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**Multidimensional Connections and Divides in
the Border Regions of South-Tyrol and Istria**

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Borders. Materiality, Significations

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1. In the nation-building effort during the XIX century Italy had established through three wars the borders of its State, a new born in the peninsula after fifteen centuries, extolling them as the borders of the Italian nation in a national-minded upsurge, which was the result of the general nationalistic spirit in Europe at the time. The aim which the borders pursued was connected in Italy with the strong belief that the political borders should identify themselves with ethnical and cultural and almost anthropological borders. To support such an aim references sometimes controversial were looked for in history, art, language and at the end those borders could not be but obviously natural borders and thus irrefutable and untouchable. In such a frame of mind at the end of the XIX century the concept of “terra irredenta”¹ was introduced: a terminology which was meant to convey the idea that the new Italy should consider its main objective in foreign policy to reach at any price the allegedly natural borders and such an objective was supposed to play the role of a precondition for the development of the country in all fields and for its future modernization. Consequently any action intended to postpone or to limit or to jeopardize the efforts to reach the ultimate aim of the chosen natural borders has to be opposed as a betrayal of national interests. Let us recall that at the time such assumptions were not an Italian prerogative, because to conceive in ideological terms the extension of the state until its natural borders was common to others as well: Germany “as far as the German language sounds” or Alsace-Lorraine as an integral part of France on the basis of history more than of ethnical or cultural factors.

Summing up the borders should be the outcome, surely in Italy, of a sort of dogma, which could not be questioned: an ideological approach cannot be submitted to doubts or to interpretations. The problem was reinforced by the fact that the Italian identity was rooted in the largely shared cultural strength through the centuries (the oldest modern language in Europe, the oldest literature, the more relevant art expressions, the Roman Empire eleven centuries long and so on), but was not supported by a shared belief in a power oriented state. A nation without a state as the consequence of the long lasting fragmentation of the peninsula, viewed as a shame to be removed. Secure borders were

¹S.Romano *L'irredentismo nella politica estera italiana*, in A.Ara-E.Kolb(a cura), *Regioni di frontiera nell'epoca dei nazionalismi*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1995, p-13.25; M.Garbari, *L'irredentismo nella storiografia italiana*, *ibid*, p.27-60

essential to build a state from a nation. Sacrosanct borders were called to play the role of a inalienable unifying factor of a not yet fully consolidated state identity.

These factors exerted a specific influence on how the borders were called to act within the political evolution of the new state, Italy, and gave them a peculiar value, impinging upon popular attitudes and sentiments as emerged vividly after the two World Wars. Its consequences are of utmost interest even now in giving the Italian borders their specific colour.

2. At the end of World War One, the self-determination proposal in the framework of the vision of the US President Wilson (the well known Twelve Points Declaration) could not affect in Italy, a victor in that war, the assuredness, considered as obvious, to be awarded the since long vindicated borders in the North (towards Austria) and in the North-East (towards the new Serbo-Croatian-Slovene kingdom, the future Yugoslavia). The fundamental ideology on the natural borders could not be jeopardized by the introduction of new principles, which should not override the vital goals of the Italian nation: the belief in the ethnical, cultural historical righteousness of the new borders rejected any verification and this even less after a bloody war. The borders could not be submitted to any discussion. But in concrete which borders?

The implementation of the “natural” borders revealed itself to be not an easy task, very much to the disappointment of all those who had burdened the sheer fact of a physical border with an ethical oriented content: could that ideology be weakened by facts or resist to ethnical, cultural or historical discrepancies? The result was twofold and interesting from a point of view of any theory on borders.

In the North the problem with Tyrol. The territory on the Mediterranean slope and astride of the Alps had been since long time a unity: in the southerner part of it an Italian and in the other part an Austro-German cultural and linguistic area as well the rest of the same region northern of the Alps; all these three parts have been joined by history into in a single political and institutional unity. Previous to adhere to the French-British Alliance of World War One a compensation has been negotiated (with the Treaty of London), namely the award of the whole territory until the ridge line of the Alps – until the Brenner Pass – not as a claim based on ethnical or cultural elements, but only with the intent to fix arbitrarily the “natural border” as the militarily strategic most convenient posture between the valley of the river Adige/Etsch and the river Inn. Having won the war any idea of a plebiscite, which was requested of course by the German-speaking part,

was thwarted with no hesitation. A fully new border, which has never existed in history was established with no opposition by the Allies: the losers had to submit to the victors, who got spoils as an outcome of force.

Was the German speaking territory “terra irredenta”? Certainly not, because that foreign region could hardly be enclosed into the concept itself of “terra irredenta”.,. Nevertheless the unity of the peninsula should go as far as the Brenner Pass even paying the price to enclose into the Italian nation-state a foreign minority not consistent with any genuine national ideology. The border was thus supposed to be in the first place a political border.

On the North East the discussion was long and for Italy very disturbing. According to the already mentioned Treaty signed before entering into the war the Italian pretensions were in this case not strategic, but on the opposite cultural and ethnical. The new frontier should and could follow an ethnical, anthropological, cultural and linguistic dividing line: the domination of the Republic of Venice during many centuries of history had left behind a clear Italian imprint along the coasts of Istria, at the door of Trieste, whilst the internal part of that region was largely made up by Slovenians or Croatians as a minority². Notwithstanding these factual elements the President Wilson opposed it without allowing a plebiscite because he deemed more urgent to support the new born Yugoslavia bringing forward as a pretext that a dividing line was not easy to trace: Italian diplomatic blurred moves worsened the situation. Social components played a role in view of fixing a border: the Italian-minded coasts were rich, bourgeois, open, progressive whilst the Slavic internal flat land was poorer and less cultivated, inhabited mostly by peasants. To make the problem even more intricate at the margin of Istria the city of Fiume/Rijeka inhabited mostly by Italians, and until 1918 included into Hungary, was to be allotted to somebody, being politically unworkable the proposal for a Free City (like Danzig). Notwithstanding the tenacious opposition of Wilson and the resistance of the Yugoslavs, Italy obtained at the end a border in conformity with its perspectives, including Fiume-Rijeka.

Summing up at the border in the North a competition between two civilizations on the same foot and in the North East a competition between civilizations on different levels (underrating the rich local multicultural traditions).

².C.Belci, *Quel confine mancato*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 1996; J.Lederer, *Yugoslavia and the Paris Peace Conference*, Yale University press 1963; E.Ratzenberger. *I confini orientali dell'Italia*, text not yet in print

3. If thus the ambitions expressed before 1914 had been achieved, two questions impinged upon the general acceptance of the new borders and on their connotation in correlation with the above mentioned ideology.

First consideration. The “natural borders”, given by history, culture and language, have been fixed not along ideal factors and not in function of them, but mostly thanks to the fact that Italy as a victor succeeded, although not without difficulties, in imposing its will and this in contradiction with the general aim of the war as embedded in the wilsonian idealistic purposes. In itself it is not a novelty that borders are traced as a result of wars., but the inconsistency with the previous moral interpretations of the idea of nation was evident: if the nationality principle had inspired the process toward the Italian national unity, how to reconcile it with the fact that national foreign minorities were compelled to become a part of a national state, foreign to them?

Second and more specific consideration. A new challenge for Italy and not a positive one for its identity. How to handle, in contradiction with the so called natural borders and within those borders, minorities speaking a different language and belonging to different cultures? After a short period of resilience and hopeful flexibility, the superseding authoritarian Italian state under the Fascist regime could not but interpret - or misinterpret? - the acquired borders as the evidence of natural borders: within the new frontiers all the inhabitants and citizens of the State should accept to be Italians as an obligation without having any possibility to keep their ethnical and cultural profile. Italy had had no tradition and no experience with national minorities: small groups of population speaking a different language and nothing more yes, but national minorities connected with a foreign state certainly not. The idea of the Italian nation brought about the postulate that all those living in Italy as a state are Italians and nothing else³. In one word no multicultural habit; only at the best tolerance.

Thirdly. As a consequence the new acquired borders were no longer the so long praised natural borders, but rather politically convenient borders to separate Italy from its neighbours and any suspicion of a permeability of the border could not be accepted. As a function of the border conceived in such a clear cut way a process of forced Italianization was unavoidable. The political border should become consistent with a new cultural and ethnical dividing line.

³U.Corsini, *La Restituzione dell'Alto Adige all'Italia*, in G.Delle Donne, p.386; E.Capuzzo, *Dall'Austria all'Italia*, La Fenice, Roma, 1996, p.184 and 188 (with a rich bibliography); P.Pastorelli, *Il principio di nazionalità nella politica estera italiana*, in G.Spadolini (a cura), *Nazione e nazionalità in Italia*, Laterza, Bari-Roma, 1994, S.186.

But important distinctions have to be traced between the handling of the two borders: towards Austria and towards Yugoslavia. The logic was different between them but the negative results were analogous. Later after World War Two in a different framework frontiers will change again in content and in effects.

4. In the North.

Italy had obtained as a winner a territory of approximately 7000 sq.Km composed by two of the three parts of Tyrol: an Italian speaking part (Trentino⁴, surely Italian) and a German speaking one. Being such an event not very consistent with the general aims of Italian unification, it was difficult to deny that the annexation of the German-speaking part was an occupation. Therefore the resentment and the repulsion of the inhabitants were spontaneous and predictable. The annexation caused a situation which had long lasting effects until to-day being the Italian-Austrian frontier a border of a special nature.

Tyrol had acquired a personality during a long history, going back at least to the XIV Century first as a County and later a Principality dynastically included into the Austrian Empire with atypical privileges to enhance its uniqueness: exemption from military service or involvement into wars only upon previous approval of the local Assembly or right to possess weapons for self-defence. Thanks to its geographical seclusion Tyrol has consolidated a special profile with which the local population identified itself: a deeply rooted local identity belonging in soul and mind to the former Austrian Empire and to the German culture as a whole.⁵

Consequently after 1919 the frontier between Italy and Austria split without any shadow of justification an entity with a strong identity in culture, in traditions and as well as in language and in history with local heroes of great impact. No distinction of any sort between the populations living on both sides of the new frontier: exactly the same people with exactly the same background and ethnically, culturally, linguistically compact. Having prevented any implementation of the right to self determination the local population felt deeply to be the victim of an act of a manifest injustice.

Italy made recourse to three instruments to give a *raison d'être* to the new border and to try to make it solid.

⁴Old were the Italian feeling in Trentino: O.Peterlini (a cur), *Autonomia e tutela delle minoranze nel Trentino Alto-Adige*, Presidenza Cons.Reg., Bolzano, 1996, p.39

⁵ J.Fontana and others (ed), *Geschichte des Landes Tirol*, Athesia-Verlag, Bozen, 1985-1989

The first, to transform the territory and its structure to make it similar to the national context. The Italianization process demanded to change everything, starting from the symbols: inventing new Italian names for every small village or river, removing the foreign (German) language at school and from the common use, neglecting all reminiscences from the past, imposing a new history of the region. A psychologically brutal undertaking: it was not an easy task to deny the cultural dignity of the German language and to convert a territory and a quiet population, who had no intention to recur to a violent resistance.

The second instrument: to alter the demographic texture increasing industrial activities to attract Italian workers, who were more than willing - above all from the South - to take advantage of very favourable life and labour conditions. The structure of the local economy, essentially based on agriculture and on the traditional activities of a mountain population, was doomed to change, contributing to water down the German speaking group, who at the end feared to be assimilated. In the course of few years a different balance between the two groups was established (in 1921 Italians 10.6% of the total population and in 1961 34.3%, but by now circa 25%).

In the same vein - the third instrument - the region was submitted to a different legislation and a different way of thinking how to run a state. The dissimilarity in political culture was soon worsened by the fact that a new regime ruled Italy, namely the Fascist regime, which endorsed a strongly national minded policy with the objective to accustom the inhabitants to a complete different way of thinking to the point of humiliating them. At the time this was supposed easy to accomplish underlining the comparison between a supposedly powerful Italy and a diminished weak Austria, for a time even under a sort of protection of Italy itself.

The political project was an interesting, although a sad one. The aim was not so much to make from the German speaking individuals good Italians, but rather to modify the social structure of the area, rebuffing as an undue interference the many attempts by Germany and Austria to intervene into the situation. The political border should turn into an ethnical and cultural one innovating from the bottom up the character of the region and of its inhabitants through an advantageous modernization in the economy able to sap the local traditional peasant oriented culture. Consequently on the long run to obliterate the border as a dividing line and to make forget an open wound.

After twenty years long efforts South Tyrol was different, but how much the border appeared to be closer to a normal border separating two different social realities?

Leaving aside any ethical or political assessment of the legitimacy of such a transformation, the border was still felt in a different way by the two groups living in South-Tyrol: for the Italians the border was just an international frontier separating two states, for the others – by the way the majority of the inhabitants - the border remained the symbol of a vicious act of force; for the Italians an unchangeable border and for the German speaking group the symbol of a shameful act to their damage and thus as something which could only be temporary. As a result the failure of the Italianization process.

The failure, namely the refusal to accept the border, was made evident by the Mussolini-Hitler Agreement in 1939: the German speaking persons were allowed to emigrate from South-Tyrol to be welcomed into the Third Reich. More than 86% declared their firm intention to leave their traditional and beloved landscape to move to the Third Reich preferring a more homogenous surrounding, even if under the swastika, than to live in a country which in their views has been expropriated from them because the unjust partition could not be accepted: a human tragedy between those who emigrated and those who remained behind (the *dableibende*)⁶ and a unique example of a population who preferred voluntarily – although under psychological pressure – to emigrate just in order to live with likeminded populations, even if settled in conditions quite different from their homes (they moved to Bohemia or to Dobruja!). Without the emergencies due to the war, which luckily made the full achievement of an exceptional distressing operation impossible, the political border at the end of such a violent process of uprooting would have become only a dividing line between two different populations: no more Austro-Germans at the south of the border in the Alps!

5. North-East

The Italianization in Istria was on the contrary considered as an unproblematic process inasmuch it should be accepted by the “Slavic” elements as a bettering of their situation: the change of names was resented but acquiesced and the schools were all in Italian without relevant opposition, although –a difference from South Tyrol –a political submerged opposition of a nationalistic nature, but as well political, was repressed with extreme duress (several capital punishments).

⁶ Very interesting above all to express the human climate of the event the documentary film “*Verkaufte Heimat*” (Script: F.Mitterer-K.Brandauer), Rai SenderBozen Novembre 1989

As a further difference from South-Tyrol strong was the belief in the North-East that after all the Italian-Venetian cultural heritage and its high values could not but prevail on the Slavic weaker tradition, inasmuch the more influential Italian townships (which made up the majority of the whole population of the area) were imbued with a multinational and multilingual tradition: a peculiarity which goes back to the tolerant dominance of the Venice (e.g. in the buildings and in the local dialects) as the main evidence of the predominant Italian character. Thus the border was not so much based on ethnical factors, but was rather regarded as a dividing line between two civilizations: the first one exalted as superior and the second one – the “Slavic” one – as inferior. Again the border took an ideological profile: a sacrosanct border of the Italian civilization pushing back a civilization labelled as different and qualitatively inferior

Such an approach outlined the nature of the border. It was a border between two states but in the same stroke between two different civilisations rather than between two ethnical and anthropological groups and the minorities could be tolerated with a sort of ill placed disdain.

6. The outcome of World War Two was certainly not in favour of Italy, regarded as an enemy state, notwithstanding the Antinazi Resistance Movement after 1943. At the end of the war the question of the borders presented itself as a difficult task to be negotiated. The nationalistic approach to the sacrosanct borders could not be any longer supported in a different constellation of forces, which could easily cast doubts on the legitimacy of the previous borders conquered by Italy as a former victorious power. Their roots were rather young and the past national aim to proclaim natural borders was no longer coherent with the weakness of a loser.. If the French pretensions on the Aosta valley were at once thwarted by the Americans with great dismay of the French ambitions, the major problems were raised around the borders with Austria and with Yugoslavia and with opposite outcomes.

Towards Austria Italy could psychologically avail itself of the fact that Austria was not only weak, but as well under suspicion because of its contradictory complicity with the Third Reich. Thus the request of the German speaking population in South Tyrol to be reintegrated into Austria could be ignored. The Italian Government was clever enough to win the support of all the Allies and to reach a bilateral agreement with Austria: the political border dividing in two parts Tyrol should be maintained intact in exchange of an Italian engagement to ensure to the German speaking area within Italian borders a large

autonomy, to be negotiated later⁷. The border will no longer be questioned because it was by now fully legitimate and to be claimed as German territory⁸ was no longer possible: after 1945 the course of history could not permit to give back the southern part of Tyrol. The border has changed once more its nature: it was now a border dividing by mutual agreement two states with two peoples with two different citizenships.

Different results on the Eastern border to Yugoslavia, a country which was among the victors and very much eager to encompass as much territory as possible even going beyond any conceivable ethnic extent, calling upon inexistent historical pretexts.⁹ Italy did not find support for his expectations and was deeply disappointed: later Italy succeeded in recovering at least Trieste, but the whole Istria was awarded to Yugoslavia without taking into any consideration its ethnic complexity. The final backlash was not foreseen and it is a rare event in history: in two-three years time almost the totality of the ethnically and linguistically Italian population abandoned the towns, where they have lived for centuries in a cultural atmosphere of high level and voluntary or under indirect pressure from the Yugoslavs emigrated to Italy: the so called “esodo” (exodus) changed totally the composition of the population of Istria. The border around Trieste divided then no longer populations nor civilizations, but states leaving behind on the Eastern side a tiny Italian minority, who intended to stay mostly for political (communist) allegiance and could only pretend the protection to whom they are entitled. The new border were by now dividing different states and no longer populations or civilizations.

As a result of such events sealed by the Peace Treaty in 1947, regarded as a Diktat by Italy, the Italian borders were no longer the implementation of a national idea but only those that two wars with different outcome had left behind.

7. The two new frontiers offer clear differences, which are still very much under debate and which raise interesting aspects concerning the characteristics of borders with their cultural, economic and psychological problems, which in many sense can be considered unique or in any case of great interest and which caused sometimes conflicts. Again the two situations have to be examined separately, because they offer different profiles above all in connections with the peoples, who are affected in different ways by the establishment of borders of a different quality.

⁷ On the negotiations R.Gaja, *Per l'Alto Adige*, Lettera Diplomatica, 1992/665

⁸ Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano, *Problemi dell'autonomia nella Provincia di Bolzano*, 1989, p.101

⁹ A.G.De Robertis, *Le grandi potenze e il confine giuliano*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1983; R. Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2009

i) Tyrol.

Without entering into the long lasting and complicated negotiations to reach the agreed upon Autonomy we have to reckon with the fact that by now the Autonomy is well established and grants to the German speaking population a very generous protection. Meanwhile on their turn the Italians, the minority in the region, enjoy solid rights but they feel uneasy suffering many inconveniences¹⁰: they belong to the majority of the State to which the region legally and politically pertains; but they are a minority in the affected region and they are still psychologically foreign to the core of the region, the history and culture of which remain linked with the German speaking world. The nature of the unchanged border is now quite different from the one in 1919 and thereafter, although it is still a border which is not accepted by all: the German speaking group acquiesce to it, but in its soul and its heart does not yet accept it, even if prevails a general climate of tolerance. In any case the partition of Tyrol is permanent: it is overriding in Europe the principle that the frontiers have to stay unchangeable (notwithstanding the exceptional dislocation of Yugoslavia).

The frontier at the Brenner Pass thanks to the membership of both Austria and Italy to the European Union and to the Schengen agreement is wide open one and only a symbolic token between two friendly States without any impact on the life and the movements of any citizen. The frontier is final and it is no longer relevant because it is largely forgotten, but the like minded populations in North and South Tyrol do not sever their connections. The border is imported inside the region on all levels¹¹ getting a singular psychological meaning. A separation remains: not at the state frontier but inside the local society. The two ethnical and cultural groups live together side by side in a sort of affluent peaceful coexistence but not mixing themselves (*nebeneinander* and not *miteinander*). No longer the German speaking group opposes Italian presence, because the Italianization is only a bad memory from the past, but reservations towards Italy still stay; they prefer to study in Innsbruck and not in an Italian University; they are reluctant in taking notice of the Italian culture and of the Italian politics; schools are not integrated nor cultural life and each group read his books in his own language; they deem Italian a

¹⁰ *In der Apartheid-Festung Südtirol fühlen sich die Italiener als Opfer*, in <Der Spiegel>1988/44, p.202-210; U.Gandini, *Fremde im eigenen Land?*, Merian Südtirol, p.99-100

¹¹ H.Kucera, *Auf und ab um Südtirol*, Haymon Verlag, Innsbruck, 1991, p. 15; F.Foraci, *Italien in Kopf und Österreich im Herzen*, in <Das Parlament>, 24 January 1992

language foreign to them, even when they speak it; almost the totality of the German speaking population still support a rallying German-speaking party¹².

Thus the civil and human society in Südtirol is not on its way to merge into a multicultural society, which could be more or less bilingual (or pretend to be bilingual), but certainly is not going to be bicultural. In all walks of life the border stays inside the feelings of the normal individuals and the prospect of mixing is as much as possible removed. No hostility but also no deeply felt closeness, nor friendship.

If the border in the North of Italy towards Austria is no longer at the Brenner Pass but inside the society on the Italian side of the Alps a question mark is legitimate. Should we jump to the conclusion that the generous autonomy structure of the region has not been a success? It is a success because peace is ensured and with peace well-being and a thriving economy. It is not a success if we consider the failure in the intermingling of two populations, who are still unable to give birth to a common and shared identity. That means that a border can change its content and in a certain sense its collocation and even disappear as a barrier, but it can stay well entrenched in its cultural and psychological meaning and then it is more durable and deep-rooted than a political border.

ii) In Istria. Problems have a certain affinity, but the content is different¹³.

The loss of Istria, Venetian for centuries and Italian for twenty years, is by now no longer a problem. Not the same can be said in the areas immediately neighbouring the border, namely in Trieste or Gorizia, a city which has been divided until 2004 in two parts by a wall separating Italy from Yugoslavia. Thanks to the Slovenian membership in the EU and hopefully in short also of Croatia the borders are disappearing for all practical purposes and free movement is or will be ensured. Should then the border separate something more besides two administrative structures or two-three languages? In a factual sense not, because at one side are living only Italians with a tiny Slovenian minority and a smaller Croatian minority, both enjoying many privileges, and reciprocally on the other side only Slovenians and Croats with an Italian minority, by now sufficiently respected and protected. Thus what is the border suppose to divide by now?

Remains a border inside the populations, in the first place in Trieste, recalling in some sort the previous mentioned borders between civilisations, the Italian and the so called Slavic: still a superior and an inferior civilisation? Officially not for sure, but psychologically the imbalance is felt even if nobody dares to confess it openly. The past

¹² N.Di Sotto, *Dalla periferia all'Europa*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2009, p.155-182

¹³ E.Cocco, *Mimetismo di frontiera. Nazionalità e cittadinanza in Istria*, ISIG, Gorizia, 2007

multicultural and multilingual way of living and thinking which was a distinctive element of Trieste or Fiume-Rijeka under the Austrian-Hungarian dominance and which was rooted in a multicultural perspective, is gone for ever. And it cannot be substituted by a merging of different cultural backgrounds. However an important distinction from South Tyrol: demography plays a role and the Slavic minority or the Italian minority are just minorities, who have little impact on the whole of the local society. An then in this case the border is certainly no longer political intrusive but remains concealed in the feelings of individuals with marginal consequences.

8. Some final remarks.

i) The political frontiers when they are established by force not in full accordance with history, culture, demography, anthropological elements are doomed to reveal themselves on the long run not durable and they risk to be removed by force (North-Eastern Italian borders) or in more favourable conditions by a balance of forces (Northern Austrian-Italian border).

ii) It could be positive and productive to strive for a multicultural approach in regions crossed by different cultures and languages and peoples, but this is feasible only in presence of very favourable conditions, which are the result of peculiar historical convergences in peculiar historical seasons and need a very long time in developing: the examples offered in the past by the area extending itself from Trento and Trieste to Vienna in the frame of a multicultural Empire are nostalgic remembrances from the past, and it is to no avail longing for it now because the past will not come back. Nationalist ideologies, the violent oppression of minorities, the self-imposing inclination for ethnical states (the Yugoslav dissolution) are more and more convincing evidence of the present negative trend against multicultural mixed structures; nowadays alas the pendulum moves in favour of ethnical homogenous states. The national ideology on sacrosanct borders is still significantly rampant, but it mainly insists on ethnical or religious factors supported by interpretations of history, more than by political elements.

iii) The vanishing away of the frontier as a custom, police, passport barrier – also in function of a common membership in international organization as the EU - is a factor for the overcoming of the border as a dividing line between different realities or former foes and thus the borders loose their political function of barrier. Even the fully ensured free movement of persons and trade does not necessarily prevent the coming up of internal separations in midst of the concerned populations living within such devaluated borders: it

happens in South Tyrol and with less intensity in Trieste in order to vindicate a smaller or closer identity within a larger political framework, which can be accepted but not by that shared. Immaterial borders are difficult to overcome or to demolish, because they are imported into the psychology and in the behaviour of individuals and peoples in opposition – even without acts of violence - to other individuals or peoples. Therefore feelings resenting the existence of a border can remain intact, because the historical and traditional elements are very slow in disappearing in the perception of the individuals and even less if it concerns a compact group of individuals.

iv) Such borders or the separations within and between peoples and among individuals can be impervious to political decisions, because they are deeply rooted in the minds and in the hearts. The integration can be enhanced through legislation and by economic development or by common responsibilities, but this does not help in overcoming the differences, the mixed feelings, the mistrust, the perception – right or wrong - of mistreatment. This is the case in South Tyrol by now more by the Italian-speaking than by the German-speaking groups;

v) The minorities expect to be well protected and when this is implemented they should not complain, but this is very often not the case. In principle a minority is never fully satisfied and it feels it necessary to overprotect himself even when there is no reason to justify fears. Thus it tends to isolate himself deepening the feeling of being a minority. In the very special South-Tyrol case the protection goes to the advantage of a regional majority, possessing all the control levers, but notwithstanding the high level of life and the many privileges, the malaise of the minority or the feeling of being a minority within a larger State does not subside.

vi) The minorities could easily accept, if they do not have enough strength for consolidating themselves as minorities, a form of hybridising (above all through marriages) with an uncertain future on their final identity: it happens among the Italian speaking in South Tyrol and even more within the Italian minority in Istria. The anthropological result is difficult to forecast: it could bring about a gradual merging of the minority into the majority (as it happens elsewhere in Europe). Nevertheless this does mean that the persisting psychological-cultural border within individuals or groups could be spurred by unexpected events (as it happened in large part of former Yugoslavia) arousing old sleeping sentiments of hate and repulsion.

vii) It could prevail a trend or an intention to merge identities into a much larger horizon. This is the intent to develop in various forms an Adriatic intermingled

community, which tries a revival of the past Adriatic homogeneity mixing cultures, peoples and languages overcoming the impact of liquid borders. Nowadays of course this is pursued through international organizations, which can coalesce interests and economic realities, universities and cultural exchanges, but it is questionable whether this succeeds in overcoming borders, even if they are less visible, among and within peoples¹⁴

9. Summing up and looking at the Italian experience in the last hundred years the borders remain a fact, which is human, inasmuch they root in differences of various nature, which can be overcome through bridges of various content, but not easily forgotten or ignored. Borders are no longer important among States – however with many exceptions – but the objective of overcoming national states, national cultures, national feelings and even nationalistic feelings is still very faraway in the world and as well in Europe. Even integration – and here it is the EU meant – is not able to destroy or minimize borders. Political borders are no longer – almost everywhere in Europe – a source of conflicts and are devaluated according to R.Schumann, but psychological and cultural borders are very present indeed and they are supported by stereotypes, by lack of understanding, by old common places, by concealed animosities, by competition in all fields¹⁵.

The consequence is that we should look, in the first place in Europe – but not only – not so much at the political borders, but at the human and anthropological borders, which are still strong and felt as strong and which are above all “mental categories”¹⁶. Mental categories prevent the arising of a European demos and of a common European soul and do not facilitate a cultural mixing around and across the borders. Here lies a problem, which is by far more relevant and much more lasting than political borders: lack of conflicts on borders does not mean always a constructive human coexistence across the borders.

¹⁴ Very important E.Cocco, *I territori liquidi*, in E.Cocco-E.Minardi (a cura), *Immaginare l'Adriatico*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2007. p.11-26 and 247-252

¹⁵ C.Magris, *Nazionalismi e micronazionalismi*, in Spadolini (footnote 3), p. 237-250

¹⁶ F.Armao, *L'Europa alla prova dello state-building*, in V.E. Parsi (a cura), *Cittadinanza e identità costituzionale europea*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2001, S. 202