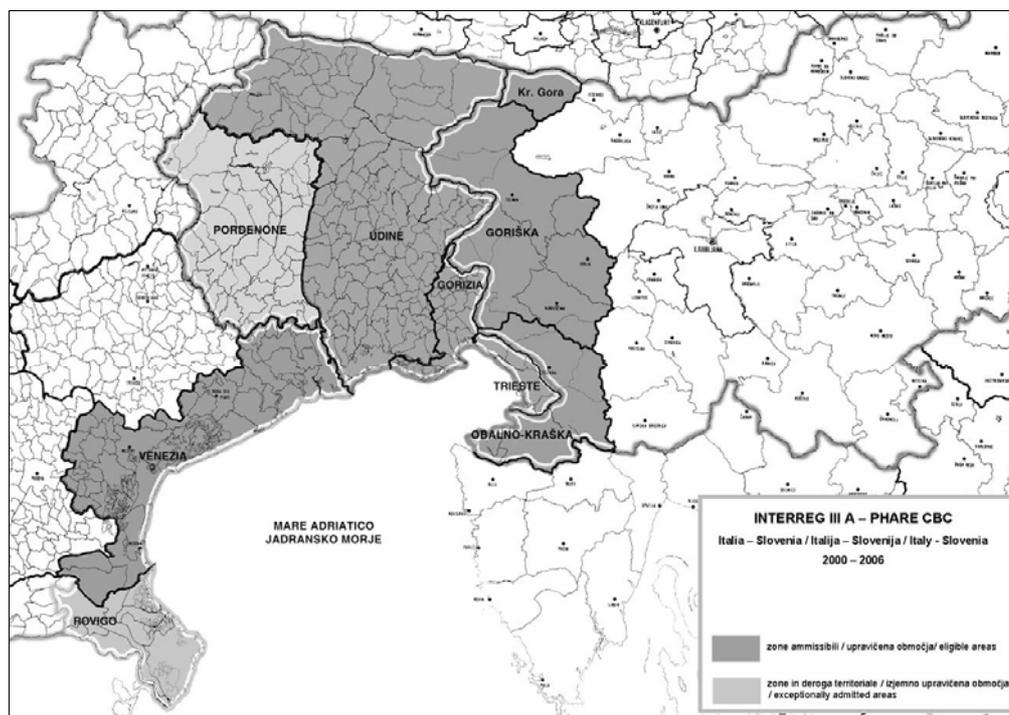


EUROREG Policy report

Regions, minorities and European integration: Recommendations for regional development strategies at the Italo-Slovene border.

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1. Introduction

This report is produced on the basis of the fieldwork research which was conducted between November 2005 and February 2006 in the Italian region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) and presents policy-relevant findings and analyses. The study has investigated the impact European integration has had on the mobilisation of the Slovenian ethnic minority and the Italian majority in the Italo-Slovene border region. It has also addressed the changing interests and identities of the Slovenophone community living in FVG, placing them within the wider regional context, the latter of which is also undergoing a redefinition.

The current report has three main aims:

- to provide an overall assessment of the minority-majority relationship in the area and to indicate relevant issues for policy making;
- in accordance to the changing interests and identities of minorities in the area, to identify the role that Europe should play in order to improve majority/minority relations;
- to suggest ways in which to enhance the opportunities offered by the European integration process.

During the fieldwork, the access to and benefits produced by Interreg programs were chosen as a specific field of investigation in order to evaluate the impact of European cross border cooperation policies on majority minority relations. For further details see the case study report at <http://www.eliamep.gr>

2. Overall assessment of the minority-majority relationship at the Italo-Slovene border area:

According to the Italian Ministry of the Interior, in 1996 there were an estimated 61,000 Slovenophones resident in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Although this number is highly disputed by scholars and Slovenian authorities, the estimated figure does not exceed 100,000 persons.

The Slovenophones living in Italy are present within 36 municipalities in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, divided between the provinces of Trieste, Gorizia and Udine. 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 area. This has significantly influenced the economic needs and social condition of the community. According to classification criteria which mainly refer to the historical background and to the characteristics of the territories inhabited by the Slovenophones, the Slovenian community in FVG can be divided in the following groups: a) the *Slavia Friulana* in the Province of Udine, mainly a mountain area distributed in three valleys: the Natisone valley, the Resia valley and the Canale valley. The Natisone valley and the Resia valley are inhabited by a high majority of homogeneous population who 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 portion of Carso is included in the administrative municipality of Trieste; d) the urban agglomerates of Trieste and Gorizia where there is an estimated 10-12 % of Slovenophone population. ,

The overall assessment of majority/minority relations in FVG reveals that they have continuously improved during the last three decade and especially starting from the 1990s. Nonetheless, this has not necessarily corresponded to the improvement of minority's condition and well being, neither to the increasing of minority's mobilizations processes. On the contrary, minority's mobilizations have decreased since the 1990s and especially during the last five years. Moreover, the part of the community living in the province of Udine still suffers a larger degree of discrimination compared to the one living in the province of Gorizia and Trieste , both in terms of access to rights (in particular, access to bilingual education) and in socio-economic terms.

3. Policy relevant findings and recommendations:

3.1 Implementation of rights and minority protection legislation:

In Italy, the lack of a general constitutional framework concerning minorities has been formally filled in through a gradual process the first step of which is represented by the introduction, in 1999, of Law 482 concerning the recognition and the protection of Italian linguistic minorities. The final accomplishment is marked by the adoption, in 2001, of Law 38 for the Slovenophone minority.

The law has provided for a new consultancy body which deals with the problems of the Slovenian minority. The *Comitato istituzionale paritetico per i problemi della minoranza slovena* is formed by 20 members, 10 of which must belong to the Slovenian minority.

The main provisions of the law concern the right to maintain or recover the Slovenian name by those community's members who in the past had been forced to change it (art. 7); the use of Slovenian language in the public administration and in the elective bodies (art. 8 and 9); bilingual road signs with toponyms and bilingual public signals (art. 10); the right to education (art. 11-14) and to other cultural activities (art. 15-16 and 18); the protection of the cultural and historical heritage (art. 20); the implementation of social, economical and environmental interests (art. 21); unionist rights (art. 22).

Article 4 of law 38/2001 establishes a proportional principle according to which minority protection only applies to those municipalities where it is requested by the 15% of the voting population or by 1/3 of the municipality's council¹. Due to this procedural mechanism of application, state funds destined for the fulfilment of minority protection remain at present largely unassigned and/or unavailable to the municipalities which have not yet requested the application of the law.

Evaluating this procedural mechanism of law 38/2001 implementation, it should be noted that the Slovenian communities in FVG is highly heterogeneous. Minority/majority divide is not always clear and does not necessarily correspond to "ethnic" categories. For example, in the *Slavia Friulanana* there are many municipalities inhabited by an ethnically homogeneous Slovenian majority which nevertheless suffer for sharp internal political divisions. In these areas, the implementation of law 38/2001 is deeply affected by contingent political situations which do not proportionally reflect the social and cultural interest of the population.

From these findings, the policy implications are the following:

- A territorial principle of minority protection (regardless of any proportional clause) should be implemented in order to assure the fulfilment of minority interest;
- A territorial principle of protection should be based on the consideration that the area as a whole has been historically affected by a deep

¹ «Le misure di tutela della minoranza slovena previste dalla presente legge si applicano alle condizioni e con le modalità indicate nella legge stessa, nel territorio in cui la minoranza è tradizionalmente presente. In tale territorio sono considerati inclusi i comuni o le frazioni di essi indicati in una tabella predisposta, su richiesta di almeno il 15 per cento dei cittadini iscritti nelle liste elettorali o su proposta di un terzo dei consiglieri dei comuni interessati, dal Comitato entro diciotto mesi dalla sua costituzione, ed approvata con decreto del Presidente della Repubblica» (art. 4 law 38/2001).

interconnection between the Italian and the Slovenian culture. Therefore, the maintenance and improvement of both historical and cultural heritage benefits the Slovenophone as well as the Italophone communities.

3.2 Socio economic conditions and territorial development

There is no specific data regarding the economic situation of the Slovenophone in FVG. The absence of definitive figures is due to a number of factors, such as the disputed criteria used to count the community members and the reluctance of Slovenophones themselves to subordinate the importance of minority issues to the number of minority groupmembers.

Said that, one aspect that needs underlining is that most of the areas inhabited by the Slovenian community are rural or mountain regions. As a matter of fact, the socio-economic situation of the Slovenophone community in FVG seems to be linked more to the different territorial conditions of the areas inhabited by Slovenians than to majority/minority relations understood in ethnic-national terms. With the exception of the two urban agglomerates of Trieste and Gorizia, Slovenophones are concentrated in the area of Carso (a rural area in the Province of Trieste), in the area of Collio (a rural/mountain area in the Province of Gorizia) and in the area of the *Slavia Friulana* (a mountain area in the Province of Udine). These three areas are not industrialised, and therefore the economic activities of Slovenophoes living in the region are mainly linked to the agricultural sector or to the eco-tourist sector. Due to this fact, issues concerning the valorisation of territorial resources are perceived as relating directly to minority needs.

The natural environment is the most important economic resource in the area, the utilization of which had been highly limited by the persistence of political and administrative borders during the cold war. Starting from the 1980s and 1990s, European structural funds promoting cross border cooperation and regional integration have improved the infrastructures of the areas inhabited by the Slovenophone minority as well as their economic conditions.

From these findings, the policy implication are the following:

- Deepening the knowledge on the socio-economic conditions of minorities living in the area. In this view, qualitative and non-simplistic approaches (instead of the simple collection of statistical data) are recommended.
- Implementation of programs and funding specifically dedicated at the valorization of the natural resources and environment.
- In particular, these programs should be aimed at the removal of administrative obstacles which limit the cross-border integrated management of the natural resources (for example in the case of the Collio and the Carso areas)

3. 2.1 European cross border cooperation and integration policies:

Among Eu integration and cross border cooperation (CBC) policies, the study has focused on the impact of Interreg programmes. As far as Interreg IIIA is concerned (2000-2006 programming period), the Italo-Slovene border has been defined as both a

land and a maritime one; 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; a maritime border, meanwhile, connects Venice with Slovenia's Italoophone municipalities. Moreover, the programme is the first of this 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 weakened institutional cooperation. In Slovenia the centralised system militated against cooperation effectiveness in the border area. In Italy, the political environment in both 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 the Slovenes, along with the rest of the newly acceded states, do not enjoy free movement of workforce – the different status among the two populations of the border probably being the strongest obstacle towards a thorough regional integration.

Interreg funds are not specifically directed to the Slovenophones minority. Nevertheless Slovenian association and business enterprises have been among the main beneficiaries and the most active actors in the access to CBC policies and funds. With regard to Interreg programs, they improve minority's conditions and opportunities to the extent that they have met or fostered minority mobilisation, implementing cultural initiatives, and, eventually, enhancing the relations with the “twin community” on the Slovene side of the border. In particular, EU funds and programmes have been successful in the improvement and in the integrated management of cultural and natural territorial resources.

Research findings have nonetheless highlighted some difficulties for private actors and small business in accessing to CBC funds. The initiative has been largely left to private enterprises (for example, Euroservis - a private company which offers consultancy services for applying and managing CBC projects). Moreover, the territorial definition of Interreg programs does not take into account the topography of existing economic relations between the two sides of the border. As a matter of fact, the Province of Pordenone in FVG has only recently been considered eligible for Interreg programmes, while the area of Maribor is not included in the programming area. According to the Commerce Chamber of Trieste the most intense cooperation and economic exchange between FVG and Slovenia concerns exactly these two areas which are nevertheless excluded from the access to funding.

As a final point, CBC priority lines should also include the improvement of social interests beside economic development. With regard to this, one interesting project was proposed in the local administration of Gorizia: the setting up of a transborder hospital. Both Gorizia and Nuova Goriza have two very small hospitals. They are located one in front of the other but on two different sides of the border. The idea was to create a big hospital which would have served the whole transborder area (250.000 inhabitants). The struggle to set up the hospital has lasted almost 10 years. Practical difficulties such as training the staff in two languages were among the reasons which caused the failure of the project. Nevertheless, according to local administrators the project's failure was mainly

due to the opposition of the centre-right former regional government of FVG. The strong competition between the University of Udine and the University of Trieste is also among the reasons which prevented the setting up of the hospital and the creation of a third scientific centre.

From these findings, the policy implications are the following:

- The improvement of knowledge about CBC programmes among majority and minority group members.
- The redefinition of the programming area, taking into consideration existing economic relations between the Italian and the Slovenian border areas.
- CBC priority lines must favour forms of cooperation which met already existing transborder networks, thus fostering minority mobilisation, implementing cultural initiatives, and, eventually, enhancing the relations with the “twin community” on the Slovene side of the border
- The knowledge of already existing cultural and economic transborder relations should be improved through specific research and studies.

3.2.3 Cross-border mobility:

There are an estimated 5,000-7,000 Slovenian ‘daily migrants’ working on the Italian side of the border, many of whom work in Trieste, attracted by better wages in Italy (or, conversely, attractive to the Italians due to their lower wages) as well as by the availability of household and care posts in this increasingly elderly city. Given the delay in the application of the free-movement-of-persons in the EU enlargement process, only borderland Slovenes are presently allowed to work in Italy without special permits, cross-border labour movement for borderlanders having been bilaterally agreed in 1955. A 1999 survey conducted by Friuli-Venezia Giulia among a total of 2,400 residents of its region, Carinthia, and the Slovene borderland, revealed that only 3% of Italians and 7% of Slovenes surveyed crossed the border for work (though, given that much day-migrant labour is ‘untaxed’, the actual number may be higher).

The persistence of the border between Slovenia and Italy is thus denounced as a constraint with regard to both social and economic activities. With specific reference to Slovenia’s accession to the EU, almost all Slovenophones living in Italy perceive it as an incomplete process in so far the right to free circulation and establishment is not guaranteed for Slovenian workers. Moreover, economic actors also denounce the strict implementation of the new border between Slovenia and Croatia (which will soon become the border of the enlarged Schengen area).

A specific concern is the border between Sezana and Gorizia where there are a number of minor border posts (second or third class border posts) which prior to Slovenia’s accession could only be used by the people living along the border thanks to a special transit document (*lasciapassare*).² The possibility to cross the border has now been increased but is still limited to certain hours per day.

² The Udine/Videm agreement on local cross-border traffic between Italy and Yugoslavia in 1955 created four-month permits which allowed the roughly 690,000 residents living within 10km of the border four

From these findings, the policy implications are the following:

- Policies which favour the free circulation of people across national borders must be considered as a key point for the improvement of the social conditions in the area, therefore political and administrative borders that limit the free circulation of people must be dismantled.
- So far as the Slovenophone minority is concerned, it must be taken into consideration that affiliation perceptions relate to the whole area of the former Yugoslavia and especially Croatia, therefore cross border circulation must be mutually facilitated also along the border between Slovenia and Croatia
- Immediate action must be taken to improve crossborder mobility between Gorizia and Sezana

3.3 Education and cultural needs:

The education and school systems are a decisive field for the improvement of minority's opportunities and social conditions. The current education system is organised along the lines of a rigidly separated model, thus ratifying the parallel coexistence of entirely Italian and entirely Slovenian institutions. As a matter of fact the Slovenian schools in the Provinces of Gorizia and Trieste are not bilingual but 'separated' schools. Slovenian is the current teaching language in all the courses, while Italian is taught as an optional foreign language. The same is true for Italian secondary schools, with regard to Slovenian as an optional class. In other words, this school system does not provide mutual bilingual competences in the two languages for Slovenophones as well as for Italophones. The current school system is a result of the pre-WWII system, which was maintained by the provisions of the London Memorandum of 1954, and thus reproduces a strict cultural division between the two linguistic communities.

This system has been implicitly ratified by Law 38 of 2001. In direct contrast to the Slovene littoral, where each resident of the bilingual communities is educated in both languages in order to ensure the equal civic participation of the minority, the current Italian legislation does not include a reciprocal provision mandating courses in the Slovene language and culture in Italian schools. As a result, knowledge of the Slovenophone community and its history in Friuli-Venezia Giulia has generally remained confined within the community itself. Moreover, Slovenian schools are present only in the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia. The only exception is represented by the entirely bilingual elementary school in San Pietro al Natisone in the province of Udine, which the

crossings per month, each for a maximum of 24 hours. The terms of the bilateral agreement were recast in 1982 to allow the roughly 1 million residents within 20km of the border permits valid for 60 months, for an unlimited number of crossings, each for a maximum of 100 hours. Cross-border mobility and transfrontier employment (in the Trieste area in particular) should increase substantially once Slovenia begins to enjoy the right to free movement of persons in 2011. The delay in its implementation is due to (by most accounts alarmist) concerns among member-states (Austria and Germany being the most vociferously opposed) regarding an influx of lower-cost labour from Central and Eastern Europe. The EU's subsequently delivered a horizontal response to all acceding states on the issue; despite Slovenia's asking Italy for a bilateral derogation on the issue in 2001, Italy fell into line as (more-progressive) publics in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Ireland agreed that free movement should be delayed. To the dismay of some and the elation of others, Slovenes will, for the time being, remain shoppers in Trieste rather than citizens.

law allowed to transform from a private institution into a public state-financed school (art. 12 of law 30/2001). At present, there are no further plans to introduce Slovene-language schools in the province of Udine, nor to further expand the bilingual educational model adopted in San Pietro al Natisone elsewhere.

For the province of Udine, art. 12 of law 30/2001 establishes that in nursery school the education program should include «arguments related to the local traditions, history language and culture that can also be taught in Slovenian language», thus not including any bounding provision for bilinguals activities. Moreover the law specifies that these activities have to be provided without further expenses for the state³. With regard to compulsory education, the Slovenian language is provided only as a second language (art. 12(2) law 38/2001)⁴. As a matter of fact, after the primary school students that would like to continue to be educated in Slovenian language have to move from the province of Udine to the provinces Gorizia or Trieste, and attend separate Slovenian schools. In addition, due to the fact that in Friuli Venezia Giulia there are not university institutions providing ordinary courses taught in Slovenian, many Slovenophones choose to attend the university in Ljubljana.

It should be noted that, although claims for bilingualism are commonly endorsed by the whole Slovenophone community, the very notion of “bilingual identity” is a contested notion among Slovenophones themselves. While everyone agrees upon the necessity of extending bilingual toponymical signage, bilingual identity documents and the use of Slovenian in public offices, views vary with regard to the implementation of a truly bilingual regime in the school system. Separate schools are functional to maintain bilingual skill within the prerogatives of the Slovenian minority, and for this reason bilingual schools are opposed by the most conservative factions of the communities. In contrast, in the Slavia Friulana the bilingual school originated from the self organization process of the community itself. Due to the forced-nationalization process that the Slovenophones had suffered in this area and to the cultural opposition against the public use of the local Slovenian dialect, the bilingual model seemed to allow for a better integration process. As a matter of fact, the bilingual model, instead of separate schools, attracts also Italophones family who sent their children to the school in San Pietro al Natisone to exploit the opportunity of being educated in two languages.

Policy recommendations in the field of education system and cultural needs should consider the ongoing transformation of the Slovenophones and Italophones community in FVG and the changing perception of identity-line divisions.

³ «Nelle scuole materne site nei comuni della provincia di Udine compresi nella tabella di cui all'articolo 4, la programmazione educativa comprenderà anche argomenti relativi alle tradizioni, alla lingua ed alla cultura locali da svolgere anche in lingua slovena, senza nuovi o maggiori oneri a carico del bilancio dello Stato».

⁴ «Negli istituti di istruzione obbligatoria siti nei comuni di cui al comma 1 l'insegnamento della lingua slovena, della storia e delle tradizioni culturali e linguistiche locali è compreso nell'orario curricolare obbligatorio determinato dagli stessi istituti nell'esercizio dell'autonomia organizzativa e didattica di cui all'articolo 21, commi 8 e 9, della legge 15 marzo 1997, n. 59».

From these findings, the policy implications are the following:

- Bilingual education models must be implemented and enhanced to the extent that they favor integration processes.
- Studies to deepen the knowledge of educational opportunities and constraints for Slovenophone group members should be promoted.

4. Concluding remarks

One of Euroreg's main research questions concerned 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 minorities' conditions. In contrast to other Central and Eastern European countries, in Slovenia the "conditionality principle" and the implementation of EU legal *acquis* in minorities related matters have not played a significant role. This was due to the fact that the legal framework of minority protection inherited by the former Yugoslav 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. Changes occurred during the 1990s in minority interests and constraints have intervened on already existing minority's mobilization processes and, as such, they are perceived as less related to the European integration process. In contrast, the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and the redefinition of the border relations in the area has been a far more relevant factor for minority conditions.

As already underlined, the improvement of majority/minority relation has not necessarily corresponded to the improvement of minority economic condition and well being. The Slovenophone minority in Italy (or at least the majority of it) was strongly supported by the former Yugoslavia in economic terms and the independent Slovenia has not replaced this role. The fall of Yugoslavia is perceived as a major turning point which has determined changes in minorities opportunities and constraints. Nevertheless, since the 1990s the European integration process has played an important role in offering an unconventional post-national identity for those members of the community which refused the identification with fixed national belonging.