Magiczny Kraków

Austrian with French charme

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Christoph Ceska Consul General of Austria in Krakow talks about the five years he spent in our city, explains what Viennese balls are all about and describes his biking trips to Tyniec. Enjoy the interview!

KRAKOW THE OPEN CITY: You are a citizen of Austria and France. Are you more Austrian or French?

CHRISTOPHE CESKA: I definitely feel more Austrian because of my life so far. I went to school in Austria; I served in the army and climbed the first steps of the carrier ladder there. Perhaps then, I could describe myself as an Austrian with a hint of French *charme*.

KOC: Arriving in the Galician Krakow you must have had some preconceptions of our city. Have the five years of your mission confirmed or changed them?

CC: I admit that coming to Krakow, I did not know the city. Of course, I realised it was a beautiful place, incredibly rich in culture and history; a city which cherishes its cultural heritage and, in many ways, stays connected with Austria and our common past. I must also admit that my arrival in Krakow initiated a string of nice surprises. First of all, I was positively surprised with Krakovians' positive attitude towards Austria. I was also pleasantly surprised with how much the people here know about history in general and our common history in particular. History is, in fact, an important component of their collective memory.

Later, my stay in Krakow confirmed my first impressions and experiences. Krakow has a lot to offer and yet, is comparatively little known in the western world. Too little, considering all the assets the city should boast of. That is why, from the very start, I attempted to implement multiple initiatives in the filed of culture, economy and science, to popularise Krakow. Thanks to my efforts, many Austrians representing very different walks of life and a variety of public spheres, visited Krakow. To help them get to know the city, I wanted to implement, together with them, as many interesting projects as possible. I noticed that all those who come to Krakow, and who – like myself - do not know much about the city at first, are positively surprised. I believe that every effort should be made to attract visitors to Krakow and show them the beauty of the city.

KOC: This year, the Diplomatic Ball took place on February 2nd in *Villa Decius* and resembled classical Viennese balls. Have you ever participated in a traditional Viennese ball?

CC: Indeed, I have participated in quite a few balls. Especially, when I was a student, but also later. We all know that Viennese balls are particularly famous, but there are many balls organised elsewhere in Austria. It is hard to say whether they all resemble those held in Vienna, however I have always enjoyed the classical ones and I was happy to participate in them. I remember them all fondly. Allow me to mention just a few: the Schotten-Gymnasium Ball in Vienna, the Viennese Philharmonics Ball, the Technical Association Ball or the Industrialists' Ball. They are all much smaller than the Opera

House Ball, which I have never participated in. It is too big and conspicuous for my taste. In my opinion, this year's ball in ***Villa Decius*** was a true success; also because it was sponsored by the city of Vienna – the organizer of the traditional Viennese balls. Together with all the guests, we created a pleasant, friendly atmosphere. The participants danced waltzes, polkas or the quadrille; all under the leadership of Romana Angel, the director of Cracovia Danza ballet. Learning the dances was not easy, but we did enjoy it a lot. The ball was also very well-prepared.

The Diplomatic Ball at ***Villa Decius*** was not a classical Viennese ball. It was meant to be a harmonious blend of a Viennese ball and a Polish carnival ball. The event's programme mirrored its international character. I am referring especially to two particular points: the first one was obligatory, the other voluntary. All my colleague diplomats were to select some best-tasting alcohols from their countries and present them. The presentations were very witty. The second challenge was to present one's singing skills. Some of my colleagues did really well.

KOC: Does a programme of a traditional Viennese ball have some fixed points?

CC: The ceremonial opening is definitely a fixed point of a classical Vienesse ball's programme; it consists of the first dance performed by the debutantes. Young ladies in white and smartly dressed young men perform a dance routine opening the ball. The opening is invariably the obligatory point. The musical repertoire is also important. The orchestra typically plays waltzes but at some point everybody should also dance a quadrille or polka. These are the most important components of a traditional Viennese ball.

KOC: You enjoy skiing, mountain climbing, diving, biking and golf. Do you have time for your hobbies while working in Krakow?

CC:I must say that Krakow is excellent for sports; not only the ones I particularly enjoy. Jogging around Błonia is really great. I try to jog regularly; 2-3 times a week. I like it also because Błonia is a magical, beautiful spot. I love the Polish Tatras and I do a special kind of sport there. Together with my Austrian friend, who knows mountains inside-out and loves mountain sports, we climb uphill with our skis on and then slide down. All this far from regular slopes attended by tourists. I also ride my bike and I would like to do it more often. However, in my profession, I do not have much free time. I like going to Tyniec on my bike; once I also made a longer trip all the way to Lanckorona.

KOC: Despite many efforts of the local authorities and the petitions to the Austrian Ministry of Foreign affairs and Austrian Embassy, the decision to close the Consulate General in Krakow is still on the cards. If the Consulate is closed, what will be your next career move?

CC: My professional plans are independent of the decision to close the General Consulate in Krakow. As a diplomat, I am a member of the Austrian diplomatic service which operates according to the principles of rotation. Every professional diplomat must apply for a new post in a different location every 3-4 years. The applications are reviewed by the Austrian Ministry of foreign affairs; one is either assigned to a new diplomatic post or to a temporary post in one of the ministry departments in Vienna. In my case, the decision will be made no earlier than at the end of April.

KOC: Is it possible to be appointed twice in the same location ?

CC: It does not happen often, but it is possible. In such cases, you often are e.g. a third secretary at an embassy as a young diplomat. Then you work in several countries and, after some time, you become a consul or even an ambassador in the original location. In Krakow we have seen a case of a diplomat serving twice in the same country, not the same city though. My predecessor, Alfred Längle, returned after some time to become the Ambassador of Austria in Warsaw. When it comes to the possibility of prolonging my mission; I have entered into the fifth year of my stay in Krakow. Originally, I was appointed for four years, so my mission has already been prolonged. It seems that I will remain in Krakow until September 2013 when the Austrian Consulate is due to close.

KOC: What will you miss after you leave Krakow?

CC: I will surely remember the interesting cultural programmes we have implemented, the skiing trips in the Tatras or Krakow’s vibrant cultural scene. I will definitely not forget the friendly people of Krakow. I will also fondly think of Poland, as an interesting country full of opportunities, where one can pursue many interesting ideas.