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GOV4PeaCE

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Third joint transnational strategic workshop with side events Gorlice (POL) 24-26/02/2026

Deliverable description:

This report and the attached video (1x) are a summary of the third joint international strategic workshop held in Gorlice on 24-26 February 2026.

Introduction:

On February 24–26, 2026, the City of Gorlice organized a three-day meeting as part of the Gov4PeaCE project, which is part of the Interreg Central Europe programme.

The meeting consisted of three working days. The first two were dedicated to the internal needs of the project partners, while the third day—open to the public—was devoted to the International Forum on the Heritage of World War I and the initiative to sign a Letter of Support from the international community for the establishment of the Museum of the Eastern Front of World War I in Gorlice.

The meeting was attended by partners (PP) from seven European countries and seventeen associated partners (AP) involved in the valorization, management, and research of World War I historical heritage from a European perspective.

The event was divided into workshops, a study visit, presentations, and a public event. Its main objective was to periodically assess the progress of the project's implementation and to work on the results planned to be achieved as part of the implementation of the pilot management model under WP II.

Day one: Tuesday, 24th February 2026

On the first day of the international partners' meeting, we hosted project partners and associated partners in the historic interiors of the Długosz Palace in Gorlice.

The conference was officially opened by the Deputy Mayor of Gorlice, Sebastian Puchajda. This was followed by a welcome address from Aleksander Klarić, representing the project lead partner – the Soča Valley Development Centre. After presenting the detailed agenda, the opening lecture entitled *"Governing Transnational World War I Landscapes of War and Peace in Central Europe"* was delivered by Dr. Kamil Ruszała, who outlined the historical context of the Battle of Gorlice and its significance for the course of fighting on the Eastern Front of World War I.





Following a short break, the first panel session began, focusing on the **presentation of results from the implementation of pilot actions within the World War I heritage management model across the three functional areas.** The session opened with a presentation by Jean-Baptiste Hintjens from the In Flanders Fields Museum, the partner

responsible for Work Package II. In his remarks, he summarized the progress achieved within all three pilots and highlighted key aspects related to refining results and preparing final reports.

Subsequently, representatives from **Slovenia and Italy presented their pilot activities**, focusing on heritage protection, promotion of a culture of peace, cross-border cooperation, as well as challenges in heritage management. A key reference point was the Walk of Peace, connecting memorial sites across Slovenia and Italy. The history of cooperation was outlined – from the establishment of the Walk of Peace Foundation in 2000, through the creation of the first cross-border trails in 2015, to the inclusion of the Slovenian section on the UNESCO Tentative List in 2016. Current cooperation is based on agreements with Slovenian ministries and Italian institutions such as PromoTurismoFVG.



The need for improved coordination of existing tourism routes (hiking and cycling) from the Stelvio Pass to the Adriatic Sea was emphasized, as their current fragmentation weakens the coherence of the historical narrative. In response, a joint communication and branding strategy based on the Walk of Peace concept was proposed. Future cooperation is expected to be formalized through two key documents: a five-year framework agreement between network institutions and a local charter of intent for museums and memorial sites based on ICOM standards. These are intended to ensure sustainability beyond the GOV4PeaCE project.

A key conclusion from the presentation was the necessity to move from dispersed local initiatives to a coordinated transnational heritage management system, enabling a coherent narrative across regions. Despite numerous trails, museums, and events, the lack of global coordination reduces both tourism and educational potential. The presenters stressed that good practices alone are insufficient without formalized cooperation structures.

Strong emphasis was also placed on communication and branding – a shared identity, promotion, and information materials are essential for building recognition and maximizing the region's potential. Combining historical heritage with tourism, research, and reenactment activities can attract diverse audiences while promoting values of peace and cooperation.

Next, representatives from **Lombardy (Italy) presented their activities**. Their presentations focused on the protection, development, and promotion of World War I heritage as both a cultural resource and a driver for tourism and education.



The first presentation outlined the strategic approach of the Lombardy regional authorities, who have been investing in identifying, protecting, and promoting Great War sites. A key element is the development of an integrated system combining museums, historical routes, and natural resources, aligned with broader European frameworks such as the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. Digital tools, resource mapping, and educational initiatives also play a significant role. A flagship example is Forte Montecchio – the best-preserved World War I fortress in Europe.

The second presentation focused on operational and infrastructural aspects, highlighting investments exceeding €10 million and the development of extensive hiking and cycling networks, particularly along the Cadorna Line. Efforts also include new museum projects, infrastructure revitalization, and modern promotional tools such as experiential tourism and digital technologies.

Both presentations illustrated a coherent vision of World War I heritage as a strategic asset requiring protection, professional management, and modern interpretation. Effective use of this potential depends on multi-level integration – local, regional, and international.

The Polish-Slovak group then presented their pilot activities, which adopted a systemic approach. The aim was to address not a lack of heritage, but the lack of governance mechanisms in a context of institutional fragmentation and dispersed heritage sites. The pilot process included stakeholder mapping, engagement, co-creation, testing, and network building. The outcome was a three-level governance model and the concept of a tourism sub-brand “Carpathia WW1/WoP”.



The Hungarian partner from **Mórahalom presented a pilot** based on establishing a heritage centre in a historic 19th-century mill building. The presentation detailed a comprehensive conceptual document exceeding 170 pages, including analysis, tourism justification,



exhibition design, and interpretation plans. Activities also include institutional cooperation and international partnerships.

After the presentations, a lunch break followed.

The afternoon session focused on **testing a digital tool for the World War I heritage management model,** led by Giulio Focardi and Lorenza Salati. Participants worked in thematic groups to identify materials, data, and good practices to enhance the tool. The testing confirmed the tool's strong conceptual foundation and usability, while also identifying areas for improvement, including question clarity, consistency, flexibility in responses, and better interpretation of results.

The tool was recognized as valuable for encouraging reflection and standardizing evaluation, though further refinement is needed to ensure practical usability.



The final session of the day, presented by **Slavka Zupan and Marco Marinuzzi, focused on future project activities and the implementation of the governance model.** A structured pathway was outlined for developing both functional-area networks and a transnational model – the Central Europe Walk of Peace (CEWoP).



The process includes transforming the project consortium into a permanent network by 2026 and establishing a formal legal structure by 2028. The proposed governance structure includes a Members' Assembly, Management Board, Secretariat, and thematic working groups.





The day concluded with a presentation by Jean-Baptiste Hinjens outlining the preliminary programme and organization of the next partner meeting, scheduled for June in Ypres, Belgium.

The first day of the conference ended with a formal dinner, during which discussions continued in smaller international groups.



Day two: Wednesday, 25th February 2026

The second day of the GOV4PeaCE project partners' meeting (25 February) had a **study-visit format** and was devoted to field visits to selected sites related to First World War heritage in the Gorlice region. The selected locations included both war cemeteries and museum facilities, showcasing the diversity of the heritage and its potential for use in tourism and education. The visit constituted an important part of the work on the concept of the cross-border Carpathian Walk of Peace – a coherent route linking places of remembrance across Central and Eastern Europe.

During the visit, participants had the opportunity to become familiar with different models of war heritage management and to discuss possibilities for securing funding for its maintenance and development, including the effects of restoration works carried out, among others, with the support of Interreg PL–SK funds. Historical information about the visited sites was presented by Kamil Ruszała from the Jagiellonian University, who also used archival photographs in his presentations.

Particular attention during the study visit was also devoted to the **specific nature of First World War heritage in the Gorlice region.** During the discussions, it was emphasized that a significant number of war cemeteries from this period are located far from main roads and transport routes. Many of them are situated in forested areas or on hard-to-reach hills, and access is possible only on foot, often via narrow, unpaved paths.

It was pointed out that, although such a location poses challenges in terms of accessibility, maintenance and promotion, it also enhances the authenticity and unique character of these places, fostering reflection and an individual experience of history. In the context of the planned Carpathian Walk of Peace, discussions focused on the need for proper marking of access routes, improvement of tourist infrastructure, and the development of solutions that would reconcile landscape protection with growing tourist interest.

Due to difficult weather conditions (rain, sleet in some places, strong wind, and mud), it was not possible to complete all the planned programme points, including visits to War Cemetery No. 116 in Staszkówka, War Cemetery No. 80 in Sękowa, and War Cemetery No. 49 "Beskidek," which requires a steep and muddy approach. Instead, during the journey, participants visited the Orthodox church in Kwiatoń – a UNESCO-listed site – which made it possible to enrich the programme with an additional cultural and architectural context of the region.

Visited sites:

War Cemetery No. 91 in Gorlice

The cemetery on Cmentarna Hill, designed by Emil Ladewig, is the burial place of more than one thousand soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian, German, and Russian armies, most of whom fell during the Battle of Gorlice. The site is distinguished by its monumental gate, stone wall, and central Latin cross, and is one of the most important places of remembrance in the region. During the visit, information was also presented on the concept for the

construction of the Eastern Front Museum in the immediate vicinity of the cemetery, as well as on the significance of the site in commemorating the Battle of Gorlice as the venue of the annual international commemorations.



War Cemetery No. 123 Łużna-Pustki

One of the largest war cemeteries in the region, located on Pustki Hill – the site of intense fighting in May 1915. On an area of nearly 3 hectares, more than one thousand soldiers of different armies were buried, and its characteristic feature is the reconstructed wooden chapel designed by Dušan Jurkovič. The visit provided an opportunity to meet representatives of the municipality and discuss practical aspects of the management and maintenance of this type of site.

In Łużna, the participants met with representatives of the Łużna Municipality, who presented the challenges related to maintaining the extensive cemetery grounds, particularly the greenery. They also spoke about cooperation with foreign partners, community activities (including joint cemetery clean-up actions), and educational initiatives such as a field game organized within the cemetery area.


GORLICE
MIASTO ŚWIATŁA


GORLICE
MIASTO ŚWIATŁA

War Cemetery No. 118 in Staszkówka

A monumental necropolis located on Mentlówka Hill, commemorating the fighting connected with the Battle of Gorlice. It is distinguished by a central monument and four stone pylons designed by Hermann Kurt Hosaeus. Soldiers of the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian armies are buried there, and its spatial layout underlines the importance of the site.





War Cemetery No. 60 at Małastów Pass

A picturesque cemetery in the Low Beskids, designed by Dušan Jurkovič. It is distinguished by its unique geometric layout and a wooden chapel forming the central element of the composition. The forest surroundings and the site's architecture create an atmosphere conducive to reflection on history and the passage of time. During the visit, participants also had the opportunity to learn about the results of restoration works carried out there, including the reconstruction of Jewish gravestones, which became a starting point for discussions on the importance of preserving authenticity and the multicultural character of places of remembrance.





War Cemetery No. 55 in Gładyszów

A small cemetery located by the Gorlice–Konieczna road, designed by Dušan Jurkovič. A total of 104 soldiers, mainly from the Russian army, who fell in 1914–1915, are buried there. The site has recently undergone restoration works, which became a starting point for discussions on the maintenance and conservation of this type of memorial site.



Orthodox Church in Kwiatoń

A wooden Orthodox church inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, representing the traditional sacral architecture of the Carpathian region. The visit to this site enriched the programme with cultural context and demonstrated the diversity of the region's heritage.



PTTK Regional Museum in Gorlice

A museum presenting the history of the region, with particular emphasis on the Battle of Gorlice, including collections of military artefacts, documents, and a model of the battlefield used to explain the course of military operations. The museum also hosted a discussion on the planned new museum, its concept, possibilities for acquiring exhibits, and the potential use of the existing collections owned by PTTK.





Walk through Gorlice

That day also included a walk through Gorlice, complementing the study visit with local historical and cultural context. Participants visited the Gorlice Town Hall and saw the monument to Fr. Bronisław Świeykowski, the mayor of the town during the First World War. The walk also introduced participants to the mural route "Street Atlas of Insects," inspired by his figure. They also saw the Basilica of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, destroyed during the Battle of Gorlice, the town's main streets, and the Karwacjan Manor, which was also destroyed during the wartime operations.





Day three: Thursday, 26th February 2026

On the final day of the conference, the **European Forum of World War I Heritage** took place. The event brought together numerous guests from Poland and abroad and became a platform for discussions on the protection of Great War heritage, the development of international cooperation, and the building of a shared European historical memory. The Forum was organised as part of the GOV4PeaCE project and gathered representatives of the diplomatic corps, local and regional authorities, cultural institutions, non-governmental organisations, and project partners from nine countries: Slovenia, Italy, Belgium, France, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine, and Romania.

Among the invited guests were, among others, Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia Tomislav Vidošević, Deputy Head of Mission of the Republic of Austria Nicole Griesmaier, First Secretary of the Embassy of Croatia Lucio Borčič, Second Secretary of the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia Denis Curanović, Consul General of Hungary in Kraków Tibor Gerencsér, coordinators for academic and educational cooperation Léonie Foncourbe and Théo Gardes representing the Consul General of France, as well as representatives of regional and local authorities.



The Forum programme included the International World War I Heritage Fair, an expert panel titled “Towards a Carpathian Walk of Peace: Creating a Cohesive Peace Trail in Central and Eastern Europe,” and the ceremonial signing of the Letter of Support for the initiative to establish the Eastern Front World War I Museum in Gorlice.

The opening presentation by **Alex Klarić** from the Soča Valley Development Centre and **Natalia Pacana-Roman** from the City of Gorlice introduced **the project’s objectives, assumptions, and results achieved so far.**





The next presentation, delivered by Dr Kamil Ruszała, focused on the work related to **developing the concept of the Eastern Front World War I Museum in Gorlice**. In his speech, he outlined the stages of work carried out by the Social Museum Council, as well as the initial assumptions of the conceptual framework and future steps and prospects for cooperation.



Another key element of the Forum was the **panel discussion**. Moderated by Dr Kamil Ruszała from the Institute of History of the Jagiellonian University, the panel featured Maša Klavora, Director of the Walk of Peace Foundation (Slovenia), Nicola Revelant from PromoTurismoFVG (Italy), Francesco Frizzera – Director of MITAG – Italian Historical Museum of War (Italy), and Franck Viltart – representative of the First World War Heritage Mission (France).

The discussion **focused on international experiences in the protection and promotion of World War I heritage**. Participants presented best practices related to the creation and management of cross-border historical trails along the Italian-Slovenian border, highlighting the importance of institutional cooperation and a coherent historical narrative. An important topic was also the role of UNESCO inscription as a tool to strengthen recognition and protection of heritage sites. The discussion also addressed the role of museums located along such routes – as educational centres and interpretation hubs that combine tourism with reliable historical knowledge. The panel emphasised the importance of synergy between tourism, education, and cultural heritage protection.



Another part of the Forum featured a presentation by experts from the Carpathian Euroregion – Anna Buk and Mirosław Majkowski – who presented the assumptions and initial proposal for **thematic routes covering key World War I heritage sites along the Polish-Slovak border.**



The final element of the Forum was the **signing of the Letter of Support**. The document was signed by regional authorities, representatives of public institutions, non-governmental organisations, cultural institutions, tourism organisations, and GOV4PeaCE project partners, including the Soča Valley Development Centre (Slovenia), the Walk of Peace Foundation, the Beskidy Military History Club, Memoriale Veneto della Grande Guerra, the City of Mórahalom, MITAG – Italian Historical Museum of War in Rovereto, the In Flanders Fields Museum (Belgium), Poloniny National Park, the First World War Heritage Mission (France), PromoTurismoFVG, the "Meritum" Association, the Jagiellonian University, Uzhhorod National University, and the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU).





An integral part of the event was the **European Heritage Fair** – exhibition stands of institutions and organisations engaged in promoting World War I heritage. Exhibitors included both international project partners and regional stakeholders such as local governments, associations, cultural institutions, and libraries, including the municipalities of Łużna, Uście Gorlickie, Gorlice, and Sękowa, the City of Bardejov, the Association of Fortress Municipalities of the Przemyśl Fortress, the Institute of Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University, the Memorial Chamber in Karwina, the Gorlice 1915 Historical Reenactment Group, the GRH Memorial Chamber in Gorlice, the Kryg Museum Chamber, the Regional Museum of the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society in Gorlice, the Museum of the Biecz Land, the Biecz Library, the Municipal Public Library in Gorlice, as well as international project partners.









The Forum became a space for exchanging experiences, presenting good practices, and building international partnerships around the protection of World War I heritage. The meeting confirmed the growing importance of cross-border cooperation and shared responsibility for preserving historical memory, while strengthening efforts to develop European memory routes and historical tourism.