

# FOCUS ON...

## Christmas Convoi Germany



Report by Nina Köhler and Stefanie Brüder



### Finally convoy again

The „Weihnachtspäckchenkonvoi“, you could translate it by „Christmas gift convoy“ but it is easier to shortcut it as „WPK“, is the largest and most successful Side by Side project of the Round Table Family (Ladies' Circle, Agora Club Tangent, Round Table and Club 41) and Friends in Germany. Since the year 2000, the WPK has been travelling to Eastern Europe for a week every year at the beginning of December to bring Christmas presents to children in need, who would otherwise not receive presents at all. It grew from just a few packages that fit into a single truck to the highest number to date of around 156.000 in 2021. The responsible people for the Round Table family and the Friends of the convoy are working continuously throughout the year in various organisational teams to carry out this joint project.



In December it's time again: The convoy is rolling! All of the passengers not only invest their free time, but of course also some own financial means, to make children happy in the target countries of Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria and the Ukraine. The convoy motto is "children help children", therefore children in Germany pack colorful shoebox packages with toys, warm clothing, sweets, school supplies and hygiene articles, with the support of their parents, grandparents, friends, schools and children daycare centers, to help the children who are not doing so well and to make them happy. Last December Poland was also served for the first time, specifically refugee camps on the border with Ukraine, where many Ukrainian children are living since the start of the war.

## Finally convoy again!

After two years of a break due to the covid-19 pandemic, we were finally allowed to drive to the target countries again ourselves to distribute packages. In 2020 and 2021, the packages were transported to Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria and the Ukraine by regular goods transportation with trucks, where they were distributed by our local partners without our help.

Local service clubs such as Ladies' Circle, Agora Club, Round Table and Club 41, but also Caritas are supporting the WPK and helping with the selection of children daycare centers, schools, children's homes and hospitals.



## Finally convoy again!

On December 2, 2022, 33 trucks, 228 passengers, 5 busses and 7 escort vehicles set out to make 265.212 children's eyes light up with 132.606 Christmas parcels donated throughout Germany.

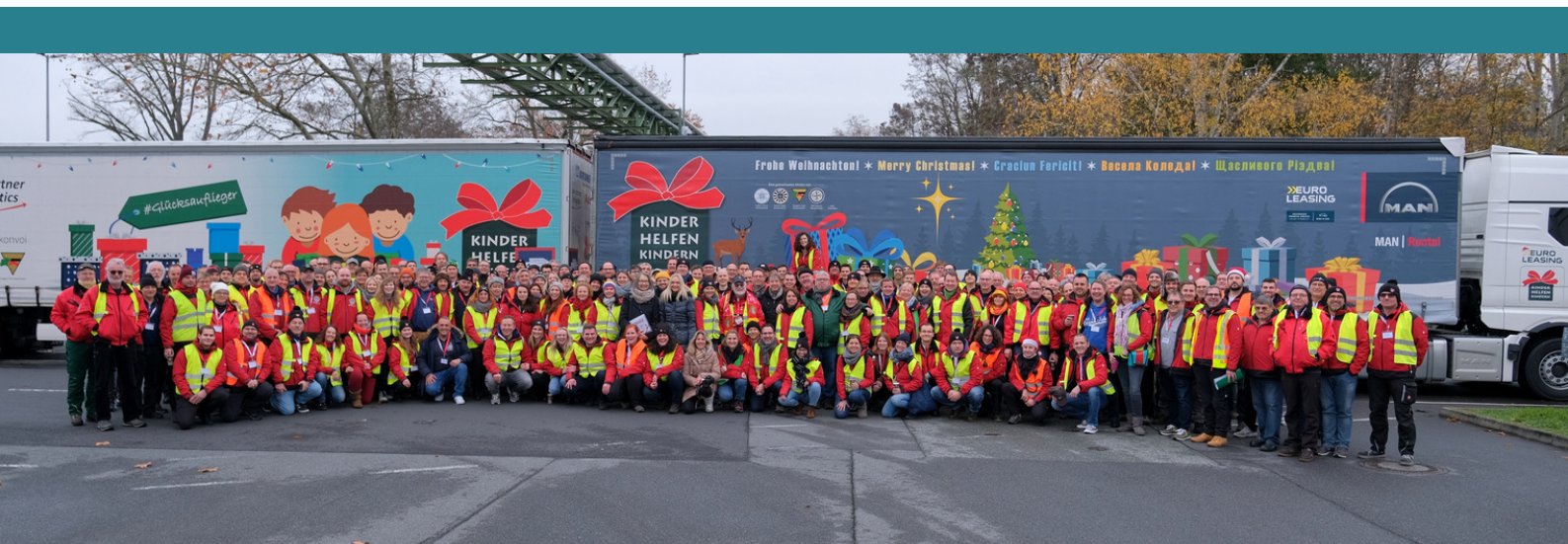
For Nina it was the third convoy after 2018 and 2019 but everything was different this time.

The WPK is divided into five sub-convoys, Romania East, Romania West, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine. Since 2020, Nina has been part of the organisation team for Romania East, which is responsible for managing the sub-convoy for this region with its nine tours and about 50 passengers.

Everything was settled in countless video conferences and telephone calls, escort vehicles and trucks were organised, tours were worked out and tour guides were "recruited", the route from Hanau in Germany to Arad in Romania was meticulously planned with refueling stops and other breaks, to name just a few things necessary for the successful distribution of all the packages. All vehicles are travelling in convoy up to Arad, after which the convoy is divided into its individual routes. Again and again new challenges, a lot of organisation in advance and also during the convoy, did not allow boredom to arise. Clear conclusion: The many hours of work were worth it!

For Steffi it was the second convoy that took her to Drobeta Turnu Severin in southwestern Romania at the beautiful Danube in 2019 and 2022. Just like Nina, she is now part of the big team that organises the WPK. Since 2021 she has been part of a four people organisational team that manages the collection of packages throughout Germany and answers all questions about packing and collecting packages.

The convoy feeling is difficult to describe to outsiders. Many passengers simply call it "convoy fever" or "convoy love". But only those who have actively accompanied a convoy can really understand this!



Even the departure from Hanau is very impressive and close to everyone: Many people seem to be running around in an uncoordinated manner, sorting and distributing food, installing radios in each vehicle, putting big stickers on the vehicles to make the convoy recognisable to outsiders, making final preparations so that the convoy with its many vehicles

can start in time. Experienced frequent drivers meet WPK newcomers, whose excitement before the adventure can be seen in their faces. And everyone is waiting for the final number of packages, because this will only be announced immediately before the convoy departs. After that, the drivers have to sit up, start the engine and count by radio. Meanwhile, the passengers have boarded the busses and escort vehicles and are waiting anxiously. And then finally the convoy starts moving by honking its horns loudly. All the remaining people are saying goodbye by waving, photographing and filming the departure. This gives pure goosebumps and many shed a few tears. Depending on the region, the convoy now has a journey of around 24 - 30 hours before it reaches its destination and the distribution of the packages can start.

## Finally convoy again!

For both of us, the WPK has been a project of our heart's desire for many years! Long before we have been an active part of the convoy for the first time, we already seized packages with our children and collected parcels with our club. But we don't want to miss the individually made experiences, adventures and impressions that we were allowed to experience during the tour anymore! When the first children's eyes light up during the distribution of the Christmas parcels and the children are overjoyed about a gift - these are the convoy moments that stay in our heads and, above all, in our hearts for a long time. For those children it is a special Christmas present, a gesture that conveys love and hope and that they are being thought of. We both are of the opinion that each Lady, each Tabler should have been an active part of the convoy at least once! You come back home grounded, a bit humble and you become more aware of the privileged situation in which we find ourselves.



Nina went to Alba Iulia in Western Romania during her first two convoy years. In 2022 she supported the five people team Campulung. Campulung is about 100 kilometres in the southwest of Braşov, a small former mining town. In Campulung there is a high rate of unemployment, because for many years there has not been mining anymore.

Together with the Tablers of Club 41 Campulung, around 3500 packages were distributed, mostly in schools, children day care centers and children's homes in small villages nearby Campulung.

Nina particularly remembers one children's home for disabled children, her team coincidentally was there on St. Nicholas Day: 15 children of all ages would not have received any Christmas presents without the WPK. Here often is a lack of clothing, bed linen, towels and other basic needs. There is little to no state support, the children's home is dependent on donations. St. Nicholas Day is an important day in Romania and therefore everyone was particularly grateful. In addition to the packages, Nina's team was also able to distribute sweets in the children's shoes, like it is usual in Germany. This was one of Nina's convoy moments!

# Finally convoy again!

During one day, the ACI President Mihaela Crăcăna supported the team Campulung in distributing parcels. A very welcome help! She is already planning to be there again for the upcoming convoy in 2023 and therefore she has bought herself a red jacket, so that she also “looks good” with us. Because our red jackets are also an identifying mark of the WPK. The Tablers from Club 41 Campulung have teamed up with other clubs in the area to buy red jackets embroidered with "A box that brings joy" during the years of the covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, to ensure recognition of the WPK.

Steffi's team of 13 people in Drobeta also has a close, friendly working relationship with the local clubs Round Table, Ladies' Circle and Club 41. Despite the language barrier, friendships have developed over the years and everyone is very happy to meet each other again to carry out this project together. Without this joint side by side within the motto “4 Clubs 1 Vision” it would not be possible to distribute over 11.300 packages in a total of 28 individual tours in the Drobeta region. Steffi's paths led her to remote mountain regions with small schools, but also to the vast plains of Little Wallachia, where the places seem to be dying out and depopulated.





## Finally convoy again!

In 2023 both of us will definitely be a small part of those dedicated Ladies, Tablers and Friends of the WPK again, who at least during the Christmas season, make the often dreary everyday life of children in some parts of Eastern Europe a little more colorful with packages that "our" German children packed for them.

We like to repeat ourselves: It is the project of our heart's desire!

A lot of information about the Christmas gift convoy can be found here:

<https://weihnachtspaeckchenkonvoi.de>

Photos and short reports of the teams Romania East Campulung 2022 and Romania West Drobeta 2022, as well as WPK impressions from the years 2018 to 2021 can also be found here:

<https://www.agoraclubtangent.de/clubs/act-48-peine/service-1>

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