



A Diplomatic Start to the Year

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The New Year meetings between the Mayor of Kraków and the consular corps are a long-standing tradition, upheld once again this year. On 15 January, Mayor Aleksander Miszalski invited Kraków's diplomatic community to another municipal cultural venue—*Apteka Designu (Design Pharmacy)*. Although the location might initially have seemed less obvious for such an occasion, it was met with considerable appreciation and interest. For many consuls, it was their first visit—but, as they assured, certainly not their last.

Mayor Miszalski reviewed the past 12 months of international cooperation, noting how strong global engagement can effectively drive local development and translate into tangible benefits for residents. *"We are very pleased to see new consular offices opening in our city—we already have 40,"* the Mayor emphasised while welcoming new consuls attending the New Year meeting for the first time: the Consul General of Georgia, Ioseb Khakhaleishvili; the Honorary Consul of Portugal, Marek Tomasz Puwalski; as well as the newly appointed heads of re-opened missions—the Honorary Consul General of the Slovak Republic, Paulina Šperková; the Honorary Consul of Malta, Prof. Piotr Ludwik Chłosta; and the Honorary Consul of Sweden, Tomasz Balcerowski. It was also the first New Year meeting for the U.S. Consul General, Gretchen McKeever Cureton, who began her mission in Kraków in August 2025.

As Mayor Miszalski pointed out, such a strong consular presence is particularly significant given that nearly 15 million visitors (14.72 million) came to Kraków last year. Kraków Airport handled a record 13.248 million passengers, advancing to a higher league of international airports. Thanks to cooperation between the airport authorities and Biblioteka Kraków (Kraków Library), travellers now have access to a small airport library. Diplomats responded enthusiastically to the city's appeal and arrived at the meeting with publications from their respective countries, which will enrich the airport's collection. Representatives of the consular corps also assured that this initiative was not a one-off and that the library would continue to be supplied with international bestsellers.

Summing up 2025, the Mayor highlighted key facts and events that undoubtedly strengthened Kraków's international standing. In October 2025, Kraków officially joined Eurocities—the largest European network of cities working together for sustainable development, innovation, and quality of life. The city was also selected to participate in the inaugural edition of the Bloomberg LSE European City Leadership Initiative, the first professional programme of its kind designed specifically for mayors and city officials, offering evidence-based strategies delivered by world-class academics, researchers, and political leaders.

An important element in building Kraków's international brand is cultural and economic promotion, with major events serving as key tools. These include the Cities Forum—the European Commission's flagship event on the future of cities in the EU; the World News Media Congress (WAN-IFRA), bringing together journalists and publishers from nearly 80 countries; the Historic Cities 3.0 conference, focused on the future of tourism in historic cities; the European Rover Challenge, combining international Mars rover competitions with a scientific conference; Digital Dragons Conference 2025, one of Europe's largest B2B events for the gaming industry; the 23rd World Congress of the



International Association for the History of Religions; the EU Sports Forum; the International PEN Congress (*The Power of the Free Word*); and the new TECH-ON! event, where science joins forces with business, culture intersects with technology, and creative energy truly inspires. These conferences, along with numerous festivals such as the Kraków Film Festival, the Science & Technology Film Festival, Opera Rara Kraków, and the Conrad Festival, demonstrate the wide range of sectors for which Kraków has become an attractive partner.

Looking to the future, the Mayor stressed the importance of investment. Kraków is one of the most important investment hubs in this part of Europe and continues to strengthen its position. This is confirmed by the decision of the European High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking (EuroHPC JU) to locate the Gaia AI Factory—a state-of-the-art artificial intelligence facility—in Kraków. The project not only reinforces Poland's role in the European AI ecosystem but also lays the groundwork for future initiatives of this kind. Meanwhile, Ryanair has opened one of the most advanced simulator and training centres in Central and Eastern Europe in Kraków.

City diplomacy also plays a crucial role in building international relations. *“Thanks to international contacts, we can benefit from the experience of our foreign partners,”* the Mayor noted. In implementing one of the key priorities of his term—the construction of a metro system—Kraków has already drawn on the expertise of specialists from Copenhagen, Milan, Vienna, and Toulouse. Further study visits are planned, including to Frankfurt am Main, with which Kraków is celebrating the 35th anniversary of its partnership this year. Experts from cities facing similar heritage-protection challenges will also be invited to Kraków. At the same time, Kraków's own specialists have shared their experience with partners from Ukraine, China, and Romania.

Great importance is also attached to constructive dialogue with expatriates who have chosen Kraków as their place of residence. *“That is why in October I took part, for the second time, in the Intercultural Dialogue Bench,”* the Mayor said. All proposals and recommendations raised at that meeting are currently being analysed and will be summarised during the planned third edition later this year.

The importance of dialogue was also underscored by the Chairman of the Kraków City Council, Jakub Kosek. With foreign residents in mind, he declared the city's readiness—together with its cultural institutions—to include elements promoting their national cultures in Kraków's cultural offer. He also encouraged Kraków's diplomats to jointly promote the city's culture in other Polish cities and abroad.

As every year, the consular corps was represented by its Dean, the Consul General of Ukraine, Viacheslav Voinarovskiy. He thanked the city authorities for their continued support for consular activities in Kraków and—speaking as a Ukrainian diplomat—for the assistance and solidarity shown to his nation in its struggle against Russian aggression. This was not the only voice from the consular community. Paweł Włodarczyk, Honorary Consul General of Croatia, took the floor as the founder of the Kraków Consular Club Association, active since May 2025. Although a relatively new endeavour, the club has already recorded its first successes, including cooperation with the Kraków Botanical Garden, which will result in a special alley featuring plants from the countries represented by Kraków's diplomats. In addition, the Public School Da Vinci will host lectures on diplomacy delivered by Kraków-based consuls.



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The official part of the meeting concluded with a presentation by Carolina Pietyra, Head of *Krakowskie Biuro Festiwalowe (Kraków Festival Office)*, who introduced both the venue of this year's New Year meeting—*Apteka Designu*—and the wider *Wesoła* district. The area is gaining an increasingly prominent place on Kraków's cultural map, successfully combining the creativity of local artists with the expectations of the local community.

While New Year meetings with the consular corps are symbolic and protocol-driven, they also strengthen Kraków's image as a city open to dialogue and demonstrate the continuity and stability of its international relations. This, in turn, is a key element in building Kraków's brand as a city friendly to diplomats, investors, and foreign residents alike.

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