



27th Council
24-26 Nov 2017
Karlstad
by the European Greens

South Tyrolean Greens VERDI-GRÜNE-VÈRC Application for EGP membership EGP Committee report and recommendations

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1. General introduction

The EGP arranged a fact-finding mission to South Tyrol (Italy) on 20 and 21 September 2016 as part of the application process of the South Tyrolean Greens (Verdi-Grüne-Vërc, from now on "VGV").

VGV, who had been a part of the Italian Greens till 2013, but decided in that year to pull out of the Federazione dei Verdi, approached the EGP for the first time on 14 July 2015 in order to ask to become a member of the EGP. Since then, they sent to our Council in Lyon in November 2015 a delegation, which included the Co-spokesperson of the South Tyrolean Young Greens, Valentino Liberto and Office Assistant, Anna Hupel. They also sent representatives to the Councils in Utrecht and Glasgow as well as to the Liverpool Congress. Moreover they took part in other EGP events like the European Ideas Lab in February 2016. In January 2016 a meeting between representatives of the Italian Greens and STG took place in Bologna. No settlement was found in that occasion, but the parties kept the dialogue open and in May 2017 they communicated to the European Green Party that they had found an agreement on their future collaboration and on the VGV application to EGP as candidate member, which was voted by the Executive of Verdi and the Provincial Assembly of VGV

In September 2016 the EGP delegation to Bolzano was made up of: Reinhard Bütikofer (Co-Chair), Monica Frassoni (Co-Chair), Mar Garcia (Secretary General), Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield (Member of the Committee responsible for Italy) and Benedetta De Marte (staff).

2. South Tyrol

South Tyrol, also known by its alternative Italian name of Alto Adige, is an autonomous province in northern Italy. It is one of the two autonomous provinces that make up the autonomous region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. The province has an area of 7,400 square kilometers and a total population of 511,750 inhabitants (2011). Its capital is the city of Bolzano/Bozen.

According to 2014 data based on the 2011 census, 62.3 % of the population speaks German, 23.4 % of the population speaks Italian, mainly in and around the two largest cities (Bolzano and



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Merano); 4.1 % speaks Ladin, a Rhaeto-Romance language; 10.2% of the population (mainly recent immigrants) speaks another language as first language.

The autonomy, which has been granted to the province in 1948 and highly strengthened in 1972, is the political outcome of a long process which started with the annexation of the province territories by Italy after World War I under the terms of the peace treaties. The incorporation of the province and the consequent forced "Italianisation" of its 99% of German/Ladin-speaking citizens under the Fascist regime, resulted in strong discontent, protests and mass emigration to Austria and Germany of part of the population.

After the World War II, it was decided that the province would stay attached to Italy, but an agreement was signed between Italy and Austria in order to re-establish the basic rights for the German/Ladin-speaking population (education, administration, etc.). The autonomy status of the province and of the neighboring province of Trento was established already at that time, but it was in 1972 that an even more important range of competences was transferred from the national and regional to the province level.

Today the province has a considerable level of self-government, consisting of a large range of exclusive legislative and executive powers. This results also in a political scene that is largely independent from the national one and in a public opinion which is more attentive to the local current affairs rather than to the national ones.

As part of the autonomy status, South Tyrol has a fiscal regime that allows the province to retain a large part of most levied taxes, while nevertheless remaining a net contributor to the national budget. South Tyrol is among the wealthiest regions in Italy and the European Union.





3. Background information on the Party

The Green movement in the province was born at the end of the '70s under the leadership of Alexander Langer (later elected 1st President of the Green Group in the European Parliament), who largely contributed to the birth of the movement at the national scale. His main idea was to build bridges and connections among languages, cultures and nations, between man and nature and his personality has a long lasting influence even today. This is also his main legacy in the Italian and European scene. Greens have competed in elections under various names since 1978, but only since 1993 they ran under the current name and they registered as a party only in 1996. They have been a provincial branch of Federazione dei Verdi till 2013, when they split from the national party due to, among other reasons, divergences over the alliance strategy to adopt in view of the national elections.

Greens have had good and relatively stable electoral results in South Tyrol. They are represented in the Province Council continuously since 1993 and they currently have 3 elected councilors there (2013 Provincial elections, 8,7% of the votes).

While in the province they sit in the opposition, in the City Council of Bolzano they are in the ruling majority together with Partito Democratico (PD) and Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP) and they could nominate one of the six Aldermen. In 2015 they also managed to win the elections for the Mayor of Merano, 2nd biggest city of South Tyrol and the only one where there is 50/50 presence of German and Italian speakers. They are represented in the Italian Parliament by MP Florian Kronbichler who has been elected thanks to an alliance with left-wing Party Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL) in 2013 and sits in their parliamentary group. Historically, they have best traction in the European Elections and they have elected several MEPs in the past who were in the list of Federazione dei Verdi in the North-East constituency (Alexander Langer and Sepp Kusstatscher; also the famous mountaineer Reinhold Messner was a Green MEP). Indeed, they profited positively from the preferential voting system and the relative strength of their organization even in such a small territory if compared with the whole of the circumscription; they were able to concentrate preferences in an organized way and several times elect a candidate to the EP. Their best score ever was realized in the 2004 European elections (13,1%).

4. Meetings with Verdi-Grüne-Vèrc

a) Schedule

The fact-finding mission was coordinated with local representatives from VGV, who supported the visit, providing technical and organizational assistance. In particular they managed the organization of a series of meetings with most of the relevant representatives of the Party, and more specifically:



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- Lunch with Provincial Councilors and Co-Spokespersons, **Brigitte Foppa** and **Hans Heiss** and Provincial Councilor, **Riccardo dello Sbarba**, together with Office Director, Verena Frei and other employees and with GreenEconomy WG Spokesperson **Johanna Donà**
- Meeting with Green&Social WG Spokesperson **Karl Tragust** and other WG representatives
- Dinner with members of Young Greens of South Tyrol, representative from Green Women WG **Evelyn Gruber-Fischnaller** and Party Treasurer, **Erica Fassa**
- Meeting with Green Environnement Alderman of the city of Bolzano, **Maria Laura Lorenzin** and other Green City Concillors
- Lunch with Merano Mayor, **Paul Rösch** and other Green representatives
- Dinner with Provincial Councilors

On top of the meetings in the frame of the FFM, the VGV and especially their GreenEconomy WG organized a public event on divestment (<http://www.verdi.bz.it/il-divestment-approdo-anche-a-bolzano/>) where Reinhard Bütikofer participated as main speaker and that has been followed up by Provincial Councilor Brigitte Foppa with two parliamentary questions asking to have access to the documents on the investment on fossil fuels by the region and the province.

b) Findings

The meetings we had allowed us to know most of the main representatives of the party and to get an idea of its functioning and topical work.

One of their main characteristics is the fact that they have been and still are today the only inter-ethnic Party in South-Tyrol and they always been defending peaceful cooperation between the different ethnic groups and advocating for a more integrated society where individuals are not defined by their ethnic identity. As mentioned, the heritage of Alexander Langer is still alive in the work of the Party as well as in the perception that the public opinion has of it. The attention to interethnicity is still very present in the party discourse and is also reflected in the party structures where both groups are represented. Gender equality is also clearly visible within their representatives and it is a theme that their Women WG work on.

The Party is in favor of keeping the province autonomy status, but they strive to reform it in particular in the direction of decreasing the relevance of ethnic census for the allocation of benefits, employment in the public administration etc. They are also in favor of fostering more direct democracy by facilitating the access to the instrument of local referenda.

On environmental issues, they have a good record on a number of topics, ranging from promotion of renewable energy to the defense of the Alpine environment, to the fight against pesticides and in general for a more sustainable agriculture (*which is a big economic sector for the province*). They also regularly stand up against reduction of public space in favor of commercial surfaces (*i.e. referendum on Benko mall*) and against infrastructures and projects with a high environmental impact (*Bolzano airport and incinerator*).



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The Party has a well-functioning Working Group on social issues (Green&Social), which is active in putting forward interesting proposals on the social sphere, in particular at the Provincial level. They have an 8-points program which includes, among others, minimum wage, basic income, childcare services, “welfare-state guarantee” and equal rights for migrant workers.

On migration the rhetoric in the province is very harsh because of the presence of several right-wing parties and because of the peculiar situation with the Brenner border with Austria. VGV is active in supporting civic movements like “Binario 1” whose aim is to help refugees stuck in the train stations on the border. They have been active also with the Tyrolian Greens in Austria in this respect.

Verdi-Grüne-Vèrc has also been the main ally of the LGBTQ movement in the province in particular on the draft of an anti-discrimination bill and in the fight on the “for marriage for all”. In our meetings it has been also underlined that Merano was the second city of the province to introduce the register of civil partnerships under the Administration of Green Mayor, Paul Rösch.

The Young Greens are quite an active and organized group despite the fact that many young activists go to study outside of the province in their university years and this makes it more difficult for them to have organizational strength. They also developed interesting concepts like organizing political conversations in pubs and bars in order to reach out to young people that are normally uninterested in politics. The idea of applying to the EGP stemmed from their initiative.

At the European level, they cooperate already with neighboring Green parties like the Austrians and the Swiss Greens on topics like borders/migration and the environmental protection of the Alpine region. They are fully aware of the “European” nature of the territory they’re living in, but also of the fact that the province and its special status risk to isolate them from the Italian and European realities around them. Therefore, joining the EGP would represent for them also an opportunity to open up and to strengthen the cooperation with other green parties in particular to learn from them and share best practices (i.e. on interethnic relations).

The EGP insisted strongly on the fact that our main goal is to have a strong Green presence at the national level in Italy and that, in case the EGP Council will decide to grant VGV the EGP candidate member status, we will want them to cooperate with us and with Federazione dei Verdi in order to reignite the Green movement at a national level.

Despite their pretty clear will to remain an independent party, they fully agreed with our perspective and explicitly mentioned that it is first of all in their interest having a good relation with the Italian Greens and that they will engage in complying with the EGP requests.

5. Meeting with Federazione dei Verdi

On the occasion of the fact-finding mission in Bolzano, we have invited also a delegation of Federazione dei Verdi, Italian EGP member party, to join us for a meeting in order to evaluate



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their perception of the situation with VGV. We met with the Members of the Executive and former co-spokespersons, Luana Zanella and Angelo Bonelli as well as with former MP Marco Boato and Verdi of Trentino co-spokespersons Lucia Coppola and Maurizio Migliarini.

We already knew from previous contacts that Verdi were disappointed by the decision of the South Tyrolean branch of leaving the party in 2013 and that the issue had caused tensions and problems in particular with the Greens from Trentino. Moreover, in 2014 in the occasion of the EP elections, the Green symbol was for the first time appearing on two different lists in South Tyrol and in the rest of Italy (the one of VGV which was part of the "Tsipras list" coalition and the one of Verdi which were running with the "Verdi Europei – Green Italia" list). In terms of votes and public image, this was of course detrimental for both political parties.

As mentioned before, in January 2016, after VGV approached us to become an EGP candidate member, a meeting was organized in Bologna between the two parties in the presence also of Monica Frassoni to discuss the VGV application and to strengthen the cooperation between them.

At our meetings in Bolzano it was clear that the separation of VGV was still an open wound for Verdi while VGV clearly expressed that they had no intention to reverse that decision. In that occasion EGP underlined that the priority for the European Greens was to strengthen the green presence in Italy altogether going forward, instead of focusing on past events.

6. EGP also expressed the view that the two parties were absolutely compatible from the content point of view and therefore they should reopen a dialogue and build a strong cooperation in view of the next electoral deadlines. In particular, we insisted on the importance of having a constructive collaboration in view of the European elections in 2019. We also offered to engage in this cooperation and support the efforts of both parts to create a more relevant Green political force in Italy.

Further developments

The dialogue between VGV and Federazione dei Verdi continued during the course of 2016 and 2017 both in the framework of EGP-related cooperation (meeting at the Liverpool Congress and organization of the EGP event on sustainable tourism in Merano) as well as independently. Their cooperation has been also facilitated by the fact that the two parties share similar views on future possible coalition and alliances in the Italian context.

As mentioned above, the two parties have communicated to the EGP that they both voted on an agreement where they commit to strengthen their political cooperation and in particular to work together in order to build a stronger Green presence in Italy, while recognizing at the same time that the two parties keep administrative and economic autonomy.



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Moreover, the agreement (available on request) particularly foresees that Federazione dei Verdi will not oppose VGV candidacy to the EGP and that they will collaborate in order to build an unitary presence in the EGP.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

The Fact-finding mission allowed us to get a pretty in-depth knowledge of the Party structures, positions, results and external perception. From our observations and talks we could gather that VGV is a functioning Party both from an organizational and political point of view.

The external meetings we had confirmed our impressions on the work Greens do on all the above-mentioned topical dimensions (*environment, social issues, migration, gender equality, LGBTs rights, etc*) and on the fact that their political action is fully compatible with the European Green Party principles and engagement.

Some interlocutors have underlined that in the latest years the Party has been more successful within the German community rather than with the Italian audience, but they all agreed that this was not due to their will or activity, but rather to the political circumstances (*lack of real center-left alternatives among the other German parties while on the Italian side of the political spectrum there is more competition on the left*).

The civil society actors we met underlined also some fields on which the Party could improve. In example it was pointed that efforts should be invested in making the party stronger in the countryside since currently the core of their electorate is still in the cities. Also, as many other Green parties, they seem to encounter criticism both from the more “idealist” electorate for being too “institutionalized”, and from the more “pragmatist” one for having a public image closer to an NGO rather to the one of a Party.

Despite this, all civil society actors we met, without exception, spoke highly of the political work of VGV, acknowledged their important role in the South Tyrol context and defined them as the *most interesting political subject* of the province. All of them advocated that the EGP should accept VGV as a candidate member.

After the Fact-Finding mission, the EGP Committee had an in-depth discussion over the way forward. The EGP Committee did not want to postpone the decision, but found itself unable to agree on common proposal and therefore decided to not put the issue to a vote at the Glasgow Autumn Council, but rather to work further on the application and to deepen the relations with VGV.

Considering the positive cooperation we had during the last year as well as the recent positive developments with Federazione dei Verdi which proved a real will from both parts to overcome their past divergences, the EGP Committee recommends to its Member Parties and to the Karlstad Autumn Council to accept Verdi-Grüne-Vèrc as a candidate member.



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Annex: List of the other meetings

- **Edi Rabini**, President of Alexander Langer Foundation
- **Irene Sentfer**, Director of Oekoinstitut (Research Center/Think Tank on sustainability issues)
- **Andreas Riedl**, Director of League for the protection of Nature (main environmental organisation in the region)
- **Andreas Unterkircher**, President of Centaurus (Gay and Lesbian association)
- **Uwe Staffler**, former Assistant to Alexander Langer and former member of the Greens; now working for Klimahaus (energy/building certification agency)
- **Georg Mair**, Editor in Chief of FF (weekly political magazine)