South Tyrolean Solutions to Ethnic Conflicts from a Security Studies Perspective¹

Andrea Carlà
Institute for Minority Rights – European Academy of Bozen/Bolzano
E-mail address for correspondence: andrea.carla@eurac.edu

Abstract

This paper analyses the South Tyrolean power-sharing system using a security studies perspective. South Tyrol is one of the best confirmations of the assumption of power-sharing theories that such type of arrangement might encourage elites' interethnic cooperation that at a later stage could spill over into society at large. However, power-sharing systems do not always work. Appling concepts from security studies (societal security and securitization) the paper identifies which specific dynamics made South Tyrol a successful story. I argue that this security studies framework offers a new insight to understand how power-sharing systems can tackle violent forms of ethnic mobilization and foster peaceful integration of society. The analysis shows that power-sharing arrangements, like those implemented in South Tyrol, can work when enacted in combination with other measures tackling societal security concerns, including measures of de-securitization that address processes of securitization, through which ethnic diversity is perceived as salient and conflictual.

ISSN: 2048-075X

Ethnopolitics Papers is an initiative of the Specialist Group Ethnopolitics of the Political Studies Association of the UK, published jointly with the Exeter Centre for Ethnopolitical Studies and Centre for the Study of Ethnic Conflict, Queen's University Belfast.

Edited by
Dr Henry Jarrett, University of Exeter
Jelena Loncar, University of York

¹ A longer version of this paper has been published in the European Yearbook of Minority Issues, 12, 2013 (2016), under the title ‘Societal Security in South Tyrol: A Model to Deal with Ethnic Conflicts.’
We welcome contributions and comments on Ethnopolitics Papers to h.jarrett@exeter.ac.uk

Ethnopolitics Papers are available online at
https://www.psa.ac.uk/psa-communities/specialist-groups/ethnopolitics/blog
1. Introduction

In light of the conflict in Ukraine, the Italian Prime Minister M. Renzi has suggested to the Russian president V. Putin to look at South Tyrol, an Italian province characterized by the presence of a German-speaking population and a complex power-sharing system to protect it, as an example to find a solution to the tensions. Similarly, scholar R. Benedikter has suggested political mechanisms based on the South Tyrolean system for the Eastern Ukranian areas of Donetsk and Lugansk as the best option available to start reducing the conflict (Benedikter, 2015). This was not the first time that South Tyrol was referred to as a model to deal with ethnic diversity and resolving ethnic conflicts. It happened several times in contexts ranging from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Iraq (Benedikter, 2004).

South Tyrol is, indeed, one of the best confirmation of the assumption of power-sharing theories that such type of arrangements might encourage elites’ interethnic cooperation that at a later stage could spill over into the society a large. The province is characterized not only by the absence of violence and passive peaceful coexistence (negative peace), but also by positive peace and the enhancement of interethnic dialogue and cooperation (Pallaver, 2014: 378). South Tyrolean institutional arrangements have convinced the German-speaking minority that it is possible to live together and cooperate with the Italian-speaking population under an Italian state. In other terms, South Tyrol shows that functioning government institutions can exists without a homogenous community and ethno-national claims can be contained, avoiding violent spirals.

However, power-sharing systems do not always work as the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina is a clear reminder with its paralyzed government and the trump of ethnic interests over more pressing and vital concerns of the state. It, thus, remains unclear what exactly made South Tyrol a success and to what extent is it possible to export its model. Many previous works on South Tyrol follows a juridical approach and/or focuses on the specific characteristics of the policies and power-sharing institutional arrangements elaborated to protect the German-speaking population (Woelk, Palermo and Marko, 2008). Other scholars have described the conditions present in South Tyrol that allowed for the peaceful resolution of ethnic tensions (Wolff, 2003). However we still miss a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics through which conditions for a peaceful settlement were created and South Tyrolean policies and institutions were not only adopted but accepted by the counterparts involved in the ethnic tensions, and proven successful in bringing and maintaining positive peace and containing the trump of the ‘ethnic card’. Furthermore, it remains unclear how to achieve similar outcomes in contexts outside of the South Tyrolean environment.

In this article I address these shortcomings by engaging with concepts from security studies, in particular societal security and securitization. I apply these concepts to identify which specific dynamics made South Tyrol a successful story, analyzing what lessons can be learned for our understanding of ethnic conflict resolution capacities. I argue that this security studies framework offers new insight to understand how power-sharing systems can tackle violent forms of ethnic mobilization and foster peaceful integration of society. Below I will present my framework to later present a brief historical background of South Tyrol and then analyze in details South Tyrolean solutions to ethnic conflicts. The conclusions highlight the lessons that can be learned by examining the South Tyrol case from a security studies perspective.

2. Ethnic Conflicts from a Security Studies Perspective

Two concepts of security studies are particularly useful to deal with ethnic conflicts: societal security and securitization. Derived from traditional understanding of security, that focuses on military threats against states, societal security refers to threats that emerge from the fact that human beings belong to different communal groups that do not necessarily correspond to defined state borders. Societal security threats involves three types of referent objects, namely what needs to be protected: the state, which is mainly interested in preserving its territorial integrity and sovereignty; communal entities, which aim at maintaining their identities and cultural characteristics and can clash with the nation–state identity and with each other; and individual members of communal groups, concerned with their general wellbeing, which is put in danger by discriminatory practice and communal conflicts.

Securitization refers to the process through which an issue is considered as an ‘existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure’ (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998: 23-24). The so-called Copenhagen School has provided a constructivist understanding of securitization, arguing that an issue is securitized ‘not because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat’ (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998: 23-24). However, it is not enough that a political agent defines a threat; rather securitization requires some kind of acceptance and endorsement. Thus, security issues are also related to perception and misperception rooted in the society. Furthermore, this process is affected by structural factors, such as methods of social control and technologies used in specific locus of power and prevailing rationalities of governance (Bigo, 2002).

With regard to societal security, I define securitization as the process through which ethnicity is perceived in prevalently exclusionary forms centered on a ‘we vs. them’ dichotomy, implying homogenous entities in conflictual oppositions. So defined the concept of securitization has several advantages. In particular, it moves the focus of the
analysis from ethnicity understood as a category of belonging to the process thorough which this category becomes salient. In this way, this framework addresses current conceptual shortcomings, by explaining the prominence of ethnicity and ethnic identity and the potential appeal of ethnic political mobilization, and addressing the link between interest and identity beyond what is, for example, explained by rational choice theories. Furthermore, it allows for the treatment of ethnic groups and identity as social agents as well as it represents ‘an attempt to deconstruct the intersubjective processes’ that lead to them (Theiler, 2003: 254). In other words, they can be considered as both independent variables that influence behavior and social outcomes and dependent variables, manipulated by political actors, affected by other types of interests and motivations and shaped by the political structure. In addition, the concept of securitization allows us to detach ethnicity and ethnic diversity from the negative connotations that tend to follow these concepts, often considered a danger for democracy and political stability and thus prone to stoking tensions and conflicts (Dahl, 1971; Lustick, 1979). However, ethnicity is not necessarily conflictual. Indeed, peaceful and cooperative relations between ethnic groups are in fact more common than violence (Fearon and Laitin, 1996). It is the development of processes of securitization that makes ethnicity problematic.

Finally, focusing on securitization, rather than ethnic violence or conflicts, changes how we deal with these occurrences and understand possible solutions. Indeed, dealing with societal security issues has two main dimensions: addressing issues that have been securitized or considering the process through which an issue is securitized. With the first dimension, the aim is to provide security to an insecure status, as Wæver describes, to ‘try to move them [securitized issues] from insecurity to security, or […] to keep the responses in forms that do not generate security dilemmas and other vicious spirals’ (Wæver, 2000: 253). Wæver’s two goals can be used to identify two types of measures to deal with societal security issues: measures to provide security tout court and measures for the management of security threats. Security tout court can be provided for example by guaranteeing human rights, individual freedom, access to citizenship and democratic processes. As clarified by Roe, management ‘is about “moderate” (not excessive) securitization, about “sensible” (not irrational) securitization […] is about “mitigating” or “ameliorating”’ what the author calls societal security dilemmas (Roe, 2004: 292-293). As specific measures to manage security threats, Roe proposes provisions and legislations that on the one hand guarantee minority communal groups the maintenance of their identities and their existence and on the other hand will assure the majority and the state that the minorities will not try to secede. Example of such mechanisms would be the institutionalization of federal state structure, or consociational institutional arrangements.

---

3 Societal security dilemma refers to societal groups aimed at maintaining their identity and interacting in a zero-sum game, where gains for one group are considered to be endangering the other group. According to Roe, the dilemma emerges because ‘measures that one side takes to defend its societal security (strengthen its identity) are misperceived by another as a threat to its own identity. Consequently, countermeasures are employed, thereby weakening the societal security of the first side,’ a dynamic that, if no stopped, can bring about ethnic violence (Roe, 2002: 73).
In the second dimension, which focuses on processes of securitization, two types of measures can also be identified. First, the goal is to ‘pre-empt or forestall securitization,’ namely avoiding ‘speaking about certain issue in terms of security’ (Jutilia, 2006: 169). In this way, issues are kept in a non-securitized status and out of an emergency mood (*measures for non-securitization*). An example of a specific measure in this regard is the successful criminal prosecution of perpetrators of ethnic violence and abuses (in national as well as international courts), which can work as a deterrence to discourage the violent mobilization of ethnic diversity by political leaders in the future and in other countries.

Second, if an issue has been securitized, the goal should be to bring it back to normal politics, namely to de-securitize it (*measures for de-securitization*) (Jutilia, 2006: 169; Wæver, 2000: 253). Social research and statistics can play an important role in order to convince people that specific groups are not dangerous and do not represent a real security threat, by showing for example that specific groups do not take away resources from other groups (Huysmans, 1995: 65-6). Economic and social policies that improve the welfare of the society can also reduce the perception of the ‘cultural other’ as a threat (Alexseev, 2011: 520). Furthermore de-securitization can be pursued with measures that aim at deconstructing and reconstructing the narratives that create societal security issues by changing the image of the issue that is considered as a threat. J. Huysmans refers to the need to splinter societal groups and their identities, showing how groups are not unitary entities, but are composed of individuals who have many identities, revealing the similarities between individuals belonging to different societal groups (Huysmans, 1995: 67-9), and contextualizing security issues in more complex narratives that include economic, social and political conditions. Other scholars suggest to rethink the friend-enemy logic and reframe narratives of groups’ identities in less exclusionary terms (see Aradau in Roe, 2004: 287), to promote inclusion and common sense of belonging. This can be obtained for example through multicultural policies that ‘encourage the sustaining of two or more societal cultures within the state,’ and can foster non-exclusionary identities (Jutilia, 2006: 179-80), and institutional mechanisms that can ‘initiate trust-building’ between communities (Bilgic, 2013: 204), and favor ethnic interactions and ‘contamination’ over the maintenance of group distinctiveness.

To summarize, a security studies perspective give us various types of measures to tackle ethnic conflicts and tensions. Which measures were taken in the South Tyrol case will be analyzed in the next section.

### 3. Case Study: South Tyrol

In this section I examine the South Tyrol case, analyzing the societal security threats that affected the province and identifying which of the types of measures presented in the
previous section were implemented to resolve them. As showed below, the South Tyrol model presents a combination of first and second dimensions measures towards all referent objects involved in the ethnic tension (namely the Italian state, the South Tyrolean German and Italian-speaking linguistic groups, and the individuals living in the province regardless of their linguistic affiliation), providing security as well as tackling processes of securitization. The South Tyrolean success is due in part to how the effects of one measure on one referent object have been counterbalanced by the outcomes of another measure. Before proceeding with the analysis I provide a detailed account of recent South Tyrolean history, necessary to later highlight the specific measures that characterized South Tyrol.

**Historical background**

South Tyrol, together with the neighboring Trentino, became part of the Italian territory after World War I as spoil of war, although the South Tyrolean population, back then mostly German-speaking, aimed at becoming part of the new Austrian state. Few years later, Mussolini had taken power in Italy and the fascist government started to implement policies for the Italianization of South Tyrol. German-speaking public officers were fired or transferred; in schools, teaching in German was forbidden and punished; only Italian was allowed in offices, public places, and public inscriptions. Moreover, industrial zones were created in the biggest South Tyrolean towns to encourage Italian immigration. In the new industrial factories, the German-speaking population could not find jobs and, in this way, lost control of the most vital economic sectors and was excluded from the process of modernization. Instead, Italian families from the rest of the peninsula received incentives to move to South Tyrol to work in public administration and the new industries. The Italian population grew from 7,000 in 1910 to more than 100,000 in 1943, becoming one-third of South Tyrol inhabitants (data from Pristinger, 1978). Furthermore, after the advent of Nazism in Germany, Hitler and Mussolini resolved the South Tyrol issue with the so-called ‘options’, the choice given in 1939 to the German-speaking South Tyroleans between German citizenship and expatriation or Italian citizenship, renouncing demands for the protection of their culture. Of the 266,985 German-speaking South Tyroleans, 185,085 chose to move to Germany. However, the war slowed down the expatriation process, and at the end ‘only’ 70,000 South Tyroleans left Italy (data from Vedovato, 1971).

After World War II the South Tyrol population demanded the right of self-determination for South Tyrol, backed up by irredentist claims of Austrian authorities. The Italian government opposed this plan, citing the fact that in previous two decades, the ethnic composition of South Tyrol had changed because a large number of Italians now lived in the region. Furthermore, the Italian state had constructed electric power plants in the region, which

---

4 It is important to note that more than 4% of the population of South Tyrol is composed by Ladins, a small linguistic group that lives concentrated in three mountain valleys and has through the centuries maintained distinct costumes and language. Because it is demographically small, this linguistic group is not considered in this contribution, which focuses on the societal security issues regarding the German-speaking population.
provided 13 per cent of the national output. Thus, the territory was an important component of the economic security of the country. With the Cold War taking shape, the Great Powers decided to keep the borders at the Brenner Pass and pushed Rome and Vienna to conclude an agreement that would eliminate the conflicts between the two governments. On 5 September 1946, the so-called De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement (also known as the Paris Agreement) was signed. The agreement, which became part of the 1947 Peace Treaty between Italy and the Allies, provided for the creation of an autonomous regional government under the Italian State with special measures to protect the German-speaking group.

The De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement is fairly generic and problems about the dimension of territorial autonomy surfaced. The German-speaking group wanted it limited to South Tyrol, where German speakers were the majority of the population. But, the first Statute of Autonomy, approved by the Italian government to put the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement into practice, gave territorial autonomy to the whole region of Trentino-Alto Adige (composed of the two Provinces of Trento and Bolzano/South Tyrol), where the German-speaking group is in sum a minority. After a short period of cooperation between the Italian- and German-speaking groups in South Tyrol, the Italian government gradually neglected the Statute. Moreover, the influx of Italian speakers, begun during Fascism, did not abate. A climate of mistrust emerged. The German-speaking population started to accuse the Italian government of having diluted its protection granted by the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement. The leaders of the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP) (the main South Tyrolean party representing the German-speaking population) requested that South Tyrol be made an autonomous region.

The Austrian government intervened in the increasing tensions first by conducting direct bilateral negotiations with Rome in order to fulfill the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement. When these negotiations failed, Vienna brought the South Tyrol issue to the United Nations General Assembly in 1960, and again in 1961. The Assembly clarified the impossibility of changing national borders and urged the parties to find a solution through the peace instruments provided by the UN Charter. However, the UN intervention did not produce immediate results and a violent period followed. Some members of the German-speaking group have embraced militancy, bombing symbols of Italian presence. The Italian State reacted to the bombings with draconian measures, brutal police operations, and a partial militarization of South Tyrol. Rome also accused the Austrian government of complicity and used its veto power to block Austria’s negotiations with the European Economic Community.

Meanwhile, in 1961, the new Italian center-left government set up a research commission (called the Commission of the Nineteen) with representatives of the South Tyrol linguistic groups. This action offered voice and representation to the local population. In 1969, based on the outcome of the commission, which was discussed with Austrian experts as
well as the SVP, the Italian government enacted 137 measures, the so-called ‘Pacchetto’ (Package), which represented a new political basis for autonomy (Wolff, 2003). The principal elements of the Package provided for the transfer of legislative and executive powers from the region to the two Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, where the German-speaking population was (and is) the majority. Moreover, the Package increased the number of special measures to protect the German-speaking population. The Package was approved by the Italian and Austrian Parliaments as well as by a tiny majority of the members of the SVP (53 per cent). In 1972, Rome enacted a second Statute of Autonomy and started to work out further implementing measures.

The second Statute of Autonomy created a sophisticated power-sharing system. Such a system is based on consociational elements, which provide access to power to the various ethnic segments of the society and elites’ cooperation, in combination with dissociative conflict resolution elements, which provides a clear delimitation of sphere of influence and special and social separation of the counterparts (Pallaver, 2014). The key characteristics of this system are extensive political autonomy for a specific territory (the Province of Bolzano/Bozen–South Tyrol) in which German speakers are actually the majority; proportional representation of the linguistic groups in legislative, executive and judiciary provincial government bodies; veto power for the linguistic groups in matters that regard vital interests of a group; the use of the so-called ‘ethnic quota system,’ namely the distribution of public employment and public resources among the linguistic groups in proportion to their numerical strength, which is calculated based on a declaration of linguistic affiliation released at the time of the census; mandatory bilingualism of public signs and public officers; the right to vote in local elections only after four years residency; and education in the mother tongue of the pupils and compulsory teaching of the other main language spoken in South Tyrol, obtained through the creation of separate school systems: Italian-language schools and German-language schools.

In 1992, the Italian government implemented the last measures of the second Statute. After approval by the SVP, the Austrian government declared at the UN that the conflict regarding South Tyrol was resolved.

Addressing Societal Security Threats in South Tyrol: Analysis

From the above account there emerges that South Tyrol history presents various societal security threats for a variety of referent objects. First there were threats to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Italian State mainly in the form of requests for self-determination by the South Tyrolean population, violent actions and foreign (Austrian) intervention. Concerning the linguistic groups, societal security issues in South Tyrol refer

In Italian-language schools, pupils are taught in Italian and learn German as a second language; in German-language schools, pupils are taught in German and learn Italian as second language.

---

5 In Italian-language schools, pupils are taught in Italian and learn German as a second language; in German-language schools, pupils are taught in German and learn Italian as second language.
not only to the threat to the identity of the German-speaking population and its ability to survive as a distinct community and preserve its language and culture within an Italian state; but also societal security threats to the Italian-speaking group, which especially with the second Statute of Autonomy and the creation of the provincial autonomy had feared abandonment by the Italian State, losing its dominant position, and becoming a minority. Finally, discriminatory practices carried out by the Italian government, especially during fascism, and the economic and social consequences of the tension in the 1950s and 1960s threatened the wellbeing of South Tyrolean inhabitants. Which specific measures were put in place to tackle these societal security threats?

The threat to the territorial integrity of the Italian State were addressed mainly by use of first dimension measures, in particular measures for the management of security threats in the form of the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement. Indeed, with the agreement, South Tyrol was no longer a serious threat to the territorial integrity of the Italian State. Through the agreement Austria recognized the border. For Italy, the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement was also an instrument ‘to maintain the existing degree of Italianization’ of South Tyrol (Wolff, 2003: 130). The agreement mitigated the security threats to the territorial integrity of the Italian State, reducing the possibility of secession or modification of state borders.

However, resolving the territorial threat came at the expense of Italian sovereignty since the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement acknowledged the specific German character of part of the population of South Tyrol while Austria became its protector. In this way, South Tyrol became an international affair (Steininger, 2003: 104). In the following years, the Italian authority over the affairs of the province was seriously challenged by mass protests, violent actions, and Austrian appeal to the United Nations.

The sovereign threats were resolved with first-dimension measures, especially measures for the management of security threats that prevent security issues from deteriorating further. First of all, there is the process through which the Italian State eventually negotiated a solution. The Italian State carried on negotiations at two levels: internationally, with the Austrian government and domestically, with the German-speaking population through the creation of the Commission of the Nineteen. Indeed, the Commission was created with the intention to demonstrate Italian concern for the German-speaking minority and to force Austria out of the ‘South Tyrol business’, enabling Italy to settle its own affairs, although the Commission ‘developed a momentum and life of its own’ (Steininger, 2003: 129). In this way, South Tyrol remained in part an internal affair, mitigating threats to Italian sovereignty.

A second measures is the so-called Operational Calendar that accompanied the Package. This was a timetable specifying deadlines for the implementation of the Package at the end of which Austria would have declared the end of the dispute. Measures taken by the Italian State were followed by actions by the Austrian government, culminating with the
Austrian declaration at the UN. On the one hand, the Calendar satisfied the desire of the German-speaking population to anchor the Package as well as its implementation internationally, and Austria was assured that Italy would implement its measures. On the other hand, with the Calendar, Italy was guaranteed that Austria would put an end to the dispute (Steininger, 2003: 147). Overall, the Calendar mitigated the Italian fear of again losing control over South Tyrol issues and being challenged internationally.

Besides these first dimension measures, there were also some elements and, later on, international developments that reflect measures for de-securitization. The De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement contains provisions to improve relations between Italy and Austria and dilutes the importance of the borders, such as agreements on mutual recognition of certain degrees, free passage and good transit between North and East Tyrol by rail and road, and facilitating frontier traffic and exchanges of goods. After the new Statute, crossborder contacts and economic and cultural activities further developed. Besides the Austrian membership in the EU in 1995, various transfrontier initiatives were institutionalized. For example, in 1995 Tyrol, South Tyrol and Trentino established joint representation in Brussels and in 2011 the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) ‘European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino’ was established to coordinate and develop common policies in various areas (although it is still at an early stage). Thus, we witness the development of a new territorial entity that overlaps with but does not threaten the old state entity. The EU as well as tranfrontier institutions like the European Region contribute to the development of a new political community based on a common identity. In sum, crossborder relationships and the development of supranational and transfrontier institutions contribute to the de-securitization of South Tyrol, challenging the dichotomy of ‘with Italy–against Italy’ to pursue common economic, social and political interests.

Concerning societal security threats vis-à-vis the linguistic groups, the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement and the creation of the autonomous region as envisioned in the first Statute, while increasing the security of the Italian State, did not dissolve the fears of the German-speaking group of losing its cultural identity inside the Italian State. This societal security threat has been dealt mainly with measures for the management of security threats. First the German-speaking group could participate in the elaboration of a solution and its implementation. As said previously, members of the German-speaking group participated in the works of the Commission of the Nineteen that collaborated in the development of the Package, as well as the so-called Commission of the Nine that prepared the second Statute of Autonomy. This ‘model of procedural inclusion’ was perpetuated with the creation of various commissions created to implement the new Statute of Autonomy and deal with the development of the autonomy and protection of minorities (‘Commission of Twelve,’ ‘Commission of Six’ and ‘137 Commission’), which include German-speaking members. The commissions created ‘institutional equality’ between the Italian and the German-speaking populations in the decision-making process and in the mechanisms for the development of the South Tyrol system (Marko, 2008: 384-85).
Second, the settlement of the dispute between Italy and Austria over South Tyrol was subjected to the approval of the German-speaking population. The Austrian government waited to hear the opinion of the SVP before agreeing on any solutions. At the time of the Austrian declaration of conflict resolution, it was stated that future developments would require the approval of the German-speaking population.

Finally, the Second Autonomy Statute includes several consociational provisions and dissociative conflict resolution institutional arrangements. With these arrangements, the German-speaking population is recognized as a distinct ethnic group and is guaranteed the protection of its linguistic and cultural diversity, even with the recognition of collective rights and cultural autonomy that at times, in order to repair past injustices, prevail over basic principles of fairness and individual rights, like the principle of meritocracy in accessing public employment. The establishment of the territorial autonomy brought a ‘relativization of the majority/minority position’ since the German-speaking population is actually the majority in the autonomous province (Marko, 2008: 382-83), guaranteeing the German-speaking group access to power and control over many of its own affairs. The ‘ethnic quota system,’ addressing the fact that in the past most public service jobs were held by Italian speakers, reinforced the position of the German-speaking group in the economic and social life of South Tyrol.

The combination of these measures for the management of security threats implemented in South Tyrol has provided a general feeling of security. The German-speaking group’s existence was reassured even as part of the Italian state (Marko, 2008: 382), mitigating the societal security threat at the group level. Through these measures, the German-speaking group has accepted a self-understanding as a linguistic minority and has prevalently discarded the idea of reversing its condition.

Whereas the Second Statute of Autonomy addressed security concerns of the German-speaking population, it brought a sense of insecurity to the Italian-speaking group; an example of how measures that increase security for one referent object can decrease it for another referent object. Rather than see an identitarian threat, there was the concern that the Italian-speaking group would have had fewer opportunities for social and economic mobility. Indeed, the Italian-speaking group feared that mandatory bilingualism would exclude its members from public posts and that the provincial power over economy would mean a reduction of the industrial sector of Bolzano, created during fascism and dominated by the Italian-speaking group (Wolff, 2003: 128).

While the fears of the Italian-speaking group proved partially unfounded, the South Tyrol system also contains measures for the management of security threats that apply to the Italian-speaking population as a group and provide to it security. First, even with the second Statute of Autonomy, South Tyrol remained part of the region Trentino-Alto Adige,
where Italian speakers are the majority. Second, the mechanism to include the German-speaking group in the decision-making process and the principle of institutional equality (as well as the ethnic quota system) apply also to the Italian-speaking group. In other words, the German-speaking group and its political representation, the SVP, could not govern alone even if they had the absolute majority.

The second Statute of Autonomy affect also the relationship between the linguistic groups. In this regard, the South Tyrolean arrangements force political cooperation among the linguistic groups, whose elites need to find a consensus. At the same time, they are based on rigid separatism between the German- and the Italian-speaking population (Carlà, 2007) and have institutionally frozen in place the linguistic divisions of South Tyrol for many aspects of social and political life—what Marko calls the ‘ethnic “Midas effect”’ (Marko, 2008: 386). Each linguistic group has created its own structures and organizations (such as kindergartens, unions, political parties, libraries, youth and sport associations, mass media and churches) and there is still limited contact between the groups (Pallaver, 2008: 311-12).

However, the South Tyrol model also contains second-dimension measures for de-securitization that aim at eliminating the linguistic cleavage and the reasons for the securitization of ethnic relations. First, the South Tyrol model presents also provisions that aim at transforming identities, sparking trust-building, overcoming ethnic divisions and fostering common forms of identification. In particular, it is necessary to highlight the importance of the establishment of a territorial autonomy that refers to all citizens independently of their linguistic belonging and that has brought advantages to the entire population. The South Tyrolean territorial autonomy has had two effects. It favored identification of all ethnic groups with South Tyrolean institutional arrangements and cross-communal loyalty to the autonomous institutions (Wolff, 2003: 148-50). In this way it transforms the identities of South Tyrolean groups by adding a territorial boundary to the ethnic boundaries. Second, it is necessary to consider how the territorial autonomy interacted at times with some of the measures for the management of security threats presented earlier. The combination of these elements have provided security that both brought peaceful coexistence as well as forced ethnic groups and their members to cooperate on various issues where they share common interests. This dynamic has favored, as pointed out by Marko, a process of social learning at both the elite and the mass level (Marko, 2008). At times, acting together in a securitized context has sparked mutual trust, integration, and social cohesion in parts of South Tyrol society.

Thus, the South Tyrol model contains mechanisms to develop a communal inclusive narrative. Part of the society would in fact like to overcome the ethnic-linguistic separations that characterize South Tyrol. According to surveys, the majority of both linguistic groups considers the presence of more than one linguistic group in the territory in a positive light and sees as a main concern the need for South Tyrol to improve the integration of the
ethnic groups, especially in schools and politics. The past years have also witnessed ‘the creation of language-comprehensive structures within parties, trade unions and associations’ and common interethnic initiatives in various fields (Pallaver, 2008: 322).

Moving from threats to the linguistic groups to threats to the general wellbeing of South Tyrolean inhabitants, the latter were tackled with measures to provide security tout court. First, since the end of World War II, Italy has been a stable democracy that recognizes in its Constitution and laws several human rights and individual freedoms and has signed various international and European agreements in this regard. Furthermore, as established in the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement, the Italian State revised the Options, returning Italian citizenship to those who had opted to relocate to Germany, guaranteeing them full membership in the society.

In addition, the South Tyrol system to protect minorities implemented with the second Statute of Autonomy combines group rights with the guarantee of individual rights. Although, at times, as stated above, individual rights are overshadowed by the need to protect collective rights and address past injustices, blatant forms of discrimination are limited. Italian and European courts have played a role in this regard, with judgments against some of the most controversial practices; these courts helped correct the system to further protect basic individual rights. Thus, the South Tyrol model has a certain degree of flexibility and includes mechanisms to make adjustments to the system in order to balance the need to protect the wellbeing of individuals with the protection of group interests. Although some elements are still criticized, these adjustments avoided an excessive detachment and resentment of on the part of South Tyrolean society.

The security of South Tyrolean inhabitants was also jeopardized with the escalation of tensions in the 1950s and especially after 1961. The bombings had social and economic consequences for many South Tyrolean inhabitants. They created a climate of fear that blocked the development of the tourist sector, which would become one of the drivers of the South Tyrol economy.

---


7 For example, in the 1981 census, the declaration of linguistic affiliation, which is needed for the functioning of the ethnic quota system, recognized only the official language groups (Italian, German or Ladin); therefore, bilinguals and people with migrant backgrounds had to declare to belong to one of these groups and hide their real linguistic identity. Following a judgment of the Consiglio di Stato that questioned this practice (Consiglio di Stato, sez. IV 439/1984), in the 1991 census there was given the possibility to identify with the term altro (other), and to release a declaration of aggregation to the official groups in order to allow the quota system to function. The 2011 census excluded foreigners from releasing the declaration of affiliation, and it provided for an anonymous declaration that is used to determine only the consistency of the groups. Individual affiliation is now determined through separate declarations that can be given at any time.
Social and economic threats to the South Tyroleans’ wellbeing were mainly resolved with measures for de-securitization. With the second Statute of Autonomy, South Tyrol has enjoyed generous fiscal arrangements to carry out its autonomous powers. This fact allowed the province to develop a vast and excellent bureaucratic apparatus with better social services compared to the rest of the Italian peninsula, enjoyed by all inhabitants of South Tyrol regardless of their linguistic affiliation. The wealth of South Tyrol institutions and social policies has decreased the animosity of the members of the German-speaking group toward the Italian state and tension among the South Tyrolean linguistic groups.

In the meantime, in the past three decades, South Tyrol has experienced remarkable economic growth that also involved those sectors (tourism and agriculture) dominated for historical reasons by the German-speaking population. The province has low levels of unemployment. As pointed out by Wolff, this economic prosperity makes ‘sufficient resources available and prevents ethnic competition in economic terms’ (Wolff, 2003: 149).

4. Conclusions

To summarize, South Tyrolean solutions to ethnic conflicts comprehend a variety of measures to tackle societal security concerns for each referent object at stake: the Italian State, the German and the Italian-linguistic groups as well as South Tyrolean inhabitants in general. In particular threats to the Italian State were addressed with measures for the management of security threats followed by measures for de-securitization, although the latter unfolded, for the most part, at a later stage and played a secondary role. Concerning societal security threats to the linguistic groups, the South Tyrol system combined first-dimension and second-dimension measures, in particular, measures for the management of security threats and measures for de-securitization. This combination has moderated the feeling of insecurity of South Tyrolean linguistic groups, avoiding the event that societal security issues descend into a negative spiral. At the same time, it has started to slowly erode the causes of securitization by sparking the initial development of a common territorial identity. Regarding threats to the South Tyrolean inhabitants, the South Tyrol system is characterized by measures to provide security tout court as well as measures of de-securitization, which interact with some of the negative effects of measures implemented in regards to South Tyrolean linguistic groups, further counterbalancing the process of reification of ethnic group identities and divisions. In addition, by dealing with individual (economic) interests, they have affected the conflict over identity, diluting the societal security threats to the existence of the linguistic groups.

This analysis of the South Tyrol case shows that using a security study framework and the concepts of societal security and securitization provides further insights to understand how
power-sharing systems, like that implemented in South Tyrol, might be successful in not only ending ethnic violence and tensions, but also fostering positive peace and social interethnic cooperation and integration. Only putting in place power-sharing arrangements does not make the trick, as it is often implied by those that refer to South Tyrol as a model to deal with ethnic conflicts. Instead, it is necessary to highlight the dynamics and specific elements that made South Tyrol a successful story.

South Tyrol power-sharing system is part of a more complex combination of first dimension and second dimension measures developed to tackle societal security threats. The South Tyrol example is characterized by measures to provide security implemented for each referent object (in particular, measures for the management of security threats). These measures ameliorated the security concerns of the Italian State, the German and Italian linguistic groups and the inhabitants of South Tyrol. They also created a securitized context in which Rome could accept limitations of its sovereignty in regard to South Tyrol; the German-speaking group was guaranteed its future existence as a minority in the Italian state; the Italian-speaking group could accept its minority status; and the inhabitants of South Tyrol stopped considering their wellbeing as being threatened by ethnic tensions. These measures were pursued together with some second-dimension measures (especially measures of de-securitization). This combination made possible to mitigate societal security issues, while providing at the same time the basis to eliminate the factors that brought about the process of securitization.

The interaction among various measures applied to different referent objects allowed to counterbalance potential negative effects and find an equilibrium among the security interests of the Italian State, the South Tyrolean linguistic groups and the inhabitants of South Tyrol. The measures for providing security to the linguistic groups were successful only when accompanied by measures taken vis-à-vis the Italian State and South Tyrolean inhabitants and vice-versa. Measures for the management of security threats were sustainable in the long run because they were accompanied by some measures of de-securitization. It is in the interactions among measures and intersections among referent objects that the success of South Tyrol is best explained.

In conclusion, the analysis sheds new lights to understand how power-sharing systems might be successful in bringing not only negative peace, but also fostering positive peace, limiting the appeal of the ethnic card and violent ethnic mobilization, and allowing a functioning government and interethnic cooperation at all level of the society. Power-sharing arrangements can work when enacted in combination with other measures tackling societal security concerns for all the referent object involved in the ethnic tensions. In particular, the solution to the ethnic tensions should include second dimension measures (measures for de-securitization) that address processes of securitization, through which ethnic diversity is perceived as salient and conflictual beyond rational grounds, and laid the ground for the development of a new common narrative where ethnic
diversity is no longer a danger. The lesson of South Tyrol is that for power-sharing arrangements to be successful, it is necessary to provide a security context for all the referent objects involved and inside this security context, insert measures that dilute the saliency of ethnic diversity.

5. Bibliography


