

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2634/06  
by Sergio Berlato (UEN)  
to the Commission

Subject: Protection of and respect for the rights of the Italian-speaking minority in the province of Bolzano

The right to use one's mother tongue can be considered an acquired right in the province of Bolzano (Italy). The same cannot be said for the right to be able to understand the province's second language. A good example is provided by the local town councils and district councils in Bolzano, where councillors from the Italian language group are unable to obtain simultaneous translation of what is being discussed at meetings. In various outlying areas of Bolzano and in the city centre/Piani district, the German-speaking majority make use of their legitimate right to speak in German, with the result that, in the absence of any kind of interpreting facilities, the Italian-speaking councillors face serious problems.

Political representation is a fundamental right in a democracy and in Alto Adige is not conditional on possession of bilingual qualifications. This state of affairs restricts and disrupts the work of councillors, undermining the general principles set out in the Treaties and constantly upheld by the Union, and threatening to create a situation where the right of political representation amounts to no more than passive exercise of the franchise.

The problem is how to ensure that this right can be exercised. The question arises regularly in institutional bodies where the Italian speakers find themselves in a tiny minority. Calls have been made locally for interpreting facilities to be made available but these have always been turned down. It should be said that the right to be able to understand the second language is an inviolable right linked to the concept of 'equal opportunities' and as such should not be subject to mediation or compromise. That is why efforts to safeguard this right are needed urgently and cannot be delayed.

In the light of the above:

- does the Commission not consider - in its capacity as guardian of the Treaties - that the above situation represents a clear breach of the Treaty provisions and existing Community law?
- what will the Commission do to ensure that the competent authorities provide adequate facilities so as to make sure that Community law is respected and that the rights of the Italian-speaking minority are protected and guaranteed?