

UPF Peace Road 2020 in Carinthia, Austria and Koroska, Slovenia

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St. Paul, Austria -- Three town mayors joined a Peace Road event, a project of UPF, connecting two neighboring regions, Carinthia in Austria and Koroška in Slovenia.

The two regions were one country during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy but were divided after World War I. A bitter dispute concerned territory as well as Slavic and German ethnicities. After a plebiscite in 1920 -- this year marks its 100th anniversary -- political borders were pinned down but internal disputes and resentments remained.



Developments during and after World War II led to even higher tensions. Koroška, the Slovenian name of this region, became part of communist Yugoslavia, and Carinthia (Kärnten) became part of the democratic Austrian Republic. Despite these developments, the people on both sides remained connected internally, and social relationships kept going to a certain extent. In 1991, after its 10-day war of independence, Slovenia became an independent state and in 2004 joined the European Union.

Some interesting facts concerning the city of Slovenj Gradec: In 1989, it was accepted as the only Slovenian city in the International Association of Peace Messenger Cities initiated by the United Nations. Now Tilen Klugler, the mayor, has a leading, active role as the secretary general of the International Association of Peace Messenger Cities. On the day of the Peace Road 2020 event, he also was awarded an Ambassador for Peace certificate by UPF.



When the day of the event arrived, September 12, it turned out that three mayors were among the approximately 70 participants: the current mayor of the Austrian town of St. Paul, Stefan Salzmann; the former mayor, Hermann Primus; and the mayor of the Slovenian town of Črna na Koroškem, Romana Lesjak. They supported the Peace Road idea very enthusiastically. Another VIP, Dr. Marjan Sturm,

participated for the second time. He is a historian and a figurehead for the reconciliation of the two ethnic groups in this region, the Austrian Slovenians and the Austrian Germans.

In his welcome address in German and English, St. Paul Mayor Stefan Salzmann supported the founding principles of UPF and its activities for building bridges of peace beyond borders. He also expressed his great delight concerning the international participation of the Peace Road event and recognized each nationality by name.



Some refreshments were then provided by the municipality before the participants started their 30-kilometer bike route. In addition to the Austrian participants, a group of Slovenian bicyclists had arrived earlier to start together with the whole group.

This year's Peace Road event marked a remarkable joint effort of Austrians and Slovenians, younger and older generations, representing not only UPF but also the affiliated organizations of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) and Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP).

In addition to the many individuals from Austria and Slovenia who organized the event, one supporter drove four hours from Northern Italy and three supporters came from Munich, Germany, to offer their help.

On the Slovenian side, the Slovenj Gradec municipality was very cooperative, offering technical support and media promotion of the event. The municipalities Dravograd and Črna na Koroškem, whose mayors were designated as Ambassadors for Peace in 2013, were also very supportive.

The Slovenian local TV was present as well, covering the event and interviewing UPF representatives and Peace Road participants.

Following the bicyclists' arrival at the main plaza in Slovenj Gradec and refreshments prepared by the organizers, the mayors of the two cities exchanged greetings in English, Slovene and German. The next highlight was the awarding of Ambassador for Peace certificates to three recipients: historian Dr. Marjan Sturm, Slovenj Gradec Mayor Tilen Klugler (who was represented by Deputy Mayor Peter Pungartnik), and St. Paul Mayor Stefan Salzmann.

In their speeches of thanks, each of them expressed his commitment to friendship, peace and cooperation between the two regions.

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