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South Tyrolean Autonomy as a Model for Coexistence between Ethnic Groups¹

South Tyrol in the interwar period – history in three phases

Apart from some minor adjustments to the national borders at the end of the Second World War, the territories of the states as they exist today were defined in the peace treaties concluded after the First World War. Exceptionally, the minorities created by the newly drawn borders of Austria and Italy were able to achieve rights of self-determination on the basis of plebiscites. In spite of the Fourteen Points announced by the American President Wilson and contrary to the Right of Nations to Self-determination (Article 9), the whole of South Tyrol – with its almost one-hundred percent German- and Ladin-speaking population – was awarded to Italy under the terms of the peace treaties of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1919) and Rapallo (1920). In addition, the general protection system of the League of Nations was doomed to failure owing to the absence of defined responsibilities and sanctions. And, apart from an Italian note accompanying the terms for peace communicated to Austria, in which the country's "new subjects of German nationality" were promised "a largely liberal policy with regard to their language, culture and economic interests", Italy as the victorious power had no minority-protection obligations under international law.²

In a first brief phase, the call for autonomy in South Tyrol focussed on administrative and legislative powers on the model of the Habsburg monarchy, whereas the Italian government was thinking in terms of administrative decentralisation. By royal decree, an Advisory Commission for Trentino-South Tyrol was appointed with a mandate to propose autonomy at the level of the municipalities and provinces and also to establish regional autonomy with independent legislative powers in the new provinces.³ These autonomy-oriented activities in Italy's South Tyrol policy came to an end with the establishment of Italian-language schools – in this phase alongside of German-speaking schools – in what was an almost purely monolingual German-speaking area. In 1921

¹ The historical part of the paper is based on sources from the book: Rautz, Günther: Die Sprachenrechte der Minderheiten – Ein Rechtsvergleich zwischen Österreich und Italien. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 1999. The second part is primarily based on the reference work: Toggenburg, Gabriel N. & Rautz, Günther: ABC des Minderheitenschutzes in Europa. Wien 2010.

²Weiss, Klaus: *Das Südtirol-Problem in der Ersten Republik.* Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik 1989. 23.

³ Paladin, Livio: *Diritto Regionale* (5th edition), Padua: Cedam 1992. 3., royal decree of 8 September 1921, no. 1319, and in this context also the law of 26 September 1920, no. 1322; royal legislative decree of 31 August 1921, no. 1269 and royal decree of 19 November 1921, no. 1746.

already, under the terms of the Lex Corbino, Italian children were obliged to attend Italian schools, with Italian or Ladin surnames treated as proof of Italian descent and affiliation to the Italian linguistic group.⁴ Italy's tradition of centralised government and the weakness of the country's liberal governments up to 1922 prevented any further positive steps being taken in the question of autonomy. Italianisation activities in South Tyrol were further strengthened with the Fascist rise to power: The use of Italian became obligatory in all official language contexts; place names and surnames were italianised, and Italian made the language of tuition in the schools.

For the German- and Ladin-speaking minorities living in South Tyrol, this second phase began with measures designed to weaken the position of German and Ladin ethnicity including assimilation and migration from the south. In 1923 already, Italian was established as the sole language of tuition in the first year of elementary school.⁵ Pupils who were being taught in their mother tongue had to attend five hours of Italian from the second to the fourth year and six hours in their fifth year at school; nor was any consideration given to the situation of the minorities in history or geography classes. It was only thanks to the use of the pupils' mother tongue for religious instruction, which was limited to the first three classes of elementary school by a decree issued on 10 January 1924, remedial classes in the pupils' respective mother tongues, and a small number of parish schools that the German language did not disappear entirely from the Italian school system. With the decree issued by the Prefect of Trento on 27 November 1925, forbidding language tuition to more than three children in the home, the South Tyroleans were finally reduced to teaching their children secretly in the many catacomb schools that sprang up.6 Finally, the work of Ettore Tolomei led to the italianisation of place names and surnames.⁷ In spite of the mandatory use of Italian as the official language, the ban on the use of German, the italianisation of names, the industrialisation of the cities, and the massive transfer of Italian population to South Tyrol from the whole of Italy, the Italian government's policy of assimilation failed. Although the share of ethnic Italians in the total population of South Tyrol increased from 3% in 1910 to 24% in 1939, the total number of German and Ladin speakers remained more or less constant at 220,000 and 20,000 respectively.

Finally, in a third phase, Hitler and Mussolini concluded the Option Agreement in 1939, which provided for the ethnic Germans to leave their South Tyrolean home, receive German citizenship and be resettled on the Crimea, in the south of Poland, or in the south of the Austrian provinces of Styria and Carinthia.⁸ The only alternative offered was to retain Italian citizenship and at the same renounce their German identity.

⁴With regard to the royal legislative decree of 28 August 1921, see Ara, Angelo: Scuola e minoranze nazionali in Italia 1861-1940. In Studi Trentini di Scienze Storiche (no. 4) 1990. 471 et sqq.

⁵With regard to the Gentile Law, see Celli, Il problema delle lingue tagliate in Italia, Rivista Giuridica della Scuola 1983, 372. et seqq.

⁶Ara, 1990, op. cit. note 4, 480.

⁷Royal decree of 29 March 1923, no. 800 and of 10 July1940.

⁸ Stocker, Martha: Unsere Geschichte – Südtirol 1914-1992 in Streiflichtern. Autonomous Region Trentino-South Tyrol, Trento 2012. 29. et sqq.

In addition, the message in the official propaganda was that the "stay-at-homes" would be resettled in the south of Italy. As a result, over 200,000 of the German- and Ladinspeakers opted to leave (about 86%)⁹, but the process of relocation was interrupted by the events of the war and only one third of the optants actually left. A quarter of the approximately 75,000 emigrants returned to South Tyrol after the war and regained their right to Italian nationality through the 1948 Optants Decree.

South Tyrol after the Second World War – the model in three phases

At the Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Paris on 30 April 1946, it was decided that South Tyrol should remain a part of Italy in compensation for the country's loss of other territories such as the Italian colonies. The Italian government at first showed itself basically willing to act unilaterally at domestic policy level to establish a comprehensive regime for the protection of minorities. The government reintroduced German as an official and school language and promised the foreign ministers of the Allies that extensive administrative autonomy would be granted.¹⁰ Internationalisation of the South Tyrol question finally came about with the signing of the Paris Agreement by the foreign ministers Gruber for the Austrians and De Gasperi for the Italians on 3 December 1946, which was incorporated in the Italian Peace Treaty of 10 February 1947 as Annex IV. With the ratification of the peace treaty, the Paris Agreement became a part of Italian law albeit, in the judgment of the Italian Constitutional Court, only at common-law level.¹¹ In view of the status of the Paris Agreement in international law, however, Austria – as a state party to the agreement – can always insist on observation of its provisions in its unilateral function as a kin-state.

The provisions of the Gruber - De Gasperi Agreement included elementary education in the child's mother tongue, equality of the German and Italian languages in dealings with the public administration and in public documents, bilingual place names, restoration of italianised surnames to their original form, and equal opportunities for all ethnic groups with regard to employment in the public sector, and the exercise of autonomous powers of legislation and enforcement. The territorial scope of the agreement was limited to the German-speaking inhabitants of the Province of Bozen/Bolzano and the neighbouring bilingual communities in the Province of Trento, which subsequently led to their incorporation in the Province of Bozen/Bolzano. Although the agreement provided for autonomy for the Province of Bozen/Bolzano with its majority of German speakers, an Autonomous Region of Trentino - South Tyrol was created with an Italian majority population.¹²

⁹Toggenburg & Rautz, 2010. 252. et sqq.

¹⁰ Cf. praeter legem regulations of the Governor: decree of 27 October 1945, no. 775; decree of 22nd December 1945, no. 825; Italian Memorandum of February 1946 (Annex 4), in Memorandum of the Austrian Federal Government Concerning the South Tyrol Question, Vienna 1960, 2.

¹¹ Cf. Corte costituzionale no. 32/1960, no. 135/1963, no. 98/1965, no. 20/1966.

¹² The special position of the Province of Trento, with its very low percentage of Ladin and German speakers,

The Special Statute for the Autonomous Region of Trentino-South Tyrol introduced with Constitutional Law no. 5 of 26 February 1948 was designed to implement the Gruber - De Gasperi Agreement and initiated the first phase in shaping autonomy for South Tyrol: legislative and administrative competences were assigned to both the region, with its Italian-speaking majority, and the two provinces, but the division of powers was clearly weighted in favour of the regional and national governments. In addition, the proposed measures first had to be specified in implementing regulations issued by the Italian government, a long process which remained incomplete. The result was that, as far as the use of the German and Ladin languages is concerned, the goal of the Paris Agreement was clearly not achieved.

In view of the shortcomings in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the first bomb attacks in South Tyrol, and with Austria's restoration as a fully sovereign state following the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955, Austria was in a stronger position to exercise its function as a kin-state for South Tyrol. The Memorandum of the Austrian Federal Government of 8 October 1956 included the main complaints relating to Arts. 1 (2) and 2 of the Paris Agreement, criticism of Italy's internal migration policy and a proposal for the creation of a joint Austro-Italian committee of experts.¹³ Following the failure of further bilateral negotiations, the Austrian side announced its intention of referring the South Tyrol question to the United Nations in 1959. Italy responded with a proposal to submit the matter to the International Court of Justice, thus giving preference to a legal solution rather than a political solution at the level of the United Nations as desired by Austria.¹⁴ The resulting resolution approved by the UN General Assembly on 31 October 1960 called for a resumption of negotiations and, in the case of their failure, any solution provided for by the Charter of the United Nations including referral to the International Court of Justice.¹⁵ With the establishment of the Commission of Nineteen in 1961, consisting of Italians and German-speaking South Tyroleans, this internationalisation of the South Tyrol question was partly returned to the domestic level, but - in spite of the occasional failure to convene meetings - the results of the commission's work served as a basis for further bilateral negotiations on the envisaged package of measures. Following the appointment of a mixed Austro-Italian committee of experts, significant concessions seemed to be within reach with regard to an international dimension to the package in the form of a court of arbitration, but the political representatives of the South Tyroleans rejected

continues to be a subject of debate, not only in South Tyrol but also at the national level, where the opinion differ varies depending on whether Rome is dominated by decentralist or, as at the present time, centralist elements. Of Italy's twenty regions, Sicily, Sardinia, the Aosta Valley and Friuli-Venezia Giulia were accorded a special statute comparable to that of Trentino-South Tyrol.

¹³ Text of the memorandum (Annex 7), 3-14 and the negative Italian memorandum of 30 January 1957 (Annex 8), 4-30 in Memorandum, op. cit. note 10.

¹⁴ Details in Toscano, Mario: Storia diplomatica della questione dell'Alto Adige. Bari: Laterza 1967. 479 et sqq.; Ritschel, Karl Heinz: Diplomatie um Südtirol - Politische Hintergründe eines europäischen Versagens. Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag 1966. 329.

¹⁵ Text of UN Resolution 1497 and reiteration in UN Resolution 1661 of 28 November 1961. In Kucera, Hansjörg & Faustini, Gianni: *Ein Weg für das Miteinander - 20 Jahre neue Autonomie in Südtirol.* Bolzano 1992. 75 et sqq.

the solution in the hope of increasing the scope of the contents of the package.¹⁶ The idea of juridical guarantees for the package at the international level was finally replaced by a calendar of operations, which provided for a Declaration of Settlement of the Dispute following complete implementation of the agreed measures. At the same time that would be seen as confirmation that the question submitted at the international level to the United Nations had been settled and that, in the case of any future conflicts, the ICJ would have jurisdiction pursuant to the provisions of the European Convention on the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes.¹⁷

The package itself comprised 137 measures, 97 of which were incorporated in the Autonomy Statute, which came into force on 20 January 1972 as Constitutional Law no. 1 of 10 November 1971. The decisive element in the second phase of implementation of the autonomy model was a major shift of powers from the region to the two provinces. The remaining measures should have been introduced by 1974 in the form of implementation provisions, but the measures elaborated by the Committee of Twelve and the Committee of Six appointed for the Province of Bozen/Bolzano, which were of critical importance for the minorities, were rejected by the Council of Ministers in Rome. It was not until the end of the 1980s that the Chamber of Deputies approved a resolution requiring the Italian government to issue the remaining implementation provisions. In January 1992, the Council of Ministers approved the last of the implementation provisions, and the Italians declared the package complete. In the middle of 1992, the Austrian government presented its Declaration of Settlement of the Dispute to Italy. The two countries then forwarded acts of notification to the United Nations in which they declared the formal conclusion of the dispute. In the case of any serious infringement of the Statute, however, Austria can continue to exercise its function as a protecting power by referring the matter to the ICJ.¹⁸

The Second Autonomy Statute did not abolish the Region of Trentino-South Tyrol but the provinces were accorded considerably more powers at the level of primary competence compared with the first statute. At the same time, it contains provisions for the protection of all three linguistic groups enjoying the additional guarantees conferred by their constitutional status. The Province of Bozen/Bolzano today has a total population of just over half a million inhabitants. The German linguistic group – in spite of a significant Italian minority population (about 26%) and a comparatively small Ladin group (about 4.5%) – is the majority group with almost 70% (according to the results of the 2011 census).

¹⁶ Ritschel, 1966, op. cit. note 14, 493 et sqq.

¹⁷ For texts of the package, the calendar of operations and the Declaration of Settlement of the Dispute, and texts relating to the question of the jurisdiction of the ICJ and the enforceability of the provisions of the package, see Zeller, Karl: *Das Problem der völkerrechtlichen Verankerung des Südtirol - Pakets und die Zuständigkeit des Internationalen Gerichtshofs*, Ethnos (Band 34), Vienna: Braumüller 1989. 109-136, 85 et sqq

¹⁸ Details in Zeller, Karl: Il Pacchetto dell'Alto Adige e la quietenza liberatoria - l'accordo De Gasperi - Gruber e la sua attuazione alla luce del diritto internazionale. In AA.VV. (ed.): A cinquant'anni dall'accordo De Gasperi – Gruber. Atti di un convegno di studio a cura della Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige, Bolzano, 11/12 June 1993. 20 et sqq

The final settlement of the dispute in 1992 marks the beginning of the third phase of autonomy for South Tyrol, which has met with much acclaim as a model solution. At the international level, South Tyrol today is seen as a positive example of successful conflict resolution and as a model of peaceful coexistence between different linguistic groups. South Tyrol's territorial autonomy protects and promotes not only the Ladinand German-speaking minorities but also the Italian linguistic group, and as such has played a positive role in local identity-building for the Italians, too. The following factors are usually named as the ingredients in the recipe for success:¹⁹ a comprehensive legal framework governing everyday life and depoliticising delicate questions of partitioning, economic and social prosperity due partly to generous national tax refunds and partly to efficient local government, a broad political consensus on active autonomy at the local level and what in retrospect can be seen as many instances of autonomyfriendly governance in Rome, the involvement of international players like the United Nations, Austria's role as a kin-state, and finally the European integration process, with its overarching status relative to regions and states, making independence movements appear increasingly anachronistic and dysfunctional.

In the relationship between South Tyrol and Italy, the central state has been left with few areas of authority like defence and foreign policy, internal security, monetary and fiscal policy, and civil and criminal law. Today, following an amendment to the constitution introduced in 2001, the central government in Rome has no political power of veto relating to provincial legislation in South Tyrol and can only refer any complaints to the Constitutional Court for a ruling.

As far as daily cooperation between the individual linguistic groups is concerned, it is perhaps worth taking a brief look at education, language use and participation. With regard to the school system, the Ladin speakers are in a different situation to that of the German and Italian linguistic groups. In accordance with the parity-based school model, Ladin-speaking children must receive equal hours of instruction in Italian and German. The separate schools provided for pupils of German or Italian mother tongue, on the other hand, only provide a few hours of teaching a week in the other language. Since both German and Italian are official languages, a fully-fledged bilingual (in the Ladin valleys, trilingual) administration has been developed, with a compulsory bilingualism assessment test, called the "patentino", created to ensure appropriate standards of language competence amongst the civil servants.

The principle of ethnic proportionality introduced in 1972 has curbed the glaring dominance of the Italian linguistic group in public sector employment and has largely established a state of proportionality amongst all three linguistic groups. What is known as the Declaration of Affiliation to a Linguistic Group ensures that public sector jobs, welfare benefits and funding for culture are distributed on the basis of the ethnic demographic quota as reflected in the census for South Tyrol.

¹⁹ Toggenburg – Rautz, 2010. op. cit. note 9, 17 et sqq.

South Tyrol as a dynamic model – three examples of the new challenges

Turning to the third phase of the South Tyrolean model, which is often referred to as dynamic autonomy, we see that – in addition to cooperation and the division of authority between central government at the national level and the South Tyrolean authorities at the local level – interest is focussed mainly on the recurrent subjects of schooling, ethnic proportionality and place names.²⁰

For the German and Italian linguistic groups in South Tyrol, the First Autonomy Statute of 1948 provided for mother tongue instruction at the kindergarten, elementary and secondary levels by teachers of the same mother tongue in separate schools. The Second Autonomy Statute of 1972 maintains this segregation, but strengthens the requirement for pupils to learn the second official language of South Tyrol that is not their mother tongue (and is again taught by first-language teachers). Regardless of the child's mother tongue or affiliation to a linguistic group, however, parents have the right to enrol their children in either a German- or an Italian-language school. This clearly makes it possible to undermine the political rationale of the segregation model, namely mother-tongue instruction for protection against assimilation. Where the enrolment of one or more pupils with inadequate language skills threatens the quality of first-language instruction, however, they may be excluded on the grounds that their language competence is not equal to attendance at the school and effective learning there.

Second-language instruction as a compulsory subject with just a few hours a week has come under increasing criticism, however, because of a decline in second-language competence in the two big linguistic groups. Another problem is the fact that the segregated school model fails to promote social contact between Italian and German schools so that pupils grow up with little experience of interethnic exchange. Many parents, especially in mixed-language families (from which some 10% of the pupils come), are responding by enrolling their children in a school targeted at the other linguistic group. Despite some attempts at reform in the last few years and growing criticism of the quality of secondlanguage teaching, there still seems to be strong resistance to greater emphasis on bilingualism in education, particularly amongst the German-speaking population.

In addition to educational policy in the context of language acquisition and its identity-building effects, the question of ethnic proportionality will doubtless be one of the major challenges in the next few years.²¹

The South Tyrol census and the related Declaration of Affiliation to a Linguistic Group have direct legal implications for the members of South Tyrol's three linguistic groups. The declaration is used to define the respective size of the groups and is thus the key to the allocation of public goods within the South Tyrolean system of ethnic proportionality, which serves to ensure equitable treatment in public life in accordance with the census for all linguistic groups. On the basis of the results of the count and their personal language declarations, individual citizens can claim the rights to which

²⁰ For information on the school models, see Toggenburg – Rautz, 2010. op. cit. note 9, 28 et sqq.

²¹ On the subject of ethnic proportionality, see Toggenburg – Rautz, 2010. op. cit. note 9, 296 et sqq.

their respective linguistic groups are entitled in the public, social and cultural fields. 1981 was the first year in which the mandatory declaration for one of the linguistic groups that accompanies the census was not used for purely statistical purposes. Every citizen over the age of fourteen had to make a personal declaration of affiliation to the Italian, German or Ladin language group. Because of the mandatory character of the declaration, with strict classification in one of the three linguistic groups, and the consequent danger of having to make an untrue statement, the regulation was challenged in a petition to the Council of State in Rome. In response to the Council's ruling, an additional category was introduced to take account of other or mixed-language speakers.

In the 1991 census, those South Tyroleans could select this fourth option who did not consider themselves to belong to any of the three named groups (Italian speakers, German speakers or Ladin speakers). However, they still have to select the linguistic group to which they wish to be aggregated. These declarations of aggregation are not included in the statistics and thus have no influence on the respective strengths of the three groups, which are calculated solely on the basis of the declarations of affiliation to a linguistic group. The declaration of aggregation is necessary, however, to ensure that the individual has a claim to public goods proportional to the strength of the chosen group. Those who select the German linguistic group, for example, can apply for one of the posts in the public sector that are reserved for that group on the basis of its numerical strength. The declarations of affiliation/aggregation to a linguistic group that underpin South Tyrol's system of ethnic proportionality have so far had to be made every ten years as part of the South Tyrolean census.

As less than one quarter of all those who make the declaration with the census will later wish to claim a public resource, e.g. in the form of public-sector employment or a subsidised apartment, the question arises whether it is reasonable to oblige the whole population to make a non-anonymous declaration. In response to concerns expressed by the EU Commission and the Italian data protection office with regard to data protection norms, the system was reformed in 2005, and the results of the anonymous declarations of affiliation to a linguistic group are now kept separate from the – binding – ad hoc individual declarations of aggregation to a group needed to take advantage of a public good.

As a growing number of people find it increasingly difficult to identify unequivocally with any one ethnic or linguistic group, it is becoming all the more important to guarantee the highest standards with regard to the management of sensitive data. Questions of efficiency and qualifications for employment in the public sector and the compliance of such group rights with the relevant EU norms are additional challenges in the further development of South Tyrol's autonomy.

All place names in South Tyrol are now bilingual or trilingual, regardless of the size of the German-, Italian- or Ladin-speaking populations there. This de facto equality of treatment accorded to the German and Italian names (and the trilingual forms in the Ladin valleys) derives from the Autonomy Statute directly, since no corresponding South Tyrolean law has been enacted to date. The primary reason for this failure to act on the part of the legislative is the obligation imposed by the Autonomy Statute and the Paris Agreement to employ bilingual (or trilingual) place names in all cases. The decisive question here is whether a South Tyrolean law can depart from the rule of bilingualism (or trilingualism) in order to correct a historical wrong. A compromise that has been in discussion for years already ultimately bases on the criterion of usage. The proposal is for a future binding register of place names, which would only include those German, Italian and Ladin names that are actually in use, although – at the macro level – the names of the municipalities and larger communities and the main rivers and mountain peaks would still continue to have bilingual or trilingual forms. At the micro level, on the other hand, in the case of hamlets and small localities, and field names and streams, only those names would be used with which the local people are familiar. The rationale behind this compromise is to guarantee the linguistic groups traditionally resident in South Tyrol the same right of belonging, taking into consideration the fact that people's places of residence and topographic names are doubtless sensitive items in terms of identity as long as the names are actually in use.²²

Finally, it might be useful to consider some basic data on migration in South Tyrol, whose population at the end of 2011 included a total of 44,362 persons of foreign nationality.²³ That is 8.7% of the resident population and twice the total size of the Ladin linguistic group. Of a total of over a hundred nationalities, the Albanians, with over 5,000 persons, the Germans (4,700) and the Moroccans (3,500) constitute the three biggest groups. In the years ahead, it will be interesting to observe the dynamics of this global phenomenon with regard to coexistence between old and new minorities. Will an autonomy regime of the type established in South Tyrol, for example, facilitate the introduction of special measures for integration? Or does a region that is home to several linguistic groups differ from a straight majority society in terms of its positive approach to integration and interethnic coexistence?

Another question, with a European rather than a national dimension, relates to European integration and the role of the regions. Minority areas in border regions have a special role to play in the context of multilingualism, cultural diversity and cross-border cooperation. In South Tyrol, for example, people have always been aware of the region's function as a bridge between the Germanic and Romance language areas, and South Tyrol – together with the Trentino and North Tyrol – was one of the first regions in Europe to form a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). With the introduction of the EGTC program in 2006, the European Union has created the legal form for a first Community-level cooperation instrument which has a supranational legal personality and as such extensive legal capacity and contractual capabilities. Ninety-five years after the end of the First World War, the Europio of Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino, which is based in Bolzano, not only strengthens cohesion between territories of the historical Tyrol but also, in addition to the EU principle of subsidiarity, constitutes a future-oriented instrument of governance, not for a Europe of the regions but for a Europe with the regions.²⁴

²² Hilpold, Peter: *Modernes Minderheitenrecht*, Baden-Baden: Nomos - Manz, 2001. 368 et sqq.

²³ ASTAT, Immigration in Südtirol 2011, ASTAT info, Ausländische Wohnbevölkerung 2011, 41/2012.

²⁴ For further examples, see Rautz, Günther: Die Euregio Alpen-Adria im Jahr 2020 – Chancen und Zukunftsszenarien. In Anderwald, Karl – Filzmair, Peter – Hren, Karl (eds.): Kärnten Jahrbuch für Politik 2010. Klagenfurt: Hermagoras 2010. 209 et sqq.