism in the border area (the coastal and Karst regions in Slovenia, and the Trieste and Gorizia region in Italy). The restructuring is aimed at creating sustainable development in versatile and modern tourist services that highlight the local (minority) particularities of the area. The project, which has a value of EUR 356,210.35 is carried out by the Slovene company, Euroservis, in Italy and the Italian Union in Slovenia ([www.slowwwenia.net/novice](http://www.slowwwenia.net/novice), 10/8-2005). Both projects are part of the EU programme Interreg III A Slovenia-Italy and are valued at somewhat less than EUR 750,000. The project term is between April 2005 and April 2007. The Slovene partners in the AGROMIN and MIN-TOUR projects (Italian Union and Coastal Self-Governing Community of Italian minority community) need SIT 24 million (EUR 100,000) for their share. The Slovene government decided to help the Italian community in these projects drawing on the Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy and the Public Fund of the Republic of Slovenia for Regional Development and Preservation of the Settlements of Slovene Rural Areas (Ribnica). However, because no financial aid actually came from these two sources, the Italian minority applied to the Governmental Office for Minorities to give funds to the community.

Interreg programmes seem to have had a greater impact on the Italian side of the border and on the Slovenophone minority in FVG, which has been far more active and successful in exploiting CBC funds compared to the Italoophone minority in Slovenia. This can be explained by the different political, cultural, social and economic relations that the Slovenian minority has always maintained with Yugoslavia since the 1950s. For the faction of the community which maintained strong links to the Yugoslav political leadership, this set of relations was, to some extent, “institutionalized”, through the creation of associations such as the SKGZ and through the minority’s bank in Trieste (which had been established with the London Memorandum at the end of WWII). Even the minority faction of Slovenophones which opposed the Yugoslav regime and was linked to the catholic/liberal party SSK maintained a range of informal connections with Slovenia (within Yugoslavia), in particular in the economic and social fields. On the contrary, nothing comparable took place between Italy and the Italoophone minority in Slovenia. The latter was, from the early 1950s onwards, somewhat separate from the Italian context, and suffered an even higher degree of isolation after Slovenia’s independence and the split of Istria.

### *3.1.2. Majority/minority relations and minority mobilization*

One of the Euroreg’s main research questions is the impact of European integration on the minority mobilization process and on majority/minority relations over the last two decades. In the specific case of the Italo-Slovene border area, it is difficult to evaluate the European integration process as an autonomous factor influencing minority conditions. In contrast to other Central and Eastern European countries, in Slovenia the “conditionality principle” and the implementation of EU legal *acquis* in minority related matters have not played a significant role. This was due to the fact that the legal framework of minority protection inherited from the former Yugoslav

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*INTERREG 3A SLOVENIA-HUNGARY-CROATIA 2004-2006: IQ-EURO: The project is carried by the Italian Union in Koper/Capodistria and the Italian Union in Rijeka/Fiume (Croatia). The objective of IQ-EURO is to establish a special service in Koper/Capodistria on the model of Euroservis in Trieste that is specialized in the planning and implementation of EU projects. (In December 2005, the Europa Office was opened in Koper. Using EU funds, the Europa Office will organize a special course for some fifteen people who will become “euro-planners” i.e. professionals who are able to negotiate extensive EU documentation, draw up quality applications and tenders, and actually implement projects. This project has been valued at EUR 145,000.*

federation was very advanced. On the contrary, it was Italy that in 2001 had to upgrade its minority rights legal framework adopting a comprehensive legislation for the Slovenophone minority. Moreover, in the Italian case, changes that occurred during the 1990s have intervened on the pre-existing minority's mobilization processes and, as such, they are perceived as not related to the European integration process. In contrast, both case studies highlight the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and the redefinition of the border relations in the area as a far more relevant factor for minority conditions. Of course, these two latter events can also be read as part of the European integration process when it is understood in its full complexity and in a broader context.

At a superficial level of analysis, both case studies emphasize the worsening of minority conditions during the decade 1990-2000, at least with regard to their economic conditions and in terms of their political mobilization. On closer analysis however the situation is far more complex. To start with, the fall of Yugoslavia has affected in different ways the economic condition of both minorities. In the case of the Slovenophones in Italy, the disintegration of Yugoslavia meant that they could no longer count on the economic support of Yugoslavia which the small newly-independent Slovenia was not able to replace. In the case of Italophones in Slovenia, the main worsening factor of change was the split of Istria, where the "bulk" of their social and economic relations had been built since WWII. At the same time as far as political mobilization processes are concerned, both case studies seem to show some discrepancy between rights and participation, in the sense that "more rights" and democratic procedures have not necessarily led to greater political participation.

Although the Slovenian case study underlines a discrepancy between the formal rights guaranteed to the Italophones within Yugoslavia and their practical application, this legal framework (which has been maintained in the independent Slovenia) allowed for a certain degree of well-being for the minority. In independent Slovenia – and only apparently paradoxically - the democratic transition and the multiparty system have allowed a harshening of nationalistic feelings among the Slovenian majority. As one can read in the Slovenian case study: «Generally speaking, there exists in Slovene society a peculiar kind of continuum between the relatively positive coexistence with the Italian minority community (established during the late 1970s and lasting through the 1980s), the so-called great revolution that took place in the 1990s, and the current period of quasi-tolerance after the 1990s when it has nevertheless become normal in

certain circles to speak openly about “removing the Italian influence from this area”. The former Yugoslav state had formally legislated minority protection. Though the Yugoslav system and ideology did not allow public criticism of minority members, it also didn’t always act when laws were not upheld but the (public) speech of the majority population parroted the government line. After Slovene independence, a different system of values and norms was established. It has not gone so far that the assimilation process of minorities in Slovenia has been legislated, but the multiparty democratic system permits political parties to openly express their opinions, and not surprisingly those of the nationalist parties are usually against people with a different ethnic identity». (Šabec 2006, p. 30).

Although the legal framework of minority protection has not consistently changed in the transition from Yugoslavia to Slovenia, the isolation suffered by the Italophones after Slovenia’s independence sheds light on the impact of the size of minorities on their economic and social status and political participation. The Slovenian case study affirms that during the decade 1990-2000, the Italian minority lost interest in “border related” matters, and highlights the relations established with the “twin” Slovenophone community in Italy as the only relevant factor which has induced new economic opportunities. This is connected to the fact that due to the small size of the minority, the “collective rights protection” system has *de facto* lost its strength, and there is little advantages for minorities members in declaring themselves as part of the Italophone community.

Comparing the above situation with the Italian one, it emerges that – although less protected by the legal framework – the Slovenophone minority in Italy has experienced a continuous mobilization process and a high degree of political participation from the 1970s up to the decade 1990-2000. Many respondents (especially in the *Slavia Friulana*) claimed that the implementation of minority protection implementation was induced “from below”, rather than resulting from external factors. During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the lack of a comprehensive constitutional and legal framework for minorities’ protection induced the community to strongly organize itself through social and political networks. Since a certain degree of protection was finally achieved at the beginning of the 2000s, the mobilization process and the political participation of the community at local level has partially decreased.

Comparing the current situation with the period prior to the 1990s, other changes can be underlined. Prior to the 1990s, the political participation of the Slovenophone community was deeply connected to the Italian political situation and the importance of political participation itself was perceived by community members as encompassing all social and economic aspects of the community's life. In recent years, there has been a noticeable propensity to perceive the participation in the public sphere as a priority of the cultural domain. In a broader sense, this is consistent with a tendency registered in other Euroreg case studies according to which since the 1990s minority groups have begun to mobilize along "ethnic lines". Evaluating these changes, one should nevertheless take into account that self-perception of the Slovenophones minority along "ethnic" lines is disputed among minority members themselves. Other factors should be considered. For instance, prior to the 1990s majority/minority relations within Italy (and in FVG) were deeply affected by the Cold War. The discrimination suffered by Slovenophones was not only connected to their Slav identity, but also to the depiction of this minority as a pro-communist community. As a consequence, the counter-mobilization process of the minority was not simply centred on cultural and ethnic issues. With the collapse of the Yugoslav federation and Slovenia's independence, the negative representation of the minority as pro-communist has decreased. This has also induced a shift toward a redefinition of majority/minority relations along ethnic/cultural lines.

Comparing differences, similarities and phases of the mobilization processes undergone by the two minorities in Italy and Slovenia, it clearly emerges that the relations between rights, political participation and community well-being is a rather ambivalent one: to the extent that it cannot be univocally stated that a greater degree of legal protection leads to greater mobilization and political participation. The Slovenian case study draws similar conclusions comparing the situation of Italophones in Slovenia and Croatia: «It is paradoxical that, despite the fact that the Italian community in Croatia has fewer legal rights (at least on paper), it probably has better possibilities for development and prosperity because of its size. Perhaps because of this situation, the process of assimilation is occurring with more intensity in Slovenia than in Croatia.» (Šabec 2006)

### *3.1.3. Changing identities and interests*

The self-perception of identity and interests has certainly been the domain most affected by the European integration process. In fact, both case studies indicate the transformation of border relations as the main factor upon which majority/minority relations and mutual identification processes have developed. Yet, focusing on the 1990s, not only the border between Slovenia and Italy should be taken into consideration but also the whole set of border transformations induced by the collapse of the Yugoslav federation, the creation of two independent states in Slovenia and Croatia and the accession of Slovenia into the European Union (while Croatia is still a Candidate country).

As already mentioned with respect to the Italian case study, the end of the Iron Curtain and the independence of Slovenia has decreased the Italian majority's perception of the Slovenophone minority as a pro-communist community. Even so, the redefinition of minority/majority relations along cultural/ethnic lines has left room for the recrudescence of more traditional forms of "nationalism" within some factions of the Italian majority. With regard to the Slovenophones' perception, the position vis-à-vis the transition from Yugoslavia to Slovenia sensibly varies within the minority itself. On the one side, the renewed identification with a "mother nation" has been translated into "nationalistic" claims (although these were never accompanied by demands or claims for independence). This situation coexists with a more critical position upheld by those who openly disagree with Slovenian internal and often nationalistic policies. The more widespread attitude among the community is neither a total identification nor a total refusal vis-à-vis the new Slovenian Republic represent.

In the case of the Italoophone minority in Slovenia, the redefinition of geopolitical borders in the area has had an even stronger impact. At one level, the separation of the Italoophone minority between two independent States has made the part of the community residing in Slovenia vulnerable. At another level, Slovenia's accession to the EU has reinforced the geopolitical and administrative borders between Slovenia and Croatia making it more difficult to maintain daily relations between the two parts of the community. The impact of these changes has been most evident with job opportunities and education system. New borders have meant new legislation and employment laws. School systems, curricula and school terms are no longer compatible

between the two countries. School textbooks are no longer the same. Within the common Yugoslav state, for example, many Italian parents from Croatia sent their children to Italian (mostly secondary) schools in Slovenia. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, it has become much more difficult for Italians from Croatia to attend Italian schools in Slovenia and even more for adults to be employed in Slovenia. These incompatibilities have become even more pronounced since Slovene membership of the EU. Nowadays, very few Italian students from Croatia attend Italian gymnasium in Piran or secondary schools in Izola.<sup>5</sup> In Yugoslavia, schools had been systematically established for the whole Istrian territory, usually with different programmes in different locations. For example, the economics high school was located in Koper, Slovenia, the construction secondary school in Buje, Croatia, and so on. Today this system is no longer valid and students have fewer choices about what and where to study in the Italian language school system. There is the additional problem of the comparability of school certificates and diplomas. This particularly affects the validity of Slovene degrees in Croatia, as Croatian legislation demands supplementary examinations in Croatian language, history and geography for those students who attended Italian schools in Slovenia.

Both case studies shed light on a disputed perception of the kin state as the “mother nation”. In the case of Italophones in Slovenia, the separation from Croatian Istria had not only administrative but also symbolic consequences. Prior to Slovenia independence the prevailing feeling of affiliation was with the peculiar “Istrian” identity (highly “multicultural” and flexible), while the community has always felt rather distant from Italy. Nowadays, the bulk of cultural and social ties for the Italophones in Slovenia is considered to be in the Croatian-Istria rather than in Italy. As a consequence, the notion of Italy as the kin state and the idea of Italy as the political entity where the bulk of the “mother nation” resides do not overlap. A comparable situation can be seen in the Italian case study. Prior to Slovenian independence only some sections of the Slovenophones community in Italy distinguished between Yugoslavia as the kin state and Slovenia as the “mother nation”. For the rest of the Italian Slovenophones (which were the majority) the prevailing sense of affiliation was with Yugoslavia itself, and in

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<sup>5</sup> In terms of secondary vocational schools, Pietro Coppo in Izola remained the only Italian vocational school in Slovenia after its independence. Prior to independence about 25% of students came from Croatia (Buje, Umag, Novigrad), but after independence this percentage has started to fall. In 1994, before problems with equivalence of school certificates emerged, 200 students were enrolled. Only 120 students attend this school today (R10).

some cases this was accompanied by the perception of Yugoslavia as a “anti-nationalistic project”.

The European integration process has also shed light on the free circulation of people as a major interest for minorities. With Slovenia’s independence and prior to Slovenia accession to EU, great expectations were placed by both the minorities on the improvement of transborder mobility which could create social and economical development opportunities. These expectations have not yet been fulfilled and both case studies indicate the persistence of limited movement of people between Italy and Slovenia as a major constraint for minorities’ interests. At the same time, the shifting of the EU external frontier at the border between Croatia and Slovenia is felt by both the minorities as the “new frontier” which has to be overcome in order to create the condition for a “truly European” sense of affiliation and the positive redefinition of majority/minority relations in a post-national dimension.

#### **4. Conclusion**

While the changes that have occurred since the 1990s have had an impact on all levels of community life such as the economic conditions and the minority rights framework, the European integration process itself has more than anything else affected the sense self-perceptions of identity among Slovenophones living in Italy and Italophones living in Slovenia. Changes that have occurred since 1990s cannot be univocally evaluated as positive or negative for minorities’ conditions. While the economic conditions of both minorities have to some extent worsened, the end of the Iron Curtain have reduced the discrimination and constraints suffered during the Cold War .

Comparing the two case studies central issues for the understanding and the interpretation of majority/minority relations in the whole border area can be highlighted. The findings of the comparative analysis are particularly relevant for the following points:

- The relation between the legal framework of minority protection and the political participation into the public;
- The relation between institutional centralization/decentralization processes and opportunities and constraints for minorities;
- The relevance of size of the minorities for their conditions and well-being;
- The relevance of geopolitical and administrative borders for the self-perceptions of minority identity;
- The problematic identification of the “kin” state with the idea of the “mother nation”;

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