

THE WORLD AMONG FRIENDS THE INTERNATIONAL CLUB AT THE FEDERAL FOREIGN OFFICE IN BERLIN ICAA

For more than twenty years, the International Club at the Federal Foreign Office has enriched social life in Berlin true to the motto "The World among Friends". In comparison to other establishments in the capital, the club, abbreviated as ICAA, is still in its infancy; nevertheless, it is already a well-recognized and established place of encounter and exchange.

The club was founded in 1998 by members of the Federal Foreign Office. Edgar Gansen, himself a diplomat and chairman of the club since 2014, describes the initial idea as follows: "With the Federal Foreign Office and the German government returning to the capital, we aimed at establishing a permanent venue where diplomats and representatives from politics, business and culture could gather for talks and discussions in a relaxed atmosphere. I believe we managed splendidly".

The club is located on the top floor of the historic building of the Federal Foreign Office on Werderscher Markt, although the entrance is somewhat hidden on Kurstrasse, a side street. The club's rooms are situated on the top floor of the building, which was designed by the internationally renowned architect Hans Kollhoff. Guests praise not only the understated elegance of the rooms and bar, but also the spacious terrace that offers captivating views of the ever-changing cityscape of the metropolis.

Edgar Gansen says: "Of course we are proud of these beautiful rooms and our club restaurant. However, it is exchange, dialogue, internationality and commitment that remain at the centre of our work. The club is not a club of the Federal Foreign Office. It is a club for the Foreign Office, its relatives and friends and all those who feel connected to its work, goals and values. Thus the ICAA provides a unique platform for dialogue on international affairs - characterised by cosmopolitan open-mindedness and commitment. Our members can meet in these premises with representatives from politics, business and culture in a relaxed atmosphere".

The club is organised as a registered association and is run independently by its elected Executive Board. It receives logistic support from the Federal Foreign Office, but is independent and funded by membership fees. The quarterly calendar of events

bears witness to the varied programmes that are offered to members and invited guests. The ICAA organises more than thirty events each year. The range of topics is shaped by the Executive Board and draws on its network and contacts, as well as on suggestions from its own members.

Whether these be lectures and discussions on current topics ranging from politics to business – which are run under the title "Forum AA" or "Treffpunkt / Meeting Point AA", with AA standing for "Auswärtiges Amt" or Foreign Office – or art exhibitions and receptions, the focus is always on the free-flowing exchange of ideas. On the first Tuesday of each month, members meet at "Treffpunkt AA" for a 45-minute lunch with a brief lecture and a discussion on current topics.

"This way, we meet the wish of many of our members to also offer short and concise formats that fit into their often intense daily schedules. An exciting political discussion condensed into 45 minutes, along with a good lunch - for many, that is a truly attractive offer. After a maximum of one hour, everyone returns to their respective business", explains Chairman Edgar Gansen.

Of course, current foreign policy topics are particularly popular, often with experts from the Federal Foreign Office itself. The so-called Chatham House Rule applies to all discussion events: information obtained from the events may be used, the sources however remain strictly confidential.



Edgar Gansen and Lord Green



We Are UN

Receptions for business representatives and the diplomatic corps complete the club's offerings, as does a regular art programme. Like in an art gallery, the walls of the club's chambers are regularly hung with exhibitions of selected artworks, on average four times a year. These vernissages enjoy great popularity as, incidentally, does the club's golf tournament.

For several years, the club has been hosting the "Generations Cup", which evolved from the long established "German Foreign Service Golf Tournament" in Berlin.



Reception

And what about the coronavirus pandemic? "Of course, the pandemic poses special challenges for us", explains Edgar Gansen: "It goes without saying that we do not want to, and must not, endanger anyone. That is why we transferred our format to electronic media and offer hybrid or fully online events, depending on the current infection numbers. In order to manage this, we had to acquire professional technology, which is now running reliably.

Even during the pandemic, we are trying not to let our regular receptions completely peter out. One particularly nice highlight was a reception at the end of last year, when we could all together - in front of our screens - and raise our glasses to the New Year after an excellent political lecture. Even though this is no real substitute for face-to-face contact and confidential sidebar conversations. Therefore, we very much hope to soon be able to receive guests in our beautiful rooms once again".

Edgar Alfred Gansen is Chairman of the International Club at the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany.

You can find more information about the club on its homepage: www.icaa.de

Photos: The International Club at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin ICAA

