

Dear Special Rapporteur Fernand de Varennes,

dear honourable guests,

dear colleagues,

first of all, I would like to thank you for the kind invitation. In my capacity as President of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/South Tyrol, it is an honour and a pleasure to present in this occasion **South Tyrol's autonomy as a best practice.**

South Tyrol is the northernmost province in Italy and is situated in the centre of Europe. Today we are one of the richest regions in Europe.

Daily life in South Tyrol is constantly influenced by its autonomy. In schools, administration, judiciary, and toponymy – anywhere you encounter linguistic and cultural diversity and self-governance. Today, South Tyrol is characterised by the peaceful cohabitation of the German, Italian and Ladin language groups and South Tyrol's autonomy is considered one of the most successful power-sharing arrangements in the world, thanks to its far-reaching powers and implementation mechanism.

This has not always been the case. **South Tyrol looks back at a troubled history.** At the beginning of the twentieth century, South Tyrol was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until being annexed by Italy, following the 1919 Treaty of Saint-Germain. After the Fascists came to power in 1922, South Tyrol underwent an intensive 'Italianisation' process including the prohibition of German-language schools and the German language. In 1939, Hitler and Mussolini forced the South Tyroleans to choose between staying in their homeland, but giving up their culture and language, or emigrating to the "German Reich". After a fierce propaganda campaign, about 86 per cent of South Tyroleans decided to leave. About 75,000 people emigrated, but the beginning of the Second World War stopped the emigration.

After World War II, the so-called '**Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement**' between Italy and Austria guaranteed autonomous legislative and executive powers and regulations to safeguard the German minority. Nevertheless, the implementation was unsatisfying as South Tyrol was united

with the Province of Trento to form an Autonomous Region. The Italian language group was thus in the majority and was able to overrule the political motions of the German- and Ladin-speaking minority. Around 1960, separatists carried out bomb attacks on electricity pylons. Later, there were also fatalities.

Meanwhile, **Austria brought the South Tyrol issue to the UN General Assembly in New York.**

Only due to the great international attention and the support by our kin-state Austria the situation changed. Crucial for this development have been the two UN resolutions no. 1497 and 1661. They were the starting point for re-negotiations between Italy and Austria. After a first unsatisfying attempt, in 1972 a second autonomy Statute for South Tyrol came into force.

The Second Autonomy Statute transferred most of the legislative and administrative powers to the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen – Südtirol and is considered the fundamental law for South Tyrol's autonomy. It brought significant improvements in terms of political, financial, cultural and economic self-government.

Today, many experts and politicians are visiting South Tyrol to study our autonomy and we are pleased to be able to consult international organizations, minorities, indigenous peoples and states all over the world.

Of course, South Tyrol's autonomy cannot be exported 1 by 1. Every region has its own specificities to consider. Nevertheless, there are some provisions and instruments, which are adaptable also to other realities:

First of all, we have **a very dynamic concept of autonomy**. Legally speaking, the Second Autonomy Statute of 1972 has constitutional rank and therefore ordinary law can neither interfere with nor change the provisions within the Statute. We implemented the autonomy over time mainly by so-called 'enactment decrees' elaborated by special commissions and bilateral negotiations with the state. The work in the commissions has been very successful, as the members represent the Italian state and South Tyrol on a numerical level and all different language groups are present.

Secondly, South Tyrol's autonomy arrangement is **designed to regulate the balance of power between the language groups** with language equality measures, reserved positions, executive proportionality, public service employment proportionality and public funding proportionality. This guarantees that the language groups are represented according to their numerical strength on a political level but also in public administration, and this is crucial for a peaceful coexistence. Finally, we also have **financial autonomy**, which is key to implement and execute the autonomous powers. Due to long negotiations, South Tyrol managed that almost 90 % of the taxes paid in South Tyrol, remain in South Tyrol.

Of course, also today, **our autonomy demands constant negotiations with Rome**. Autonomy and minority protection in that sense is a 'never-ending story' and political negotiations are and always will be key for South Tyrol.

Next year we celebrate the 50-years-jubilee of the Second Autonomy Statute, and more than ever, we sense, as one of the best protected minorities in Europe, that we also have to support other minorities to achieve similar things.

In that regard I would like to remember the **Bolzano-Bozen Declaration in 2004**, which was addressed to all EU member states and the European Commission. With the accession of new member states from Central and Eastern European countries in the year 2004, minority protection became more crucial for the European Union. Also, the **Bolzano-Bolzano recommendations from 2008**, which are a set of recommendations on national minorities in inter-state relations by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities show the importance of interstate diplomacy and bilateral agreements, as it was the case in South Tyrol's history.

Let me finish by saying that South Tyrol's model is far from perfect and it needs to be further developed and adapted to new challenges of our times. But, we are also aware that our autonomy has worked out to pacify a conflict successfully and the last 50 years have shown that the autonomy has given us the tools to develop our territory, economically and socially.

South Tyrol is a living example for effective conflict resolution and we are doing our best to share this knowledge and experience within the EU and worldwide. Our wish is that we might be able to contribute that other states and minorities are able to coexist peacefully.