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Roman Mehela and GDIP Director-General, Pavlo Kryvonos

Roman Mehela,
Honorary Consul of the Democratic
Republic of the Congo in Uzhhorod

EDUCATION, CULTURE, PARTNERSHIP: vectors of cooperation between Ukraine and the Democratic Republic of the Congo

— Your work as Honorary Consul takes place during a difficult period for Ukraine and the world in general. In your opinion, what sort of role can an honorary consulate play in forming more resilient and flexible forms of international interaction at the regional level?

— A modern honorary consulate is not only a symbol of diplomatic presence but also a tool of flexible and sensible foreign policy. At a time of global instability, armed conflicts, and new geopolitical challenges, it's important to strengthen horizontal, people-to-people, and inter-institutional contacts. Honorary consulates act as platforms for regional dialogue, supporting initiatives of local communities, businesses, and educational institutions. We help build bridges of cooperation in places where large diplomatic mechanisms are slower or less flexible.

— Lately, there has been a surge of interest in cooperation with countries of the African continent in Ukraine, both at the intergovernmental and institutional levels. What do you consider to be the most important element in building trust between our countries?

— Trust-building begins with deep and genuine familiarity between both sides. Ukraine and the African countries possess a wealth of historical and cultural experience that deserves to be studied and mutually respected. Consistency of intentions and actions and openness to partnership are important conditions of trust. Constructive dialogue, academic exchange, youth cooperation, and clear-cut joint projects — all these things form a foundation for trust based on mutual benefit, shared values, and long-term vision.

— *The establishment of consulates in Ukraine's regions increasingly draws attention to the potential of local initiatives in international cooperation. Do you view this as an example of the potential of the regions to turn into platforms for a new type of public diplomacy?*

— Absolutely. The regional level is the birthplace of a new kind of public diplomacy that is flexible, transparent, and focused on the real needs of communities. Local initiatives often have more operational space for action and are better versed in the local context, and thus can offer more viable and effective forms of international interaction. Honorary consulates play the role of intermediary, coordinator, and partner in this.

— *Your participation in the Africa Day event at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv offered a chance to discuss educational initiatives, including the launch of the African studies programme. How would you assess the capacity of Ukrainian academic institutions to become platforms for dialogue and the development of partnerships with African countries?*

— Ukrainian academic institutions possess a high level of expertise, scientific potential, and international experience, which allows them to be active participants in global dialogue. The launch of the African studies programme is an incredibly important step. It's not just about academic interest: it's a real contribution to forming a new level of understanding. Initiatives like this promote both education cooperation and the development of cultural diplomacy with long-term impact.

— *In this context, you also met with the rector of the National University of Kyiv, Volodymyr Buhrov, to discuss the involvement of students from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the education process in Ukraine. Do you think that such educational contacts may become a foundation for long-term academic interactions? In your opinion, what forms of cooperation will be among the priorities in the near future?*

— Yes, I strongly believe that education is one of the strongest foundations for long-term partnerships. Students receiving education abroad not only obtain professional knowledge but also become the mediums of understanding between cultures. We have already had a positive experience with the involvement of students from the DRC in the Ukrainian higher education process. I see joint education projects, academic exchange, short-term internships, the establishment of African studies centres, and dual degree programmes as our work's priorities.



Почесний консул України в Кіншасі Патрік Болонья, Міністр закордонних справ України Андрій Сибіга та почесний консул ДР Конго в Україні Роман Мегела

Honorary Consul of Ukraine in Kinshasa, Patrick Bologna; Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Andrii Sybiha; and Honorary Consul of the DRC in Ukraine, Roman Mehela

— *What role can the Honorary Consulate play in developing cultural diplomacy between Ukraine and the Democratic Republic of the Congo? Are there any examples of successful cultural initiatives worth developing further?*

— Culture is a universal language that requires no translation, and it can form the strongest connections between people. The Honorary Consulate supports African cultural initiatives in Ukraine, such as Africa Day celebrations, art evenings, and inter-cultural festivals. We see the interest Ukrainian youth takes in Africa's culture and believe that the expansion of cultural exchange, participation in joint art projects, and presentations of the Congolese culture in Ukraine are a tremendous resource for mutual understanding and respect.

— *Your participation in the Fifth International Diplomatic Forum at the Ostroh Academy gave you an opportunity to see how Ukrainian educational traditions and modern diplomatic challenges combine. What innovative approaches to training diplomats and international relations specialists do you believe to be particularly useful in developing cooperation between Ukraine and the countries of Africa, particularly the Democratic Republic of the Congo?*

— The forum in Ostroh once again proved the high level of the Ukrainian diplomatic school. In my opinion, a modern diplomat's training has to include practical tools of intercultural communication, modelling real negotiations, studying African regional contexts, and developing digital diplomacy. It's particularly important to teach young specialists to be open to cooperating with the countries of the Global South, understand the values of partnership, and respect the historical uniqueness and cultural wealth of our countries. This should make for a solid foundation for a new generation of diplomats, capable of building a dialogue in a complex multipolar world.