



International Boundary Study

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Austria – Italy Boundary

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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AUSTRIA – ITALY BOUNDARY

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AUSTRIA – ITALY BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Austria–Italy boundary is 233 miles in length¹. It follows the main Alpine water divide between rivers flowing south, and those flowing north and east, with two small exceptions: areas where headwaters of eastward-flowing streams rise on the Italian side of the boundary. Starting in the west, at the juncture point with Switzerland, the boundary runs generally eastward along the crest of the Alps for 117 miles, turns southerly for 40 miles, then swings east again following the crest of the Carnic (Karnische) Alps to the tripoint with Yugoslavia. To the north are the Inn and Drava (Drau) rivers draining into the Danube; and to the south the Adige, Piave, and Tagliamento rivers which flow into the Adriatic Sea. The present boundary was delimited following World War I. Its western sector was shifted considerably northward at that time, due to Italy's acquisition of the former Austrian territory of South Tyrol.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Geographical

The frontier area is extremely rugged, with elevations at some points exceeding 12,000 feet. The mountain wall followed by the boundary has been considered by many Italians as part of their "natural" border, protecting them from invasion from the north. However, this wall is pierced by a number of passes, among them the Brenner, Resia (Reschen Scheideck), Dobbiaco (Toblach), and Monte Croce Carnico (Plöckenpass).

The main chain of the central Alps extends eastward from Switzerland as the Ötztal and Breonie Alps to the Brenner Pass (4,501 feet) with the Zillertal Alps to the east. Within the Ötztal range are Wildspitze (12,380 feet) and Palla Bianca (12,257 feet), while several peaks in the Breonie and Zillertal Alps reach over 11,000 feet.

East of the Zillertal, the higher mountains continue eastward through Austria as the Hohe Tauern dividing the Inn Basin from that of the Drava. The drainage divide of the Adige River system, however, swings southward from Dreiherrns Spitze (Pico dei Tre Signori) in the westernmost Hohe Tauern along the Defereggengebirge and the international boundary follows this divide. Peaks in this range also rise over 11,000 feet. West of the boundary are the Dolomites, an extremely rugged limestone range with eighteen peaks exceeding 10,000 feet in elevation. To the east of the boundary are the upper valleys of the Drava drainage system. The headwaters of the Drava actually rise about ten miles west of the boundary line in northeastern Italy, and flow into Austria via the Dobbiaco Pass (3,967 feet). Shortly beyond this Pass the boundary swings east again along the crest of the 9,000-foot Carnic Alps. These mountains separate the Drava valley from those of the Piave and the Tagliamento to the south. The Monte Croce Carnico Pass (2,037 feet) connects the Tagliamento and Drava

¹ Measured on the AMS 1:250,000 maps showing the boundary.

valleys. In its easternmost sector, the boundary passes through areas of lower elevations, from 7,000 to less than 4,000 feet near the terminal point with Yugoslavia. A few miles from the Yugoslav frontier, the Austria–Italy boundary is again crossed by one of the Drava tributaries, the Gailitz (Silizza) River. It rises a few miles south of the boundary and crosses through the Tarvisio Saddle (2,119 feet) to join the Drava.

Mountains and hills prevail for many miles on both sides of the Austria–Italy boundary and the only level areas lie along some of the river valleys. The Inn River rises in the Swiss canton of Grisons, and flows for 55 miles through the Engadine before entering Austria. Below the Austrian town of Landeck the river valley broadens, reaching a width of a mile at Innsbruck. A number of short, swift tributaries rise in the uplands to the south of the Inn River; among these is the Sill River which provides access to the Brenner Pass. The Inn flows in an easterly direction for over 100 miles through mountainous western Austria before turning north, at Kufstein, to join the Danube.

The Adige River rises in Lake Resia in the northwesternmost corner of Italy's Bolzano Province, a few miles south of the Resia Pass (4,947 feet). Downstream, the Adige is joined at Merano by the Passirio, flowing from the boundary area in the north, and near Bolzano, by the Isarco, giving access from the south to the Brenner Pass. The Rienza, a tributary of the Isarco, provides a route eastward to the upper Drava valley and on into Austria. The entire upper basin of the Adige is mountainous, with narrow river plains at Bolzano and Trento. Above Trento is the Salorno gorge of the Adige, located at the boundary between Bolzano and Trento provinces. This gorge is the linguistic frontier, inasmuch as the population of Bolzano Province is predominantly German-speaking, while in Trento Province it is overwhelmingly Italian. East of the Adige, the upper basins of the Piave and Tagliamento also consist of narrow, steep-sided valleys, and swiftly flowing streams.

The Drava River, north and east of the Austria–Italy boundary, is oriented east-west and flows through mountainous terrain. At Lienz twenty miles east of Dobbiaco Pass, the floor of the valley broadens to more than a mile in width. The principal tributary south of the upper Drava is the Gail River which parallels the Carnic Alps along their northern slope. From the valley of the Gail, routes lead south into Italy through the Monte Croce Carmico Pass and the Travisio Saddle.

The climate of the boundary area reflects its mountainous character. Average temperatures tend to decrease about 3° Fahrenheit for every 1,000-foot rise in elevation until, in the higher parts of the mountains, glaciers abound. Innsbruck (1,970 feet) has a mean average temperature in January of 26° F, and in July of 64° F, while in Bolzano (950 feet), 50 miles to the south, the corresponding figures are 32° F and 72° F. The influence of the Mediterranean climate reaches north into the southern boundary area, as evidenced both by the warmer temperatures and by the drier summers of northern Italy. In winter the area south of the boundary may be affected for days at a time by the foehn, a dry, warming wind resulting from air masses which have crossed the Alps from northwestern Europe. At other times in winter, the region receives continental polar air moving south from well-developed high pressure systems lying over the Alps.

Annual precipitation is adequate for agriculture, ranging from less than 30 inches per year in the valleys of the upper Adige to over 50 inches in the higher slopes north of the boundary. In winter, the valleys are often covered by layers of clouds while the higher slopes are in sun. However, in summertime, the valleys tend to be clear while the mountains are shrouded in clouds. Strong daytime temperature differences exist in winter between slopes which receive the sun and those in perpetual shadow. Likewise, in winter the valleys are often affected by temperature inversions, in which the cold air drains down the slopes, resulting in nighttime temperatures in the valley floors considerably colder than those higher up the slopes.

Because of the year-round precipitation, the boundary area is covered with forest, both deciduous and coniferous, except where steep slope, inadequate soil cover, or low temperatures prevent tree growth. Above the tree line are many areas of summer grassland which are utilized for dairy cattle. On the Italian side of the boundary Mediterranean sub-tropical vegetation extends as far north as Merano, and is found in other parts of the upper Adige as well.

The principal Austrian cities in the boundary area are Innsbruck (101,000) and Villach (33,000), while in Italy are Bolzano (89,000), Trento (75,000) and Merano (31,000). Innsbruck, capital of the Land of Tirol, is a tourist and university center, as well as a transportation focal point. Through it passes a north-south rail line between Munich and Verona via the Brenner Pass, and an east-west line connecting Vienna with Zurich through the Arlberg Tunnel in westernmost Austria. Villach, on the Drava River, produces lumber and iron and steel products. Bolzano is the capital of the Italian province by the same name, and since 1934 has undergone considerable industrialization. Its major industries are steel, textiles, and food processing. Before World War I, Bolzano's population was predominantly German-speaking, and its economy was based primarily on tourism. However, in recent decades there has been an increase in employment in the expanding industries. The Italian Government has carried out extensive hydroelectric development in the upper Adige, and the surplus of power has been a strong incentive for industrialization.

Trento never had the German-speaking population of Bolzano. It, too, is an industrial city, producing textiles, chemicals, cement, and wine, and is the capital of Trento Province. Merano, northwest of Bolzano, is a famous tourist center.

Communication lines in the Austria-Italy boundary zone are strongly influenced by landforms. Three railroads cross the boundary: a) one through the Brenner Pass between Innsbruck and Bolzano; b) a second through the Dobbiaco Pass linking Bolzano with Lienz and other towns of the Drava valley; and c) a third via the Tarvisio Saddle between Tarvisio and Villach. All-weather roads cross the boundary at four points: a) the Resia Pass close to the Swiss tri-point; b) the Brenner Pass; c) the Dobbiaco Pass; and d) the Tarvisio Saddle. In addition, a highway extends north from Tolmezzo through the Monte Croce Carnico Pass to connect with a secondary road in Austria leading to the Drava valley. The Brenner Pass has long been a major north-

south link through the central Alps. A Roman road ran through the Pass and, in the early Middle Ages, German peoples crossed through it to settle in the valleys of South Tyrol. Since the 14th century, the Brenner has been one of Europe's great trade routes. The economy of the boundary area is based largely on agriculture, forestry, and tourism. Fruit, wines, and dairy products are the principal exports from the mountain areas on both sides of the border. In addition, wheat and corn are also raised in the valleys of the Inn and the Drava. Innsbruck, Merano, and the Dolomites (particularly the area around Cortina d'Ampezzo) are important tourist centers. Mention has already been made of the hydroelectric development and the industrialization carried out by the Italians in the South Tyrol. Power development is now under way in the Austrian Tirol as well and, in coming years, the Inn valley may also become an important industrial region.

B. Historical

Italy's northern borders have long been a zone of contact between Italian and German-speaking peoples. Although the Carnic Alps in the east have functioned as a barrier separating the two ethnic groups, in the west there is little relationship between physical and ethnic boundaries. In the 13th century the counts of Tyrol united the upper Adige, Drava, and Inn valleys and created a principality of the Holy Roman Empire, spanning the Brenner Pass. Except for a brief period under Napoleon (1805–1813), the Tyrol remained undivided until 1919.

Italy was unified in 1861 but for five years its northern borders remained inexact. Italy's boundary with Austria was finally established by the Vienna Peace Treaty of 1866, running to the east along the crest of the Carnic Alps, and in the west along the southern boundary of Austrian Tyrol. The population of South Tyrol² at that time was almost entirely German-speaking; in the 18th and 19th centuries Italians have moved in sizeable numbers into the Austrian-controlled Trentino areas to the south.

Increasing demands were made in Italy in the decades prior to World War I for the extension of the country's borders to the "natural" frontier along the Brenner Pass. With the approach of the war, these demands became more insistent. Austria was prepared to cede Trentino to Italy but not South Tyrol. In the secret Treaty of London, signed between Italy and the Allied powers in 1915, Italy was guaranteed all the Austrian territory south of the Brenner Pass in exchange for Italy's entrance into the war on the Allied side. By the 1919 Treaty of St. Germain between Austria and the Allies, Italy's boundary was moved northward to the Brenner Pass, thereby splitting the historic

² There are two different contexts in which the term South Tyrol is often used. In some references, it includes all of the area south of the Brenner Pass which Italy gained from Austria after World War I. In others it denotes only the northern, predominantly German-speaking part of the former Austrian glacis. In this latter context, it conforms closely to the present Bolzano Province, which is referred to officially as Alto Adige. In the former usage, South Tyrol includes both the provinces of Bolzano and Trento (Trentino) and thus corresponds to the area which before World War II the Italians often referred to as Venezia Tridentina and which now comprises the Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige. In this report, South Tyrol will be taken as referring only to the northern, predominantly German-speaking portion of the former Austrian territory.

territory of Tyrol. About 5,425 square miles, or just over half the area, went to Italy. Italy subsequently detached 174 square miles and joined them to neighboring provinces: a) a small, predominantly Ladin-speaking area at Ampezzo was annexed to Belluno Province and b) a portion of Trentino along the Val D'Astico was added to Vicenza Province.

The Austrian census of 1910 listed 215,796 German-speaking peoples in the South Tyrol, along with 16,510 speaking Italian, and 5,990 Ladins. The last-named, who had long inhabited the area of the Dolomites, speak a Rhaeto-Romanic language, similar to the Romansch of eastern Switzerland. When Italy received the territory, she was bound by no treaties protecting the rights of minorities. With the coming to power of the Fascists in October 1922, the Government began a program of forced "Italianization" of the German-speaking inhabitants. On the one hand, the Fascists sought to destroy the identity of these inhabitants by discouraging or prohibiting all manifestations of the German culture, and on the other, they stimulated Italian immigration into the Bolzano area. Prior to World War I persons of Italian origin made up less than 10 percent of the population of Bolzano Province; by 1939 they comprised nearly 30 percent.

The absorption of Austria by Germany in 1938 paved the way for a solution to the minority problem. In October 1939, Germany and Italy signed an agreement under which the German-speaking peoples in northern Italy were to opt once and for all for transfer to Germany or retention of Italian citizenship. Of the 267,000 German-speaking Italian subjects in Bolzano, Trentino, Belluno, and Udine provinces, 205,441 opted voluntarily for return to Germany. After 1945, the Government of Italy not only reinstated them in the properties they had sold, but also allowed 201,327 of those who had opted in favor of Germany to re-acquire Italian citizenship.

By 1945 there was some feeling, particularly among British officials, that an injustice had been done in 1919, and that Bolzano Province should be returned to Austria. Italy, however, argued that it had invested heavily in the hydroelectric and industrial development of the area. The 1946 Council of Foreign Ministers decided that no change should take place in the Austria-Italy boundary. On September 5, 1946 Italy signed an agreement with Austria guaranteeing the rights of German-speaking minorities in northern Italy. This agreement was included in the Italian Peace Treaty of February 1947. Not only did it provide that "German-speaking inhabitants of the Bolzano Province and of the neighboring bilingual townships of the Trento Province will be assured a complete equality of right with the Italian-speaking inhabitants," but the agreement also stipulated that "the populations of the above-mentioned zones will be granted the exercise of an autonomous legislative and executive regional power." The Italian Constitution of 1948 united the provinces of Bolzano and Trento into one special region with considerable legislative and executive autonomy. Although in the Province of Bolzano, German-speaking people make up over 60 percent of the population, in the total Trentino-Adige region their proportion is about 30 percent. The majority of the German-speaking population in Bolzano is rural, while practically all of the Italians are urban, thereby adding an urban-rural schism to the linguistic one.

The German-speaking groups maintain they are discriminated against in public posts—such as schools, government administration and the courts—as well as in assignment to public housing projects. They complain about the continued influx of Italians into Bolzano to be employed in the better-paying industrial jobs. To rectify this alleged discrimination, they ask that regional autonomy, agreed to in 1946, be applied to Bolzano Province alone, in which they would have a far stronger voice. Italy, however, has not altered the administrative structure in Trentino-Alto Adige. Recent Austro-Italian agreements have contributed to a lessening of official tensions on the minority question.

III. BOUNDARY ANALYSIS

Starting in the west at the Gruben Joch near the northern slope of the Piz Lad (7,155 feet), the boundary runs east for three miles to Resia Pass. In this area the border separates the Austrian Land of Tirol from the Italian Province of Bolzano. East of Resia Pass, the boundary continues in an easterly and southeasterly direction, climbing 12,257 feet in the Ötztaler Alps. At L'Altissima (Ger., Hochwilde), it turns northeast and then east, reaching an elevation of 11,299 feet in the Breonie Alps. The Brenner Pass, which lies 73 miles east of Resia Pass, is the principal route between the valleys of the Inn and Adige rivers. From the Brenner Pass, the boundary continues east for an additional 42 miles, reaching an elevation of 11,516 feet in the Zillertal Alps, before coming to Dreiherrnspitze (11,482 feet), the western end of the Hohe Tauern. For a few miles west of Dreiherrnspitze, the boundary divides Bolzano Province from the Austrian Land of Salzburg.

At Dreiherrnspitze, the boundary turns south and runs for 39 miles through the Defereggengebirge (maximum boundary elevation, 11,269 feet) to the Dobbiaco Pass. Here the headstream of the Drave cuts across the boundary to flow from Italy into Austria. In this section, Bolzano Province again is separated from Austrian Tirol. The Tirol is divided in two parts by an extension of Salzburg Land to the international boundary.

South of Dobbiaco Pass, the Austria-Italy boundary continues southeast for about ten miles at maximum elevations of about 8,000 feet, until it reaches the Carnic Alps where it turns east again. For a few miles in this sector, the boundary is bordered on the south by Belluno Province. Before it reaches Monte Croce Carnico Pass, the boundary divides the Province of Udine—a part of the Italian special region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia—lies to the south from the Austrian Land of Kärnten to the north. The Monte Croce Carnico Pass is situated 33 miles southeast of Dobbiaco Pass. Shortly before reaching this Pass, the boundary reaches its maximum elevation in the Carnic Alps—a height of 9,022 feet.

In its final 43 miles, the boundary continues east along the crest of the mountains, crossing the Tarvisio Saddle four miles from its terminal point with the Yugoslav frontier. In the final ten miles elevations decline from 6,731 feet at Mt. Osternig to 4,948 feet at Cabin Berg on Mt. Forno (Ger., Mt. Ofen), the tripoint with Yugoslavia.

IV. TREATIES

Two treaties established the present Austria–Italy boundary: one in 1866 for the section east of a point near the Dobbiaco Pass, and the other, in 1919, for the area westward to the Swiss border. Demarcation of the boundary was completed in 1924.

A. Vienna Peace Treaty between Austria and Italy, signed on October 3, 1866

This Treaty ceded the Lombardo–Venetian Kingdom to Italy and established the eastern sector of the boundary along the historic borders of the Kingdom. In the west, Austria retained its territorial glacis south of the main crest of the Alps. The International Commission for the Demarcation of the Italo–Austrian boundary redemarcated the entire boundary from Switzerland to the Adriatic in 1911 and 1912.

B. Treaty of St. Germain signed on September 10, 1919 by the Allied Powers and Austria

By this treaty of peace, Austria ceded the Tirol south of the Brenner Pass to Italy. Article 27 generally delimited the boundary as follows:

"From the point 2645 (Gruben J.) eastwards to point 2915 (Klopaier Spitz), a line to be fixed on the ground passing through point 1483 on the Reschen–Nauders road; thence eastwards to the summit of the Dreiherrn Spitz (point 3505), the watershed between the basins of the Inn to the north and the Adige to the south; thence generally south-southeastwards to point 2545 (Marchkinkele), the watershed between the basins of the Drava to the east and the Adige to the west; thence south-eastwards to point 2483 (Helm Spitz), a line to be fixed on the ground crossing the Drava between Winnbach and Armbach; thence east-south-eastwards to point 2050 (Osternig) about 9 kilometers northwest of Tarvis, the watershed between the basins of the Drava on the north and successively the basins of the Sextenbach, the Piave and the Tagliamento on the south; thence east-south-eastwards to point 1492 (about 2 kilometers west of Thörl), the watershed between the Gail and the Gailitz; thence eastwards to point 1509 (Pec), a line to be fixed on the ground cutting the Gailitz south of the town and station of Thárl and passing through point 1270 (Cabin Berg)."

To effect the demarcation, the Council of Ambassadors on July 22, 1920 issued "Instructions relative to the Delimitation Commission for the Austro–Italian Boundary." These included the organization of the Commission, the delegation of the interested powers, the creation of a commission secretariat and the functions, technical operations, and field of work for the commission. For the lines to be determined on the ground, the Council ordered the commission to make use of existing administrative boundaries and cadastral limits, as well as natural lines and limits.

The Commission was to execute protocols for the demarcation and these, after approval by the national members of the commission, were to be submitted to the Council of Ambassadors for the final acceptance.

After completing the basic geodetic and trigonometric recovery work, the Commission began its delimitation and demarcation work. The Commission chose maps at a scale of 1:25,000 with a generalization to 1:75,000 for the entire boundary. Very large-scale maps, some at 1:2,000, for the principal crossing points at passes, etc., were also made.

The principal members of the Commission were Col. Pariani of Italy, Lt. Col. Behrens of Britain, Commandant Rouget of France, Commandant Hattori of Japan, and Lt. Col. Bernhard of Austria. They commenced work in the early fall of 1920. It soon developed that 23 particular locals would involve problems of considerable magnitude. These problems were solved, in time, and the final demarcation work was completed in 1924. It should be noted that a Procés Verbal of June 22, 1922 established the tripoint with Yugoslavia on Monte Forno (Pec) at a pillar 3.69 meters east of the old trigonometric point of 1509 meters.

Procés Verbaux were drawn up to cover the meetings of the Commission and submitted to the Council of Ambassadors. A complete delimitation of the 430 kilometer lines was also established with twelve 1:25,000 strip sheets showing the boundary and a narrow band of terrain adjacent to it. The maps and the pillar descriptions are contained in Col. Vittorio Adami's Storia Documentata dei Confini del Regno d'Italia, Volume III, Confine-Italo-Austriaco (Rome, Ministero della Guerra, 1930) a monumental work.

C. Treaty of Paris signed by Italy and the Allied and Associated Powers, February 10, 1947

In Article I the Austria–Italy boundary was confirmed as that which existed on January 1, 1938. Article IV reaffirmed the Austro–Italian Agreement of September 5, 1946 pledging regional autonomy for the Bolzano Province, and the neighboring bilingual townships of Trento Province.

D. Austrian State Treaty, signed at Vienna May 15, 1955 between Austria and the Allied and Associated Powers.

Article 5 stated that the frontiers of Austria shall be those which existed on January 1, 1938.

V. SUMMARY

The Austria–Italy boundary follows, for the most part, the water divide between the Inn and Adige rivers in its western sector; the Drava and Adige in its central portion; and between the Drava and the Piave and Tagliamento rivers in the east. It is crossed by

several passes, the most important being the Brenner Pass. The boundary has been demarcated along its entire length. The principal problem in the boundary area concerns the minority rights of German-speaking people in Italy who inhabit the former Austrian territory south of the Brenner Pass.

For small-scale compilation, the boundary is accurately depicted on the International Map of the World 1:1,000,000. For medium-scale, the 1:200,000 topographic series published by the Italian Istituto Geographico Militare (sheets 4871, 4971, 5070, 5071, and 5170) are deemed excellent. Large-scale maps should be drawn upon the original surveys at 1:25,000 cited in Adami (above).

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Geographer, Office of Research in Economics and Science, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Geographer, Room 8744, Department of State, Washington, D.C. (Telephone: Code 182, Extension 4508)