

South Tyrol's changing political system: from dissociative on the road to associative conflict resolution

Günther Pallaver*

Department of Political Science and Sociology, University of Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria

(Received 27 March 2013; accepted 19 August 2013)

South Tyrol (Italy), with its three officially recognized language groups (Germans, Italians and Ladins), is a successful model of how a minority problem can be solved. It is based upon the principle of dissociative conflict resolution, which means separating the language groups as much as possible between themselves, as well as the principle of consociational democracy, which focuses primarily on the cooperation between the language groups' elites. In the last few years it has been observed that while the institutional frame has not changed, society has, thereby starting to undermine the existing political and institutional system from below. This concerns mainly the ethnic division, which is being questioned more and more by civil society, as well as aspects of cooperation between the elites. As a consequence of this process, South Tyrol's autonomy is moving toward further integration, with the latter again translating into strengthening the two factors of territoriality and identity.

Keywords: South Tyrol; divided societies; conflict resolution

Introduction and thesis

The editors of the *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict*, Cordell and Wolff, indicate that the dynamics, causes and implications of ethnic conflicts are essentially well understood nowadays, with prevention and conflict resolution models constituting major elements of political analysis and theoretical debate (2011, 4).

There is indeed an abundance of theoretical and empirical studies on all these questions. However, political and institutional transformation processes within ethnically divided societies that change from one specific type of conflict resolution to another enjoy less attention, as is to be shown here by the example of South Tyrol.

The South Tyrol conflict was sparked at the end of World War I (WWI) and the corresponding implosion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Despite the declaration of American President Woodrow Wilson in his "Fourteen points" statement of 1918 that "a readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality" (Wilson 1918), South Tyrol was annexed by Italy in exchange for entering the war on the side of the Entente powers.

Fascism tried to forcefully assimilate the German-speaking population, and an agreement between Mussolini and Hitler (1939) was to bring German-speakers home to the German Reich in the framework of an alleged option. Despite attempts to return to

*Email: guenther.pallaver@uibk.ac.at

Table 1. Population development in South Tyrol 1900–2011, according to linguistic groups (%).^a

Year	Italians	Germans	Ladins
1900	4.0	88.8	4.0
1910	2.9	89.0	3.8
1921	10.6	75.9	3.9
1961	34.3	62.2	3.4
1971	33.3	62.9	3.7
1981	28.7	64.9	4.1
1991	27.6	67.9	4.2
2001	26.4	69.1	4.3
2011	26.1	69.4	4.5

Source: *astat* (2013, 118–119).

^aThe remaining percentage points adding to 100 pertain to other linguistic groups.

Austria after WWII, South Tyrol remained part of Italy. However, the 1946 Paris Agreement between Italy and Austria guaranteed major minority protection provisions for the German-speaking population, thus constituting the basis for the passage of the first Autonomy Statute of 1948, South Tyrol's provincial constitution (see Table 1 for the development of the ethnic groups in South Tyrol and Table 2 for the distribution of mandates in the regional parliament according to language groups).

The central government of Italy, however, largely sabotaged the implementation of the autonomy provisions and minority protections, causing Austria to present the South Tyrol problem at the United Nations Organization (UN), which passed resolutions in 1960 and 1961 that asked both parties to the agreements to come to a solution by means of negotiating. Far into the 1960s, these negotiations were accompanied by terrorist attacks, the perpetrators of which did not pursue substantial autonomy, but the return to Austria.

In 1972, the second Autonomy Statute was successfully passed. The revised province constitution ensured a significantly improved territorial autonomy for South Tyrol and a generous minority protection for German-speakers and Ladins alike, thus being internationally praised today as an exemplary model of how to solve a minority problem through granting a high degree of minority protection (Lantscher 2008; Steininger 2009). This successful model for conflict resolution that has been able to defy nationalist and centrifugal forces for decades is based upon a dissociative solution. It aims at establishing negative peace, which is

Table 2. Distribution of mandates according to language groups in the South Tyrolean provincial assembly 2013.

	German	Ladin	Italian	Percentage rates
Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP)	16	1		45.7
Die Freiheitlichen (F)	6			17.9
Verdi – Grüne – Verc – Sel	2		1	8.7
Süd-Tiroler Freiheit	3			7.2
Partito Democratico (PD)			2	6.7
Forza Alto Adige – Lega Nord – Team Autonomie			1	2.5
Movimento Cinque Stelle	1			2.5
Bündnis Bürgerunion – Ladins Dolomites – Wir Südtiroler	1			2.1
L'Alto Adige nel cuore			1	2.1

Source: www.landtag-bz.org/de/wahlen/ergebnisse-landtagswahlen.asp

conceived as the absence of personal violence. It is sort of a cold peace that physically separates the conflict parties. It is the lesser but necessary evil to prevent violence. The model is manifested by clearly demarcating spheres of influence as well as by spatially and socially separating conflict parties (Galtung 1976, 1996).

Ideally and, therefore, in its most extreme version, the dissociative model of conflict resolution intends a complete physical division on every level between the parties in conflict. However, in reality, there exist different types and thus also softer versions of the model. The ethnic division of the language groups in South Tyrol consists in the fact that “the life-worlds are basically regarded from above as ethnically divided and also organized in that way – as far as that is possible given the everyday life tendencies in the communication to overcome linguistic barriers” (Baur 2000, 235). This division does not apply to all areas of society, but first and foremost to education/language and culture as well as to also specific forms of organization of society such as parties, trade unions, and associations.

This dissociative conflict resolution model has undergone a process of transforming into one that is associative ever since the 1992 declaration that concluded the conflict between Austria and Italy at the UN. This associative model pursues to establish positive peace, which is conceived as the overall absence of structural violence. The goal thus is to integrate former conflict parties (Baur 2000, 235). This model is not to be confused with the assimilation of minorities, but is associated with cooperation, thus making sure that common interests take priority over ethnic considerations. The transformation from the dissociative to the associative conflict resolution model, from socially separating linguistic groups to incrementally tearing down the walls of separation and creating cooperative structures between the linguistic groups is to be analyzed here in several stages. First of all, one will outline the preconditions that have led to pacifying the conflict while at the same time elaborating on the internal and external conditions contributing to this outcome. It is argued here that cooperation only becomes a possibility when there is security for the further social, economic and cultural development of an ethnic minority, and when mutual distrust among linguistic groups is mitigated while at the same building mutual trust, with the European integration process ultimately having greatly contributed to this positive outcome.

Secondly, the author intends to highlight the motives behind initializing and further expanding cooperation among the linguistic groups. The argument is that cooperation is rooted in the manifold interests of the political, economic and cultural elites, and that cooperation intensified as a result of increasing benefits for the latter, as it was theorized by Deutsch (1972). These elite interests are more and more supplemented by interests “from the bottom,” by initiatives coming from civil society. While the role of elites behind interethnic cooperation is not to be underestimated, it has to be mentioned that the incremental transformation to an associative conflict resolution model is hardly conceivable without the increasing efforts for cooperation made by various initiatives of civil society.

As a consequence of this process, my third hypothesis is that South Tyrol’s autonomy is increasingly “territorializing” itself, which means that autonomy, consisting of the complementary functionality of segregation at the bottom and integration at the elite level, is moving toward further integration, with the latter again translating into strengthening the two factors of territoriality and identity (Pallaver 2010).

Preconditions for pacifying the South Tyrol conflict

Internal and external factors of conflict resolution

The probability of resolving ethnic conflict hinges upon a number of internal and external factors in the specific case here. The successful pacification of the South Tyrol conflict

is due to factors such as South Tyrol's domestic politics, the two negotiating parties of Austria and Italy as well as the international context (Bekridaki and Weck 1999; Benedikter 2007; Pallaver 2002, 2008; Wolff 2008, 365).

The 1946 Paris Agreement marked the starting point in this respect, with Austria officially renouncing its (re-)claim for South Tyrol. Italy, in turn, agreed to renounce exercising its full national sovereignty over South Tyrol, while at the same time South Tyroleans de facto abandoned their claim for self-determination. All parties involved in the conflict refrained from claims for territorial changes and agreed upon internal self-determination.

South Tyrol

With regard to South Tyrol, all three linguistic groups were relatively flexible when it came to implementing autonomy and minority protections. The minority's advantage was that there was a high degree of political consensus in the German and Ladin population groups. Until 1964 the South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP) constituted the only minority party in South Tyrol's provincial legislature. From 1948 until October 2013, the SVP has always reached an absolute majority of mandates in the regional parliament. Moreover, the SVP has also been the only political party representing German- and Ladin-speaking minorities in the Italian parliament until the last national elections in February 2013. The SVP is also the only South Tyrolean minority party elected into the European Parliament since 1979 (Pallaver 2011b). Being a hegemonic democratic party, the SVP, mustering almost 80% of minority votes until the elections of 2003 (but only 54% in 2013), was able at all times to come up with a unified minority position vis-a-vis the Italian central government.

The absolutely loyal stance of the minority toward the political elite enabled the latter to formulate clear goals, to enter negotiations with Rome presenting these ambitions, to show flexibility, to make compromises and to ultimately gain acceptance for them among the population without having to fear rejection by supporters. The few extremists thus never managed to sabotage the tediously negotiated compromises through politically polarizing the population, as it was the case in Northern Ireland, for instance (see e.g. Nordlinger 1972).

In spite of escalations of violence in the 1960s, ethnic tensions continuously dissipated over time, while economic growth was remarkable as a result of the second Autonomy Statute (1972), with South Tyrol today ranking among the top economic regions of Italy. South Tyrol is indeed among the 20 wealthiest regions in Europe (Benedikter 2011; *Südtiroler Wirtschaftszeitung*, December 12, 2008, 4). Studies confirm that a prospering economy alone does not lead to pacifying ethnic conflicts. However, it at least contributes to averting redistribution conflicts, which could cause a further degeneration into nationalism (Haller 2006). With the passage of time, loyalty among all three linguistic groups vis-a-vis the institutions also increased, with the advantages and benefits of autonomy clearly perceived by all three groups (astatinfo 2009).

Italy

After a long phase of stagnation caused by Italy in terms of implementing autonomy, the center-left governments of the early 1960s started to become more aware of their own ethnic minorities while at the same time showing a willingness to accept a substantial autonomy for South Tyrol.

The negotiations on the resolution of the conflict were held at two levels: that means between Rome and the South Tyrolean minority as well as with Austria. Italy did not even

refrain from negotiations when there were terrorist attacks carried out in South Tyrol in the 1960s (Peterlini 2006). Contrary to the common regional autonomy of Trentino and Bolzano as stipulated by the statute of 1948 that favored the Italian majority, the revised statute of 1972 granted South Tyrol a specific territorial autonomy, in which the German-speaking population formed the majority.

Austria

Austria is an external nation-state actor the South Tyrolean minority has been able to rely upon ever since 1945. With the signing of the Paris Agreement, Austria received the legal status to protect the South Tyrolean minority (Zeller 1988), again and again interfering with Italy at the request of the minority, especially at the UN in the years of 1960 and 1961. Despite manifold hardships, Austria continued to negotiate with Italy and encouraged the SVP leaders not to pursue a highly unrealistic solution in the sense of external self-determination, but to accept the more realistic intra-Italian solution. Austria consulted with the South Tyrolean minority on a regular basis, and did not act contrary to the wishes of South Tyroleans. If not immediately affected, Austria refrained from interfering entirely once a deal was struck between Bolzano/Bozen and Rome.

The international context and the European integration process

The conflict resolution process was mainly based upon the bilateral commitment to find an acceptable solution for all parties involved. The political pressure exerted by the UN on Austria and Italy to start negotiating in order to resolve the conflict had a strong impact on all negotiating parties. Also were there legal means to call upon the European Court of Human Rights in order to claim that the violation of minority rights constituted a simultaneous infringement upon human rights.

The continuing European integration process led to a steady shift of competencies from the nation-state to community institutions as well as to increasing interrelations between the member states. This integration process had a decisive impact on the individual nation-states, thus paving the way for a European culture of negotiation and compromise. The precondition for this was mutual political trust, which was necessary for sustainable compromise (Gehler 2010). This culture of negotiating and cooperating at least had an indirect impact upon the resolution of ethnic conflicts. Permanent collaboration among member states, the minority protection provisions guaranteed by the Union treaties and the redistribution scheme of the structural funds all contributed to the positive handling of such conflicts. The Council of Europe had already preceded the European Union (EU) in terms of minority protections (Palermo and Woelk 2008, 94–99).

The European integration process is based upon the recognition of state boundaries, thereby sanctioning once more what was agreed upon in the 1946 Paris Agreement. These boundaries, however, are relative against the background of the Schengen Agreement. Both Italy (1990) and Austria (1995) signed the agreement, with border controls becoming obsolete in 1997. It is true that the legal boundary between South Tyrol (Italy) and North Tyrol (Austria) is still in place. However, its significance is diminished in everyday life.

International organizations such as the EU, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe or even NATO are not enough to peacefully solve minority conflicts. Negative examples are the Basque country, Northern Ireland or former Yugoslavia. However, they do further peaceful solutions because they have established a series of formal and informal conflict resolution instruments (Benedikter 2007, 89).

Dissociative conflict resolution and consociational democracy

After the disappearance of Fascism and National Socialism, the Paris Agreement of 1946 laid the preconditions in South Tyrol for establishing negative peace among the three linguistic groups. The 1948 Autonomy Statute, which was revised in 1972, was designed to further cooperation among elites while at the same time separating linguistic groups. Cooperation followed the political principle of as little as possible and as much as is necessary.

Just like in other strongly fragmented societies the idea behind this strategy for South Tyrol started from two basic assumptions, which were formulated based upon the exemplary works by Lijphart (1977, 1990, 2004), Lehmbruch (1967) and others (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Reynal-Querol 2002; Sisk 1996; Wolff and Cordell 2011). The two assumptions above are fragmentation and power sharing. South Tyrolean society is divided into subsystems relatively strongly separated from each other, among which communication was rare at least in the past. There used to be little consensus and no common identity.

In order to counter centrifugal tendencies that occurred among the linguistic groups of South Tyrol, the 1948 Autonomy Statute legalized a consociational democracy model, reducing political competition and the majority principle as well as strengthening elite cooperation, albeit shrunk to a minimum level. The consociational model of democracy partly eliminates the distinction between majority and minority so essential to competitive democracies, with power shared among the political elites (Pelinka 2003; Wolff 2008). It is not competition that takes center stage, but mutual guarantees for the access to and the use of power. This model constitutes the antithesis to the negative experiences of the past, which are marked by Fascism and National Socialism, ethnic cleansing and violence. The local political elites at the time originated from anti-Fascism and anti-Nazism movements, which signed a “non-aggression pact” in order to prevent violence in the future, despite diverging interests.

The core principle of *power sharing* in South Tyrol refers to four basic principles (Pallaver 2008, 303–304):

(1) Participation of all relevant language groups at the governmental level and at subordinated different subsystems. The principle is to include all language groups. This means that all linguistic groups represented in the province legislature are proportionally represented in the province government according to their numeric strengths. There are particular rules in place for Ladins, which is the smallest linguistic group. This principle of proportional representation is equally applied at the community level and at all public representative territorial entities. In fact, it was the two Catholic parties which shared power – the South Tyrolean SVP with its absolute majority and the Italian Democrazia Cristiana (DC). During the 1970s, the Italian Socialist Party also managed to be part of the government. Overall South Tyrol’s political system is about horizontal power sharing at the regional level only (Wolff 2008, 344).

(2) Decision-making autonomy of the respective linguistic group pertaining to questions not of common interest. This is a matter of group protection in the fields of cultural and school autonomy.

(3) Proportional representation of each language group in political organs (by means of the proportional electoral system), at the level of recruitment of personnel in the public sector (ethnic proportional quota system), and at the level of allocating public funds. The ethnic proportional quota system is often considered one of the major pillars of autonomy. The system of proportional representation makes sure that all public jobs are distributed according to the proportional strength of the given linguistic groups, which is

determined by the most recent popular census. However, this system is also applied when it comes to the composition of local public authorities, the management of the budget in the welfare, social and cultural sectors, and the allocation of material resources, concerning student grants and even public housing projects. Along with the legislative branch, including the linguistic groups based on electoral results, the proportional system does not just apply to the executive branch and the according public administration, but also to the judicial branch, in which the personnel composition is also subject to the ethnic proportional quota system (Denicolò 2010). Bilingualism (Trilingualism in the Ladin valleys) forms the precondition for access to public service sector jobs.

Competition between the linguistic groups thus becomes a struggle within the respective linguistic group so that social conflicts do not transform into ethnic ones. The distribution rules for resources are laid down in an agreement between the elites. If one intended to change these rules, the agreement among the linguistic groups would have to be altered, which can only happen through unanimous consent by all.

(4) Veto power of the respective language group, if one has to decide upon the defense of vital interests in group protection, and if the agreed forms of conflict resolution do not appeal. For instance, there is the possibility for the majority of a linguistic group represented in the province legislature to ask that each linguistic group votes separately on the single chapters of the budget draft.

The consociational model at the level of elites is paralleled by the ethnic separation of a number of institutions and civil society alike. The separation of South Tyrolean society along ethnic lines thus pervades the entire political and administrative system and its corresponding subsystems. Parties (except the Green Party) and most associations are essentially organized according to the logic of ethnic separation (Pallaver 2005, 2006a). What speaks volumes for ethnic impenetrability is the fact that, during the 2008 and the 2013 provincial elections, approximately 10% of Italian-speakers voted for a German-speaking party, mainly the SVP, but only 2% of German-speakers voted for an Italian nationwide party (Atz and Pallaver 2009, 2014).

There is an ethnically separated school and educational system. And this also applies, with exceptions, to cultural institutions (such as libraries, orchestras and bands, choirs, theatres) and social institutions (such as social housing and emergency rescue organizations). The media is also organized around separate ethnicities and their news programs are also separated along ethnic lines (Pallaver 2006b).

Institutional separation is also reflected in everyday life, which is characterized by relatively rare contacts between the linguistic groups although the opportunities to do that are manifold (Pallaver 2010, 383). The social separation of linguistic groups is very much contingent upon profession and the degree of education.

(Pre-)conditions for the transition from dissociative to associative conflict resolution: security and trust

Security and trust are categories that are of utmost importance to peace, and thus for peace between ethnicities. Security is a relative concept because there is no absolute security. Ideally, however, it describes a condition free of threats. Following and deducting from Mitrany's (1966) theory, security can be conceived in the context of a process-oriented approach, promoting a steady development toward functional integration that corresponds with attitudinal changes and far-reaching interdependence, the reversal of which could only be yielded at significant costs (Rudolf 1995, 121–122). Security

concepts are only successful when a variety of different forms of threats become increasingly improbable.

With regard to an indigenous ethnic minority, peace denotes the absence of threats to the existence of that same minority. The preconditions for this are compliance with minority rights, development opportunities in all spheres of life within the autochthonous territory, including (exclusive or shared) political decision-making autonomy. In terms of the relation between minority and majority, one can speak of bilateral security that follows the logic of the collective security concept. This basically means that security comes at no one's expense. South Tyrol's minority has long felt the need for security. After a long process that even included violence, the wide majority among the minority today perceives itself as legally and politically secure.

Legal security consists of a far-reaching network of specific national constitutional norms and international law provisions (Wolff 2008, 347). Along with the international 1946 Paris Agreement and other European framework conventions on minority protection adopted by Italy, the Autonomy Statute enjoys constitutional guarantee while at the same time also being based upon the international Paris Agreement of 1946. Furthermore, there is general intra-state framework legislation on the protection of minorities as well as a number of specific norms. The compound of legal protection provisions adopted in favor of the South Tyrolean minority today amounts to an ever-increasing number of approximately 20,000 pages (Benedikter 2007, 90).

Along with the dense network of legal protection mechanisms, South Tyroleans also enjoy a high degree of political security, mainly provided by the Republic of Austria, which closely follows developments in South Tyrol and constantly consults with the political elites of the minority, and, if necessary, with the central government in Rome. The Federal Republic of Germany was also committed to South Tyrolean concerns during times when the South Tyrol conflict escalated, although there was no legal basis to do so. From a political perspective, it is the EU only that is today able to provide security for South Tyroleans beyond legal foundations. Beyond that, the SVP is represented in numerous international minority organizations, such as the Federal Union of European Nationalities.

All these security axes form the precondition for trust, which in turn is the condition for cooperation. According to Simmel, trust is "one of the most important synthetic forces within society" (Simmel 1992, 393).

The closer context of trust is constituted by alter-ego relationships. It is chiefly about two social entities or actors attributed with a certain degree of continence and contingency (unpredictability) (Fuhse 2002, 414). As soon as the two actors interact, a set of expectations evolves, with communication unfolding upon the latter (Katovich 1987). It is true that alter and ego still remain the same, but what has changed fundamentally is the relationship between them. From this point, trust is no longer a property, but denotes the quality of a relationship between two actors.

Social trust forms the basis for any kind of trust, and thus for trust in (political) institutions, too (Warren 1999). It is essentially about an individual's expectation that other individuals act the same way in the future, and that the results of such action are beneficial or at least not harmful to the former individual. It should be born in mind that trust thus involves risky preliminary outlay or action (Luhmann 2000, 28). In order to establish acquaintance as a precondition for trust, the ego requires reference points emanating from personal experiences with the actions of other agents in the primary lifeworld. These personal experiences are then generalized and projected into the future. This outlay for the future has to be constantly renewed.

In ethnically fragmented societies characterized by a correspondence between the ego-alter relationship and that between majority and minority, this “risky outlay” involves particular risks for the minority because it finds itself in a weaker position. Positive experiences concerning the security and development of the minority are of utmost significance in terms of the gradual elimination of distrust and the building of trust in the alter. Therefore, there should not be major discrepancies between normative expectations and actual actions. Otherwise the result is a decrease in trust or even utter distrust (Fuchs, Gabriel, and Völkl 2002, 430). (Political) distrust can be surpassed when interpersonal relationships of trust are replaced by a form of trust that is based upon abstract resources and that is perceived as “accepted” as a result of long-standing experiences in the sense of generalized trust (Stolle 2002). In ethnically fragmented societies, the mass media operating as mediators of trust are particularly compelled to maintain a confidence-building information process between majority and minority in order to build “public trust” in the respective opposite language group and the common institutions alike (Pallaver 2006c, 19).

The South Tyrolean minority’s trust mainly refers to the Italian elites and fellow citizens, not to the Italian state, which is not considered from an ethnic perspective, but mainly from a perspective of economic mismanagement, disorganization of the state, crime, etc. The SVP nevertheless established a relationship of trust with the relevant political actors of the center-left camp at the central state level during the negotiations on the second Autonomy Statute in the 1960s. This was mainly due to the fact that the center-left camp always remained open-minded toward South Tyrolean minority claims. The second Autonomy Statute as well as the further expansion of autonomy, which even go beyond legal agreements, are very much based upon the policies of the above-mentioned actors. The South Tyrolean government, therefore, always reflected the political coalition between DC/Socialist Party at the central state level. The changes of political conditions occurring in the Second Republic at the outset of the 1990s did not mark a substantial transformation in this respect (Massl and Pallaver 2010).

Trust also manifests itself at the level of non-political elites and civil society. Surveys confirm that there is an ever-increasing trend among the economic and cultural elites of the three linguistic groups and civil society alike to perceive the social distance between the language groups to be continuously decreasing (Pallaver 2010, 387–390).

The role of elites and civil society

There was distrust between the political elites and the language groups when defining the legal provisions of the first Autonomy Statute, the South Tyrolean provincial constitution (1948). Twenty years of Fascism and assimilation pressure (1922–1943) had had an adverse impact on the relation between the German and Italian language groups. Conversely, the two years of National Socialist reign in South Tyrol (1943–1945) led the Italian-speakers to even further distance themselves from their German counterparts. While it was true that the anti-Fascism and anti-Nazism spirit was indeed represented by political minorities in both linguistic groups, the political visions for the future between the latter could not differ more from each other. The German-speakers favored a return to Austrian territory, while the Italian-speakers wanted to maintain Italian sovereignty over South Tyrol.

The 1946 Paris Agreement forcefully bound together the two linguistic groups, expressed in a minimal degree of cooperation between the political elites and a strict separation of the civil society spheres. Both the levels of elites and civil society were initially

dominated by confrontation instead of cooperation. Nationalism was indeed the predominating force of the everyday political culture of the province.

However, it was mainly the political elites and, at a later stage, civil society that played an essential role in pacifying the ethnic conflict and initiating the integration process, which sought to gradually overcome the dissociative conflict resolution model.

The approach applied here presupposes that integration is a continuous interaction process, in which the decision-making political, economic, bureaucratic, and cultural elites respond to changing social and political conditions through establishing new forms of cooperation and institutions that enable permanent interaction between elites and citizens alike (Haller 2009, 62).

Without elaborating on a variety of elite theory approaches for too long, one can at least hold that elite theories discuss questions of power distribution in society. They argue that, in any society, there are small groups with a disproportionate degree of power, and that, among the latter, there is a relatively high degree of direct social interaction and communication. The elites are paralleled by the popular masses (see e.g. Coenen-Huther 2004; Hradil and Imbusch 2003; Putnam 1976; Scott 1990), although there is a need to revise this classical dichotomy as a result of profound transformation processes within social structures. Actions by elites are essentially a combination of utilitarian-rational, value-based and emotional components. Elites are related to the social base through manifold social processes, with the respective higher level having an impact on the lower one, and vice versa (Haller 2009, 65–66, but mainly see e.g. Weber 1973).

Elites are paralleled by civil society. Civil society denotes a network of grassroots-oriented initiatives and projects, which is typical of a democratic society. Civil society constitutes sort of an opposing public to that created by the state, implying the end of the monopoly on the political and social order (Gellner 1995, 63).

Since interethnic dialog and interethnic cooperation cannot come about by political decree from above, civic engagement is indeed required. This kind of activism unfolds independently from hierarchies and gains legitimacy from below. Etzioni (1993) was not the first to underline the community-building force behind civil society organizations, which have the capacities to integrate and to spur intercultural dialog and openness. Both the elites and civil society have mitigated distrust and built trust overtime, thereby contributing to gradually transforming the dissociative conflict resolution model into one that is more and more becoming associative.

The role of political, economic and intellectual elites

When analyzing the role of elites who have played a crucial role in transforming the conflict resolution models until now, we place our focus mainly on political, economic and intellectual elites.

It is not their external function to promote peace that is analyzed, that is the relation to the state of Italy or Austria, for instance, but their role within South Tyrolean society in terms of eliminating distrust and prejudice as well as building mutual trust, thus overcoming ethnic separation. Furthermore the role of the three elites mentioned above varies as a result of different starting positions. The political elites of the three language groups were forced to cooperate right from the beginning as a result of statutory requirements, although cooperation was mainly limited to what is absolutely necessary. The forced character of cooperation was not so much felt by economic elites, albeit the latter were also united in a number of professional associations through obligatory membership.

Political elites

Political elites are those who are in central political power positions, among them are South Tyrolean province legislators and members of the government, members of the Italian parliament, members of the EU Parliament as well as the mayors of the most important cities.

The German- and Italian-speaking political elites differed widely from each other when they initially embarked on the path toward autonomy. The leading positions among German-speakers were assumed by the liberal bourgeoisie, whereas those of the Italians were taken by members of the bureaucracy and freelancers. In spite of diverging interests, manifested in how to implement autonomy, both political camps were connected by the common Catholic matrix. The common political culture of Catholicism and the corresponding anti-Communism constituted the common bond that, again and again, united the camps when it came to major issues.

In the 1950s, the liberal leaders within the minority were replaced by the rural-radical elite of well-organized farmers that can well be called the “Wehrmacht generation.” The latter were mainly those (essentially men) who served in the German Wehrmacht during WWII, but also those who were part of the Italian army, all of whom were not subject to democratic socialization (Gatterer 1968). They were thus more prone to nationalism than the generation that preceded them. The same accounts for the Italian political elites.

However, it was the “Wehrmacht generation” that worked toward a resolution of the conflict. The common interest not to escalate the conflict was simply too strong. This was, on the one hand, due to the negative experience of war, but, on the other hand, due to the pressure exerted by the Catholic dogma of peace and, ultimately, due to the economic elites, who feared negative implications for the economy as a result of instability. It speaks volumes that the governing parties of SVP (the economic wing especially) and DC, the Church and the media all strongly condemned the terrorist attacks of the 1960s (Pallaver 2011a).

There was a further generation shift that occurred almost simultaneously with the declaration to resolve the conflict at the UNO (1992). Within the German-speaking political elites, there was a new elite coming into power that was featured by strong pragmatism and less ethnicism, which, in the meantime, propagated the benefits of autonomy almost daily against the background of a number of political and legal security provisions for the minority. Identification with autonomy was due to a number of factors: The SVP was considered the party that managed to achieve autonomy. The political elites were thus very self-confident, with the younger generation perceiving itself as that to politically follow the older one. There were also a number of Italians who participated in establishing and expanding the degree of autonomy, thus also strongly identifying with this autonomy. Furthermore, South Tyrolean autonomy is repeatedly presented abroad as a prime example of how to peacefully and successfully resolve an ethnic conflict. Delegations from all over the world, from the Dalai Lama to the Palestinians, constantly visit South Tyrol in order to study its conflict resolution model. The political elites, regardless of linguistic group affiliation, take great pride in that. Ultimately all the political elites praise the social and economic success of autonomy. The South Tyrolean political system’s output is marked by great efficiency, thus setting itself apart from the rest of Italy in a positive way.

The discomfort felt by the Italian-speaking population during the transition from the first to the second Autonomy Statute that rearranged policy instruments for control in favor of the German-speaking majority in South Tyrol as well as the implosion of the Italian party system at the outset of the 1990s also led to the replacement of the Italian

political class. A compact party elite consisting of the big popular party, the Catholic DC, and the Socialists was followed by a generation of nationalists who disagreed with reforming the statute and the decrease in power of Italians, assuming the political opposition position. Along with the center-right camp, an autochthonous pro-autonomy elite emerged that was part of the center-left camp, recently regaining increasing consensus (Pallaver 2007, 615–616, see results of regional elections in Table 2).

Personal and international prestige, personal power, the overwhelming economic and social benefits of autonomy ultimately caused the political elites of all linguistic groups to increasingly cooperate in order to stay on the course of success.

Cooperation among political elites is stipulated by the Autonomy Statute, just like the principle of power sharing therein. The linguistic groups are proportionally represented in the respective representative bodies' executives, such as the province government, the communal level and all political organs overall. Dealing with the opposite language group on a daily basis over the years in the legislative and executive branches has led to a decrease in stereotypes and an increase in mutual trust, thus making sure that common interests are pursued beyond linguistic group considerations. The same phenomenon can be observed in the public administration branch. The fact that jobs in the public sector are distributed according to the ethnic proportional quota system with a third going to Italians, two-thirds going to Germans, and some percentage points going to Ladins (Peterlini 1980), has caused the language groups to meet in their offices on a daily basis in order to work on common fields of work, and to cooperate and communicate in the various official languages. The public administrative sector, especially drives the process of interethnic socialization.

This institutional kind of “forced cooperation” in common commissions or in the public administration as well as the corresponding everyday life experiences continue at the level of relations with the state overall. In order to implement the Autonomy Statute, to constantly readapt the latter to new conditions at the state and European levels, there are essentially two commissions in place (the commission of six for relations between the province and the central state and the commission of 12 for relations between regions and the central state, since the two Autonomous Provinces of Bolzano/Bozen and Trento together form the region of Trentino-South Tyrol, which is almost entirely deprived of competences). These commissions are composed of German- and Italian-speaking representatives of the provincial, regional, and central state levels. The work in these commissions that has gone on for years and the resulting pattern of cooperation have long gone beyond the respective issue areas dealt with therein. Ultimately the political elites of both language groups continuously present a unified position in the public, which symbolically underlines the close connection and cooperation between the language groups. This is true, for instance, in terms of representing the interests of the province of Bolzano or the Trentino-South Tyrol region vis-a-vis the capital of Rome.

Despite positive trends, there have not been any developments toward the formation of common interethnic parties, which can be well considered the most important step toward overcoming ethnic separation. The German parties are paralleled by the Italian ones, and the electorate continues to follow ethnic voting patterns. It was only 2% of German-speaking voters who have elected an Italian party in the 2008 and in the 2013 province elections, while about 10% of Italians voted for a German party (Atz and Pallaver 2009, 2014). However, there is an increasing number of German-speaking candidates on the Italian party lists to be observed. It is the Green party only that conceives itself as an interethnic party.

What remains to be realized at the provincial level has already become a reality at the communal level. There are more and more municipalities with voting blocks that are

composed of representatives from all linguistic groups (Asam 2008). Common interests in everyday life thus overcome ethnic considerations.

In spite of an ever-increasing identification with autonomy and the intensification of cooperation, South Tyrolean political elites overall do not challenge the consociational model of democracy. There are a number of reasons for that. First of all, it has been very successful so far. Secondly, the parties want to win elections in their ethnically defined electoral sub-arenas, and, in order to win elections, they try to appeal to those voters who are still in favor of ethnocentric positions and reject cooperation with the other groups. Although new constituencies cannot be added, the credo is at least not to lose the old ones. This is one reason why the governing parties and elites continue to make compromises with their more ethnically oriented party wings, all of which prevents or at least postpones the definitive elimination of segregation. Ultimately, it is about holding on to power positions. If electoral sub-arenas disintegrated, competition would increase while the odds for winning would decrease (see e.g. Baur, Guggenberg, and Larcher 1998, 271–274). Nevertheless: regarding the cooperation between the ethnic groups, the “Wehrmacht generation” followed the principle of “as little as possible and as much as is necessary,” while today’s principle follows the logic of “as much as possible, but no definitive integration.”

Economic elites

In terms of the economic elites, autonomy opens the door for a number of advantages. The passage and implementation of the second Autonomy Statute (1972) did not just cause a transfer of competencies from the central state and the region to the Province of Bolzano, but the autonomy was additionally supplemented by generous financial endowment possibilities. The Province of South Tyrol has over the long-term average become a net recipient as a result of this generous financial arrangement (Benedikter 2011, 341). South Tyrol is allowed to both manage more than 90% of total tax revenues in the Province and additional transfers from the Italian state, thus having authority over approximately 100% of tax revenues collected in South Tyrol (Benedikter 2008). This provision took effect as of 1990. Although the 2010 Milan agreement stipulates that South Tyrol’s primary fiscal bottom line slightly increases in favor of the central state in the framework of the reform of Italian tax federalism, the province has maintained its special role and was only slightly affected by the far-reaching austerity measures recently introduced by the Italian government (*Alto Adige*, December 22, 2011; Benedikter 2011, 356).¹

The high tax revenues and the corresponding high provincial budget turned the provincial government into a huge distribution agency. South Tyrol can afford a much higher volume of public contracts than other regions in Italy. South Tyrol’s subsidy levels in favor of the industrial economy are much higher than in the remaining parts of Italy. Social spending is also much higher as a result of a higher number of qualified laborers moving to South Tyrol and the fact that employment figures are higher. In spite of the economic crisis, the unemployment rate amounted to only 4.5 in 2013 (females 5.8; males 3.6) (astatinfo 2013, 2). South Tyrol’s local authorities spend significantly more money than the Italian average, which elevates the quality of life and improves the business location through previous infrastructure measures. Apart from that, South Tyrol’s duties and taxes are lower than in the rest of Italy (Benedikter 2011, 248–249).

The economic elites greatly benefit from this situation. The inflow of public funds drives the demand of public authorities at all levels, thus also promoting the local economy. High revenues guarantee public investments that drive the economy, stabilize

economic fluctuations and avert bigger crises in the field of employment. In the competition between neighboring business locations, South Tyrol both excels at the level of public spending (increased subsidy levels, better social benefits, more efficient infrastructure) and when it comes to lower provincial taxes (Benedikter 2011, 357).

The South Tyrolean autonomy and its respective government that operates as a great financial distribution agency are, therefore, strongly backed by the economic elites, with the economy and a number of autonomous working sectors such as lawyers, notaries, architects, economic advisers, etc. having communicated and cooperated across linguistic frontiers at all times. The reason for this is regulations by the central state for professional associations, requiring mandatory membership as a result of trade activity. Although associations are, just like parties, usually organized by ethnic affiliation, most central state-level associations with mandatory membership are not organized by ethnic separation. All this is true for the chambers of lawyers, architects, auditors and tax consultants, for instance.

This is also true for the big interest group associations. The trade association, the industrial association, the association of craftsmen or the chamber of commerce are all formed beyond linguistic differences because economic interests take priority over ethnic ones. Cooperation between the language groups within these associations runs smoothly and without any problems, while the leading positions often alternate by ethnicity on a voluntary basis. There are furthermore many cross-linkages between political, economic and media elites.

The economic elites are way ahead of the political elites when it comes to cooperation and the integration of language groups. However, the strong dependence of the latter on the public administration that functions as a distribution agency prevents the economic elites from further strengthening the integration process.

Intellectual elites

These are persons who participate in public debates on important social and political issues, and who are essentially part of the professional groups of scientists, artists and writers. When analyzing, commenting and debating social and political trends, they argue on the basis of universal values, such as freedom, equality and social justice (Charle 2001; Gramsci 1948). They try to gain influence over the powerful and their respective decisions through public attention (Boudon 2004).

It cannot be denied that intellectuals played a major role in the past when it came to social transformation processes, and that they pushed for creating a “better society” and institutional reform. South Tyrol’s intellectuals also played such a role, and they still do. In the past, intellectuals mainly committed themselves to promoting German and Ladin minority rights, mentioned the dangers and pitfalls of nationalism and chauvinism while at the same time pushing for peaceful conflict resolution.

The calls for stopping ethnic trench warfare and for starting to build the future of South Tyrol together could already be heard in the interwar period (see e.g. Rieder 2007). It really was the intellectuals from the Catholic and left-wing camps that started to deal with the questions of ethnic separation in the 1960s, while at the same time trying to initiate cross-linguistic projects (Langer 1996, 33). The driving force behind their actions were (and are still) cosmopolitan, peace-promoting and peace-keeping arguments.

Often denounced by the political elites as “traitors of the people” up until the replacement of the “Wehrmacht generation” at the end of the 1980s, the intellectuals’ ideas of peaceful and constructive coexistence instead of separately living next to each other

slowly started to dominate. One of the intellectual pioneers in this respect, the Green EU deputy Alexander Langer (1946–1959), has mentioned the importance of mediators, bridge builders, wall jumpers and boundary spanners. There is a need for “traitors of ethnic uniformity, but not for defectors” (Langer 1996, 139).

Although the fields of culture and education are still administrated by way of political separation – the school system is, just like the libraries and choirs, ethnically separated – there are clear signs for increased cooperation and openness in both the cultural and educational fields.

Educational student exchange between German and Italian high schools is currently thriving, which was still considered an assault on the minority in the 1980s. Bilingual education (German at Italian and Italian at German schools) today starts in the first year of primary school after long fights for only starting it in the second year. It is the Italian-speaking school that is massively pushing for bilingual education. Many education institutions (the film school, for instance) operate without ethnic separation. The bilingual university claimed by intellectuals ever since the 1970s was founded as the trilingual Free University of Bozen/Bolzano in 1997, with representatives of the minority long-attacking intellectuals because a university apparently constituted a Trojan horse of assimilation if implemented (Peterlini 2008). The university is not the only multilingual education and research institution anymore today.

The claim for cooperation in cultural affairs mainly concerns high culture. An ethnically indifferent museum for modern arts appeared, as did an ethnically indifferent regional orchestra. State exhibitions are jointly organized, and a common state library is in the planning stage (Pernthaler 2009). The vertical cooperation patterns within high culture are oftentimes paralleled by the horizontal impenetrability of popular culture, albeit there is an ever-increasing cooperation to be noticed between the language groups (youth centers, street theaters).

Intellectuals play a particularly important role in processing and re-evaluating the history of South Tyrol, in discussing the collective memory, in dealing with symbols, in trying to overcome prejudices, in pronouncing criticism for emerging nationalist backslides, and in communicating the positive impact of constructive collaboration among the linguistic groups. A number of intellectual associations (South Tyrol’s societies for political science or for regional history) operate beyond linguistic boundaries.

In a nutshell, the structures of power in the fields of politics, the economy and culture can be depicted as follows.

An earlier but unique study by Niederfriniger and Kienzl (1996) comes to the conclusion that the value conceptions of the Italian-speaking and German-speaking elites do not differ all too widely from each other. This is true for self-assessment, the assessments of politics and the future of the country.

Large parts of the elites from both language groups are proud to be South Tyroleans. The political and economic achievements take center stage in appraisals here. In spite of differences perceived by elites regarding the language groups, they consider the confrontation between two cultures to be progress. About 80% of respondents explained that cultural life in South Tyrol would be much poorer if there was just one language group. The study, however, concludes that South Tyrolean elites are only weakly or at best moderately integrated. The reasons for this are quite revealing. The younger the respondents of the German-speaking elites, the higher is the degree of integration. When it comes to Italians, on the other hand, it hinges upon their places of birth. Italians raised in South Tyrol are much more strongly integrated than those who moved there at a later stage. The

socialization process in a multilingual environment and concrete everyday life experiences with the opposite language group seem to be particularly important aspects for living together.

Regardless of linguistic affiliation, South Tyrolean elites overall have an optimistic view of the future. A majority of Italian elites, however, believe that the greatest dangers might emanate from renewed ethnic tensions, while the German-speaking minority fears that threats to their own identity could well reappear. The attitudes are, nevertheless, more and more becoming positive the younger the elites are (Niederfriniger and Kienzl 1996, 206–213).

The role of civil society

As opposed to the mainly German-speaking political parties and their representatives, initiatives of South Tyrolean civil society tried to establish interethnic solidarity and ethnic indifference (Baur, Guggenberg, and Larcher 1998, 279).

Civil society – defined as organized collective activities that are not part of the household, the economic production and the state – is very diverse and heterogeneous, as it includes many different and sometimes opposing agents (Kopecký 2003, 7ff; Mudde 2003, 164). South Tyrolean organizations that are open to all citizens regardless of their linguistic affiliation can be regarded as part and reflection of civil society. They mainly fight for the realization of civil and political rights at the informal level, thus trying to guarantee them through democratic processes. Even from a neutral point of view, such initiatives are part of the social reality and do influence the transformation process from dissociative to associative model of conflict resolution.²

These kinds of civil society initiatives do not bear ethnic connotations and are thus not based upon on the perpetuation and/or reconstruction of group identities, but on promoting civic freedom and individual identity (Baur 2000, 216). Societies fragmented along ethnic lines pursue to increase the value of the “demos,” not that of the “ethnos,” while at the same time maintain difference in unity or equality (Baur 2000, 229). Apart from that, civil society initiatives try to undo with socialization in the corresponding ethnic groups, to resist the repetitive force of the permanently reproduced dichotomy between the self and the other, and to deconstruct ethnic stereotypes.

This process of de-ethnicization can be tested against popular attitudes on the cohabitation of the linguistic groups. Over the last couple of years, popular attitudes on living together have indeed improved enormously. A 2004 study, for instance, showed that about 25% of South Tyroleans do not consider living together to be a problem anymore. This figure only amounted to about 8% in 1991. In 2004, 60% considered the problem to be much smaller than it used to be (1991: approx. 53%). Only 11% thought that living together constituted a huge or rather huge problem, while this figure came to 38% in 1991. All surveys on the question of living together overall indicate an increasingly positive trend (Pallaver 2010).

One reason behind gradually overcoming the social distance between the language groups is people’s language skills. Second language skills among adolescents have increased over the past decades, despite existing deficits. Multilingualism is overall considered to be an asset and competitive advantage (astat 2006, 194). This is paralleled by identification with the country and its institutions. In 2009, 95% of the population was rather or even very satisfied with the provincial administration, 90% utter the same when it comes to communal administrative management, while 34% pronounced dissatisfaction with public departments (astatinfo 2009). There is a similarly positive trend to be

noticed in terms of the territorial and the corresponding ethnic affiliation, which is very high among 90% of German-speaking South Tyroleans, whereas it is on the increase among Italians with close to 30% (astat 2006, 158–159).

The ever-increasing territorial identification of Italians with South Tyrol is generally contingent upon the persistent desire of the north of Italy for more decentralization and federalization of the state, but even more so it is a product of the efficient administration of the province and the close social ties and networks, which distinguish themselves positively compared to the rest of Italy.

The ever-increasing identification with autonomy, territory as well as the reduction of the social distance between the language groups are, among other things, result of and at the same time cause for cooperation among the linguistic groups. By now there is number of organizations, associations and interethnic initiatives initiated and supported by civil society.

It is true that, over the past decades, there has been a steady buildup of cross-lingual structures within institutions like parties (rather tentative), unions and associations. However, grassroots initiatives in the fields of ecology and environmental protection, for instance, are much more significant here. The latter are oftentimes connected with opposition to (major) projects or with the promotion of civil rights. Cooperation between the linguistic groups can be subdivided as follows: the interethnic opening (of, for instance, child care facilities to children from the opposite language group during holidays), interethnic alliances/cooperation (for instance, class partnerships, bilingual specialized colleges for healthcare jobs), ethnic indifference (for instance, self-help groups in the social sector or associations dealing with bodily “pathologies”). There is an additional variety of different grassroots democracy movements and initiatives that do not just include the social, cultural, economic sectors, but also the public sector (for instance, the committee of equal opportunities for women) (astat 2006, 287–302).

The Catholic Church plays an important role in this regard, because it has been proclaiming and practicing the cooperation between language groups in the spirit of Christian charity and brotherhood for a long time (cf. Egger 1997). An example for these efforts is the “Institute for justice, peace and conservation of creation,” which is an interdisciplinary institute of higher education researching social, ethnic and societal issues.

There is a relationship of mutual influence between initiatives coming from civil society and political elites. The public discourse has been dominated by references by the political elites on the benefits and advantages of autonomy as well as on peaceful coexistence for years. Indicating that autonomy is reserved for all, that is the minority in Italy (Germans) just like the minority in the province (Italians), has gradually led to positive identification with autonomy and territory, as is confirmed by a number of surveys (mentioned above). The elites have created a positive climate for the autonomy and the reduction of the social distance between the language groups. This has created pressure from below, that is, civil society. Abstractly indicating the advantages is a concrete claim by the latter. The Italian population, for instance, expects intensified second language training and education, opportunities to meet German-speaking South Tyroleans, bilingual schools, and training and cooperation programs with the other language group, and so forth. Albeit tentative, such claims are also made by enlightened German-speaking South Tyroleans, such as the demand for bilingual schools. When cooperation offers clear benefits, against the background of associations dealing with the health of citizens, for instance, the pragmatic usefulness of cooperation really starts to dominate in citizens’ minds in the sense that the normative power of the factual prevails. Political elites are indeed powerless when it comes to fighting these forms of integration.

Overall the steps toward integration mostly constitute a discontinuous process. Dynamic moments alternate with moments of stagnation, at times even with crisis-like moments. Political elites are oftentimes the accelerating forces, while at times it is civil society, a language group or at times even all of them. Economic and cultural/intellectuals are the ones to continuously drive the integration process. When doing so, some refrain from the public arena while using the pressure created by their economic resources. Others do it by making public use of the power of words. The varying speeds of the integration process sometimes lead to fear when it proceeds to fast, and to frustration when it develops too slowly.³

Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper, the author departed from three hypotheses. The first, which was verified, holds that cooperation among various language groups only becomes reality when there is security for the further existence and development of the minority. It is only then that distrust is slowly replaced by trust.

The second hypothesis holds that cooperation is derived from the manifold interests of the political, but mainly of economic and cultural elites, not to mention civil society initiatives, and that cooperation is the more intensive the more it yields personal and collective gains. Elites and initiatives coming from civil society which both try to overcome the ethnic division, constantly interact, which means influence is exerted both from “above” and from “below.” We have seen that there are differing speeds of integration that the economic elites are ahead of the political ones, who are – in spite of their openness and willingness to cooperate – not willing to essentially change the consociational model of democracy, which highlights elite cooperation while at the same maintaining the ethnic separation of linguistic groups. Elites and civil society steadily interact at the social level so that there is both influence “from above” and “from below.” For the rewards in these two spheres are far more tangible as we have seen already.

The third hypothesis states that the South Tyrol autonomy more and more “territorializes” and, at the same time, weakens ethnic division. It has indeed been possible to essentially transform the insolvable ethnic conflicts into solvable ones as a result of the establishment of a sophisticated system. The elites and initiatives of civil society additionally show an increased identification with the concept of territorial autonomy, regardless of linguistic affiliation. Identification with the country is ever increasing in all language groups, as has been shown above. Just like territory has replaced the great ideologies in the process of their erosion, territory is on the way to replace or at least relegate ethnicity aspects to the second rank (Palermo 1999). The wider, more intensive, more consistent, meaningful and rapid such interactions between the language groups are, the more materializes the integration of a territory (Deutsch 1972). While in the past, politics used to be centered on issues regarding the language groups, minority protection and ethnic conflicts, today issues of territorial autonomy become increasingly important. It is a striking fact that the Bolzano Agreement (August 2013) only includes open questions of (territorial) autonomy but not one “ethnic” measurement in favor of one language group. Additionally, the Agreement does not mention the particular minority situation of South Tyrol at all (salto politics 2013).

What remains to be answered are the questions of negative peace, and the transition from the logic of dissociative to the logic of associative conflict resolution. The political elites (especially the German-speaking elite) expect that, albeit less intense and more permeable, ethnic fragmentation is to continue to exist. At least no one can deny one great

achievement of this model: the danger of violent escalation was averted, and violence was replaced by the concept of a negotiation democracy, albeit by way of separation. The ever-increasing desire especially among economic and cultural elites as well as among great parts of civil society to overcome ethnic divisions collides with the finding that consociational democracy is not able to yield integration at all levels because it requires discernible dividing lines between separated sub-societies. The political, economic and cultural pre-conditions for an “integrative democracy” are there, just like achievements in overcoming ethnic division as well as interethnic cooperation. What seemed to the unthinkable 30 years ago, is taken for granted today. To mention a few examples again: associations whose members come from all language groups; officially funded exchanges between students of German and Italian schools; a trilingual university (German, Italian, English, in part Ladin); common regional festivities (such as commemorations of the resistance against Fascism and National Socialism, commemoration of the freedom fight of 1809);⁴ trade unions representing all language groups together; the election of German or Italian MPs by the “other” language group respectively; the slight increase of interethnic parties.

However, in order to effectively finalize the transformation process from a dissociative to an associative conflict resolution model, there is a need for other mechanisms that do not replace consociational democracy, but that go beyond it.

Notes

1. After conflicts with the Monti government, in August 2013 the South Tyrolean provincial government replaced the Milan Agreement by the Bolzano Agreement, which was signed by the Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta and the president of the province of South Tyrol Luis Durnwalder.
2. The focus on initiatives of civil society trying to overcome the ethnic division does not mean that the debate about civil and non-civil society has become redundant, but only that the debate cannot be further elaborated here (cf. therefore Kopecký and Mudde 2003).
3. The media play an important role in the process of integration, for they construct social reality and create a public arena. The mass media are, therefore, particularly expected to drive a confidence-building information process in order to increase public trust in the respective opposite language group and in the common institutions. This, however, requires an undivided public arena, while the latter oftentimes disintegrates into various public sub-arenas in ethnically fragmented societies, since the media in South Tyrol are monolingual while oftentimes making ethnic references. For a general discourse on this issue, see e.g. Pallaver (2006b).
4. In 1809, the Tyroleans led by Andreas Hofer, a national hero in Tyrol, fought against French–Bavarian occupation.

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