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## **EUROPEANIZATION AND THE ‘REGIONALIZATION’ OF NATIONAL MINORITY IDENTITY**

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the paradox of identity continuity and identity change with regard to different national minorities in 'old' and 'new' (post-2004) European Union member states, and sheds light on how Europeanization processes may influence these developments. For national minority groups, identifying as ‘different’ from the majority population is essential, as its difference (e.g. in language and culture) provides the basis for demanding group rights and safeguarding measures. Keeping a distinct minority identity is therefore important for its long-term goals of preserving its identifying and differentiating features. On the other hand, minority identity does not exist in a vacuum, but is heavily influenced by socio-political processes, such as European integration. The main argument of the paper is that identity continuity and identity change are not mutually exclusive concepts, but rather that they precede, overlap and complement each other. The paper looks at the conditions under which identity becomes permeable, and how shifts in emphasis on minority identity take place. The German-speaking minority in South Tyrol (Italy), the Italian minority in Istria (Croatia) and the German minority in Silesia (Poland) will serve as case studies to illustrate these developments.

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## **Introduction**

In traditional minority politics, the tactic of emphasizing ethnic difference has been used by both the minorities themselves and by nation-states or majority populations. On the minorities' side, focusing on the ethnicity cleavage was a way of underlining their difference from the rest of the nation's inhabitants, and often acted as a basis for claiming minority protection rights (e.g. the right to schooling in the minority language). On the other side of the spectrum, the notion of difference and 'us' vs 'them' was used to create a distinction between majority and minority populations, and to frame minorities as ethnic outsiders, not belonging to the national culture. From both angles, ethnicity was used as the main lens for viewing the issue of minorities and minority rights – a scenario visible in many western European countries and, more recently, also in central and eastern European countries and in the western Balkans (cf. Pan and Pfeil 2003; Schwellnus 2007; Anderini 2006; Vermeersch 2004; Freyburg & Richter 2010; Sasse 2008).

I previously conducted a comparative case study across 'old' and 'new' EU member states (pre- and post-2004 enlargement)<sup>1</sup>, looking at how Europeanization processes impact national minority communities. Europeanization encompasses both the adoption of European rules and norms at the national level, as well as a general shift in policy making and interaction towards the European level. Europeanization theories primarily focus on 'top-down' definitions – one of the most prominent is 'the domestic adaptation to European regional integration' (Graziano and Vink, 2007: 7). On the other hand, Della Porta and Caiani (2009: 25) define Europeanization 'from below' as 'Europeanization of and by civil society'. My previous research aimed to bring attention to this 'bottom-up' side of Europeanization, e.g. how minority groups 'use' the European arena to advance their claims. My research showed that minority population developments in 'old' and 'new' member states were relatively similar after the EU accession process had been completed and the tool of conditionality was no longer available: while the EU has some leverage to demand the implementation of minority rights during accession, as one of the conditions to be fulfilled for membership, this possibility is no longer available after a candidate has entered the EU I interviewed minority representatives, local

politicians and EU officials from the European Commission and analysed the interview data together with official documents and statistical census data. This process tracing revealed that one of the most striking similarities between ‘old’ and ‘new’ member states was their ongoing processes of ‘regionalization’. ‘Regionalization’ can be defined as a shift of minority identification from an ethnicity-based to a more territory-based allegiance. This allows for a less exclusive construction of identity, and for more collaboration with other ethnic groups in the territory. Paraphrasing Günther Pallaver’s (2014) description of the South Tyrolean case provides a good illustration of this phenomenon: if a minority has reached a certain standard of protection, ethnicity may stop being the main cleavage, and alignment around different themes becomes possible (e.g. along the centre–periphery divide). Politicians and local elites focus on territorial issues instead of ethnic issues, which then also include the Italian-speaking national majority population in their claims. This creates a regional, rather than ethnic, model of distinction. Similar developments can also be detected in two other case studies: the German minority in Silesia (Poland) and the Italian minority in Istria (Croatia). Both show regionalization in their census data, which is echoed in my interviews with minority representatives and activists. My previous research included a study of the Breton minority in France, but this case is excluded here as regionalization or territorialization developments are absent. Following Pallaver (2014), this can be attributed to the lack of minority protection measures or minority recognition in France to date. If no standard of protection has been granted, ethnicity remains the main framework of separation and also the main grounds for lobbying for pro-minority measures.

This paper therefore aims to comparatively investigate how Europeanization and European integration influence regionalization processes, and to analyse these processes as a common phenomenon present across both ‘old’ and ‘new’ member states. The presence of a certain minimum protection standard has been identified as a prerequisite; the article will look at which other factors and framework conditions might foster or hinder the erosion of the ethnic cleavage and a shift towards territorial alignment. Drawing on official documents, census data and qualitative structured interviews with minority representatives, the cases of the German-speaking minority in South Tyrol (Italy), the German minority in Silesia (Poland) and the Italian minority in Istria (Croatia) are compared, providing a novel comparative lens and bridging the often separate analysis of ‘old’ and ‘new’ member states. Process tracing methodology (Beach and Brun Pedersen, 2013) is used to identify developments and crucial turning points or attitude shifts. Although the minorities differ significantly in size, degree of

protection, political representation and so forth, similar processes of regionalization can be observed. Census data (for Poland and Croatia) and scientific surveys (for South Tyrol) show the development and current status of regional identities. The paper also investigates how Europeanization and regionalization processes interact or trigger each other, and how they may shape and change minority identities. The chosen case studies represent different geographical areas, as well as different accession periods: Italy was one of the founding members of the EU, with Poland acceding in 2004 and Croatia in 2013. Therefore, the time axis will also be a frame of reference for developments. First, I present an overview of each case study and each minority's situation and analyse the different patterns of Europeanization and regionalization. I then outline Pallaver's model of territorialization (developed for the South Tyrolean case), followed by a discussion of its adaptability to the other case study countries. Finally, a comparative analysis will look at similarities and differences, as well as at possible future areas for research on regionalization.

## **1. Case studies**

### *1.1 South Tyrol*

The Italian Republic recognizes linguistic minorities through article 6 of the Constitution and through the Law on the Safeguarding of Historical Linguistic Minorities (December 15, 1999). According to article 2 of the 1999 Law, Italy 'safeguards the language and culture of the Albanian, Catalan, Germanic, Greek, Croat and Slovene populations and that of populations speaking French, Franco-Provencal, Friulan, Ladin, Occitan and Sardinian'. The linguistic minorities are often concentrated in regions with a special statute, which grants more powers to the regional level; these regions are Friuli Venezia Giulia (Slovene, Croat and Friulan populations), Sardinia (Sardinian and Catalan), Sicily, Valle d'Aosta (French) and Trentino-Alto Adige<sup>2</sup> (German and Ladin). For South Tyrol, additional international protection is granted through the Gruber-Degasperi Agreement, an attachment to the Paris Peace Treaty 1947. The treaty sets out protection measures for the German- and Ladin-speaking minority populations (e.g. regarding minority language education), who had suffered severe repression during the fascist period. However, these measures were not properly implemented in the years following World War II, resulting in political violence and demands for a return to Austria. In 1960 and 1961, Austria presented the South Tyrol problem at the UN General Assembly, which issued a

resolution asking both Austria and Italy to find a solution. In 1972, the second Autonomy Statute was passed; it shifted many competences to the provincial level and granted a high degree of minority protection. As Pallaver (2014: 377–378) notes, it was a model of dissociative conflict resolution, spatially and socially separating conflict parties. In South Tyrol, this entailed the separation of linguistic groups in most areas of life (such as schools and sports clubs) and was a necessary and successful measure to ensure the minority's survival. However, nowadays there is a stronger desire for more interaction and collaboration, especially among political, economic and cultural elites.

According to the 2012 census, the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano had a population of 509,626 people; 69.41% declared themselves to belong to the German language group, 26.06% to the Italian, and 4.53% to the Ladin group (ASTAT, 2013). In South Tyrol, there is a proportional system for the distribution of public service jobs, whereby jobs are reserved for each linguistic group based on the declarations made in the census. Linguistic group identification is therefore the only type of ethnic question asked in the census; there are no options to declare regional alignment. In 2014, the *Sprachbarometer* (a survey on language use) also asked about South Tyroleans' national, territorial and ethnic identity. Regional affiliations prevail in this case: 61.5% of the respondents identified as South Tyrolean (using the terms *Südtiroler*, *Sudtirolesi* or *Altoatesini*<sup>3</sup>), while 22.7% identified as Italian and 17.2% identified as European. The German-speaking minority population shows particularly high numbers of regional affiliation, with 80% of respondents primarily identifying as South Tyrolean, and only 9.6% as Tyrolean<sup>4</sup> and 2.2% as Austrian (Astat, 2015: 169–170). Regional identification is therefore much stronger than identification with the minority's kin-state, Austria.

Günther Pallaver (2014) also observes a process of alignment along the centre–periphery rather than the minority–majority cleavage, turning from a dissociative to an associative model of conflict resolution. He argues that minority protection measures and a certain minimum standard are prerequisites for such processes:

[...] cooperation only becomes a possibility when there is security for the further social, economic and cultural development of the ethnic minority, and when mutual distrust among linguistic groups is mitigated while at the same time building mutual trust, with the European integration process ultimately having greatly contributed to this positive outcome (Pallaver 2014: 378).

Additionally, Pallaver highlights the importance of a preference for collaboration from the political, cultural, and economic elites of both groups, as well as civil society organizations, in order to successfully shift to a territorialization (Pallaver, 2014: 393). Social trust (Warren 1999), supplied by minority protection standards as outlined above, is also an important factor as it establishes the basis for collaboration. For South Tyrol, both preconditions are in place: protection standards are established and there is mutual trust between the language groups. The role of Europe and Europeanization processes is also considerable, as it was in the context of European integration that the linguistic groups could move closer together. The EU's non-discrimination and human rights provisions also provide an important frame of reference and establish a climate of trust. An adaptation of the Autonomy Statute or its regulations became necessary as some provisions or their implementation clash with EU law and have been contested at the European Court of Justice (e.g. ruling C 281/98 states that all officially issued language certificates must be recognized, not only those gained through examinations within the province); other provisions needed to be updated to meet modern-day policymaking needs. This so-called 'Autonomy Convent', a larger dialogue involving experts and civil society members, and crossing linguistic group barriers, presented its final reports in 2017. A discursive policymaking institution like the 'Autonomy Convent' underlines the shift towards an associative model, and could represent a chance to change the Autonomy Statute from primarily being an instrument of minority protection to a type of regional 'constitution' for all territorial citizens. In September 2017, the Convent's results, reports and recommendations were submitted to the Provincial Assembly (*Landtag*), who will then decide upon submitting a proposal to update the Autonomy Statute together with the Assembly of Trentino in the joint Regional Assembly (*Regionalrat*). However, reform efforts seem to have stalled, and it remains to be seen when the proposed updating process will resume (Röggla, 2017).

The erosion of ethnic identity in favour of a more regional identity could also be detected in qualitative structured interviews with minority representatives and members of civil society groups. All interviewees highlighted the process of European integration as a positive framework for minorities and proposed a 'Europe of the Regions' as their ideal concept for the future. The establishment of new states and borders was seen as undesirable; rather, the goal should include further collaboration across linguistic groups in more policy areas, such as enabling possibilities for bilingual education. Similar to the *Sprachbarometer* findings of 2014, a majority of interviewees also identified as South Tyrolean, followed (and often accompanied by) a European identity. Earlier work by Niederfriniger and Kienzl (1996) suggests that political

elites from both language groups have similar political values; about 80% of respondents in the *Sprachbarometer* study also said that the cultural life would be much poorer with just one language group. The *Sprachbarometer* data suggests that this perception has deepened further over the last 20 years: a majority of all linguistic groups views South Tyrolean linguistic diversity as an asset that should be valued and kept (Astat, 2015: 196). Furthermore, 49% of both German- and Italian speakers responded that autonomy was what they value most about South Tyrol (Astat, 2015: 181). While 49% is not an absolute majority, it shows that a significant part of the Italian population also views autonomy as an asset; this would have been unthinkable in the past, and signals strong regionalization tendencies among the Italian-speaking population. The most recent provincial elections on October 21, 2018, brought significant losses for many of the German right-wing populist parties who had advocated for Austrian dual citizenship and for a South Tyrolean ‘free state’ outside of Italy. The Eurosceptic centre-right Lega emerged as one of the winners, becoming the strongest Italian-speaking party in South Tyrol. As such, the Lega has entered into a governing coalition with the centre-right, pro-Europe South Tyrolean People’s Party (*Südtiroler Volkspartei*, SVP) which represents the interests of German and Ladin-speaking communities. This move has been criticized by scholars, and even some SVP members, fearing that Lega involvement will interrupt the region’s pro-European course. However, the *Lega’s* governing coalition with the Five Star Movement in Rome was dissolved in August 2019, and Italy is now governed by a Five Star Movement–*Partito Democratico* coalition. The *Lega* is therefore likely to be more consensus-oriented regarding its policies at the regional level.

## 1.2 Silesia

The German minority in Silesia (Poland) is mainly concentrated around the Opole and Silesia voivodeships (250,000 people); a smaller minority (around 30,000 people) exists in Gdansk and Masuria. Leaders from the Association of German Socio-Cultural Societies (*Verband deutscher Gesellschaften*, VdG), the main minority organization in Poland, estimate the total population to be around 300,000, with the German Foreign Ministry placing the estimate at around 300,000–350,000 (*Beauftragter für Aussiedlerfragen und nationale Minderheiten* 2013). It used to be a much larger minority, but strict outlawing of German language and culture after the end of World War II, as well as expulsions and people leaving for West Germany and other European countries, saw approximately a million Germans leaving Poland. The Treaty of Warsaw, signed in 1970, provided for a significant number of minority members to leave for Germany, but in 1991, Germany and Poland signed the treaty on good neighbourly relations

and friendly cooperation (*Vertrag über gute Nachbarschaft und freundschaftliche Zusammenarbeit*), which outlined protection measures for the German minority. In 2005, Poland passed the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Languages, providing a legal basis for regulating minority issues within the territory.

The Polish census has a question regarding ethnic groups, but it is not mandatory and multiple identities are possible (e.g. 'German' and 'Silesian', or 'German' and 'Polish'). According to the 2011 census, 148,000 people declared themselves to be German, but 847,000 people chose Silesian. This represents a rapid growth in regional affiliation: in 2002, only 173,000 citizens chose the Silesian option. German observers commented that Silesia has a German connotation, similar to Bavaria or Saxony, but this point of view is very controversial; growing regional identity makes it increasingly difficult to establish precise numbers around the German minority in Poland (Cordell and Wolff, 2005: 268). According to the interview data, adopting a regional 'Silesian' identity is especially common among younger minority members, as it constitutes an identity that feels closer to their reality than 'German' does. Many young people also add 'European' as their identity, underlining the importance of European integration for allowing travel and interaction. A purely 'German' identity is often too far removed from young people, many of whom did not learn German as a first language; in their parents' generation, there was widespread language loss due to German being outlawed in the public sphere. Additionally, due to the Second World War, identification as 'German' and Germans in general had a very negative public image in Poland, and it still does to this day, to some extent; while 'Silesian' offers a more neutral identity while also underlining regionality. Cordell and Dybczynski (2005) thus see being Silesian as a 'way out' for ethnic Germans who do not wish to declare themselves as such, or in fact feel that after being part of the Polish state for over half a century, they no longer belong to this group, but rather possess a distinct regional identity. There is also a growing Silesian Autonomy Movement, demanding more competences from the relatively centralist Polish state. Interviewees from the German minority see this movement as a positive development, but are reluctant to openly participate in it, fearing that their German identity will impart a negative image. In fact, centralist politicians have tried to discredit Silesian autonomy claims by framing them as 'German', and referring to them as irredentist or secessionist ideas.

My interviewees identify the fall of communism and the EU accession process as the two main turning points for the minority situation. As in the South Tyrolean case, the EU and the integration process are seen as providing an important setting for minority protection,



especially since the EU is seen the most trustworthy partner in human rights issues. Protection standards have been achieved, and minority–majority relations are normalizing through Europeanization processes, which also foster a stronger regional identity. From the ‘top-down’ perspective, the conditionality tool of the EU accession process demanded protection measures be put in place. As one minority member recalls, EU involvement acted as a catalyst, for example in finalizing the minority law which had been discussed and re-drafted for 17 years. Another example is when right-wing parties lobbied for a 50% minority population threshold to warrant bilingual signage – a level that none of the minorities in Poland could have reached. Through EU mediation, the threshold was set at 20%, which allowed some of the towns in the Opole region to get bilingual signage. The accession process also saw EU-funded monitoring missions, primarily focused on progress regarding Roma inclusion, and the adoption of international minority protection standards and the drafting of national minority protection legislation. Analysing parliamentary debates on the Framework Convention on National Minorities in the Polish *Sejm*, Schwellus (2007: 157–158) notes that government representatives argued in favour of ratification as it is ‘monitored all the time’ in EU accession negotiations. The EU accession process thus brought a more favourable climate for the installation of minority rights, and provided the final impetus to follow through on legislation providing minority protection, as both the EU and Polish decision-makers saw them as prerequisites for accession. In the case of bilingual signage, EU mediation directly achieved a solution; it can thus be argued that the EU accession process was crucial in establishing a framework of mutual trust and collaboration. Regarding the ‘bottom-up’ direction of Europeanization, the German minority is especially active in interacting with other minorities through the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), a minority non-governmental organization (NGO) that collaborates transnationally, and has recently been at the forefront of the successful Minority SafePack Initiative.<sup>5</sup>

However, times seem to be getting more difficult for the German minority under the rule of the nationalist Law and Justice party. In 2017, both German and Polish inhabitants protested an enlargement of the city of Opole, which would reduce the proportion of German speakers below the threshold for bilingual signage; Warsaw implemented the enlargement nevertheless (FUEN 2017). Ethnic cleavages have already been overcome in this joint regional effort and it will be interesting to see whether joint minority and majority regional protest can change the current situation.

Indeed, regional identification seems to be something that both German and Polish speakers can agree on. Silesian identity is seen as a positive concept in the interview data, and does not suffer from the same negative connotation as German identity. In 1900, Austrian Silesia was composed of 45% Germans, 33% Poles and 22% Czechs (Cordell and Dybczinski, 2005: 80); this historic ethnic diversity is often referenced, as well as the transnationality of the region today (modern-day Silesia extends over Germany, Poland and Czechia). Its shared history and multicultural society are often mentioned as positive factors, and stronger cross-border collaboration is among the most frequently quoted advantages of EU accession. In the minority's future, an associative approach to minority–majority relations can be expected and is already visible, as with the Opole enlargement protests. One of the minority's main goals is to foster bilingual schooling; this increasingly also appeals to Polish-speaking families who think further language skills will benefit their children's future careers. A further increase in regional identification and collaboration between groups can therefore be expected.

### *1.3 Istria*

The Italian minority in Istria (Croatia) has been well-protected since Yugoslavian times. The Italian-speaking areas were part of Austria-Hungary until 1918, when the Kingdom of Croats, Serbs and Slovenes was established following Austria's defeat in World War I. Italy laid claim to Istria, and in 1919 the fascist poet Gabriele D'Annunzio seized Rijeka/Fiume, which became part of Italy in 1922; Trieste remained independent and only became part of Italy in 1954. In the 1920s and 1930s, assimilation measures took place, and Croatian and Slovenian schools were destroyed. Much like Silesia, Istria had been a traditionally multicultural area, also under Austro-Hungarian rule, and is nowadays split across three countries (Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia). In 1941, the German occupiers established a fascist state under the Ustasa regime,<sup>6</sup> and further territories were given to Nazi ally Italy, including most of the Dalmatian coastline. In 1945, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was established; Istrian and Dalmatian Italians could opt for Italian citizenship, and about 250,000 Istrians and 45,000 Dalmatians left for Italy. The remaining minority population was granted minority rights; article 1 of the Constitution defined Croatia as 'the national state of Croats, Serbs in Croatia, and other nationalities', leaving room for ethnic diversity. The Constitution also granted a relatively far-reaching network of provisions, including free and equal use of minority languages, minority language education, proportional representation in government bodies and official use of minority languages in the courtroom; these provide the basis of current minority rights. In 1991, 94% of the citizens of current Croatia voted for independence, and rising nationalism across the

former Yugoslavia provided the conflict-ridden climate for the Balkan Wars. As Anderini (2006) argues, the Italian minority also became more aware of its own ethnicity, but this led to the development of a strong Istrian regional identity rather than a wish for closer ties with Italy. While these people identify as Italian, they also feel closely related to Croats and Slovenes living in the territory and share in the pride for the economically strong region of Istria (Anderini, 2006: 39–40). The interviewees see Istria as a traditionally multicultural and pluralist region, and feel that this diversity should be preserved.

Regional identity was very important for all my interview partners, most of whom self-identify with at least two concepts of alignment; most identified as ‘Istrian’ first and foremost, with ‘Italian’ and ‘European’ as the additional components. As with Silesia, this may be because an ‘Italian’ ethnic identity is too far removed from their self-perception, or because they wish to actively dissociate themselves from it for some reason. The ‘top-down’ European dimension was again stressed very strongly; while the EU was mainly concerned with issues regarding the Serb and Roma minorities during the accession phase, the Italians cite the abolishment of borders and possibilities for closer cooperation as positive. They also strongly emphasize the ‘bottom-up’ role of civil society, and new ways of collaborating as minorities transnationally.

The regionalization hypothesis is also reflected in the most recent Croatian census data. According to the 2011 census, the Italian minority has 17,807 members (0.42% of the total population of Croatia). Most of them live in Istria, with a smaller population in Dalmatia (about 1,000–4,000 people). This makes it the third largest minority in Croatia after Serbs, with 186,633 people (4.36% of the population) and Bosnians, with 31,479 people (0.73% of the population). Their number is also declining; in the 2001 census there were still 19,636 Italians – not a large loss in absolute numbers, but a significant drop considering the minority’s small size. At the same time, 36,361 people did not declare their ethnic group alignment in the 2011 census – a larger number than all of the minority populations except the Serbs – while 27,225 people declared a regional affiliation (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2013: 110). This shows that ethnicity is still a sensitive subject in post-war Croatia; a regional affiliation could therefore represent a less contested way of expressing a minority identity.

As seen in the case of Silesia, this may be because declaring regional affiliation may be prominent especially among minority members, either because the purely ‘German’ or an ‘Italian’ ethnic identity is too far removed from their self-perception, or because they wish to actively dissociate themselves from it for some reason. Regional identity is a very important

concept for all my interview partners, most of whom self-identify with not only one but at least two concepts of alignment; most identified as ‘Istrian’ first and foremost, with ‘Italian’ and ‘European’ as the additional components. The ‘top-down’ European dimension was again stressed very strongly; while the EU was mainly got involved on concerned with issues regarding the Serb and Roma minorities during the accession phase, the Italians cite the abolishment of borders and possibilities for closer cooperation as positive. They also strongly emphasize the ‘bottom-up’ role of civil society, and new ways of collaborating as minorities transnationally, denoting also a ‘bottom-up’ side to Europeanization and regionalization.

Despite its small size, the Italian minority is very active; the *Unione Italiana* is the main minority organization and is spread across 40 communities in Croatia and Slovenia. There is a wide range of Italian publications, and three Italian radio broadcasts per day. In Istria, there are 24 minority kindergartens and 10 primary schools, four secondary schools and a teachers’ academy programme where Italian is the language of instruction (Minority Rights Group International, 2003: 13). Much like in the South Tyrolean case, mother tongue education is thus guaranteed in Istria, and almost all members of the minority have learned Italian as their first language. My interviews confirmed that language proficiency and identification with the language is very high. Most minority members see their minority status as a positive part of their identity, and emphasize language learning and competence as an asset, especially in the European context.

With minority protection provisions, as outlined by the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities (2002), together with bilateral treaties between Italy and Croatia (1992), a setting of mutual trust has been established and collaboration with the authorities has been described as largely positive. In 2014, Istria became part of the larger European Region Without Borders (*Euregio ohne Grenzen – Euregio senza confini*) with Italy’s Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia and Austria’s Carinthia. Large parts of the historic region of Istria are thus collaborating again in the context of regionalization and integration. In January 2018, Croatia and Italy signed a Joint Declaration on enhanced cooperation on a variety of issues including tourism, migration, transport, trade, research, agriculture and environment. The Declaration also mentioned the respective minorities in both countries, and outlined provisions for the Croatian minority in Italy:

Reaffirming the key role played by autochthonous Croatian and Italian national minorities living in Italy and Croatia and providing a fundamental contribution to the social, cultural, and economic

development of each country, Italy and Croatia welcomed the recent measures taken in favour of the Croatian minority in the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia. Furthermore, Croatia Side (sic) welcomes allocation of the financial funds designated to solve the infrastructural problems (mainly roads) in the Molise Region in the area where the Croatian linguistic minority lives.

Confirming their commitment to further guarantee protection, inclusion and empowerment of the rights of respective ethnic communities, in accordance with national, European and international laws, Italy and Croatia took positive note of the important progress made so far and encourage further progress in enhancing their legal and financial status [...]. (Government of the Italian Republic & Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2018: 1).

The Joint Declaration underlines the collaborative efforts between the two countries, and the important role that the minority populations play in this collaboration. As regional identification is strong and the framework conditions set by the nation-states are favourable, regional cross-border cooperation is likely to intensify in the future. Istria's plurilingual and traditional diverse identity therefore lessens ethnic alignments and creates a framework for regional collaboration across linguistic groups.

## **Conclusion**

This paper aimed to look at the connection between Europeanization processes and regionalization processes regarding minorities in 'old' and 'new' member states, focusing especially on how Europeanization developments and the European integration process may foster regional, rather than ethnic, identities. It established that European integration provides a safer environment for minorities, and thus fosters the shift from a purely ethnical identification to a more regional affiliation. When ethnic identity and minority culture are no longer threatened, different cleavages (e.g. centre-periphery) may become more important. Europeanization allows minorities to connect and support each other internationally through 'bottom-up' processes, providing a strong support network and international attention for minority issues if needed. These processes can be detected in both 'old' and 'new' member states after accession, which implies that EU membership and the establishment of minority protection measures enable minorities to feel better protected and to adopt a less ethnically driven position. The duration of membership does not seem to have much of an impact, as similar developments can be detected in all case studies. A focus on the differences between 'old' and 'new' member states is therefore not needed; if anything, differences can be noted

between candidate countries and member states. As soon as a country joins the EU, differences start to subside and Europeanization ‘from below’ becomes more important. Therefore, all three case studies show similar developments, despite differences along the temporal axis.

First, all minority representatives I interviewed emphasized European integration. The EU provides the context of respect for human and minority rights through specific provisions such as the prohibition of discrimination and the Race Equality Directive, through the abolishment of borders and possibilities for transnational collaboration, as well as through case-specific engagement such as its mediation in the determination of quotas for bilingual signage in Poland. Severe repression in a member state would be incompatible with the EU’s often-flagged ‘united in diversity’ motto, and is thus seen as an unlikely scenario. Most interviewees were very positive about the EU and the integration process, and frequently also added a ‘European’ dimension to their identity. The European arena continues to be an important frame of reference if problems arise between a minority and a nation state, providing a public forum for raising concerns and supplying an international support structure ready to intervene. In the Silesian case, for example, the European Parliament Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages was informed about the proposed expansion of the city of Opole in 2017, and FUEN issued a resolution in support of the German minority in Poland. With the success of the Minority SafePack Initiative, minority members now know that the EU also offers policymaking and participatory instruments that can be used to further their claims at the European level, and that a transnational collaboration of minority groups can be strong enough to successfully make use of these instruments.

Second, Günther Pallaver’s (2014) prerequisites for the regionalization of minority identity in the South Tyrolean case can also be identified in the other case studies. Minority protection standards are present in all three countries, albeit to differing levels and through different measures. For example, the Italians in Istria can be regarded as almost equally well-protected as the German and Ladin minorities in South Tyrol. The regional level of Istria does not hold as many competences as South Tyrol, but the protection measures are well established and unlikely to be retracted due, for example, to changes in government. In Silesia, protection standards and civil society organizations that lobby for them had to be rebuilt after the downfall of communism, making it more difficult than in the other countries where there was more continuity. Nevertheless, minority protection legislation has now been established, and the German minority’s negative public image is now its main struggle. Additionally, the current nationalist government is taking action that may not directly target the weakening of the

minority group, but that has strong negative effects on minority representation. However, the minority has a strong set of allies at the European level, ready to raise the issue on their behalf. The success of the Minority SafePack Initiative underlines the role of, and demand for, Europe as a normative power supporting minority rights. As Pallaver argues, European integration is the context in which protection developments can take place, and where mutual trust is built (Pallaver, 2014: 378). Minority protection measures and the climate of mutual trust fostered by European integration are the main prerequisites for a shift from ethnic to regional alignment. Trust is therefore vital for regionalization processes; a stronger focus on the concept of a 'Europe of the Regions' might be able to provide an even stronger foundation for this trust in future. Additionally, through the successful Minority SafePack Initiative, minority members have now experienced how transnational collaboration can give more power to their voices in Europe, which could lead to intensified cooperation across minority regions as well.

Third, I have identified two additional factors that positively influence regionalization processes: a positive connotation of the region as well as a shared transnational regional history involving a common narrative and identity. All three regions in this article are relatively wealthy. Economic prosperity, through industry or tourism, likely fosters positive identification with a regional identity, as it also creates a higher standard of living and helps to create a distinction to other, less well-off parts of the country. Also, an economically strong region might possess more funds for projects important and relevant for minorities, like language education or the preservation of cultural heritage. Most interviewees highlighted the common multicultural history of their region, and emphasized this as an asset, especially in the context of European integration. Silesia and Istria are both split over three different countries, yet the old 'historic' region still plays an important part as a transnational context for regional identity. Interviewees often invoked their area's history of ethnic diversity, arguing that historical collaboration between ethnic groups should again prevail. In this context, regional identity is also a multi-ethnic identity – 'Istrian' and 'Silesian' are concepts not only common to minorities, but adhered to by the Croatian and Polish majority populations as well. Identification as South Tyrolean is also making its way into the Italian-speaking narrative, as the recent data from 2014 shows. As a border region between Italian and German linguistic areas, South Tyrol also has a history of different linguistic groups living together, although it was not as diverse as Istria or Silesia. However, both minority and majority populations increasingly view autonomy and cultural diversity as an asset that must be preserved; this

agreement and the climate of mutual trust could also lead to more regional identification within the Italian-speaking population.

Finally, I want to address some interesting points made by Cordell and Dybczynski (2005), who view processes of regionalization and voluntary integration as a possible danger for minorities: these processes could result in cuts to funding, or a weakened political position. Kin-state involvement may also be rendered more difficult. However, I would argue that the political position would not be weakened, but merely changed – the possibility of forming further alliances at the regional level may be an asset rather than a challenge, as outlined in the South Tyrolean case. More regional alignment may also present itself as a by-product of the European integration process and adequate minority protection. In fact, in all three case studies, the ‘big battles’ for minority rights have already been fought, so further large-scale kin-state involvement in a matter of domestic politics is unlikely. Instead, Europe is becoming an ever more important frame of reference, as underlined by the Minority SafePack Initiative. Additionally, ‘bottom-up’ Europeanization and connections with other minorities provide an international support network in cases of minority rights violations (such as the enlargement of Opole). It would be interesting to look at the connection between Europeanization ‘from below’ and the regionalization of minority identity in a larger number of case studies that fulfil the prerequisites of European integration, minority protection measures, mutual trust and a positive connotation of the region. A larger-scale cross-country study could trace the interaction between Europeanization and regionalization, and also try to search for deviant cases where all prerequisites are fulfilled, but no regionalization processes can be detected.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Crepaz, Katharina. *The Impact of Europeanization on Minority Communities*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> *Alto Adige* is the official Italian name for South Tyrol, or the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano.

<sup>3</sup> Due to its connections to Ettore Tolomei, the most prominent figure of the fascist era’s ‘Italianization’ efforts, the use of *Alto Adige* or *Altoatesini* is contested among the German-speaking group, and some of the Italian speakers, who would prefer ‘Sudtirolo’ to be the official Italian nomenclature. The different terms used by the respondents in the survey (*Altoatesini/Sudtirolesi*) thus carry the same regional affiliation, but might imply a certain positioning on the naming issue.

<sup>4</sup> To identify as Tyrolean refers to the historic region of Tyrol, made of South Tyrol, North Tyrol, and East Tyrol. North and East Tyrol belong to Austria; it can therefore be interpreted to not only have a regional but also an Austrian affiliation.

<sup>5</sup> The Minority SafePack Initiative was launched by FUEN in 2012; it was a European Citizens’ Initiative aiming to get the European Commission to take action on minority protection. The Commission first refused to register the Initiative, arguing that some of the issues raised were outside EU competence. The authors appealed the



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refusal, and the General Court annulled the Commission's decision in February 2017. In March 2017, the Commission decided that the collection of signatures could be launched; it lasted until April 3, 2018 and reached the necessary number of signatures across member-states (1,128,385 validated signatures total). Minority SafePack thus became the fifth EU Citizens' Initiative to successfully reach the required number of signatures. An expert group has now been established to draft proposals on how to put the Minority SafePack Initiative's contents into practice (Author 2019, forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> The Ustasa (meaning 'insurgence') was a fascist movement that ruled the state of Croatia during World War II. It was modelled after the Italian fascist movement, and collaborated with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, taking over Croatia after the axis powers had invaded Yugoslavia in 1941. The Ustasa aimed to make its state purely Croatian, resulting in genocide of the Jewish, Bosnian and Serb populations. The regime remained in power until May 1945.

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