Aleksander Ziemny

This is my picture taken in 2002. The photo was taken in my apartment in Warsaw. I personally came to the spiritual side of Jewishness gradually. I never doubted my origins, of course, that was clear. As for religion, my attitude hasn't changed since my youth. I don't go to synagogue in Warsaw, but I respect religion. Although the religion is the foundation of the culture, thought and traditions, Judaism simply isn't important to me, but Jewishness is. On my school certificates before the war I gave my creed as Jewish. But I and my parents always gave our nationality as Polish. But that hasn't lasted, because in the meantime there was 1968, and then I began putting 'Polish Jew.' Two years ago, though, during the last population census, I gave my nationality as Jewish. With full conviction. I came to that conclusion in the light of a number of experiences, but not in terms of

bitter reflection. Quite simply, I am a Jew and I consider myself a Jew. What is important to me is that I have learned that Jews have a deep-rooted need for truth and justice, and that is something that over the years has come to play an increasingly important role for me. My change of surname from Keiner to Ziemny is connected with my writing. When I worked on 'Przekroj' I was called Keiner, but I signed myself Ziemny. The name Ziemny comes from the word 'ziemia' [earth, land, soil]. I just thought it up, out of my head. That was my pen name, which in time became my surname. The Austrians sent the worst idiots to Galicia as civil servants, and it was they who gave the Galician Jews their surnames. The more offensive, the better and the funnier. I was called Keiner, meaning 'none', and my cousin Minder, 'lesser, worse.' If you had money and paid one of those pen-pushers, you could be called Himmelblau [literally 'Heaven-blue'] or Silberstein [literally 'silver stone']. I saw no reason to cling to such a surname, and officially over 50 years ago I changed my name to Ziemny.