

# Between progress and new challenges

*Language is one of the most important characteristics of any culture, so it is not surprising that the educational system of any country is one of the most sensitive areas. Especially ethnic minorities like those in South Tyrol had to painfully feel throughout history the dramatic consequences of foreign domination on the educational system.*



Some teachers paid for their commitment with their lives.

## **Fascism and Catacomb Schools** (Paul Decarli)

With the annexation of South Tyrol and the takeover of power by the fascists in the 1920s, the suppression of the German and Ladin population began immediately. By law, the teaching of German and Ladin was forbidden in South Tyrol and only Italian was allowed as the only language of instruction. At that time, so-called catacomb schools were established, which were forbidden and in which the children were secretly taught the German language. About 500 young women taught in these schools and if they were caught, they faced banishment to southern Italy.

## **End of the War and First Statute of Autonomy** (Paul Decarli)

With the Treaty of Paris of September 5, 1946, South Tyrol was granted a number of fundamental rights, including elementary and secondary education in the respective mother tongue (German, Ladin or Italian). In South Tyrol, therefore, instruction in kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools (middle and high schools) is given in the students' native language. It must also be given by teachers for whom this language is the mother tongue. In 1948, the Treaty of Paris formed the basis for the first Statute of Autonomy and also the cornerstone of the South Tyrolean school system. For the school of the German and Ladin ethnic groups, the need to preserve their own linguistic and cultural identity as minorities in Italy has always been central. The development of the school

system, especially the secondary schools, was very difficult until the 1960s: school buildings had to be laboriously built with little state support, there was a great shortage of qualified teaching staff and there was hardly any suitable teaching material available.

## **Second Statute of Autonomy and School Autonomy** (Dr. Margareth Lun)

With the Second Statute of Autonomy of 1972, improvements occurred in South Tyrol with regard to the school system. Thus, the legal provisions in the field of education were newly regulated, but not the entire legislative power was transferred to South Tyrol. In technical language, one speaks of primary and secondary legislative power. In the field of education, the primary legislative power of the province includes, among other things, kindergartens, music schools or vocational schools. Secondary legislative power, on the other hand, means that South Tyrol must comply with the state's requirements and may only make minor changes. Unfortunately, the majority of schools fall into the secondary area, because elementary, middle and high schools are state schools. Here, all state guidelines from Rome still apply. However, it has been possible to adapt some areas to the needs of South Tyrol by means of implementing regulations.



**“School to the Land” - but still under the control of the state** (Dr. Margareth Lun)

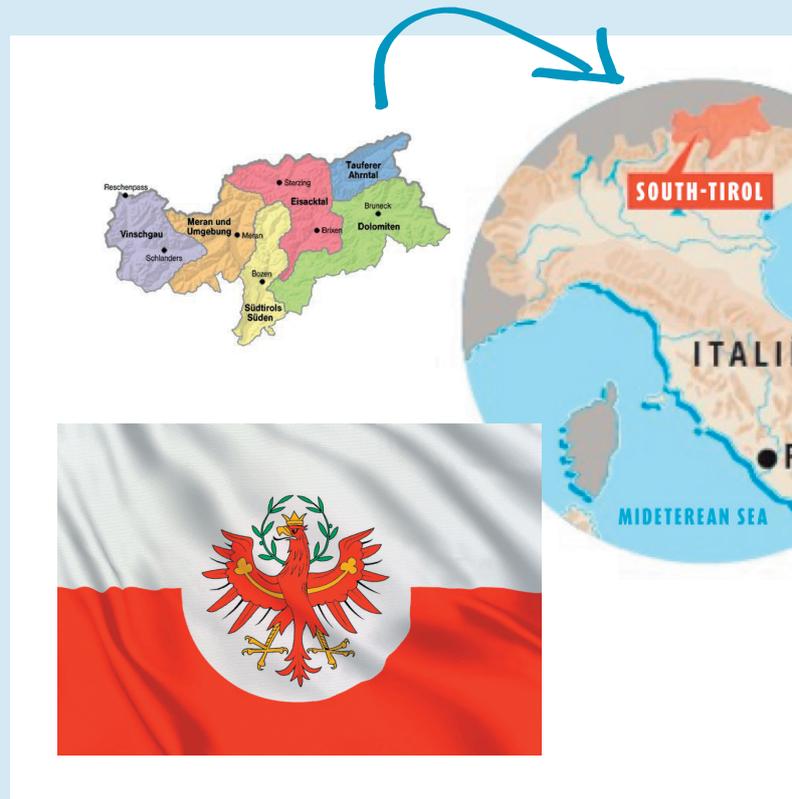
In 1996, an initiative called “Schule zum Land” (School to the Land, meaning South Tyrol) took place, by which further rights were transferred from the Italian state to South Tyrol. While the teachers remained state employees, the service and salary rights were transferred to South Tyrol. Furthermore, since then South Tyrol has been allowed to modify curricula and examination schedules, to determine teaching times and to have a say in the definition of examination subjects. Nevertheless, today schools in South Tyrol are still dependent on Rome in many areas and there is still a long way to go to achieve complete control of the educational system.

**Foreign language teaching in South Tyrol** (Dr. Margareth Lun)

In South Tyrol, the Italian state distinguishes between “second language teaching” (Italian in German schools and German in Italian schools) and “foreign language teaching” (for example English or Spanish). This means that German-speaking South Tyroleans are considered to be Italians who have a “first” language (German) and a “second” language (Italian). In reality, however, every South Tyrolean who does not grow up in a mixed-language family must learn Italian as a normal foreign language, just like English, French, Russian, Spanish or Latin.

The fact that Italian is classified in German schools as “second language instruction” and not “foreign language instruction” has fatal consequences, especially in German secondary schools. Since it is assumed that they do not have to learn this second language first, the goal of Italian instruction is not primarily language acquisition, but the teaching of classical Italian literature and culture. Thus, the lessons are not geared to everyday practice and students are often barely able to hold a casual conversation with Italians of the same age, let alone express themselves fluently in Italian in the world of work. The same is true in reverse for the Italian young people in South Tyrol.

For some years now, the CLIL method has also been gaining ground in South Tyrol. CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is a pedagogical approach in which the second or foreign language is used for the teaching and learning of subjects and language with the aim of promoting mastery of both the subject and the language in relation to predefined objectives. In practice, however, this is utopian, as students often do not have sufficient mastery of the second or foreign language, resulting in a massive decline in the quality of subject matter instruction.



With this information in mind, the following demands of the South Tyrolean movement are thus legitimate:

- Get native language education, so no mixed language experiments (CLIL).
- Objective teaching of Tyrolean history in South Tyrolean schools.
- Promotion of student exchanges within Tyrol.
- Priority for German-speaking children in German nursery and primary schools.
- Promote your own culture and song treasure in the lesson package.



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