

Peace Road Event connecting AUSTRIA and SLOVENIA, Sept. 12, 2020

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This year's Peace Road in the regional triangle of Austria, Slovenia and Italy marked a remarkable breakthrough connecting the two neighbouring regions Carinthia in Austria and Koroška in Slovenia, in particular Alfred's hometown St. Paul and the city of Slovenj Gradec, the district capital.

The picture below depicts St. Paul and the Catholic Benedictinian monastery, founded in 1091 with the two private High School buildings.



The four venues connected through this year's Peace Road

Here is some historical background why this route was chosen in particular:

From the historical perspective the two regions have been one country during the Austrian Hungarian Monarchy but became divided after WW I. A bitter dispute aroused concerning territory as well as Slavic and German ethnicity. After a plebiscite in 1920 – this year marks its 100's anniversary, political borders were pinned down but internal disputes and resentments remained. Developments during and after WW II led to even higher tensions again. Koroška, the Slovene name of this region, became part of communist Yugoslavia, Carinthia became a democratic state, part of the Austrian Republic. Despite of such development the people on both sides remained connected somehow internally, social relationships kept going on to a

certain extent. In 1991, after the Yugoslavian war, which lasted only 10 days for Slovenia, the country became an independent state and joined the European Union in 2004.

Some interesting facts concerning the city of Slovenj Gradec:

In the year 1989 the city of Slovenj Gradec was accepted as the only Slovene city in the International Association of Peace Messenger Cities initiated by the UN. Now Mr. Tilen Klugler, the mayor of Slovenj Gradec, assumes a leading, active role as the Secretary General of the International Association of Peace Messenger Cities. At this event he was also awarded as Ambassador for Peace by the UPF.

When the day of the event arrived it turned out that two mayors of the town of St. Paul, Mr. Stefan Salzmann with the former mayor, Mr. Hermann Primus, and one lady mayor from **the municipality Črna na Koroškem, Mrs Romana Lesjak**, participated in the 30 kilometers long bike route. They were very enthusiastic to support the Peace Road idea. Another VIP, Dr. Marjan Sturm, already participated the second time. He is a historian and a figurehead for the reconciliation of the two ethnic groups in this region, the Austrian Slovenian and the Austrian German.

The picture below shows all the participants at the start in front of the townhall of St. Paul with the two mayors and Mr. Sturm holding the Peace Road banner. In his welcome address in German and English Mr. Salzmann supported the founding principles of UPF and its activities for build bridges of peace building beyond borderlines. He also expressed his great delight concerning the international participation and recognized each nationality by name. Some refreshments were then provided by the municipality and a group of Slovenian bikers had arrived earlier to start together with the whole group.



This year's Peace Road event marked a remarkable joint effort of the Austrian and the Slovenian blessed families. This fact turned out to be the main pillar for success. Kristina Bacovnik and Sonja Grcar, WFWP President, Radoslav and Sun Woo Irgl, UPF representatives together with Erna Kosmrlj, FFWPU Slovenia, did a marvellous job in preparing and organizing all different matters from the Slovenian side. A good number of second generation young people from our Slovenian movement coming up as well, giving their full support with Nao Kitič together with his father playing excellently on the Oboe and the guitar. Vida Bajt Kmetec did a great job as translator during the afternoon program. Much of the joint planning and preparing was done by using Zoom technology.

The great local, national and international support this project was receiving needs to be mentioned as well. One Italian brother, Roberto Tonna, was driving four hours from Northern Italy in order to arrive in time. Three persons, Stefan and Jae Suk Schmid and Wolf Osterheld were coming from as far as Munich, Germany, to offer their help. Elisabeth Cook, President of FFWPU Austria was part of the event as well. Hermann Grubelnik from Bad Eisenkappel, Carinthia, took responsibility for the transport of bikes and Gottfried Ibounig from Klagenfurt who also gave the start signal on his trumpet, was setting up market umbrellas at the destination point and prepared drinks and snacks for everybody.



Our two mayors at the rest stop.



At the Dravograd Bridge, the first stop in Slovenia

The Slovenj Gradec municipality was very cooperative, offering all the technical support and media promotion of the event as well as the municipalities Dravograd and Crna na Koroskem from where two women mayors were already awarded as AFP in 2013.

The Slovenian local TV was present as well, covering the event and taking interviews with UPF-representatives and participants.

Here are pictures below depicting the afternoon event at the main square of Slovenj Gradec, the award ceremony for the Ambassadors for Peace and various international performances.



At the main Square in Slovenj Gradec



The Slovene Men's Choir

Following the joint arrival at the main plaza in Slovenj Gradec, a tasty snack with drinks and cakes prepared by the organizers, Mrs Kristina Bakovnik was guiding through the afternoon program. The mayors of the two cities exchanged their greetings in English, Slovene and German. Next highlight was the awarding of the Ambassador for Peace Certificate to three recipients, Dr. Marjan Sturm, Mr Tilen Klugler who was represented by the deputy mayor Mr. Peter Pungartnik as well as Mr. Stefan Salzmann.



The three newly awarded Ambassadors for Peace with Mrs Lesjak, previously awarded In their speeches of thanks each of them expressed his commitment for friendship, peace and cooperation between the two regions. Two Slovenian choirs together with Micha and Nao Kitič livened up the program



Performance of Scottish highland music



Mr. Pungartnik together with UPF the representatives

The afternoon ended with international music performances: Scottish dance music, songs from Italy, South America, Austria, Italy and Slovenia. After everything was said and done many attendees expressed their wish to meet again to continue building bonds of friendship.

The Peace Road certainly will go on in this region, we are looking forward to meet again.

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