

LEGAL STATUS OF THE ITALIAN MINORITY IN SLOVENIA

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1. Ethnic Structure and the Legal Regulation of Minority Rights

Historically, since the time Slovenia was settled by the South Slavs in the sixth century until the foundation of the independent state in 1991, the area has never been ethnically homogeneous. Ethnic frontiers have often overlapped and ethnic Slovenes are not the only people who live within the borders of the Republic of Slovenia, today. This can be explained by frequently changing political boundaries, particularly those of the last one hundred fifty years.¹

After the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991 a minority population of more than 200,000 people from other areas of the former Yugoslavia were in Slovenia, in addition to autochthonous minorities, such as Italians and Hungarians.² The former Yugoslav minorities remained in Slovenia primarily as a consequence of economic circumstances.

The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolically illustrated the intensive transformations that were taking hold of the former socialist states. However, it did not suffice as an illustration of the beginning of decentralization or democratization in the former Yugoslavia. Instead, this period saw the massive erosion of Yugoslav ideals—such as those of national equality—as well as an encroachment upon the rights of nations and minorities to autonomous development.³ An attempt to introduce already abandoned values of orthodox communism merely resulted in furthering the collapse of the state.

Slovenia's independence produced numerous political and legal documents which particularly stressed the protection of human rights and specifically the rights of minorities.

¹ *Veliki splošni leksikon* (1988) Državna založba Slovenije, Ljubljana, seventh book, p. 3950.

² According to the last census (1991), the total number of inhabitants was 1,965,986. Of them 3,064 (0.16%) belonged to the Italian minority and 8,503 (0.43%) to the Hungarian minority. Komac, M. (1999) *Varstvo narodnih skupnosti v Republiki Sloveniji*, Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana. pp. 5-6.

³ The 1974 Constitution of the former Yugoslavia, as well as the constitutions of its former republics and the constitutional laws of the former autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo, were at least, from the normative point of view, the reflection of its legislators' desire to introduce federal order within a multiethnic and economically and culturally disproportionately developed society. The first sign that the federation would collapse could be seen in the revocation of the autonomy (which effected elements of legislative, juridical and administrative power) of Vojvodina and Kosovo.

In 1991 the Constitution of Slovenia was created in that spirit. Article 5 guarantees and protects the rights of the autochthonous Italian and Hungarian minorities. Hungarian and Italian are also official languages in regions inhabited by these minorities; however, Article 11 declares the state's official language to be Slovene. Article 65 provides a special legal regulation on the status of Slovenia's Roma community. Article 61, aimed at the relatively large numbers of other minorities, particularly those from the former Yugoslavia, guarantees the right of all citizens to the free expression of ethnic affiliation in terms of language, writing and culture.⁴ At this moment, no other document regulates the status of new national minorities, despite the numerous problems concerning their culture which are also matters of interest to the state.

It is important to stress that none of the abovementioned documents regarding the protection of minority rights in the Republic of Slovenia contain a definition of the term "national minority."⁵ The constitution acknowledges two minorities whose language and cultural particularities are to be protected by the government. However, some difficulties have arisen concerning the status of minorities, minority affiliation and how it should be defined. The constitution clearly takes the subjective approach, basing minority affiliation on the individual's identity.

The status of the Italian minority is regulated by several legal acts. In addition to constitutional regulation, numerous laws and other legislation address Italian issues. Also, Slovenia has signed multilateral and bilateral treaties regulating minority status, such as bilateral agreements made with Italy and Hungary on the protection of minorities. Italy and the former Yugoslavia were the contracting parties of the Treaty of Osimo (1975), which regulates the mutual protection of minorities. The treaty also compelled the two states to enforce internal measures proceeding from the Special Memorandum on Accordance (1954), which had ceased to be valid.⁶

⁴ These minorities are composed of the members of nations and minorities of the previous common state, who immigrated to Slovenia, mostly for work reasons, from the mid-1960s until the early 1980s. Article 40 of the Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Slovenia provided all resident minorities with opportunities to obtain citizenship in Slovenia. They had the opportunity to make their request by December 25, 1991. 174,228 applications (8.7% of the total population) were made. From that number 170,990 persons got a positive response and, by this, a new category of citizens, most of them dual citizens, was created. Until now Slovenia has not succeeded in making agreements regarding citizenship difficulties with any of the newly created states within the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

⁵ No international legal document, nor those adopted by the Council of Europe, contains an acceptable definition of "national minority." It is important to mention the Rapport of Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (No. 1201 of February 1, 1993) in the context of this issue. In that document, "national minority" refers to those persons in a state who: a) live in the territory of that state and are its citizens; b) hold firm and lasting connections with that state; c) display diversity in ethnicity, culture and language; d) constitute a group, however proportionately low their number; and e) attempt to preserve characteristics important for their collective identity, including culture, tradition and language. See Komac, M. op. cit., p. 13, cf. 26.

⁶ With the Act of Notification of Succession of Treaties of Former Yugoslavia with the Republic of Italy, Slovenia revalidated the Treaty of Osimo. See *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* (1992) No. 40, August 14. pp. 127-128.

Since becoming a member of the UN in 1992, Slovenia has signed numerous international human rights documents.⁷ After becoming a member of the Council of Europe in 1993, Slovenia regionally adopted resolutions regarding the development of democracy, the protection of human rights and the protection of minorities.⁸

2. The Demographic, Social and Economic Structure of the Italian Minority

In 1991 the Italian minority amounted to 3,063, up from 2,188 in 1981. They live mainly in the ethnically heterogeneous region which includes Koper, Izola and Piran. (This region encompasses Koper/Capodistria, Škocijan/San Canziano, Semedela/Semedella, Šalara/Salara, Bertoki/Bertocchi, Ankarani/Ancarano, Hrvatini/Crevattini, Škofije/Valmarin, Piran/Pirano, Portorož/Portoroze, Lucija/Lucia, Strunjan/Strugnano, Seča/Sezza, Sečovlje/Sicciole and Parecag/Parezzago. In some areas the minority population is disproportionately high. They make up 20% of the population in Strunjan/Strugnano, in other parts hardly ever then 10%, coming to total amount of 5% within the mentioned region of the Slovene part of Istria. Around 75% of the Italian minority live in urban centers, where they represent a minor part of the population.⁹

Before the Second World War, the Italian population was a local majority in some towns and a few rural locations, although not in the internal areas of the country. However, in the 1950s the demographic structure completely changed when a major part of the Italian population emigrated; it has consistently decreased to this day.¹⁰

⁷ This refers primarily to the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, as well as the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education. In addition, as a member of the UN, Slovenia is also obliged to honor the Declaration of Rights of Persons who belong to National or Ethnic, Religious or Language Minorities.

⁸ Besides the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ratified by the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia on June 28, 1994), Slovenia has agreed to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (signed on February 1, 1995, ratified on March 25, 1998) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (signed on July 3, 1997, but not yet ratified). This last concretely concerns the Italian and Hungarian languages. Slovenia has also accepted all the obligations connected with its membership in the OSCE. It is also important to mention the Instrument for the Protection of National Minorities adopted by the Central European Initiative during its Torino session in 1994. M. Komac, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁹ Komac, M. *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Table 1. Italian Population in Slovenian Istria from 1961 to 1991

| Year | Total population | Number of Italians | % of Italians |
|------|------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 1961 | 34,063 | 2,581 | 7.6 |
| 1971 | 43,894 | 2,467 | 5.6 |
| 1981 | 55,465 | 1,849 | 3.3 |
| 1991 | 61,078 | 2,575 | 4.2 |

Source: *Geographic Slovenica*, No. 16, p. 52; Census of the Population, 1991.

During the period 1961 to 1991 there was little change in the number of Italians in Slovenia. Around 85% of them lived in Istria and about 15% lived elsewhere. There was a large number of elderly people, the most numerous age group being 50 to 65. However, apparently there was an increase due to the reworking of census statistics.

One thousand people declared themselves native Italian speakers, far less than the 4,009 who declared their ethnic affiliation to be Italian, a fact which could be explained by the large number of ethnically mixed marriages.¹¹

Education is one indicator of minority socioeconomic status. Italians showed an above average level of incomplete elementary education, due to their high average age. While some portions of the group were below average in education levels, those with higher and university education were quite within the national average.¹²

In terms of employment, few Italians were employed in industry (18%), considerably less than the Slovene average (44%). However, the number employed in a professional sphere of activity was above average. Above-average employment in the field of education and culture is partly a result of protective measures that concern the minority.¹³

In terms of economics, according to national criteria, the majority of the Italian population was middle class and employed in professions such as civil service, teaching and so on. Entrepreneurship was growing due to business contacts with Italy. International business cooperation through joint ventures was also increasing.¹⁴

3. The Legal Framework and Implementation of Particular Minority Rights

There is no clear and precise set of rights and obligations the state owes minorities, nor is there a list of duties the state requires of minorities. Through the analysis of numerous international legal and political documents we have come to the conclusion that minority

¹¹ Ibid., p. 19.

¹² Ibid., p. 21.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

rights can be divided into: a) fundamental rights, b) “compensatory” rights and c) rights concerning the participation of minorities in decision-making.

The so-called fundamental rights for minority individuals primarily include the right to existence and the right to affiliation with their ethnicity, which is the basis of their right to special protection. These rights were upheld in the former Yugoslavia by the Federal Constitution (1963) and the Constitution of the (Socialist) Republic of Slovenia (1974) and are guaranteed by the present Slovenian Constitution and by numerous laws and other legislation.¹⁵

The right to special protection is elaborated by the so-called compensatory rights, which, in fact, have been continually implemented. These rights include: a) language rights; b) the right to education; c) the right to information; d) the right to cultural development; e) the right to free communication; f) the right to economic development; and g) the right to use national symbols.

A special section below deals with the participation of minorities in decision-making procedures. The chapter discusses problems related to their rights as well as questions of general political importance at the local and national level.

3.1. Language Rights

In practice, the right to the free use of language is implemented through the use of bilingual place names, signs, public proclamations, notes, warnings, etc. Its legal basis can be found in republican legislation (regulations defining names of settlements and streets and on marking settlements, streets and buildings).¹⁶

Language rights are extremely important to the Italian minority. These rights cover public and private life. Italian has the status of an official language in areas inhabited by the minority. The use of Italian in speech and writing is commonplace in government institutions. The right to use Italian officially, which cannot be reduced by *numerus clausus*, is based on various laws.¹⁷ It should also be mentioned that the Rules of Parliamentary Procedure (Article 5, paragraph 2) allow the use of Italian in Parliament.

¹⁵ The statutes of particular regions precisely define the ethnically heterogeneous areas: Article 7 of the Statute of the Municipality of Koper/Capodistria (1995) *Primorske novice, Uradne objave*, No. 9; Article 2 of the Statute of the Local Government of Izola/Isola (1995) *Primorske novice, Uradne objave*, No. 8 and Article 3 of the Statute of the Local Government of Piran/Pirano (1999) *Primorske novice, Uradne objave*, No. 10.

¹⁶ *Uradni list Socialistične Republike Slovenije* (1980) No. 11, Article 25, as well as in municipal provisions: Municipality of Koper: Decree on Bilingualism in Ethnically Heterogeneous Regions (1998) *Uradne objave*, No. 22, June 30. paragraph 4 of Article 6; Statute of Commune of Piran (1999) *Uradne objave*, No. 10. Article 75.

¹⁷ Articles 11 and 64 of the Constitution are relevant to this, the Administration Law (1994) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 67, Article 4 and the Judicature Law (1994) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 19, Article 5. We can also find similar provisions in the Law on Notary Publics (1994) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 13, Article 13, paragraph 2, as well as in the Public Prosecutor Law (1994) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 63, Article 6.

The use of Italian in ethnically heterogeneous regions is also granted by several laws, namely, the Law on Registers (*Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 2/1987), the Identity Card Law (*Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 75/1997) and the Passport Law (*Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 1/1991). All inhabitants of the abovementioned ethnically heterogeneous regions are obliged to possess bilingual documents, irrespective of their ethnic affiliation. Identity cards and passports are trilingual (Slovene, Italian, English). Driving licences, traffic licences, health cards and military cards are bilingual.

Also important is the law on the financing of communities (*Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 80/1994 and 56/1998), in which paragraph 7 of Article 26 regulates the financing of bilingual communities.

The use of Italian in churches within the bilingual Koper Diocese should also be mentioned. Mass in Italian is given once a week in Koper, Izola and Piran.¹⁸

3.2. *The Right to Education*

Education is one of the most important guarantees of cultural and ethnic independence. For minorities, education must cover two functions. It must disseminate information specially oriented to the minority group and provide adequate general education, which is essential to successful integration into society. For ethnic minorities, education must offer real opportunities for the protection of their cultural and spiritual identity. Finally, the educational system must promote the value of tolerance, which is essential in an ethnically heterogeneous region.¹⁹

Slovenia's policy concerning minority education is based on the methods which most efficiently protected and developed minorities in the period after World War II. These principles contributed to the development of the belief that peace and tolerance are necessary in ethnically mixed regions.

The educational process is adapted to the needs of the Italian minority. In the heterogeneous region of Slovenian Istria a monolingual system of education has been used with the Italian minority, which means that the state must cooperate actively with members of this minority.²⁰ Education in Italian can be found in kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools. During the 1997–98 scholastic year 197 children attended Italian-language kindergartens and there were 526 pupils in nine central or local elementary schools. During the same period 319 students were enrolled at three secondary schools. A majority of the students were Slovene citizens, but around 10% were Croatian citizens and 4% Italian citizens. Educational material is prepared in Slovenia with a few exceptions of material imported from Italy.

¹⁸ Komac, M., *ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁰ There are two important laws concerning the education of Italian minority members: The Law on Implementation of Special Rights of Members of the Slovenian and Hungarian Minorities in the Area of Education (1982) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 12 and the Law on Organization and Finance, Education and Training (1996) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 12.

It must be stressed that Italian-language schools are not exclusive, in spite of the fact that they are designed for the education of the Italian minority. While Italian is the schools' operating language and the language spoken at home by the majority of the pupils, teachers and staff, it is still compulsory to learn Slovene in these schools. Article 4 of the Law on the Implementation of Special Rights of Italian and Hungarian National Minority Members Regarding Education and Training states that "in educational institutions that operate in a minority language the pupils have to learn Slovene; in Slovene-language educational and training institutions, pupils have to learn the minority language. Thus they develop bilingual ability, which fosters an appreciation of cultural and other values of both nations and deepens mutual relations."²¹ The obligation of the ethnic Slovene students to study the language of the regional minority has generally been well accepted by the populations of ethnically heterogeneous regions.

However, the future of Italian-language education is in danger due to a decrease in students (both in Slovenia and Croatia). An indicative statistic is that only 25% of students in these schools are ethnic Italians; of the remainder, 15-20% are ethnic Slovenes or Croats and the rest are other ethnicities.²²

Members of the Italian minority may continue their education in their mother tongue only by studying Italian language and literature at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Ljubljana or at the Italian Literature and Language Department of the Faculty of Pedagogy at the branch of the University of Ljubljana situated in Koper. In Koper, students can obtain teacher training for Italian-language kindergartens or elementary schools. Another opportunity is to study in the Croatian universities at Rijeka or Pula, or in Italy. In 1995 Slovenia and Italy signed an agreement on the mutual recognition of diplomas.²³

3.3. *The Right to Information*

This right entails the right to create and distribute information in a minority's own language, which is problematic for the Italian minority in the Slovene media, and the right to broadcast or receive broadcasts from the "mother state."

The implementation of these rights requires a legal framework and professional knowledge. According to the Law on the Public (*Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 14/1994), the state is obliged to support the development of noncommercial media devoted to the Italian minority (paragraph 1 of Article 3). This state support extends to the financing of important advertisements published in Italian in non-Italian public media (paragraph 2 of Article 28). A similar provision deals with RTV programming in Slovenia in ethnically

²¹ There are similar provisions in the Law on Kindergartens (1996) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 12, Article 5; the Law on Elementary Schools (1996) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 12, Article 6; and the Law on Grammar Schools (1996) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 12, Article 8.

²² Bogulun-Debeljuh, Loredana (1994) *L'identità etnica: gli Italiani dell'area Istro-Quarnerina*, Etnia-V, Centro di ricerche storiche, Rovigno. According to Komac, M., op. cit., p. 49.

²³ The Memorandum on the Mutual Recognition of Slovene and Italian Diplomas and Professional Titles (1996) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije, Mednarodne pogodbe*, No. 4.

mixed regions (Article 68). There is also a legal mechanism enabling institutions established by self-managing national minority groups to register “for publishing press and other forms of public information distribution as well as for preparing and broadcasting RTV programs” (paragraph 5 of Article 40). This opportunity is a form of positive discrimination since it is not offered to the majority.

The first Italian-language radio station was established in 1949 in Koper. It now broadcasts fourteen hours of Italian-language programming daily. A sister television station was established in 1971 broadcasting to listeners in Slovenia and Croatia. It features eleven hours of programming in Italian daily and one in Slovenian. An investigation carried out by the Institute for Ethnic Research in Ljubljana showed that almost 60% of the regional Slovene population and 90% of the Italian population were a regular or frequent audience. In addition, in Slovenian Istria it is possible to pick up Italian television and radio quite easily. Local Slovene television for the region of Koper/Capodistria is broadcast under RTV Slovenia. A director of a minority programming is nominated by a council, which also nominates the head of minority programming, who must have a thorough knowledge of Italian.²⁴ The members of the program council are obligated to represent the interests of their ethnic minority, as mandated by Article 54 of the Statute of RTV Slovenia. The council is composed of seven members, five of whom are appointed by the Italian community and two directly by the Council of RTV Slovenia.

In addition, the Italian minority has access to mass media. Edit publishing house was established in Rijeka, Croatia, in 1952 and has a bureau in Koper. Edit publishes *La voce del popolo*, with a circulation of 3,750, of which 300 are distributed in Slovenia. Other publications include the weekly *Panorama* (around 600 distributed in Slovenia) and the quarterly literary review *La Battana* (about 50 distributed in Slovenia). In addition to *La voce del popolo*, The Trieste daily *Il Piccolo* has circulated since 1992. Also, numerous local publications are put out by cultural societies. On the publishing of minority print media the Republic of Slovenia spends 20% of what is spent by the Republic of Croatia.²⁵

There are no laws against the importation of foreign press, which means that the Italian minority can bring in material from Italy (paragraph 3 of Article 67). Information regarding the international legal obligations of Slovenia in that field is given in the previously mentioned Framework Convention for the Protection of Minorities (Article 9).

3.4. Participation in Decision-making

The minority rights of the Italian ethnic group include the right to participate in decision-making procedures. Within this paramount civic/political right exists the “double” concept, based on the nature of Slovenian constitutional values, which have led to legislation that provides for the inclusion of minority groups in the political process. First, like all Slovenian citizens, members of the Italian minority participate in national and local elections. In addition, minority members have the right to vote for managers of their own national

²⁴ The Statute of the Public Institution of Radiotelevision Slovenia, (1995) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 66, Articles 40, 41, 47 and 48, according to Komac, M. op. cit., p. 52.

²⁵ Komac, M., op. cit. p. 153.

community. Therefore, one type of vote reflects their political opinions, while with another type of vote belongs to so-called “interest representation.” Concerning this “double suffrage,” the Constitutional Court has stated that “special suffrage for minorities expresses the constitutionally guaranteed protection of those minorities and of their members respectively. Although it comes as an aberration of the principle of equal suffrage, such positive discrimination is not constitutionally inadmissible; on the contrary, the constitution requests the legislator to implement such measures within legislation.”²⁶

On the national level, provisions of Article 64 of the Constitution ensure proper representation for the Italian minority in Parliament and in the bodies of local government. Article 80 details the election of an Italian (or Hungarian) representative to Parliament. The minority representative inherent in system of “double suffrage” is elected by all the members of the minority, irrespective of where they reside. Those who do not reside in mixed regions of the country can exercise this right through written request.²⁷ This double suffrage means a “double aberration from the principle of equal suffrage, although the aberration has been foreseen and encouraged in the constitution as a form of so-called positive discrimination.”²⁸

In this area local level legislation is similar to that of the national level, Article 39 of the Law on Local Government²⁹ states that “in ethnically heterogeneous regions, which are determined by law, where Italian or Hungarian minorities reside, they will have at least one representative in local government.” The statutes of individual local governments in ethnically mixed regions define these provisions in more detail.³⁰ Electoral procedure on the local level is similar to electoral procedure at the state level and is regulated by the Law on Local Elections, which states that “the members of the Italian or Hungarian national minority have active and passive suffrage in elections for local government and for their group’s representation.”³¹

In order to protect the interests of the nationally recognized minorities and to prevent legislation which could harm them, the constitution states that measures which concern minorities cannot be adopted without the consensus of the members of the minority ethnic group.³² This protection exceeds the international standards adopted by the Council of Europe.

The autonomous organization of the Italian minority is defined by paragraph 2 of Article 64 of the Constitution. The Law on Self-Managing National Communities was created on the basis of Article 64.³³ It deals with the tasks of these communities, the

²⁶ Ustavno sodišče, 844. Odločba o ugotovitvi (1998) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 20. p. 1312.

²⁷ Zakon o evidenci volilne pravice (1992) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 46. Article 20, 21, 22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1313.

²⁹ *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* (1993) No. 72.

³⁰ Statut občine Piran (1999) *Uradne objave*, No. 10. Article 15, paragraph 2: “The local government has twenty-five members, three of whom are elected by voters the Italian minority on the basis of special suffrage.” Statut občine Koper (1995) *Uradne objave*, No. 9. Article 28: “The local government has thirty-two members, three of whom are to be elected by the members of the Italian national minority.”

³¹ Zakon o lokalnih volitvah (1993) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 72. Article 6.

³² *Ustava Republike Slovenije*, Article 64, paragraph 5.

³³ *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* (1994) No. 65.

methods of implementing their activities, and their organization, financing and relation with state institutions and local self-managing authorities. These organizations, which exist in every ethnically heterogeneous area, are united under the Italian Self-Managing National Community, which has relations with the state. The Community must approve actions relating to the status of the minority before they are implemented by the state. In addition, the Community has two other main functions. The first relates to international cooperation with Italy and other states having a sizeable Italian minority. The second function deals with the process of preparing international agreements concerning minority rights and status. This, again, is evidence of the fact that Slovenia's own obligations to the Italian and Hungarian minority exceed the level of the measures taken by the Council of Europe.³⁴ Additionally, the existence of such self-managing organizations does not prevent minorities from founding any other sort of political or social organizations for the promotion of interests that may exist outside of the context of self-managing organizations.

4. Conclusion

The implementation of positive discrimination is one of the most important features of the "Slovene model" of minority protection. This principle came into existence in legislation and practice between the end of World War II and the independence of Slovenia from the former Yugoslavia. It places Slovenia within the small group of states whose legislation surpasses that of international standards. The principle has a great impact on the fact that members of nationally recognised minorities (here Italians, but also Hungarians) play an active role in creating minority legislation, such as in their right to veto measures that effect the status of the Italian minority, both nationally and locally. This is a strong safeguard against assimilation and an addendum to the basic rights and duties that minority individuals bear as citizens of Slovenia. "Double suffrage" is also derived from the principle of minority protection. Members of the Italian national minority may use the services of various national and international rights organizations, including the Human Rights Ombudsman.³⁵ It must be stressed that minority legislation does not contain any limit related to the principle of *numerus clausus*. This is very important, as the number of the Italian minority is sometimes very small in a given area. Minority rights, guaranteed by the constitution, originate from the civic strength of ethnically mixed regions in Slovenia and demonstrate the country's commitment to the protection of minorities.

³⁴ Komac, M., op. cit., p. 65.

³⁵ See also Zakon o varuhu človekovih pravic (1993) *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, No. 71.