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What Kind of Involvement for National Minorities in the Political Decision-Making Process? An Overview of the Case of the Slovenes in Italy

The paper examines participation through representation in elected bodies and participation in consultative bodies for Slovenes in Italy. The legal framework for political participation for Slovenes in Italy is also discussed. Recent legal reforms of the Italian public administration at national and regional levels are considered since they reduce the level of the participation of Slovene representatives in decision-making processes, as well as limiting the public use of Slovene. The analysis shows that the presence of Slovene-speaking elected representatives in some municipalities has not yet been accomplished. Moreover, the question of various forms of political participation at the level of legal provisions on the rights of Slovenes in Italy remains unsettled.

Keywords: Slovenes in Italy, political participation of national minorities, legal protection of national minorities.

Vključevanje narodnih manjšin v politične procese odločanja: splošni pregled primera Slovencev v Italiji

Prispevek obravnava participacijo Slovencev v Italiji z vidika predstavnštva v izvoljenih telesih in udeležbe v posvetovalnih telesih. Avtorica razpravlja tudi o zakonskem okviru politične participacije Slovencev v Italiji. Analiza upošteva sodobne reforme italijanske javne uprave na državni in deželni ravni, saj slednje znižujejo raven participacije slovenskih predstavnikov v procesih odločanja in omejujejo javno rabo slovenskega jezika. Analiza pokaže, da v nekaterih občinah še vedno ni slovensko govorečih izvoljenih predstavnikov. Poleg tega ostaja na ravni zakonodaje o pravicah Slovencev v Italiji nerešeno vprašanje različnih oblik politične participacije.

Ključne besede: Slovenci v Italiji, politična participacija narodnih manjšin, zakonska zaščita narodnih manjšin.

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1. Introduction

In addition to the public use of minority and regional languages, the educational systems in these languages and the cultural autonomy of national and linguistic minorities, the question of the political participation of national and linguistic minorities is a fundamental issue. Linguistic, educational and cultural rights cannot be guaranteed without effective participation of national and linguistic minorities in decision-making processes, particularly on issues of direct concern to them, including education, language use and cultural institutions. Different forms and mechanisms of the political participation of minorities mean that diversity must be considered in terms both of equal participation and representation of minorities in the overall society, as well as involving and representing the differences within minority communities. Research work in this field also contributes to overcoming the concept that national and linguistic minorities are just cultural groups, as these communities are also political communities which affect the socio-political and economic relations in the areas where they live.

The paper will present the case of the Slovenes in Italy and the forms of political participation which have been developed for this national minority. The analysis comprises an overview of the recent legislation for the protection of Slovenes in Italy regarding participation in decision-making processes and focusing on the Norms Concerning the Protection of the Slovene Linguistic Minority in the Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (State Protection Law 38/2001) and on the Regional Norms Concerning the Protection of the Slovene Linguistic Minority (Regional Protection Law 26/2007). The participation of representatives of this minority in electoral processes will be considered in light of some recent empirical data. Some of the main consultative institutional bodies that enable Slovene representatives to negotiate issues with the centres of power will also be included in the analysis. Moreover, the paper will discuss some relevant changes in the legislation on the structure and activities of the public administration in Italy and their impact at the level of political participation of Slovene representatives. The analysis will show how a weak normative basis concerning the forms of political participation regarding this national minority in Italy affects the level of inclusion in political decision-making processes of its representatives as well as the public use of Slovene due to recent Italian reforms of local government.

2. The Theoretical Framework on Political Participation of National and Linguistic Minorities

Based on legal and political instruments of self-determination and involvement in processes of political decision-making, the concept of political participation

grants national minorities substantive equality with the majority nation (Palermo & Woelk 2003, 228–241). The right of national minorities to political participation represents a limitation of the absolute rule of the majority which prevent “a permanent monopoly of power by any social structure and enable equal competition of political actors in their struggle for (political) power” (Žagar 2005, 48). It relies on the fundamental principles of “self-rule” and “power-sharing” (Schneckener 2004, 18–23).¹ The former refers to the possibility for the minority community to reach (at least to a certain extent) independent decisions on political, economic, cultural and social matters. The latter concerns the minority’s specific representative rights in the overall political system, which may range from the right to have its own political representatives in the parliament, all the way to complete power-sharing systems. According to Weller (2010, 477), minority participation intended “in the sense of minority self-government either by way of cultural autonomy or possibly even through elements of territorial autonomy”, represents the first phase where minority participation is conceived as an “inward-looking entitlement of a group”. A second phase occurs when “minorities have a role to play in determining the public policy of the overall state, rather than just in relation to internal decision-making within the group” (Weller 2010, 478).²

Participation of political representatives of minorities in elections and their election to state and local political institutions are the most common mechanisms of the political participation of ethnic minorities (Palermo & Woelk 2003, 228–241, Pan & Pfeil 2003). O’Leary (2010, 399) argues that “a fair electoral system, fairly regulated, and transparently designed to provide both participation and autonomy opportunities to national minorities, will reduce the temptations, and the justifications, for parties among national minorities to become ‘anti-system’”. In proportional electoral systems the easiest way to support the election of minority parties’ representatives is to reduce or even eliminate the threshold for their election (Žagar 2005, 70). Melansek (2010, 358) stresses the meaning of the electoral rights of minorities which “had become an important election standard when drawing election boundaries and delineating constituencies”. Thus, in mixed and majority electoral systems special attention can be given to the way constituencies are conceived in order to draw up such a constituency where minority member voters can elect their representative or even to create a “minority” constituency (Žagar 2005, 70).³

According to Protsyk (2010, 400) electoral rules and legislation on political parties affect how minorities are represented in parliament, but his point can be extended to elected bodies on different governmental levels (besides parliaments, also regions, provinces, municipalities). In practice, if the existing laws relevant for political participation of national minorities do not contain specific provisions that guarantee or at least facilitate their representation, minority representation in regional and municipal councils is rather limited,

which is confirmed at the empirical level by the election results documented by Constantin in the case of the Slovak system of minority protection and their political representation (Constantin 2010, 42). Moreover, Protsyk (2010, 413) notices that “whether ethnic minorities are present in national legislative assemblies, whether their voices are heard and whether their interests are taken into account are all important indicators of the ability of the minority to effectively participate in the political process” which can be again extended to various elected bodies (national, regional and local).

Although this paper will treat mainly participation through representation in elected bodies at the local level and to some extent participation in consultative bodies in the specific case of the Slovene national community in Italy, the perspective in the academic debate concerning the possible future developments of new forms of minority participation should also be mentioned. Palermo (2010, 439) establishes that minority participation is currently more present “in areas where it is less effective (in elected bodies)”, while minorities have less space in forms of participation in public life such as the public administration,

even if these forms are more promising both because the public administration (including the government and the courts) is more influential than parliament and because representation in non-parliamentary bodies is more pluralist (thus more representative and therefore more effective) as it affects larger numbers of persons belonging to minorities (Palermo 2010, 439–440).

Thus, he underlines that there is still much work to do to identify the most effective instruments to develop proper forms of “guaranteed participation in the civil service, and generally through the branches of government other than the legislature” (Palermo 2010, 452). Similarly, Weller (2010, 479) argues that the contemporary so-called “fourth generation of debates” should widen the consultative mechanisms of minorities in public life, incorporating “the economic and social dimension” to promote full integration in economic and social issues.

3. General Legal Framework for Slovenes in Italy

The Slovene national community in Italy is a border-area national minority in the traditional sense of the term, as it acquired the minority status in the process of nation-state formation in the Upper Adriatic from the second half of the 19th century onwards.⁴ Its traditional settlement area in the Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) region covers a total of 39 municipalities along the border with Slovenia (Bogatec, 2004). From a formal point of view, according to the list of municipalities drawn up on the basis of the State Protection Law 38/2001, the presence of this community is documented in a more narrow territory of 32

municipalities⁵ in the provinces of Gorizia (Gorica), Trieste (Trst) and Udine (Videm or Viden) in the areas of Benecia (Benečija), Resia (Rezija) and Val Canale (Kanalska dolina).

Slovenes in the provinces of Trieste (Trst), Gorizia (Gorica) and Udine (Videm) have established a thriving network of activities, institutions and associations which focus mainly on cultural and sports activities in the framework of professional institutions or in grassroots associations, parishes and other centres (Kosic et al. 2013). Slovene-medium kindergartens and schools have been set up in the provinces of Trieste (Trst) and Gorizia (Gorica), and a bilingual Slovene-Italian kindergarten and school centre in S. Pietro al Natisone (Špeter) in the province of Udine (Videm). Media communication in Slovene takes place at the level of public radio and television within the regional headquarters of Italy's national public broadcasting company RAI and through various forms of print and online media. The Slovene language can be used in interactions between the public administration and the public: such as communication through linguistic help desks or directly through bilingual staff, but the impact of this system on the public use of Slovene language is rather weak as these services are not properly promoted and their use among minority members has not yet become widespread (Vidau 2012, 2014, 2015). Moreover, the project-based funding system does not enable public administrations to cover the costs of permanently employed Slovene-speaking staff, thus the language services are of limited duration and dependent on project funds (Vidau 2012, 2015). Slovene can also be used in place names and road signs in the legally defined area, although recent studies showed that Slovene does not enjoy a high status in the linguistic landscape (Mezgec 2016).

There are various legal provisions regulating the minority rights of this community deriving from the post-war international agreements and recent Italian laws. The first international legal source that provided Slovenes living in Italy with a basic form of legal protection was the Special Statute of the London Memorandum of 1954, which laid down a number of political and social rights, such as: the right to use their language in interactions with administrative services and judicial authorities; the right to bilingual public signs and printed publications; the right to bilingualism in educational, cultural and other organizations; the right to public funding intended for these organizations; the right to instruction in their mother tongue and the right to preserve the existing Slovene schools (Stranj 1992). These rights continue to form a model for the protection of the Slovene minority in Italy. The territorial scope of these rights was limited only in the area of the former Zone A which covered the present province of Trieste (Trst). This meant that the Slovene population in the area of Gorizia (Gorica) and Udine (Videm) was in a different legal position. In the area of Gorizia (Gorica) certain acquisitions from the period of the Allied Military Government between 1945 and 1947 were preserved (e.g., the public use of

Slovene language and bilingual signs in some municipalities with an entirely Slovene population) (Troha 2003). In the area of Udine (Videm), the Slovene population was not legally recognized until 2001, and until the adoption of the State Protection Law 38. The Italian government adopted the content of the London Memorandum in 1975 by signing the Treaty of Osimo.

Among the recent Italian laws, the most relevant is State Law 38/2001 regarding the protection of the Slovene linguistic minority, which was acquired when the State Framework Law 482/1999 for the protection of historical linguistic minorities was already in effect. It recognises the Slovene national minority living in the provinces of Trieste (Trst), Gorizia (Gorica) and Udine (Videm) as a single entity, whose members enjoy equal rights regardless of their province of residence. The Law covers various aspects of minority rights: the right to use one's name and surname in the mother tongue; to use spoken and written Slovene in interactions with public institutions; to use Slovene in elected assemblies and collegiate bodies; to visual use of bilingualism and to bilingual topographical indications; to education in the minority language; to the restitution of property to Slovene organizations confiscated during the Fascist period; to the protection of historical and artistic heritage at the level of public planning, land use, economic, social and urban planning; to trade unions and trade organizations; and to criminal proceedings related to expressions of intolerance and violence committed against members of the Slovene minority, etc. In 2007, the FVG region adopted Law 26 on the protection of the Slovene minority. Regional Protection Law 26/2007 regulates some central fields of legal protection: international relations with the country of cultural and linguistic reference; inter-minority relations within FVG; recognition of minority umbrella organizations and other organizations; operation of regional advisory committees for different areas of application of legal provisions (particularly in education, language policy, and funding of each minority's organizations and associations); organization of regional conferences intended to evaluate and assess the implementation of legal provisions; proper public use and spelling of first and last names, titles and topographical indications in the minority language; the use of the minority language in the public administration and in the private sector; the use of the minority language in education and the media; the protection of the social, economic and environmental interests of minority communities; the implementation of activities promoting the minority language and its local variants; the protection of linguistic and cultural heritage; and procedures of funding minority organizations and associations (Vidau 2013).

3.1 Legislation on Political Participation for Slovenes in Italy

The State Protection Law 38/2001 does not in fact regulate the political participation of the Slovene national minority members. It contains only a general provision (Article 26) that the laws concerning the system of Italian

parliamentary elections should support access to representation for candidates belonging to the Slovene minority. Thus the question of political participation remains unsettled at the level of legal provisions (Vidau 2016a). The Slovene national community has no provisions for guaranteed representation through reserved seats or veto rights in the elected or consultative bodies on matters it considers of vital importance. Nor does the Regional Protection Law 26/2007 refer to any specific right of the Slovene minority regarding the election of its members to political bodies.

The only relevant article in State Protection Law 38/2001 regarding political participation is Article 9, which regulates the use of Slovene in the elected bodies at a local level, both regarding the councils, as well as the executive committees on the territory of the 32 municipalities where it can be applied. This article recognises the use of both oral and written Slovene during the various activities of these bodies (i.e. different kinds of proposals, questions, interrogations, minutes). To be applied, these provisions must be included in the statutes and activity regulations of every elected body, namely municipalities and provinces (Vidau & Štoka 2015). The article also says that all the written or oral interventions must be translated into Italian. Members of the elected bodies can also use Slovene in all the public functions they hold. Moreover, the public services in the protected area can use both Slovene and Italian in their relationships. While the article gives the right to minority elected representatives as well as to the public bodies themselves to use Slovene, this language use cannot be exclusive, as in Italy the only state language is Italian (as written also in the first Article of the framework State Protection Law 482/1999) (Vidau 2015, 160).

Based on a recent analysis of the statutes, the municipalities applying these norms are the seven which already used Slovene in their activities before the recent State Protection Law 38/2001, in accordance with the provisions laid down by the Allied Military Government from the post-war period and the minority rights granted by the Special Statute of the London Memorandum (Vidau & Štoka 2015, 55–57). They have Slovene-speaking mayors, executive committees and councillors as well as administrative staff. The statutes of the Trieste (Trst) and Gorizia (Gorica) Provinces should also be mentioned, as they provide for the use of Slovene in their elected bodies due to the State Protection Law 38/2001, albeit in a more restricted way than the seven bilingual municipalities (Vidau & Štoka 2015, 59).

The Regional Protection Law 26/2007 contains some general references concerning the political participation of the Slovene minority in the FVG region, namely the recognition of the minority's main or umbrella organizations, which should be representative of the whole community and thus the political interlocutor with the regional authorities (Article 6). In Article 23, two umbrella organisations are mentioned: the Slovene Cultural and Economic Association (Slovenska kulturno-gospodarska zveza SKGZ) and the Confederation of

Slovenian Organisations (Svet slovenskih organizacij SSO). They bring together the majority of Slovene institutions and organizations from the provinces of Trieste (Trst), Gorizia (Gorica) and Udine (Videm). These two organizations are an expression of the civil society; however, they also appear in the political arena as interlocutors with various European, national, regional and local political institutions in Italy and Slovenia.

3.2 Legally Provided Consultative Bodies for Slovenes in Italy

Due to the State Protection Law 38/2001 and the Regional Protection Law 26/2007 different bodies of a consultative nature were established, which perform the function of direct interlocutors between the representatives of the Slovene minority in the FVG region and political administrators at national, regional and local levels in Italy. These are institutional bodies that enable Slovene representatives to negotiate issues that are critical to the Slovene national community in Italy with the centres of power at the state and local levels. Unfortunately, no recent analysis have been carried out concerning their impact on the decision-making processes in which they are involved as well as on the level of the overall minority rights protection that could help us to evaluate their activities in this paper.

On the basis of the State Protection Law 38/2001, the Institutional Parity Committee for the Problems of the Slovene Minority has been established, which is responsible for the implementation of the mentioned law. It consists of 10 members of the Slovene minority and 10 members of the Italian majority, who are appointed directly by the Council of Ministers, the Regional Assembly and the Regional Government of FVG and indirectly by representative organizations of the Slovene minority and the Assembly of the Elected Representatives of the Slovene Minority within local administrations.

At the regional level, there are also two commissions responsible for issues concerning the Slovene national community, which have been set up on the basis of the State and Regional Protection Laws 38/2001 and 26/2007. The Consultative Commission delivers opinions on issues and topics included in the Regional Protection Law 26/2007, on proposals for the allocation of financial funds by the state to the region that are intended for the activities of minority institutions and organizations, on issues of regional authorities and, more generally, on regional policy guidelines promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. Under the State Protection Law 38/2001, the Regional Education Commission is responsible for education in Slovene language.

The Slovene national community has at its disposal an additional instrument of political participation: the presence of its representatives in various consultative bodies of public administration, such as commissions. These are actively involved in the management and planning of interventions, which are also related to the interests of the Slovene national community. Both the State

Protection Law 38/2001 (Article 21), as well as the Regional Protection Law 26/2007 (Article 14), contain provisions on the protection of social, economic and environmental interests of the Slovene national community. On this legal basis, its representatives must be included in the consultative bodies dealing with administrative arrangements, land use, urban planning, and economic and social planning. However, these consultative bodies have not yet been determined. Moreover, we currently have no information whether the Slovene representatives have already been included in individual consultative bodies of public administrations.

At the level of consultative bodies, two in the province of Gorizia (Gorica) should also be mentioned. The statute of the province provides its own consultative body for the Slovene community, which has been operating since 1999, but due to recent reforms that abolished the provinces it is no longer active. It consisted of 15 members, who were very familiar with issues relating to the Slovene language and culture. Its members were appointed by each of the nine municipalities inhabited by the Slovene national community, by the Slovene School Union (Sindikat slovenskih šol) and by the umbrella organizations of the Slovene national community SKGZ (Slovenska kulturno-gospodarska zveza) and SSO (Svet slovenskih organizacij). Three members were appointed by the Province of Gorizia (Gorica). The statute of the municipality of Gorizia (Gorica) provides for a Consultative Committee for the Problems of Urban Ethnic Minorities. The Committee's Rules of Procedure stipulate that it is to be composed of 15 members appointed by the municipal council: three members of the Italian majority who are experts in the field of national minorities; two members from the ranks of the Slovene School Union (Sindikat slovenskih šol); five members from the ranks of SKGZ (Slovenska kulturno-gospodarska zveza) and five representatives from the Association of Slovene Catholic Educational Societies (Zveza slovenske katoliške prosvete).

4. Elected Representatives of Slovenes in Italy

Traditionally, members of the Slovene national minority in the FVG region identify mainly with left-wing or centre-left parties (e.g. Democratic Party, Communist Refoundation Party, Italian Communist Party). Since the 1990s, political activity in the context of Italian parties has expanded, although to a lesser extent, through the involvement of Slovene candidates in centre-right and right-wing parties (e.g. the People of Freedom, Northern League) and contemporary political movements (Five Star Movement). Thus, the Slovenes in Italy vary in terms of their political and ideological positions, although there is no data on the basis of which to differentiate the votes in the provinces of Trieste (Trst), Gorizia (Gorica) and Udine (Udem) according to the ethnicity of voters (Janežič 2004).

In terms of its political activities, the Slovene national community is integrated into the Italian political system and reflects its characteristics concerning the legislation and implementation of elections at national and local levels, as well as political parties. Its members are politically active in Italian majority parties as well as in the Slovene ethnic party the Slovene Union (*Slovenska skupnost*), which defines itself as an assembly of members of the Slovene minority. The issue of political engagement either through an ethnic party or under the auspices of Italian parties is a topical issue among the Slovene minority. Left-wing political representatives support political action within the framework of Italian left-wing and centre-left parties, in the form of separate sections and through Slovene candidates. On the other hand, the Slovene Union advocates the model of political participation through a single party and political autonomy on the basis of ethnicity (Valenčič 2000, 188).⁶ For specific socially and politically important events and meetings with the authorities, a joint representation is usually formed. This practice was introduced in the 1970s, when the adoption of the law on the protection of the Slovene national minority in Italy became a transversal policy objective among Slovene politicians, which also triggered the need for a unified political appearance before the Italian authorities (Stranj 1992). Although the composition of this body may vary according to need, it normally consists of the already elected national, regional and local political representatives and typically comprises one representative from the ranks of left-centrist and leftist parties in addition to representatives of the two umbrella organizations of the Slovene Cultural and Economic Association (*SKGZ*) and of the Confederation of Slovenian Organisations (*SSO*).

Political representatives of the Slovene national community in Italy have so far been regularly elected to provincial and municipal bodies, the Regional Assembly of the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia and to the Italian Parliament; however, their election is not guaranteed by law. The electoral Law of the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (Regional Law 17/2007), which provides for a reduced threshold in the election of a candidate from the Slovene Union, is a notable exception. At all local, provincial or state-level elections, political and party coalitions are being formed. Within individual parties, these coalitions allow for the election of political representatives who are recognized as members of the Slovene national community and who therefore promote its interests. In this context, the Slovene ethnic party and Slovene candidates competing within Italian parties work closely in various groupings.⁷

Several elected representatives of the Slovene national community can be found in provincial and municipal councils of the provinces of Trieste (*Trst*), Gorizia (*Gorica*) and Udine (*Videm*) in the area of the 32 municipalities covered by the State Protection Law 38/2001.⁸ According to a recent analysis, there were 138 elected Slovene representatives in 20 municipal and provincial councils of the provinces of Trieste (*Trst*) and Gorizia (*Gorica*) (Vidau 2016b).

Of these, eight belonged to provincial councils: five councillors in the Province of Trieste (Trst) and three councillors in the Province of Gorizia (Gorica). The remaining 130 elected Slovene representatives belonged to municipal councils of 20 municipal administrations.⁹ They are almost evenly distributed between the three provinces: 32 per cent of Slovene councillors in the six municipalities of the province of Trieste (Trst), 33 per cent of Slovene councillors in the four municipalities of the province of Gorizia (Gorica) and 35 per cent of Slovene councillors in the ten municipalities of the province of Udine (Videm).

The data on Slovene-speaking councillors can also be compared with the total number of councillors in the area where the presence of the Slovene national community has been legally defined by the State Protection Law 38/2001, with 23 per cent of Slovene-speaking councillors in the 32 municipalities and three provinces (Vidau 2016b). The data on their share within individual municipal administrations shows that the presence of Slovene-speaking councillors is highest in the bilingual municipalities of the provinces of Trieste (Trst) and Gorizia (Gorica), where it ranges from almost a half to a full share of Slovene-speaking councillors. In the province of Udine (Videm), the shares of elected Slovene-speaking representatives in municipal councils range from 15 per cent to 62 per cent. The lowest proportions of Slovene-speaking representatives can be found in the municipalities of Muggia (Milje) (5 per cent), Trieste (Trst) (5 per cent) and Gorizia (Gorica) (10 per cent). This situation is also related to the dual system of the public use of Slovene language in dealings between public institutions and the citizens in the 32 municipalities in the legally protected Slovene-speaking area. The first system applies to seven bilingual municipalities in the areas of Trieste (Trst) and Gorizia (Gorica),¹⁰ where administrative staff engage in oral and written communication with the public in Slovene in accordance with the provisions laid down by the Allied Military Government from the post-war period, the minority rights granted by the Special Statute of the London Memorandum and from 1992 onward,¹¹ in accordance with their own statutes. The second system concerns the establishment of linguistic help desks, adopted on the basis of State Protection Law 482/1999, which granted funding for these types of minority-language services prior to State Protection Law 38/2001. Other municipalities started introducing the public use of Slovene in interactions with the public in 2011 with the provision of annual funding in line with State Protection Law 38/2001. These dedicated language services have also been introduced by the Provinces of Trieste (Trst), Gorizia (Gorica) and Udine (Videm).

In 2014, some of the elected Slovene-speaking representatives assumed the position of mayor: in seven bilingual municipalities in the provinces of Trieste (Trst) and Gorizia (Gorica) and in five municipalities in the province of Udine (Videm) (Vidau 2016b). Of the above-mentioned Slovene-speaking elected representatives, a total of 20 performed the function of committee members.

Several Slovene-speaking representatives were also found in district councils of the Trieste (Trst) municipal administration; in some district councils they held the position of chairperson.

In 2016, in addition to the elected representatives to municipal and provincial bodies, Slovenes in Italy also had one elected representative in the Italian Parliament and two councillors in the FVG Regional Assembly. Of the latter, one elected regional representative held the office of the Vice-President of the Regional Assembly. He was elected due to the reduced threshold in the election of a candidate from the Slovene Union while the other Slovene-speaking regional councillor was elected on the list of the Democratic Party.

There are some relevant changes that have to be mentioned concerning the elected representatives of the Slovene national community in Italy which have lowered the level of the participation of its representatives in the decision-making processes in the short and probably the long term. Based on State Law 56/2014 the Provinces of Trieste (Trst) and Gorizia (Gorica) were abolished. As already mentioned in this paper, there were eight elected Slovene representatives in these two provinces as well as a consultative body at the Province of Gorizia (Gorica), thus the Slovene community lost a relevant number of political representatives who were involved in decision-making processes concerning the issues of territorial government, such as the development of tourism and agriculture in the provincial areas, the use of bilingual signs on roads and buildings in the charge of the provinces or the managing of Slovene school buildings. These matters were transferred to various departments of the FVG Region (e.g. road management), thus the decision-making processes regarding these issues became more centralized. Other matters were delegated to municipalities, such as the managing of school buildings, or to the unions of municipalities, a new administrative instrument led by the mayors of groups of municipalities on a certain area. These unions of municipalities are the consequence of the reform in the FVG region brought about by Regional Law 26/2014. As some of these unions were only just formed and others are still in the process of formation, it is not clear what role the mayors and councils of the smaller municipalities in the protected Slovene-speaking area will have compared to the big municipalities of Trieste (Trst), Gorizia (Gorica) or Udine (Udine). The question is still open about the public use of Slovene in the administrative procedures and documents which will be produced and used among these new unions. A relevant issue is also whether the unions will have a bilingual name or not, as some of them already adopted bilingual names (i.e. the union from the former Province of Trieste area, *Unione Territoriale Intercomunale Giuliana/Julijska medobčinska teritorialna unija*) while others not, even if they have bilingual municipalities among them (i.e. the union including a group of 15 municipalities from the former Province of Gorizia area, *Unione Territoriale Intercomunale Collio – Alto Isonzo*).

5. Conclusions

At the level of the representatives elected to local administrations in the provinces of Trieste (Trst), Gorizia (Gorica) and Udine (Videm), the presence of elected representatives of the Slovene national community in some municipalities has not yet been accomplished, even though these municipalities are on the list of the 32 municipalities comprising the legally defined area of the Slovene presence. This can be seen as an additional area of political participation which has not yet been fully developed and into which political strategies could be directed in order to ensure that in the remaining 12 municipalities Slovene-speaking political representatives are elected. Moreover, this issue is relevant as the presence of the Slovene national community in some of these municipalities is undoubtedly expressed in the form of Slovene-language education and Slovene associations. It must be stressed also that the recent abolition of the Provinces of Trieste (Trst) and Gorizia (Gorica) represents a heavy loss of elected representatives. Moreover, they were not replaced with other forms of representation in matters which were formerly under the provinces' remit. The newly formed unions of municipalities have just begun their activities, so it is not yet clear how the question of the public use of Slovene and the importance of Slovene-speaking mayors concerned with issues relevant to the minority community will be dealt with.

Also the fact that since the 1990s different representative and consultative bodies have emerged (the Institutional Parity Committee for the Problems of the Slovene Minority, the former consultative body for the Slovene community of the Province of Gorizia (Gorica) and a similar one at the Municipality of Gorizia (Gorica); two commissions at regional level, responsible for issues concerning the Slovene national community, etc.) has to be highlighted. These bodies play the role of intermediaries between the decision-making centres on the one hand and the Slovenian minority in Italy on the other. This indicates a higher degree of recognition of the Slovene minority's political role and a higher level of its integration into political processes. However, the question how effective they are when safeguarding the Slovene community's interests is still open, as there are no provisions for veto rights in these consultative bodies, even if they treat matters that are considered of vital importance to the community. To evaluate their efficiency a more detailed analysis regarding the impact of their activity should be carried out, including interviews with the persons leading these bodies or working within them.

To summarise: the question of various forms of political participation at the level of legal provisions on the rights of Slovenes in Italy remains unsettled. The Slovene national community has no provisions for guaranteed representation through reserved seats either in Parliament or at regional and local levels. The likelihood of minority representatives being elected depends on political nego-

tiations within and between the parties and on the importance Slovene-speaking voters have in the electoral processes.

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Notes

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- ¹ According to O'Leary (2010, 364) "promoting the participation of national minorities in governmental decision-making at all levels, central, regional and local" as well as "promoting the self-government of such minorities through functional or territorial autonomy" are the "two core goals" of the Lund recommendation on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life.
- ² The third phase of discourse about minority political participation regards the development of "complex power-sharing techniques" to guarantee "the full and effective participation of persons belonging to minorities in all aspects of public policy and governance of the state" which happened especially after the violent ethno-political conflicts in Eastern Europe (Weller 2010, 478). The author explains that the aim of such systems is to develop a "sense of shared ownership of the state" among the minority members (Weller 2010, 478).
- ³ Empirical observations show that "a constituency that differs excessively in size from other constituencies in the country challenges the principle of equal suffrage" (Melansek 2010, 358). Moreover, "the practice of gerrymandering by merging areas with different shares of minorities is heavily criticized and prohibited" (Melansek 2010, 358).
- ⁴ The history of Slovenes now living in Italy is closely tied to the history of the entire Slovene nation and to the history of the Slavic tribes who settled in this area in the sixth century. Slovene national identity in the modern linguistic, social and political sense began developing, for the most part, in the nineteenth century during the period of European movements for the establishment of modern nations and nation states. At that time, the first Slovene reading clubs, societies, and political organizations were formed within the Austrian Empire in Trieste (Trst) and Gorizia (Gorica). For a short period of time between 1797 and 1866, the regions of Benecia (Benečija) and Resia (Rezija) were joined together with the rest of the Slovene settlement territory under the Habsburg Monarchy, but after that they were annexed to Italy. The Slovene settlement area of Trieste (Trst), Gorizia (Gorica) and Val Canale (Kanalska dolina) was severely affected by the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I, which marked a transition to Italian rule. This shift was followed by a period of forced assimilation, which reached its peak during the Fascist period. What followed were various forms of violence launched against institutions, associations and representatives of the Slovene minority and other citizens of Slovene nationality (Stranj, 1992, Sussi, 1998). As a result, Slovenes had already begun developing forms of an illegal anti-Fascist resistance movement by the mid-1920s. From 1941 onwards, this movement found its outlet in the Liberation Front of the Slovene Nation under the auspices of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army, an anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist resistance movement. During the post-war period, the Slovene settlement area bordering Italy was divided into several political units. Benecia and Val Canale were immediately re-annexed to Italy. The area of Trieste (Trst), Gorizia (Gorica) and Istria (Istra), on the other hand, was divided into two parts: Zone A comprising Trieste (Trst) and Gorizia (Gorica) came under Anglo-American administration and Zone B covering Istria (Istra) came under Yugoslavia (Stranj, 1992; Troha, 2003). With the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, Gorizia (Gorica) was annexed to Italy and thus separated from its hinterland. As for Trieste (Trst), provisions were made for the establishment of the Free Territory of Trieste (Trst), which never actually came into effect. Trieste (Trst) in Zone A and part of Istria (Istra) in Zone B remained divided in this way until 1954, when under the London Memorandum an agreement was reached between the two parties, namely that Zone A with Trieste (Trst) would remain under Italy, and Zone B with Istria (Istra) would remain under Yugoslavia. This delineation was confirmed by the 1975 Treaty of Osimo concluded between Italy and Yugoslavia.
- ⁵ On the basis of popular demand, municipalities were added to this list if they had at least 15 per cent of the population, or one-third of municipal advisors. The Institutional Parity Committee for the Problems of the Slovene Minority then finalised this list and submitted it for approval to the Ministerial Council in Rome. The list was approved on 3 August 2007, and on 12 September 2007 the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano signed the decree of its validity. This list may be extended if additional municipalities apply for inclusion.

- ⁶ O'Leary (2010, 399) observes that some international positions such those in the Lund Recommendations do not support the creation of national minority parties while the author suggests that "a national minority is not a free national minority unless it has at least one nationalist party (with the word nationalist being used here in a non-pejorative way, and with no presumption being made that a nationalist must necessarily have a secessionist as opposed to an autonomist agenda)".
- ⁷ At provincial elections in Trieste (Trst) in 2008, the *Slovenska skupnost* party, the Democratic Party and the two sections of communists appeared as competitors; while at local elections in the municipality of San Dorligo della Valle/Dolina in 2009 and the municipality of Duino-Aurisina/Devin-Nabrežina in 2012 they appeared in a coalition.
- ⁸ The study took into account the list of members of the Assembly of the Elected Representatives of the Slovene Minority within local administrations in the provinces of Trieste (Trst), Gorizia (Gorica) and Udine (Videm) which operates at the Regional Assembly of the Autonomous Region of FVG with the elected representatives of the Slovene minority at administrative elections between 2009 and 2014. Determination of the elected representatives of the Slovene minority is based on self-declaration by each individual. The regional administration sends to the mayors of the municipal administrations and to the three provinces a letter requesting the names of their councillors who are representatives of the Slovene minority. At the request of the mayor or the president of the province, the councillors then define themselves in terms of their language/ethnicity. This is how the minimum number of Slovene-speaking councillors is determined; however, individual councillors may be left out of the process by missing the due date for their linguistic self-declaration. This happened in the case of a Slovene-speaking councillor in the Province of Udine (Videm) who was not included in this analysis, since he was excluded from the list of the Assembly of elected Slovene-speaking representatives.
- ⁹ The sum of 20 municipalities accounts for almost two thirds, or, more specifically, 63 per cent, of the 32 municipalities that make up the area of the Slovene national community as legally defined by Protection Law 38/2001: 100 per cent of the municipalities in the province of Trieste (Trst), 50 per cent of the municipalities (or four municipalities out of eight) in the province of Gorizia (Gorica) and 56 per cent of the municipalities (or ten municipalities out of eighteen) in the province of Udine (Videm).
- ¹⁰ San Dorligo della Valle/Dolina, Sgonico/Zgonik, Monrupino/Repentabor, Duino-Aurisina/Devin-Nabrežina, San Floriano del Collio/Števerjan, Doberdò del Lago/Doberdob and Savogna d'Isonzo/Sovodnje ob Soči.
- ¹¹ Based on State Law 142/1990 municipalities in Italy acquired autonomous forms of authority concerning their organization, financing and legislation on the basis of the principle of decentralization of the administration system in Italy (Coren 2003, 212). Due to this law, municipalities adopted their own statutes in 1992.