A brief contemporary history of Alto Adige/Südtirol (1918-2002)





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Act one

The history of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano-Alto Adige/Bozen-Südtirol began following a great tragedy, the First World War of 1914-18. Up till then Alto Adige/Südtirol was part of the county of Tyrol and thus of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In this era Tyrol included the current Austrian Tyrol and the two autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano/Bozen (the present day Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol), extending over an area of more than 27,000 km² and inhabited by around 860,000 people, of whom 55% were German-speaking, and 45% Italian or Ladin-speaking. When the war finished in November 1918, it left around 20,000 dead in Tyrol (around 8,000 in Alto Adige/Südtirol alone) and thousands of wounded, ill and mutilated victims, while the old world had disappeared forever. The Empire had broken up and Italy, as the victor, occupied Tyrol up to the Brennero/Brenner pass, severing almost all the old links between the north and the south. With the signing of the Saint Germain peace treaty on 10 September 1919, the annexation of Alto Adige/ Südtirol to Italy was also ratified by international law.

The approximately 220,000 German and Ladin-speaking inhabitants of Alto Adige/Südtirol found themselves in a new State, within which they were linguistically a minority. The King of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele III, renowned liberal politicians and the representatives of the armed forces had ensured the inhabitants of the territories which had been annexed that their schools, institutions and associations would be maintained, and in effect immediately after annexation negotiations were begun on autonomous administrative structures capable of guaranteeing the integration of the old institutions within the new State



system. At the first elections for a new parliament in which the inhabitants of Alto Adige/Südtirol also participated (15 May 1921) the *Tiroler Volkspartei*, the *Deutschfreiheitliche Partei* and the *Sozialdemokratische Partei* presented themselves. The first two parties stood together as the *Deutscher Verband*, obtaining around 90% of the votes and four seats (Eduard Reut-Nicolussi, Karl Tinzl, Friedrich Graf Toggenburg and Wilhelm von Walther), while the Social Democrats, with the remaining 10% of the votes, did not succeed in sending a representative to Rome. The four parliamentary representatives from Alto Adige/Südtirol continued the negotiations on autonomy, but were unable to conclude them due to the advent of fascism (28 October 1922).

Under the yoke of fascism and national socialism

The true face of fascism, and its attitude towards the new linguistic minorities, was in truth revealed long before the march on Rome, On 21 April 1921 the fascists had attacked the march organised during the first trade fair in Bolzano/Bozen, killing an artisan from Marlengo/Marling, Franz Innerhofer and injuring dozens of people, some seriously, After 28 October 1922 the new regime immediately set to work revoking any special dispositions in favour of linguistic minorities. On 21 January 1923 the province of Trento was established, including Alto Adige/Südtirol and placed on a par with all the other provinces in the kingdom. A prefect with special powers was placed at its head. On 29 March the exclusive use of Italian place names was imposed and on 15 July Ettore Tolomei (1865-1952), a nationalist from Rovereto. presented a programme of 23 points for the italianization of Alto Adige/Südtirol at the theatre of Bolzano/Bozen, drawn up according to the instructions of the new regime. The measures proposed included among other things the exclusive use of Italian in public life (offices, courts, signs, placenames, surnames etc.), the closing of German lanauage schools, expropriation of the refuges of the Alpenverein, State help for Italians moving to Alto Adige/Südtirol from other regions, the limiting and for a brief period the complete suppression of the German language press and the economic development of the province. The programme, which from then on was to constitute the main point of reference for fascist policy as regards the German-speaking minority, was partly implemented and partly set aside, according to the interests of the time, while the main objective of the regime remained to definitively italianize Alto Adige/Südtirol.



It was above all the closing of German language schools and the consequential obligation to hold lessons in Italian which encountered resistance and aroused indignation at international level. In order to allow children to learn the basics of German, starting from 1925 the so-called Katakombenschulen were created, clandestine schools organised by Canon Michael Gamper. Furthermore, thanks to the intervention of ecclesiastical dignitaries from Adige/Südtirol, Austria and Germany it was possible to maintain the teaching of religion in German, despite strong opposition from the regime. At two religious institutes, the Johanneum (in Tirolo/Dorf Tirol near Merano/Meran) and the Vinzentinum (in Bressanone/Brixen), it was permitted to continue teaching in German, but without any official recognition. With the establishment of the fascist dictatorship all political organisations (parties) were outlawed - as in the rest of Italy - and many local associations were disbanded: the German-speaking minority was in effect deprived of its leaders. In 1926 the old system of autonomy for the communes was also definitively abolished; municipal councils and mayors were substituted by provincial administrators known 'podestà', nominated by the State and subordinated to prefects. In order to allow the regime to act with the maximum efficiency, the two provinces of Trento and Bolzano/Bozen were created in December of the same year, within the context of a reform at national level.

While the Catholic church managed to maintain a minimum of autonomy and freedom of action due to conciliation with the Italian State (Agreement of 11 February 1929), starting from 1922 the Germanspeaking minority was obliged to reckon with a political regime which gradually excluded it from political and social life. Apart from the church, there was

nothing to do but withdraw to the private sphere and to the country; public life, and above all the cities and large towns were now occupied by the others, the Italians, who had mostly arrived after 1919, officials, clerks, soldiers, railwaymen etc., sometimes transferred to the new provinces with the accusation of antifascism and who, finding themselves in an altogether strange and often hostile environment, ended up by being completely dependent on the fascist system. Italian immigration was further stimulated starting from 1935 when the industrial area of Bolzano/Bozen was created Given the wealth of resources in terms of watercourses and woods, the fascist policy of self-sufficiency concentrated on the systematic realisation of industrial settlements, also to increase the number of those belonging to the Italian ethnic group, added to by workers mostly coming from the underdeveloped areas of Veneto and the Po valley. In the 1930s two linguistic groups lived in Alto Adige/Südtirol, both relatively large, but which nevertheless did not know or concern themselves with the other

The advent of the Adolf Hitler's Nazis in Germany (30 January 1933) was for many Germans outside Germany a source of hope for better times. The summer of 1933 saw the founding in Alto Adige/Südtirol of the Völkischer Kampfring Südtirol (VKS), mostly joined by young people, an association which was ideologically and politically close to the Nazi party, characterised by strict centralism according to the principles of the Führer and animated by the hope that Hitler would liberate Alto Adige/Südtirol from the fascist oppressors and welcome it into the Third Reich. In truth the dictator had altogether different plans for Alto Adige/Südtirol, knowing well that in order to achieve his expansionist objectives in Europe he needed an ally, which could not be other



than fascist Italy. As it was not possible to remove a province from an ally without threatening the alliance, Alto Adige/Südtirol would have to be sacrificed to a higher cause.

Thus the Brennero/Brenner pass would always mark the southern border of the Reich (from 1938), even if this would not necessarily imply renunciation of the precious human material constituted by the 200,000 Germans who lived south of this frontier and whose position, as this represented a possible reason for conflict between the two allies, would have to be definitively resolved. On 23 June 1939, in a meeting in Berlin between the Italian ambassador and the head of the SS. Heinrich Himmler the options were decided, according to which the inhabitants of the province of Bolzano/Bozen and of some communes in the nearby provinces of Trento and Belluno would be able to opt for German citizenship with the obligation to expatriate to the Reich, or else remain in their own land, but without any rights in terms of the safequarding of their language and culture. They were therefore called on to choose between their linguistic-cultural identity and their homeland (Heimat).

After some initial hesitation the VKS, which in the meantime had spread throughout Alto Adige/Südtirol, decided to accept the appeal of the Führer and to promote the expatriation of South Tyrolese to the Third Reich. Initially the fascist leadership also believed it necessary to use every means to encourage the South Tyrolese to opt for expatriation. Only some important exponents of the by now defunct Deutscher Verband and most of the clergy decided to remain in Alto Adige/Südtirol. These last, known as Dableiber, were a clear minority, as most of the South Tyrolese – both due to the widespread propaganda of the VKS and due to their own experience – were certain that they had no future in their own land. On 31 December

1939, on expiry of the term for the options, 212,000 South Tyrolese (around 85%) had decided to expatriate. By 1943, the year in which expatriation was suspended, 75.000 had emigrated and if the plan was not fully implemented this was only the result of the war and the delaying tactics adopted at bureaucratic level. The question of the options had however created a serious rift between the German-speaking population, to the extent that the minority not opting to expatriate was subjected to intimidation and attacks by the majority who had opted to leave. The situation deteriorated further after 8 September 1943, involving also the Italian-speaking group.

A number of serious defeats led to the fall of the fascist regime and the arrest of Mussolini; Italy surrendered and a large part of it was occupied by German troops. In Alto Adige/Südtirol at this point many hoped for annexation to the Reich, something which did not take place due to the creation of the Italian Social Republic. The three most northerly provinces of this puppet State - Bolzano/Bozen, Trento and Belluno were brought together in the cisalpine zone of operation, with the Tyrolean national socialist Franz Hofer at its head as supreme commissioner, under the control of the Third Reich. The commissioner began to adapt and subordinate the administration of the province of Bolzano/Bozen to the Nazi system. Conscription was enforced and conscientious objectors were put to death. Numerous persons opposing the regime among all the linguistic groups were interned, together with partisans from northern Italy and other people persecuted for racial reasons, in the notorious Bolzano/Bozen transit camp (known among the population as Bolzano/Bozen concentration camp), where family members of conscientious objectors also ended up, called on by Franz Hofer to answer in person for the objectors' failure to discharge their duty.



The difficult recovery

Resistance was soon organised against the Nazi occupation in Bolzano/Bozen, above all in the industrial area, polarising around the Committee for National Liberation (C.L.N.), whereas in the rural areas it was also concentrated in the Andreas-Hofer-Bund (A.H.B.), the movement founded by some of those who had opted not to expatriate. The men who would subsequently contribute to the rebirth of our province came precisely from these two movements. On 2 May 1945 there was the surrender of the Wehrmacht in Italy and with this the end of the war. But what was to become of Alto Adige/Südtirol? The two linguistic groups had completely contrasting projects: the Italians in the various parties deriving from the Committee for National Liberation, in particular the Christian Democrats (DC), the communists (PCI), the socialists (PSI) and the Partito d'Azione (Action Party), hoped that the territory to the south of the Brennero/Brenner pass would remain within Italy. whereas the Germans, who on 8 May 1945, under the guidance of important figures among those who had not opted for expatriation, had founded the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP), hoped for the right to self-determination and annexation to the Austrian State which had been created after the war. However the population was not permitted to decide: the question of Alto Adige/Südtirol raised an international problem and as such it became a pawn in the dealings between the allies (USA, Great Britain, France) and the Soviet Union, which in the end decided to confirm the border drawn in 1919. In any event the politicians of the time were aware of the need to protect the German-speaking minority which lived to the south of the Brennero/Brenner pass - the Ladins were forgotten! - in order to safeguard their identity and to prevent a repeat of what had happened during the fascist regime.

Within the context of the peace negotiations in Paris between the allies and Italy (1946-1947) the representatives of Italy and Austria were invited to draft a joint treaty for the protection of this minority, drawing up the **Degasperi-Gruber treaty**, signed in Paris on 5 September 1946 by the President of the Council of Ministers and Italian Foreign Minister, Alcide Degasperi and the Austrian Foreign Minister Karl Gruber. This was also known as the **Paris Agreement** and is the basis of our autonomy. It guaranteed German-speaking inhabitants in the province of Bolzano/Bozen and the nearby province of Trento – at this time the area to the south of Bolzano/Bozen (Bassa Atesina/Unterland) came under Trento – the following rights:

- teaching in the mother-tongue;
- parification of the German and Italian languages in public offices and official documents, as well as in bilingual topographic naming;
- the restoration of German surnames italianized under fascism;
- an appropriate distribution of public posts among the linguistic groups;
- administrative autonomy;
- recognition of university qualifications obtained in German-speaking countries;
- review of the options;
- facilitation of the circulation of persons and goods between the various parts of the old county of Tyrol.

On 31 January 1948 the Italian constituent assembly, elected on 2 June 1946, ratified the Statute of Autonomy of the Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol Region, drawn up on the basis of the Paris Agreement, but nevertheless disappointing for the political representatives of the German-speaking population, in that there were fewer autonomous areas of jurisdiction



than foreseen and also because autonomy was granted jointly with the province of Trento and not to the province of Bolzano/Bozen alone, thus making the German-speaking group a minority even at local level. The true holders of autonomy were the regional government and the regional parliament, although they could delegate jurisdiction to the two provinces and to the two provincial parliaments which composed them. On 28 November 1948 there were the first elections for the regional parliament, and hence for the provincial parliament, in practice the first democratic elections for 26 years (the last had been the local elections of 1922): on 16 April elections were held for the Italian parliament, on 11 July there were local elections in Bolzano/Bozen and in November regional elections. Of the 20 members elected, 13 belonged to the German-speaking group (all from the SVP), 7 to the Italian-speaking group (two Christian Democrats, one Socialist, one Communist, one Republican, one member of the MSI and one from the Union of Independents). In subsequent years the composition of the provincial parliament was to be characterised by substantial stability. Karl Erckert from Merano/Meran became the first president of the provincial government, Silvius Magnago was the first president of the provincial parliament, with Luigi Negri as his deputy.

However, power was firmly in the hands of the region, where the SVP had formed a coalition with the Christian Democrats, who had 17 members out of 46. At this point a period of political, cultural and to a certain extent also economic-social recovery began. The province gradually acquired jurisdiction in the areas of agriculture and forestry, trade, artisan activities and tourism, public works, culture, health and in the field of welfare, although it possessed only a quarter of the regional budget; it could administrate

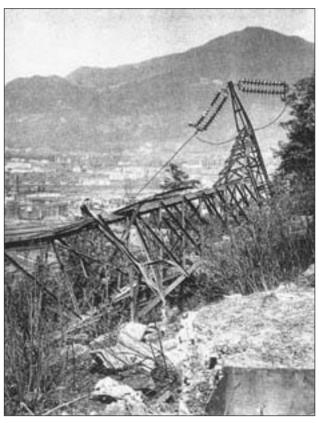
its own finances but not make political decisions. which instead came under the jurisdiction of the regional parliament. Furthermore, the two provinces were increasingly less entrusted with the implementation of regional laws. There was a growing trend against autonomy deriving from Rome, and many provisions of the Paris Agreement were implemented very slowly, if not disregarded completely, to the extent that in 1954 the SVP presented the Italian Government with an official protest. In 1956 Austria also took action as one of the signatories of the Paris Agreement, proposing negotiations with experts, On the announcement of the arrival of direct State help for the construction of more than one thousand council houses in Bolzano/Bozen the SVP, irritated by this direct interference in an area of provincial iurisdiction - the German-speaking group feared Italian infiltration - responded on 17 November 1957 with a major demonstration at Castel Firmiano/Sigmundskron, which marked the beginning of a new phase in the Alto Adige/Südtirol guestion, giving rise to a serious crisis



The experiment is successful

The main demand made by the demonstrators at Castel Firmiano/Sigmundskron, among whom there was also the newly elected secretary of the SVP. Silvius Magnago, was genuine regional autonomy for Alto Adige/Südtirol (Los von Trient!). In the meantime the Italian government had stated that it was willing to negotiate with Vienna, but the talks had not achieved any results. As a sign of protest against the reduction of provincial jurisdiction in the subsidized construction sector, imposed by Rome, on 30 January 1959 the SVP abandoned the regional government. In Austria in the meantime the conclusion had been reached that it was necessary to involve international institutions in the problem. So on 21 September of the same year Bruno Kreisky, the Austrian Foreign Minister, announced that he wished to present the question of Alto Adige/Südtirol to the General Assembly of the United Nations in the following autumn, in the event that bilateral talks did not achieve any results. This was indeed what occurred. After various talks and interventions by the two parties, on 31 October 1960 the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution which urged the parties "to find a solution for all differences relating to the implementation of the Paris Agreement of 5 September 1946 ...". This resolution was reconfirmed by the General Assembly in the sitting of 28 November 1961.

So what was happening in Alto Adige/Südtirol in this period? In January, May and June 1961 the two Foreign Ministers had met while bombs exploded in our province. The attacks, which began in 1956-1957,



culminated in the 'night of fires' between 11 and 12 June 1961 (the Sunday of the Feast of the Sacred Heart), when 47 pylons were blown up, mostly in Bolzano/Bozen and Burgraviato/Burggrafenamt. The bomb attacks, some of which also caused victims, had by now become a constant in the negotiations



between Rome and Vienna or between Rome and Bolzano/Bozen: the origin of the attacks lav initially in Alto Adige/Südtirol and then became increasingly external. The night of fires led to the adoption of severe and at times excessive policing measures by the Italian State, which together with the attacks contributed rather to aggravating the problem than to resolving it. On 1st September 1961 the Government had established the Commission of 19, made up of eleven Italians, seven Germans and one Ladin. given the task of analysing the problem in depth and of presenting proposals for genuine autonomy on the basis of the Degasperi-Gruber Agreement. Work ended in 1964 and the conclusions were used as the basis for discussion in negotiations between Italy and Austria, negotiations which in some respects went well beyond the proposals of the commission.

In the second half of the 1960s Italo-Austrian negotiations benefited from the more tolerant political climate present in Italy from December 1963 with the governments of the centre-left, in particular with Aldo Moro as the President of the Council of Ministers and at the Foreign Office. After numerous meetings and talks, at the end of August 1966 Rome made a global offer, better known as the Package of measures in favour of the population of Alto Adige/Südtirol. Vienna made it clear to the SVP that this was the maximum it was possible to obtain and an extended group of leaders from the party decided to approve it, while requesting the redefinition of certain points. Among the most controversial points there was the issue of legal guarantees, i.e. the recognition of the international status of the Package. In 1969 a group of experts drew up the so-called Operational Calendar, a sort of register of expiry dates which guaranteed the effective implementation of the measures contained in the Package, at the end of which Austria

would issue the declaration of resolution of the controversy before the UN. From that time on any disagreements concerning Alto Adige/Südtirol would be submitted to the *International Court of Justice* in The Hague.

In October 1969 the Package and the Operational Calendar were ready. The first contained 137 measures, most of which designed to protect the German and Ladin population, some also for the protection of the Italian population, such as for example the possibility of opposing the budget, while the second fixed the 18 steps to be taken in order to guarantee implementation of the 137 measures. At this point lively discussion took place within the SVP between supporters and opponents of the Package, concluding on 22 November 1969 when the party conference in Merano/Meran decided to approve it, also thanks to the work of conviction carried out by Magnago, who for years had been president of the provincial government and secretary of the party as well as the person principally responsible for the Package. After fourteen hours of debate, 53.4% of the 1104 delegates voted in favour and 46.6% against. Following approval by the main political organisations representing the German and Ladin-speaking linguistic groups, the Italian and Austrian parliaments also gave their go-ahead. As this involved a complex set of important provisions with the status of constitutional law and hence subject to a complex procedure of approval, the Package of measures known as the Second Statute of Autonomy only came into effect on 20 January 1972 in the form of a consolidation act made up of 115 articles.

The subsequent decades were characterised by long and difficult negotiations between Bolzano/Bozen and Rome on the norms for implementation of



the individual provisions of the Statute of Autonomy. within the context of which it was possible to improve and further extend the areas of jurisdiction. The official name of the region had become Trentino-Alto Adiae/Trentino-Südtirol. The main innovation of the Second Statute of Autonomy consisted in the reduction of the powers of the regional government due to the transfer of almost all its authority to the Autonomous Provinces of Bolzano/Bozen and Trento. This led to a major revaluation of the provincial parliament and required an extensive programme of work to ensure that a legal basis for the new form of autonomy in Alto Adige/Südtirol could be created. The most evident mechanism for the protection of the German-speaking and Ladin-speaking groups was the obligatory application of bilingualism and the allocation of all posts within the civil service according to the principle of ethnic guotas. This finally allowed the minorities to obtain appropriate linguistic and ethnic representation in public life and in many workplaces. The revaluation process also concerned the languages of minorities, and this guaranteed that Germans and Ladins would survive linguistically and culturally, despite the fact that they are a minority in a large nation.

The results began to be seen increasingly clearly in the 1970s, when there was substantial growth throughout the province, especially in the tourist sector and light industry and artisan activities, which ended the depopulation of the more peripheral areas, encouraging widespread prosperity. This led to a more open cultural and intellectual climate and to greater pluralism, especially among young people, a consequence among other things of the winds of change brought to Europe by the 1968 protest movement. Some sectors of the Italian-speaking group began to feel themselves relegated to the back-

ground, as they were unprepared for bilingualism, deprived of jobs by the system of proportional allocation and by the crisis in heavy industry, and only partly involved in the growth of the tourist and artisan sector due to lack of the economic requisites; in other words the conviction became widespread that Italians were the losers within the new autonomy. Starting from 1985 this apprehension manifested itself with a clear movement of the Italian electorate towards the right-wing, an orientation which continues today.

Twenty years after the second Statute of Autonomy came into effect, and more precisely on 30 January 1992, the Italian government, guided by Giulio



Andreotti, issued the final norms for implementation. On 22 April the relative accompanying note was delivered to Austria and on 19 June 1992, after extensive debate in the Austrian parliament, the representatives of Italy and Austria issued a *discharge* before the United Nations in New York, bringing to an end the question of Alto Adige/Südtirol which had been pending there since 1960.



In the meantime, following the progressive unification of Europe and the gradual dismantling of State frontiers, the situation in Alto Adige/Südtirol began to take on a new dimension. With the entry of Austria into the European Union (EU) on 1st January 1995 and the coming into effect of the Treaty of Schengen on 1st April 1998, a Europe without frontiers became a reality and new prospects for interregional co-operation within a united Europe opened up. Thanks to Italian governments in favour of autonomy, the provinces of Bolzano/Bozen and Trento were able to acquire jurisdiction in additional areas, despite the declaration of resolution of the controversy. The transfer of important responsibilities for the road network (among these ordinary and extraordinary maintenance of state roads), communications and transport, state-owned waters and the water network (including the granting of major deviations of water for hydroelectric stations), the production and distribution of electricity and the management of provincial schools (e.g. powers to determine the legal and economic status of teaching staff) stand out in terms of their importance as regards new areas of jurisdiction. A State law also gave Alto Adige/Südtirol the necessary authority to set up a university, subsequently founded on 31 October 1997 as the Free University of Bolzano/Bozen, based in Bolzano/Bozen and Bressanone/Brixen, and inaugurated on 10 November 1998.

These developments have now reached the end of the line, at least for the moment, with the constitutional law of 31 January 2001, no. 2, which among other things modified and integrated the Special Statute of the Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol Region, and with the constitutional law of 18 October 2001, no. 3 on the reform of the Italian Constitution, approved by a people's referendum. This last law in

particular has provided a considerable boost to federalism in Italy, placing communes, provinces, metropolitan governments and regions on an equal level with the State in terms of their importance in the organisation of the Republic. The constitutional reform has also radically modified the jurisdiction of the State and of the regions. Previously these only had legislative authority in certain specifically defined sectors - the jurisdiction of the province of Bolzano/ Bozen was and still is much more extensive than that of other regions, especially those with an ordinary statute, as a result of the Statute of Autonomy while in all other sectors it was the State which had jurisdiction, whereas the situation has now been overturned. This reversal of roles meant that the authority of Alto Adige/Südtirol increased further, as did the authority of the other regions with a special statute (the Valle d'Aosta, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia and Sicily) and that of the Autonomous Province of Trento, which following modification of the Constitution now forms, together with the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, the region officially known as Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol in both languages. A clear consequence of this first step towards federalism by Italy is on the one hand the abolition of the Italian Government's approval for regional and provincial laws, which now come into effect immediately after approval and without prior controls by the Italian Government, and on the other hand the abolition of the control exerted on municipalities and other local bodies by the regions, or in the case of Alto Adige/Südtirol, by the province, and the revaluation of local bodies through the compulsory establishment of a Council of Local Bodies. Before the reform of the Italian Constitution, the aforementioned constitutional law of 31 January 2001, no. 2, had already led to a radical transformation of institutional relations between the Trentino-Alto



Adige/Südtirol Region and the two autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano/Bozen, Indeed while the region was previously subdivided into two provinces, now following the aforesaid reform of the Statute of Autonomy, it is the two provinces of Trento and Bolzano/Bozen which form the region. In other words the provinces have become the mainstays. within the context of a clear revaluation of their role as compared to the region. In future in Alto Adige/ Südtirol members of the local parliament will no longer be elected as members of the regional parliament but as members of the provincial parliament, and in this way the provincial parliament will also have jurisdiction as regards the definition of electoral rights and the form of government. All these modifications represent a great challenge for the province of Bolzano/Bozen and thus also for the provincial parliament, which on the one hand enjoys far greater autonomy in its legislative activities but on the other must demonstrate greater attention and responsibility in the exercising of that authority.



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