



Fidenza, 18.12.2023
Prot. n. 1889/2023

For the attention of Members and Friends
European Association of Via Francigena ways, EAVF

Subject: Letter from President Massimo Tedeschi and Deputy Vice-President Francesco Ferrari_2024.

The year 2023 marked a decisive restart of the Via Francigena (VF for short) and the activities of the European Association (EAVF for short). The number of EAVF credentials issued in 2023 (around 15,500 in continuity with 2022) shows that pilgrims are numerous. This leads us to confirm the estimated number of pilgrims and walkers in the range of 50,000 (with an average stay of 7 days). All data from the portal www.viefrancigene.org show a positive trend: in 2023, the site had almost 3 million page views. Alongside the portal, the numbers of the social channels continue to grow: *Facebook* (74,000 members), *Instagram* (31,000 members), the *Road to Rome Community* (14,000 members) doubled compared to 2022. Demand for official Road to Rome guides also remained high, thanks to the initiative of the three partner publishers: Terre di Mezzo (Milan), Cicerone (London), Favre (Lausanne); publishers that EAVF supported editorially and financially. The publication of the six-monthly magazine 'Via Francigena and European Cultural Routes', published by Studio Guidotti of Fornovo Taro (Parma, Italy) continued. At the same time, the institutional work continued with the increase in the number of territorial collectivities adhering to EAVF, which reached the number of 239 in the four States crossed (a year ago we were 222) and of friend associations (which reached the number of 93 compared to 88 in 2022).

At the governance level, it should be noted that in the French national section, important reflection is underway for the organisation of a 'route committee' composed of representatives of the eight departments (Pas-de-Calais; Somme; Aisne; Aube; Marne; Haute-Marne; Haute-Saone; Doubs) and the three regions (Hauts-de-France; Grand Est; Bourgogne-Franche-Comté), in close collaboration with EAVF, to make the planning and coordination of the route's promotion activities more effective.

Cooperation continued with the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome (CPR) in London, the *Fédération Française de Randonnée* (FFR) in Paris, the French Federation of the Via Francigena (FFVF) in Reims, with the Swiss Via Francigena Association (ASVF) and with the local Italian associations represented in the EAVF Bureau, the '*Gruppo dei Dodici*' of Fondi (Lazio), the '*Brindisi e le Antiche Strade*' Association of Brindisi (Puglia) and the ATVF 2.0 (Tuscany).

We would like to thank the Mayor of Calais, Natacha Bouchart, and the Mayor of Pavia, Fabrizio Fracassi, together with their respective staff, for the excellent welcome and organisation of our two General Assemblies (Calais 26/05/2023; Pavia 20/10/2023).

The European planning capacity of EAVF and Francigena Service S.r.l. is being consolidated, including the three-year project (2021-23) 'Rurallure - Promotion of rural museums and heritage sites in the vicinity of European pilgrimage routes' (Horizon 2020 Programme), in which EAVF is a partner, and the ERASMUS+ calls



for the mobility of young people that will enable, also in 2024, dozens of recent graduates in the tourism sector to carry out professional training outside their own country.

Also in the course of 2023, important work took place on the more than 500-page *dossier* for the periodic evaluation (cycle 2023-24) by the Council of Europe to confirm the certification of the VF as a 'Cultural Route of the Council of Europe' and EAVF as a 'réseau porteur' of the VF. This is the ordinary evaluation (period 2020-2023) of the European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR) in Luxembourg, which appointed Professor Maria Gravari-Barbas of the Sorbonne in Paris as evaluator. On 15 May 2024, the meeting of the Governing Board of the EPA (Enlarged Partial Agreement) on Cultural Routes will take place in Luxembourg, where the final decision on the confirmation of the certification will be formulated. EAVF will be represented by EAVF Vice-President Gaetan Tornay.

The projects, for which we have been commissioned by private operators and public bodies, aimed at improving the route from the point of view of promotion, safety and technological innovation applied to walking, have continued. Among these, we highlight:

- The project *Via Francigena for all*, by the Piedmont Region, aimed at making a section of the regional VF accessible to people with motor, visual and hearing disabilities.
- The *States General on Walking and Sustainable Tourism* in Italy (19.10.23), held by EAVF in cooperation with the Municipality and Chamber of Commerce of Pavia, represented an important moment of reflection and exchange, with the remote participation of the Italian Minister of Tourism Daniela Santanchè.
- The collaboration between Coop, a system of Italian cooperatives comprising a network of supermarkets and hypermarkets, and EAVF aimed at relaunching a healthy and sustainable lifestyle through walking. The 'Coop Outdoor' project proposed a rich calendar of walks/events on foot and by bicycle.
- Media-Tour in Switzerland entitled 'The Via Francigena through the medieval villages in Valais'. The event took place from 4 to 8 September 2023 from Martigny (Canton Valais) to the Great St. Bernard Pass, with the participation of international bloggers and influencers, who reported on the route.
- The event 'la Via Francigena GR®145 en fête', organised in Haute-Saône by the Communauté de communes des 4 rivières together with EAVF, FFRandonnée and local associations on 3 June 2023, a large walk accompanied by cultural events along the route that brought together more than 150 participants.

The joint activity of EAVF and Francigena Service S.r.l. has expanded the partnerships with several companies (Trenitalia, Trenord, Coop Italia, Flixbus, Consorzio Parmigiano-Reggiano, Consorzio Prosciutto Toscano D.o.p., Ferrino, Garmont, SNAM, Banca Generali; CAMCO) and private tourism operators (hostels, hotels, restaurants) scattered along the VF. More than 350 accommodation facilities in Europe adhere to the *VisitVieFrancigene* visibility platform.

Looking ahead to 2024, there are three main objectives:

- Implementation of the Strategic Plan 2023-25 programme lines: 1. Route management in collaboration with the territorially competent subjects (signposting, maintenance, variants). 2.

Governance and strengthening of the Via Francigena brand. 3. Communication, organisation and animation of events. 4. Monitoring pilgrim and cultural tourist flows. 5. Research, culture and sustainability.

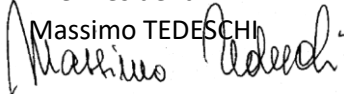
- Programme of activities to celebrate 30 years of the certification of the Via Francigena as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe (1994-2024). Jacques Le Goff writes on this subject: "A route is not content to live of the past or even the present, it somehow sends out a signal for the future [...]. A route like this lives in time, it combines slowness with longevity." The 30th anniversary celebrations are therefore intended to best represent the various facets that make the VF a perfect synthesis of many different souls, which combine to create one great cultural, social, sustainable tourism and peace project. We will keep you constantly updated on the programme of activities.
- UNESCO candidature of the Via Francigena. To date, the necessary European context study (framework) has been approved by Italy, Switzerland, France, the United Kingdom and the Vatican City State, giving the green light to proceed with the candidature of individual national sections. Italy is proceeding with a ministerial allocation of EUR 1.1 million (approved in 2016 and only released at the end of 2022). The coordination of administrative actions is in the hands of the Tuscany Region. The local authorities and parliamentarians of the French stretch have expressed interest in the UNESCO candidacy of the respectful stretch.

Finally, **the next EAVF General Assembly will take place in Vevey (Canton of Vaud) on Friday 26 April 2024 (2-6 p.m.)**. The agenda is dense and includes, among other items, the approval of the 2023 accounts of EAVF and Francigena Service S.r.l..

Looking forward to seeing you all in Vevey, we extend our warmest wishes for successful work and Happy Holidays!

Fidenza, 18 December 2023

The President

Massimo TEDESCHI


The Deputy Vice President

Francesco FERRARI

