

WRITTEN QUESTION E-6013/07
by Sergio Berlato (UEN)
to the Commission

Subject: Further deplorable incidents at the Brenner frontier which are inconsistent with the desire for peaceful coexistence between the Italian and Austrian peoples

The 'Freiheit für Südtirol' political group led by Eva Klotz, a member of the (Italian) regional council for Alto Adige, has always been committed to actively seeking to encourage the secession of Alto Adige from Italy. On 11 November 2007 the group, together with other Austrian organisations, held a demonstration near the Brenner frontier marker (on the Austrian side) to mark the anniversary of the day on which Italian troops crossed the watershed of the Alps at the end of the First World War in 1918. Those taking part in the demonstration made no secret of their intention to challenge the legitimacy of the Brenner frontier which was laid down on the basis of the outcome of those hostilities. With Siegfried Steger, a former terrorist and fugitive from justice living in Austria, looking on, a large sign was fixed firmly into the ground bearing the words 'Südtirol is nicht Italien' ('Alto Adige does not belong to Italy') against the background of the Austrian flag. Other deplorable actions were carried out by persons unknown that night, including the theft of a wreath laid a week before by the 'Alleanza Nazionale' party in memory of those who had died in the fighting.

It is particularly outrageous that the neighbouring Austrian local authorities (the commune of Gries am Brenner and, possibly, others) appear to have received, and granted, permission to put up a sign - on a board which is still firmly in place - carrying a message which is offensive to another EU Member State (Italy). It is surprising, and also significant, that there has been absolutely no comment by the President of the Province of Alto Adige, Mr Durnwalder, or the local authorities in the commune of Gries am Brenner (Austria), which endorsed the demonstration. It is also painful to note that Italy has not expressed the least regret in relation to the incident even at government level, thus encouraging a divisive spirit of revanchism which should no longer be tolerated in today's Europe, based as it is on treaties of accession signed by national states which recognise each others' borders and undertake to follow a policy of mutual cooperation based on respect for each others' distinctive character. It should be pointed out that the Austrian police did not remove the sign (citing the requirements of road safety) until a few days later.

Does the Commission, in its capacity as custodian of the treaties, agree that it should issue a strong and decisive statement on the incidents referred to?

Does the Commission agree that the competent authorities of the countries concerned should be reprimanded in the event of actions of this kind, which are contrary to the spirit of peace, disruptive and inconsistent with the desire for peaceful coexistence between peoples enshrined in the Treaty and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU?