

UPF Austria: Bicyclists from Italy, Slovenia and Austria in Peace Road 2018

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Klagenfurt, Austria -- Bicyclists from Italy, Slovenia and Austria took part in a UPF Peace Road event that visited all three nations in one day.

Starting from the town of Arnoldstein in the Austrian province of Carinthia, the group bicycled to the Italian town of Tarvisio and ended in the Slovenian town of Kranjska Gora, a total of 32 kilometers (almost 20 miles). The event took place on June 9, 2018.

Six months earlier, three members of UPF representing the three nations met together in the Slovenian town of Celje to make initial plans for the event. The motto of the event was decided at that time: "Bicycling for Peace Where Our Great-Grandfathers Were Fighting 100 Years Ago."

Six weeks before the actual event, concrete preparations got under way. First the route, leading through the so-called Three-Country Corner, was selected. Flyers, a banner and white T-shirts were designed and printed. Then the mayors of the three towns were contacted and visited. Two mayors immediately responded and promised to receive the bicyclists.

On the morning of the event, 25 bicyclists and supporters from the three nations gathered in front of the community offices of Arnoldstein, including one prominent bicyclist from the Austrian city of Klagenfurt, Dr. Marjan Sturm, chair of all affiliated Slovenian organizations in Carinthia.

The mayor of Arnoldstein, Mr. Erich Kessler, greeted the group. He outlined his deep desire for friendship and communication, especially in this border region, and explained about various sisterhood projects that Austria has with the two neighboring countries.

Then in a solemn moment before the start of the bicycling, Mr. Kessler was awarded an Ambassador for Peace certificate. When the content of the document, explaining the core values of the Universal Peace Federation, was read aloud. Mr. Kessler totally agreed with it and said how precious this was for him, more meaningful than any other gift, as he was celebrating his 40th marriage anniversary the next day. He also received a gift basket with Austrian specialties.

The first, rather challenging, stage of the route led from Arnoldstein to Tarvisio, comprising 14 kilometers (over 8.5 miles) through woods and hills on a former railroad line built under the Austro-Hungarian Empire over 100 years ago. One and a half hours later the bicyclists arrived at the Piazza Unita in Tarvisio, where drinks and snacks were prepared for everybody.

At noon the mayor of Tarvisio, Mr. Renzo Zanetto, came to meet the group, accompanied by the two Italian participants, Vittorio Juliano and Roberto Tonna. In his welcoming remarks he explained about the importance of friendship and reconciliation between the neighboring countries. He was the second mayor on this day to receive an Ambassador for Peace certificate together with a gift basket from Austria. He listened to the explanation of the award's significance in English and in Italian and gave his farewell to everybody.

The second part of the tour led 18 kilometers (over 11 miles) from Tarvisio to the famous Slovenian tourist town Kranjska Gora at the foot of the Julian Alps. Again, this was a challenging route, as there were many ascending passages in this section. The scenery, though, was breathtaking.

As in the first part of the tour, the bicyclists rode at different speeds. Some would take around one and a half hours, others needed two hours or longer to arrive at the final destination, the marketplace in Kranjska Gora.

Mrs. Klavdija Gomboc from the Kranjska Gora tourist office officially welcomed the group, representing the mayor. She explained about different peace activities the community has undertaken. Dr. Marjan Sturm also explained about the joint project Building the Peace Region Alps Adriatic, inviting UPF to cooperate in future peace activities.

At this point each bicyclist was awarded a certificate of participation from Erna Kosmrlj of UPF-Slovenia, who also gave the final remarks, concluding the Peace Road event. Musicians started to play, and Slovenian, Austrian and Italian songs were sung together, creating a joyful, harmonious spirit on this beautiful day.

Finally, thanks must be expressed to all those who made this project possible through their efforts on that day and beforehand: to the Austrian participants from the provinces of Carinthia, Styria, Burgenland and Vienna; to all the participating Slovenian friends and families; and to our Italian supporters.