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### Inter-Ethnic Relations in Italian Borderlands: From the March on Bolzano to Alpe-Adria

  
Fondation Pierre du Bois  
pour l'histoire du temps présent

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October 2022 marks the centenary of the march on Rome. Between 27 and 28 October 1922, the fascist *camicie nere* took over the main government buildings of some cities in northern and central Italy and threatened to occupy the capital. Under pressure from the insurrection, King Vittorio Emanuele III gave Benito Mussolini, leader of the Italian National Fascist Party, the mandate to form a government, opening the way to the establishment of his dictatorship.<sup>i</sup> But October 2022 is also the anniversary of another important, although less well-known, fascist march: the march on Bolzano, the capital city of South Tyrol, an Alpine province that Italy annexed from the Habsburg Empire at the end of WWI. While the March on Bolzano followed a pattern similar to other raids conducted by the fascist forces throughout the summer of 1922, and fatally repeated at the end of October of that year, it was a different march from all others.

Following a consolidated practice, on 1 October 1922, 1,000 fascists occupied a school and the town hall of Bolzano. They called for the replacement of the local administration (accused to be pro-German) and the conversion of the school, which provided tuition in German, into an all-Italian institution. Once the municipal authority accepted their demands, the *squadristi* moved to nearby city of Trento. There, they occupied the office of the General Civil Commissary Luigi Credaro, a kind of local governor in charge of administering the recently acquired region, and obtained his resignations too. What distinguished this fascist show of strength from previous assaults in other parts of Italy was that fascist violence in South Tyrol (as in the other border region of Venezia Giulia) had an ethnic component. For the assailants, a raid in Bolzano symbolised the ‘true’ conquest of a territory that, in their opinion, had become part of Italy but had not been Italianised. For the assailed, it meant a threat to their native language and culture. The interwar historian Gaetano Salvemini seized the essence of this peculiarity when commenting on the catastrophe that befell Italy after the establishment of dictatorship. ‘It is right to recognise – he argued – that the “allogeni” – the fascist term for non-Italian speaking citizens of the new provinces – have undergone an additional scourge, which does not affect the “natives”: the scourge of the measures taken by the dictatorship to force all those who, within the borders of Mussolini’s empire, do not speak the language of the “masters”, to speak, think, dream only in Italian’.<sup>ii</sup>

As the March on Bolzano is much less known than the March on Rome, so have fascist attempts at homogenising the minority populations of South Tyrol and Venezia Giulia occupied second stage in the historiography of the regime. However, apart from providing a unique perspective on the relationship between fascism and borderlands, studying fascist policies in these territories is important for two reasons. First, these policies have inflicted long-lasting wounds that nourished resentment and caused conflict in Italy’s border areas for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They have thus had a decisive impact on the relationship between Italy and her neighbours, namely Austria and Yugoslavia, but also Germany. Second, the fascist handling of minority populations in the interwar period allows us to illuminate two blind spots in the historiography of minority questions.

The first issue with this historiography is that it has tended to focus on those central and eastern European countries that either had lost WWI or had been created at the end of the conflict.<sup>iii</sup> At the Paris Peace Conference, these states were forced to accept a series of treaties protecting minorities and subjecting them to the supervision of the new-born League of Nations. However, these regulations did not apply to the other League members. The Great Powers justified this asymmetry with the twin arguments that western countries were homogenous – i.e. without minorities – and that eastern European countries were not capable of dealing with



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minorities on their own. Therefore, they needed international assistance.<sup>iv</sup> Unfortunately, the historiography has tended to reproduce this superficial opposition between a homogenous and tolerant West and a heterogenous intolerant East.<sup>v</sup>

The second issue with the historiography lies in the analytical frameworks that scholars have developed until now to evaluate the integration or exclusion of minority populations into the larger state community. Most current schemas suggest that states can either include or exclude minorities.<sup>vi</sup> Recognising that inclusion does not necessarily mean to accept minority demands for linguistic and cultural protection, some authors have distinguished between strategies of assimilation, exclusion and accommodation.<sup>vii</sup> Yet only few scholars have pointed to the existence of contradictory or ambiguous approaches combining inclusion and exclusion in different spheres of life and stages of minority incorporation.<sup>viii</sup>

On the centenary of fascism's rise to power, this paper shows how Mussolini's regime did confront important minority questions and stood out for its especially repressive measures. Furthermore, the paper argues that fascist authorities followed a pattern of "consistent ambivalence" throughout the interwar period that does not fit easily within existing analytical frameworks. It concludes that the attempts to Italianise the regions of South Tyrol and Venezia Giulia had a long-lasting impact on majority-minority relations in Italy's border areas and on relations between Italy and her north-eastern neighbours throughout the 20th century. However, this is not only a history of conflict. 2022 also marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the second statute of autonomy for Trentino-South Tyrol, signed in 1972. This agreement stabilised majority-minority relations in the region and, along with the 1975 Osimo Treaty and the continuing process of European integration, opened the way for the transformation of what used to be a hard and contested border into a success story of European minority recognition and cross-border cooperation.

### Italy's Minorities and the Fascist Onslaught against Them

The Paris Peace Conference brought substantial territorial expansion to the Italian Kingdom, as Italian diplomats secured the annexation of the regions of South Tyrol and Venezia Giulia from the former Habsburg Empire. Italian political elites had long considered these two areas as Italian regions that they had to incorporate to complete national unification and to secure more defensible borders. Yet, most of the people living in these territories spoke a language different from Italian and did not identify with Italy.<sup>ix</sup> As political organisations calling for self-determination and autonomy arose in both areas, Italian political elites confronted a minority question on their own territory.

Italy was spared the application of the minorities treaties that were imposed to the countries on her east. Yet liberal politicians made several promises to afford these new populations the same standard of treatment as that envisaged in the treaties.<sup>x</sup> The reality on the ground however did not always reflect these official commitments. Especially in Venezia Giulia local authorities promoted the Italianisation of these areas, although they kept the Habsburg legislation in place. The Prefect of Trieste, for instance, did not reopen many Slovenian and Croatian schools that had been closed during the war, while the police tolerated growing fascist violence against Slovenian and Croatian speakers. Later, this trend spread to South Tyrol, as witnessed by the March on Bolzano that local authorities could have prevented, had they taken stronger measures.<sup>xi</sup>

When Mussolini became Prime Minister, the Italianisation of South Tyrol and Venezia Giulia became a primary goal of the new regime. Generally speaking, this entailed the assimilation of the local population by means of the imposition of Italian in schools, workplaces and public life. In 1923, Italian became the only language of instruction, first in public schools, and by the late 1920s in private ones as well. Similarly, Italian became the sole language of use in public employment and non-Italian speakers were purged out of the civil service because they did not command Italian well enough and/or were deemed unreliable. Homogenisation included the Italianisation of the public space, with the conversion in Italian of street names, monuments, institutions and public signs. From 1926-27, the government cracked down on minority organisations and forced many of these to close, notably political parties such as the *Deutscher Verband* and *Edinost* that claimed to represent the German and Slavic populations in these two areas and received sizable support from them. Many of their leaders, such as Josip Wilfan and Eduard Reut-Nicolussi were forced to leave the country to avoid arrest and persecution, while others, such as Josef Noldin, were sentenced to confinement in the island of Lipari. The regime's repression was even stronger against the members of the anti-fascist terrorist organisation TIGR (*Trst-Istra-Gorica-Reka*),



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which carried out a series of violent attacks in Venezia Giulia between 1927 and 1930. In 1930, the regime intensified its repressive efforts against the organisation and in September staged a show trial in Trieste. The Court sentenced four people to death.<sup>xii</sup>

The Italianisation of the region did not only concern the public space, but also extended to the private sphere. For instance, through a mix of social pressure and administrative coercion, the regime tried to force the *allogeni* to Italianise their names. Under the leadership of Senator Ettore Tolomei, a team of linguists drew lists of names that had allegedly been Germanised/Slavised during the Habsburg period and local authorities ran campaigns to convince people holding these names to convert them into their Italian equivalent (duly identified by fascist 'experts'). While the regime preferred the conversion to be the result of a person's choice in order to show that the *allogeni* wished to become 'true' Italians, civil servants sometime converted names by default.<sup>xiii</sup> The economic sphere was not spared either. The regime introduced rules that discriminated against banks and other financial institutions affiliated with the two minorities. Furthermore, as a result of the disappointing (from the fascists' perspective) evolution of the minorities' assimilation, in the early 1930s, the regime began to scale up the acquisition of land in these regions to promote the colonisation of the areas with 'true' Italians. Hence, an ad hoc institution, the *Ente Tre Venezie*, was founded with the purpose of buying land from the *allogeni* and transfer it to Italians from the other provinces of the Kingdom.<sup>xiv</sup>

All these efforts did not bear the fruits that the regime wished to gather. In 1939, persistent frustration with poor assimilation results, coupled with foreign policy concerns, led Mussolini to agree with Hitler on a population transfer agreement that asked the German speaking inhabitants of South Tyrol to decide whether they wanted to remain in Italy and behave as 'good Italians', or whether they preferred to become German and move beyond the Brenner border. Unsurprisingly, 86% of the local population opted for Germany in what became a plebiscite against 20 years of fascist abuses against them.<sup>xv</sup>

By international standards, fascist policy in South Tyrol and Venezia Giulia was highly repressive. Italy's mistreatment of its minorities was not very different from comparable situations in central and eastern Europe, notably in Poland where, despite the existence of laws formally protecting minorities, local and national officers did not apply them consistently. However, fascist violence never reached the deadly paroxysm of anti-Semitic pogroms in Poland in the immediate post-war period, or the mass-repression of the 'pacification' operations against the Ukrainian minority in Polish Galicia in 1930. The Italian regime certainly offered a more hostile environment to the *allogeni* than that afforded by Estonia, which adopted the most far-reaching system of minority autonomy in the entire Europe. It was also more repressive than Czechoslovakia where, despite the concentration of power in the hands of the Czech elite and the occurrence of widespread purges of German-speaking civil servants, minorities were generally free to speak and learn their native language and promote their culture.<sup>xvi</sup>

### Consistent Ambivalence

What was the regime's conception of the minorities and their treatment? Was there anything like an 'ideology' of assimilation? It is of course difficult to pin down a uniform and consistent pattern of behaviour for the varied set of actors that composed the regime. Without denying the existence of different, sometimes contradictory, positions within the regime itself, we argue that fascist policy towards the *allogeni* was structured by two key contradictory elements that could be found in the practice and discourses of multiple fascist officers, both in Rome and in the new provinces: the naive belief that assimilation was inevitable and a parallel deep-seated distrust of German and Slovenian/Croatian speakers.

The belief that the *allogeni* would easily assimilate stemmed from two interpretations of Italian history. The first, proposed among others by Senator Ettore Tolomei, Mussolini's advisor on the Italianisation of South Tyrol, consisted in the idea that the *allogeni* were in fact Germanised/Slavised Italians who had to be brought back to their 'original state'. Mussolini conveyed this understanding of the nature of the new provinces when, in a famous speech pronounced in Parliament in 1927, affirmed that 'up there [in South Tyrol] there is a minority of Italians who speak a German dialect as their language of use, and they have been speaking it only for a century'. He then concluded that the regime considered the population of the region 'as Italian citizens who must rediscover themselves'.<sup>xvii</sup> Fascist authorities eagerly embraced this narrative and disseminated it both in external propaganda and in internal communications. For instance, in a 1925 circular to the prefects of the new provinces, the Duce explained that the





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premise of the government's action in the borderlands was that those territories had lost their Italian nature 'because of an arbitrary and violent action of foreign governments'.<sup>xviii</sup>

The second reading of Italian history boldly affirmed that the Italian civilisation had such a power of attraction that no ethnic group coming into its orbit could resist its assimilationist pull. Mussolini shared this idea with some Slovenian delegates from Venezia Giulia visiting him in November 1922, shortly after he had become Prime Minister. On that occasion, the Duce explained to his guests that their Italianisation was inevitable since the Italian '3000-year-old culture conquered everyone until now'. 'This is why – he added – I do not fear the Slavs, and I do not wish for a violent assimilation, as if Italy feared them'.<sup>xix</sup>

Towards the end of the 1920s, this belief began clashing with a much different reality on the ground. Assimilation was not working as expected and several local observers noticed the *allogeni*'s stubborn clinging to their original language and culture. In Venezia Giulia for instance, a 1930 report from the fascist federation of Trieste made clear how the terrorist attacks of the TIGR had 'dashed the illusions and hopes nourished in these last years, especially by the local authorities in charge, of a simple work of assimilation of the Slavs'. Similar doubts spread also in South Tyrol.<sup>xx</sup>

In this context, the idea of colonising the borderlands with 'true' Italians became increasingly popular throughout the 1930s. Yet although the regime did scale up land settlement efforts, these never really replaced more traditional assimilationist tools, notably through the school system. On the contrary, throughout the 1930s, the regime promoted assimilation by extending the presence of fascist entertainment, youth and welfare organisation in the new provinces to boost the *allogeni*'s identification with the regime as well as their Italianisation.<sup>xxi</sup> Furthermore, land colonisation was conceived as complementary, rather than alternative, to assimilation. The purpose was not to fully replace the *allogeni*, but rather to dismantle the demographic advantage they held in the region – as a local majority – in order to surround them with an Italian environment that would 'eventually absorb them'.<sup>xxii</sup>

While the fascists declared that the *allogeni* could not but assimilate, they also deeply distrusted them. This profound strain between inclusion and mistrust runs as a red-thread throughout the history of interwar fascist rule in South Tyrol and Venezia Giulia, generating the consistent ambivalence at the core of the difficult relationship between the regime and its minorities. The Prefect of Trieste Giovanni Gasti, for instance, openly shared his concerns towards the integration of the *allogeni* in a 1926 message to the Ministry of the Interior. There he warned against the 'double, treacherous' character of the *allogeni*, who simulated loyalty to Italy and respect for the law, when in reality they did all they could to strengthen Slovenian sentiments.<sup>xxiii</sup> Some minority MPs lamented this attitude in a 1927 memorandum to Mussolini where they admitted having the impression that 'the population and its representatives are treated as enemies...held, as much as possible, away from the administration of the affairs that concern it'.<sup>xxiv</sup> Practice confirmed their suspect. Although it was rare, some *allogeni* did become committed fascist and even made some inroads within the party. Yet they kept being deemed suspicious throughout the dictatorship. An illuminating story in this respect is that of Massimiliano Markart, who, as podestà of Merano, had enjoyed a brilliant record as administrator and as fascist. Despite being respected by many and held in high esteem by Mussolini himself, pressure to remove him from his position piled up and in 1935 he was forced to leave. As a colleague, who had taken Markart's defence in the local fight to remove him, noted, 'if we give to the good Italian citizens of German nationality the impression to always and systematically distrust them because of their nationality...no German will become loyal to us, and we will fatally remain few and isolated individuals in a bluntly hostile environment', which is exactly what happened.<sup>xxv</sup>

The consistent ambivalence resulting from the combination of the assumption of the inevitability of assimilation and the concurrent deep-seated distrust was most visible in the aforementioned Option agreement, implemented in South Tyrol in the second half of 1939. Although part of the historiography has suggested that the Italian government was seeking a full transfer of the entire population of South Tyrol,<sup>xxvi</sup> the available records, as well as the behaviour of Italian authorities, make this interpretation unconvincing. Of course, there were actors who supported a 'clean-sweep'. However, many others, notably those in charge of managing the process on the ground, such as the Prefect of Bolzano Giuseppe Mastromattei, rather aimed at getting rid of those inhabitants that they identified as the 'agitators' who were preventing the majority of the local population from assimilating. Until the autumn of 1939 (the substance of the agreement was discussed in June of that year, although some details were finalised in October and December) local Italian authorities did not do anything to push the *allogeni* to leave. Internal records show that in



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August 1939 Mastromattei believed that only around 30,000 people out of roughly 200,000 would opt for Germany and concluded that if the regime wanted to push more to leave it had to adopt more vigorous policies, which it did not.<sup>xxvii</sup> When, towards the end of September, the regime realised that most of the local population was going to vote massively for Germany, it completely changed tack and began trying its best to convince the *allogeni* to stay. Yet, for as much as fascist officers wanted to turn the boat and save face before the wave of votes for Germany crashed over the regime, their deep-seated distrust of the *allogeni* constrained their action. The regime could not sign a blank check to the German speakers of South Tyrol or beg them to stay.<sup>xxviii</sup> It could not team up either with the leaders of the Remain camp, since many of these were the same minority representatives that the regime had persecuted and distrusted throughout the interwar period.

Several authors have explained the sudden U-turn of fascist authorities in the autumn of 1939 with reference to economic arguments. As they realised that South Tyroleans were going to emigrate in mass and Italy was supposed to compensate the property they would leave behind, the argument goes, the state tried to minimise the economic loss that this outcome would generate. Although economic concerns were certainly a factor, and they had hampered land colonisation throughout the 1930s,<sup>xxix</sup> there is little evidence that they were the main driver of fascist policy in the region in the second half of 1939.<sup>xxx</sup> The consistent ambivalence resulting from the combination of the assumption that assimilation was inevitable and the regime's deep-seated distrust of the *allogeni*, along with concerns for national prestige, provide a better explanation of fascist behaviour in South Tyrol in the second half of 1939 than considerations of economic rationality.

### Long Standing Impact

Between 1900 and 1950, ethnic and racial conflicts haunted European societies as probably never in history. Millions of people died or experienced transfer, incarceration, and torture because of 'wrong' national or religious affiliations.<sup>xxxi</sup> This obsession with ethnicity, race and minorities left scars that took decades to heal. The Italian case is no different. In 1941, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and exacerbated assimilation measures. Slovenes and Croats faced systematic denationalisation, deportation and massacre.<sup>xxxii</sup> Later, the Italian surrender on 8 September 1943 resulted in the total disappearance of the state's structures in the borderlands.<sup>xxxiii</sup> What followed was a brutal war between the occupying forces and the communist partisans of Josip Broz 'Tito', who wanted to liberate the territories in the East and to build a new socialist state. South Tyrol escaped fighting, but ethnic tensions remained. The spiral of violence reached its peak in the last years of the war and its immediate aftermath, with more mass killings, persecutions and expulsions.

The unresolved border issues of 1918 came up again in 1945 and involved both South Tyrol and Venezia Giulia. Against the background of the emerging Cold War, all the governments of the three states converging in the area – Italy, Austria and Yugoslavia – had different ideas about the future of these territories. Rigid confrontation hampered any peaceful compromise. Moreover, the three countries developed different economic and political systems. Italy and Austria became liberal democracies, but while Italy was a NATO and EEC founding member, Austria followed a strict policy of neutrality. By contrast, Tito's Yugoslavia was a socialist country with a planned economy.

The Allies decided that South Tyrol had to remain a part of Italy in return for a serious commitment to guaranteeing the rights of the German minority. However, this choice rekindled diplomatic confrontations and social tensions. The new Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi and his Austrian counterpart Leopold Figl signed an agreement in September 1946 that provided for total cultural and linguistic parity between German and Italian, the revision of the 1939 Option, special agreements for cross-border transit and, above all, a large degree of administrative and political autonomy.<sup>xxxiv</sup> However, the implementation of the agreements, as well as the full recognition of minority rights, occurred very slowly. In an ethno-linguistic context profoundly different from 1919 (more than 100,000 Italian speakers lived in South Tyrol by 1950), the relationship between the two groups remained marked by mistrust. The dissatisfaction of the German-speaking community culminated in terrorist attacks against public buildings and Italian officers. Austria raised the issue at the United Nations in 1960 and the South Tyrolean 'question' remained a source of conflict in bilateral relations for the following decade.<sup>xxxv</sup>



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In the East, the situation was even worse. In an escalation of retaliations that began in 1943 and continued after 1945, mostly begotten by twenty years of fascist abuses in the area, Yugoslav forces committed egregious acts of violence against Italian speakers causing the exodus of almost the entire Italian-speaking population of the east Adriatic coast, which had to resettle in Italy. The 1947 Peace treaty assigned Istria, Dalmatia and large areas of Venezia Giulia to Yugoslavia, while Trieste and its hinterland was turned into a 'free territory' divided in two administrative areas: 'Zone A' under Anglo-American supervision and 'Zone B', controlled by Yugoslavia. Concerning the question of Trieste, the governments of Italy and Yugoslavia found a partial solution only in 1954 with a provisional 'Memorandum of Understanding' that transferred Zone A to Italy and Zone B to Yugoslavia.<sup>xxxvi</sup> On the ground, contacts between Italian and Slovenian communities were rare and tense, while central authorities controlled borders meticulously, militarised the territory and monitored the daily activities of local inhabitants.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In particular, the Italian government established a special office, the *Ufficio per le zone di Confine* (Office for the Borderlands) that, beyond its official task of providing support to Istro-Dalmatian refugees, financed hundreds of initiatives to promote the 'Italianness' of the border region.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Taking all these factors into consideration, any move towards cooperation and appeasement seems astonishing. Yet, dialogue between the three countries never completely stopped for a series of international and domestic reasons.<sup>xxxix</sup> First, the Tito-Stalin split of 1948 and the ensuing Yugoslav non-alignment facilitated the creation of amicable bonds between Yugoslavia, Italy and Austria. Second, a significant increase in economic and cultural exchanges followed the signature of the diplomatic treaties of the 1940s and 1950s. As all the three governments sought normalization and mutual economic development, they signed trade agreements that made cross-border movements somewhat easier. Simultaneously, a rapprochement from below in the form of cultural, sport and artistic exchanges followed the rapprochement from above.<sup>xl</sup>

Three documents, produced by Italian, Austrian and Slovenian officers respectively between 1963 and 1969, provide evidence of this growing cross-border trust. Each document shows the same intention to depict the border as 'the most open of Europe'.<sup>xli</sup> The first is a relation written in 1963 by Corrado Belci, an Istrian exile who became the Secretary of Christian-Democracy (DC) in Trieste between 1957 and 1963. In 1963, while contributing to the elaboration of the Special Statute for the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, Belci openly advocated turning Friuli-Venezia Giulia into an actor in international politics because of the area's 'peculiar border position' that framed 'the entire political activity of the region into the fabric of European evolution'.<sup>xlii</sup> The second is one of the many TV speeches of Hans Sima, the governor of the Austrian *Land* of Carinthia between 1965 and 1974. Sima systematically employed the label 'Alpen-Adria' to communicate his political vision of 'good neighbourhood' and depicted the border as a shared space where to cultivate harmonious relationships and peace.<sup>xliii</sup> The third is an anonymous report written in 1969 by an officer of the Executive Council of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. As a follow-up to a visit of a Slovenian political delegation to Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the author openly talked of how 'the open border, which has allowed an extraordinary movement of people and goods, created in this part of Europe an exemplary case of coexistence between two social systems, and could serve as a model for active coexistence elsewhere in Europe and the world'.<sup>xliv</sup> This normalisation eased dialogue between the three regions and helped to change the perception of the border.

The gradual rapprochement between the three countries continued in the 1970s. The Treaty of Osimo of 1975 resolved the dispute of the Italo-Yugoslav border once and for all. The second statute of autonomy of Trentino-South Tyrol, signed exactly 50 years ago, in 1972, granted the full autonomy of the provincial government of Bolzano that minority representatives had sought until then.<sup>xlv</sup> This gave further impetus to regional cooperation. In 1978, regional representatives of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Slovenia and Carinthia (Austria) established the 'Alpe-Adria Working Community', a platform to discuss common border problems relating to regional development. South Tyrol joined in 1986. The Working Community was a unique example of trust at the regional level, as it was the first experiment of cross-border cooperation between regions of eastern and western Europe. Moreover, it institutionalised the informal bonds built in the previous decades and mirrored the broader process of rapprochement at the international level.<sup>xlvi</sup> This collaboration continued later and today is integrated in the framework of EU cross-border projects.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Both South Tyrol and Venezia Giulia experienced dramatic violence in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that left long-lasting scars on cross-border relations. Luckily, after WWII, political decisions at the regional, national and international level contributed to pacifying these borderlands. This process, supported by a favourable economic conjuncture, helped enormously the socio-economic development of the regions, although some matters, notably the enforcement of minority rights, took longer to be





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implemented. Nowadays, South Tyrol, Venezia Giulia and their neighbouring regions in Austria and Slovenia are fully integrated in the European Union and stand as successful examples of multi-ethnic, cross-border cooperation.

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- <sup>i</sup> On the “March on Rome” see Gentile, Emilio. *E fu subito regime: il fascismo e la marcia su Roma* (Roma: Laterza, 2012).
- <sup>ii</sup> Salvemini, Gaetano. ‘Il Fascismo e Le Minoranze’. In *Opere*, ed. Gaetano Salvemini (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1966), 481-82.
- <sup>iii</sup> For a similar argument see Tara Zahra, “The ‘Minority Problem’ and National Classification in the French and Czechoslovak Borderlands,” *Contemporary European History* 17, no. 2 (2008), 137-65.
- <sup>iv</sup> On the civilisational argument see Mazower, Mark. ‘Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe’. *Daedalus* 126, no. 2 (1997), 53. On the homogeneity argument, see Carlile Aylmer Macartney, “Minorities: A Problem of Eastern Europe,” *Foreign Affairs* 9, no. 4 (1931), 677.
- <sup>v</sup> Rogers Brubaker, Myths and Misconceptions in the Study in the Study of Nationalism, in *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, ed. J. A. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 281-85.
- <sup>vi</sup> Among others see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 1-17.
- <sup>vii</sup> Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21-23.
- <sup>viii</sup> For instance Lerna Ekmekcioglu, ‘Republic of Paradox: The League of Nations Minority Protection Regime and the New Turkey’s Step-Citizens’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 4 (2014): 657–79; Erol Ülker, ‘Contextualising “Turkification”: Nation-Building in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1908–18\*’, *Nations and Nationalism* 11, no. 4 (2005): 613–36.
- <sup>ix</sup> Roberta Pergher, *Mussolini’s Nation-Empire: Sovereignty and Settlement in Italy’s Borderlands, 1922-1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 56.
- <sup>x</sup> See for instance the speech in Parliament of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Tittoni in October 1919, quoted in Lavo Čermelj, *Sloveni e Croati in Italia tra le due guerre* (Trieste: Editoriale stampa triestina, 1974), 21.
- <sup>xi</sup> Andrea Di Michele, *L’italianizzazione imperfetta: l’amministrazione pubblica dell’Alto Adige tra Italia liberale e fascismo* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2003), 71-156; Annamaria Vinci, *Sentinelle Della Patria: Il Fascismo al Confine Orientale, 1918-1941*, Quadrante. Laterza 166 (Roma: Laterza, 2011), 34-121.
- <sup>xii</sup> On the policies of Italianisation of the fascist regime see, among others: Di Michele, *L’italianizzazione imperfetta*, 157-342; Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria*, 122-242; Milica Kacin-Wohinz, *Vivere al confine: sloveni e italiani negli anni 1918-1941* (Gorizia: Goriška Mohorjeva družba, 2004); Pergher, *Mussolini’s Nation-Empire*; Leopold Steurer, *Südtirol zwischen Rom und Berlin, 1919-1939* (Wien; München; Zürich: Europaverlag, 1980).
- <sup>xiii</sup> Maura Hametz, ‘Naming Italians in the Borderland, 1926-1943’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15, no. 3 (2010): 410-30.
- <sup>xiv</sup> On land colonisation see Pergher, *Mussolini’s Nation-Empire*.
- <sup>xv</sup> On the Option see Mauro Scroccaro, *Dall’aquila bicipite alla croce uncinata: l’Italia e le opzioni nelle nuove provincie Trentino, Sudtirolo, Val Canale, 1919-1939* (Trento: Museo storico, 2000); Rolf Steininger, *Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert: Vom Leben und Überleben einer Minderheit*. (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2016), 153-74; Leopold Steurer, *Südtirol zwischen Rom und Berlin, 1919-1939* (Wien : Europaverlag, 1980), 283-402; Karl Stuhlpfarrer, *Umsiedlung Südtirol: 1939-1940* (Wien: Löcker Verlag, 1985).
- <sup>xvi</sup> On Poland, see Richard Blanke, *Orphans of Versailles: The Germans in Western Poland : 1918-1939* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993) and Kathryn Ciancia, *On Civilization’s Edge: A Polish Borderland in the Interwar World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). On Estonia, see David J. Smith, ‘Estonia: A Model for Inter-War Europe?’, *Ethnopolitics* 15, no. 1 (2016): 89–104. On Czechoslovakia, see Peter





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<sup>xxvii</sup> Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia: 27 Maggio 1927 - 11 Febbraio 1929. 23: Dal Discorso Dell'Ascensione Agli Accordi Del Laterano*, 2a ristampa (Firenze: La Fenice, 1963), 368-9.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The President of the Council of Ministries to the Ministers' Secretaries of State, 1.11.1925, Archivio centrale dello stato (ACS), Interno, Direzione Generale Amministrazione Civile, Divisione II, Comuni, Box 2002.

<sup>xix</sup> Jože (Bitežnik?) to Wilfan, 25. 11. 1922, Historical Archive of the city of Ljubljana (HAL), AS 1164 Vilfan, box 824, folder 17.

<sup>xx</sup> Report from the Directorate of the Fascio of Trieste, no date, but early 1930s from the context, ACS, PNF, Situazione politica ed economica delle provincie, Box 27, folder on Trieste. For similar doubts in the context of South Tyrol see Pergher, *Mussolini's*, 97-104.

<sup>xxi</sup> Milica Kacin-Wohinz, 'Gli Sloveni Della Venezia Giulia Alla Fine Degli Anni Trenta', *Qualestoria* 20, no. 2 (1992), 60; Adriano Andri and Giulio Mellinato, *Scuola e Confine: Le Istituzioni Educative Della Venezia Giulia 1915-1945* (Trieste: IRSML, 1994), 213.

<sup>xxii</sup> Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire*, 100.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Gasti to the Ministry of the Interior, 25.1.1926, Archivio di stato di Trieste (ASTr), Prefettura, Gabinetto, 143/68.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Memorandum by the MPs for South Tyrol Karl Tinzl and Paul von Sternbach to Mussolini, 1927, document nr. 24, in Michael Gehler, *Eduard Reut-Nicolussi und die Südtirolfrage 1918 - 1958*, vol. 2 (Innsbruck: Wagner, 2007), 72-6.

<sup>xxv</sup> Quoted in Di Michele, *L'italianizzazione imperfetta*, 333.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Matthew Frank, *Making Minorities History. Population Transfer in Twentieth-Century Europe*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 8; Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire*, 203-42; Steininger, 153-74.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Mastromattei to the Ministry of the Interior, 20.8.1939, in Christoph von Hartungen, Fabrizio Miori, and Tiziano Rosani, *Le Lettere Aperte 1939-43: L'Alto Adige Delle Opzioni* (Bolzano: La Fabbrica del tempo, 2006), 230.

<sup>xxviii</sup> See for instance S.E. il Prefetto consacra la Casa Littoria di Appiano e pronuncia un importante discorso sugli accordi italo-tedeschi', *La Provincia di Bolzano*, 31.10.1939, 3.

<sup>xxix</sup> On this see Pergher, *Mussolini's*, 253; Prefect of Bolzano (Marziali) to the President of the Opera Nazionale Combattenti, 27.2.1930, ACS, ONC, Servizio Agrario, Alto Adige, Coloni, Box 10, folder on anticipazioni conti colonici; as well as the two letters from the Government Commissary to the Director of the Agricultural Firm of Merano of 15.1.1930 and 16.4.1930 in ACS, ONC, Servizio Agrario, Alto Adige, Coloni, Box 10, folder on anticipazioni conti colonici.

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<sup>xxxi</sup> Portmann, Michael. 'Non-Slavic Groups as "Danger and Misery" for the State? Germans, Hungarians and Italians in Communist Yugoslavia 1943-1954', in *The Alps-Adriatic Region 1945-1955. International and Transnational Perspectives on a Conflicted European Region*, eds W. Mueller, K. Ruzicic-Kessler, P. Greiling (Wien: New Academic Press, 2018), 17.

<sup>xxxii</sup> On the Italian occupation in the Balkans see: D. Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo*. (Torino: Bollati Boringheri, 2003). See also: E. Gobetti, *L'occupazione allegra. Gli italiani in Jugoslavia* (Roma: Carocci, 2007).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> M. Cattaruzza, Marina. *L'Italia e il confine orientale*. (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016): 241. See also Dennison Rusinow, *Italy's Austrian heritage, 1919-1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 293.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Steuer, Leopold. 'Il problema dell'Alto Adige/Südtirol nei rapporti italo-austriaci (1945-1955)', in *La difesa dell'italianità. L'Ufficio Zone di Confine a Bolzano, Trento e Trieste (1945-1954)*, eds D. D'Amelio, A. Di Michele, G. Mezzalana (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015), 103-8.



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