

Beniamin Zylberberg With The Polish Ambassador To Syria



This is me with the Polish ambassador to Syria; the picture was taken in Warsaw in the 1970s. From left to right: secretary of Polish Embassy in Damascus, ambassador Ryszard Cymerman, me, the secretary's wife, Zenon Wieniakowski, ambassador's wife.

In 1960 Mieczyslaw Moczar [then junior minister for internal affairs, in 1968 instigator of the anti-Semitic campaign] wanted to have me thrown out of the army on disciplinary grounds, because someone had told him that I had called him anti-Semitic. But fortunately, his superior, the minister of internal affairs, was a decent man, who annulled the dismissal and ordered the head of the personnel department to find me another job. And I was on first-name terms with the head of the personnel department, because we had done our school-leaving exam together after the war. He said, 'We'll pay you as if you were on regular service, and you can do a full-time degree.' He was an anti-Semite as well. And that's how, thanks to two anti-Semites, I did a degree; I'm a Master of Economics, a graduate of the Institute of Planning and Statistics.

After my degree somebody gave me a leg-up into the Institute of Economics and Industrial Organization on Aleje Jerozolimskie. 1968 was drawing near, and unfortunately the head of the Institute was Professor Ilia Epszajn. It was a small research institution, with a dozen or so employees. As well as the Jewish professor, there were also one or two other Jews and myself, and it wouldn't have done to throw those few Jews out, so they closed the entire institute down. That was the end of my academic career. As by then I could speak five languages well: Polish, Russian, Yiddish, German and English, and I had mates in Orbis [the Polish state travel agency], I became a tour guide taking Polish people on holidays abroad.