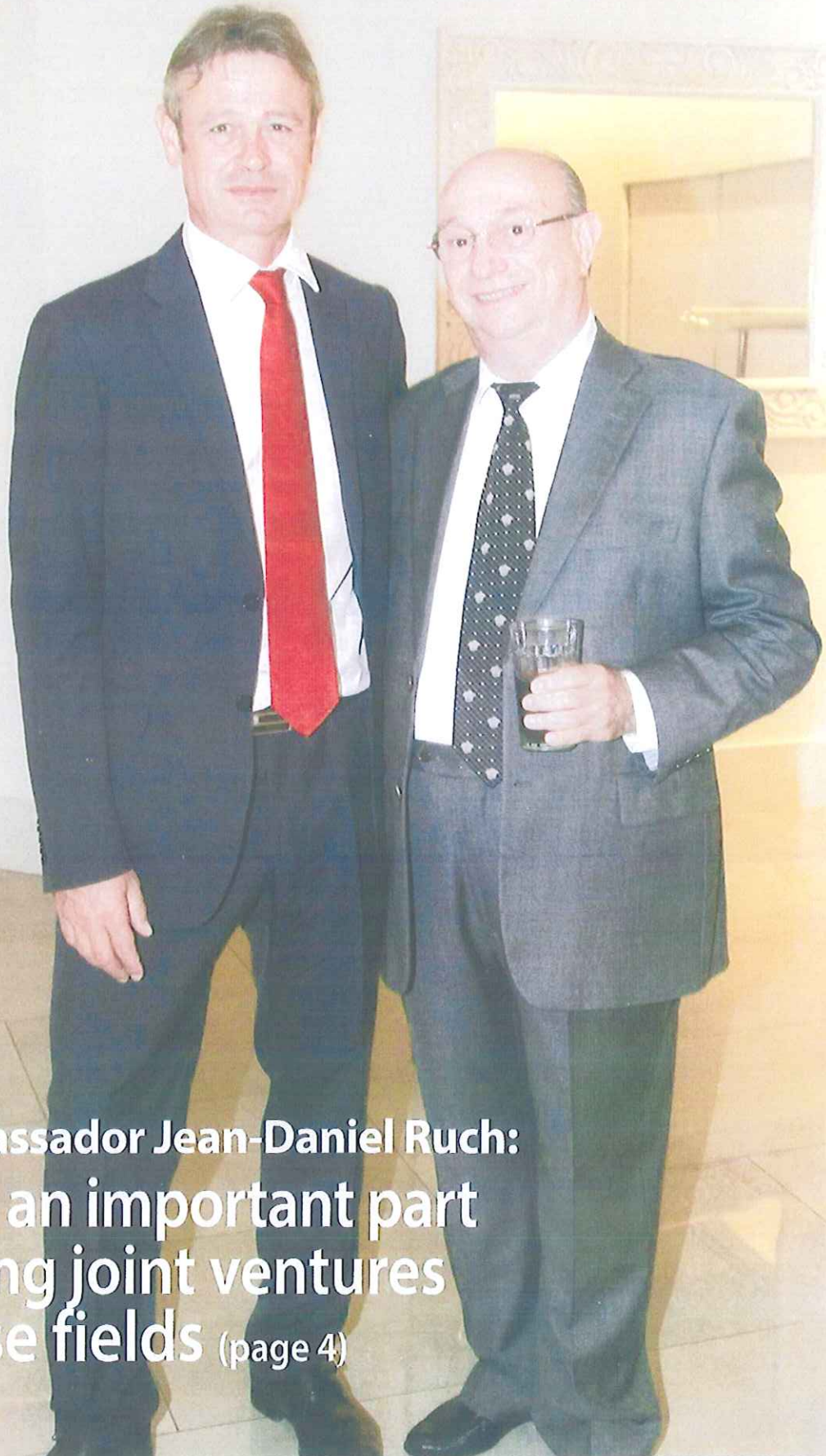


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Swiss ambassador Jean-Daniel Ruch:
We have an important part
promoting joint ventures
in diverse fields (page 4)

Prof. Zvi Arad, President of Netanya Academic College: Opening academic periphery colleges is an outstanding act of Zionism

Prof. Zvi Arad has uniquely contributed to establishing Israel's status as a global source of scientific knowledge and original thought. With his pioneering research in algebra, he has fostered scientific collaborations with China, Russia, the US, Europe, Pakistan, and other countries. At the same time, he boasts the accelerated establishment of regional academic colleges, primarily the Netanya Academic College, a model of financial independence and academic excellence. This is the beautiful Israel



Prof. Zvi Arad

Professor Zvi Arad, 75, admired prize-winning scientist and gifted mathematician, who speaks calmly in a measured tone projecting modesty, could have well been expected to keep to his room and work on mathematical proofs whose intricate solutions would be later explained in an article, or rather a book. Indeed, such a book lies on Prof. Arad's desk. Four hundred pages of proof for a one-paragraph mathematical theorem. But his name is followed by the names of his five co-authors: Bangteng Xu and Guiyun Chen from China, Effi Cohen from Israel, Arisha Haj Yehia Hussam, one of the few Israeli Arabs specializing in this field, and Michail Muzychuk from Ukraine.

This international setup offers a glimpse into Prof. Arad's credo, which, while based on science, has social, Zionist and above all human motivations. "Pure science belongs to all of humanity; therefore we must all share scientific research and development. The more involved we are in it, the greater the knowledge we disseminate to serve as basis for further research; the more we explore new sources of knowledge and thought – the greater our gain. Of course, this is easier in pure science than in the applicative sciences, which clearly involve financial interests, and tend to be secretive and compartmentalized. And of course, this comes more naturally in the natural sciences, which are devoid of personalized or opinionated motives that keep pulling them in specific directions, as often also happens in the humanities and in the social sciences".

- And this comes from a man who, besides his degrees in mathematics, has an advanced degree in philosophy.

"You are right, but at its most advanced levels, mathematics is very close to philosophy".

Pure science: A bridge to distant worlds

And so, this ostensibly narrow and focused interest in science, mathematics, algebra – specifically table algebra, a sphere that owes much of its current fame to Prof. Arad's research – has yielded international activity. It allowed him to establish worldwide scientific ties, including in countries that have no official relations with Israel. He relates smilingly and with great satisfaction his warm encounters in international conferences with Iranian colleagues, who have never hesitated expressing their appreciation openly.

"Science is indeed capable of creating bridges between nations and states, and can be



a catalyst in developing bilateral ties. Scientific development is central to every modern society, and in many cases it may also pave the way for political discussions". As an example, Prof. Arad brings the story of an official Israeli delegation headed by then Minister of Science Ezer Weitzmann, which visited the Soviet Union for the first time in 1991. Prof. Arad and his colleagues, Technion President Max Reiss and Ben Gurion University rector Rami Tamir joined the delegation, with the purpose of establishing ties with senior members of the Soviet academic world.

"In those days, diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, severed in 1967, had not yet been renewed, and Israel did not have an embassy in Moscow. The visit was extremely successful and led to signing scientific cooperation agreements with universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Another no less important benefit arose from it: In St. Petersburg there was an extensive and rare collection of ancient Jewish writings, and we were given permission to photocopy all of them and take the copy to Israel". After that visit, it was quite natural for Prof. Arad, in his capacity as President and Dean of Bar Ilan University, to host President Gorbachev on his first official visit to Israel, and meet him again in 2003, this time at the Netanya Academic College, where he was awarded a title of honor.

"On the same occasion we also awarded an honorary title to Abd a-Rahman Wahid, president of Indonesia, the largest

Muslim state in the world, and to South Africa's president Frederik de Klerk, who acted to abolish apartheid. With their humanistic vision, all three were groundbreaking leaders.

That impressive ceremony was followed by a meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, to discuss the issue of attaining peace in chaotic circumstances".

An even more exotic example regards Prof. Arad's close connections with faraway China, which he visited with a scientific delegation from

Bar Ilan University in the early 1990, before an Israeli embassy was opened in Beijing. "I had been in contact earlier with Dr. Guiyun Chen of Chongqing University, who wished to do his post-doctoral research in table algebra at Bar Ilan University. Of course, we were happy to accept him, but in addition to my scientific academic interest, I also saw this as a window that opened to a faraway rising superpower.

Indeed, there is no comparing the Beijing we visited 25 years ago, where the road from the airport had one lane in each direction, to current-day Beijing, which is entirely surrounded by highways with six lanes in each direction..."

Prof. Arad has since visited the People's Republic of China many times. He has established strong ties with local scientists, participated in conferences and was even appointed editor of the →

"Pure science belongs to all of humanity; therefore we must all share scientific research and development. The more involved we are in it, the greater the knowledge we disseminate to serve as basis for further research; the more we explore new sources of knowledge and thought – the greater our gain. Of course, this is easier in pure science than in the applicative sciences, which clearly involve financial interests"



← China Academy algebra journal.

It seems that by choosing mathematics you have deprived the State of Israel of an energetic and talented diplomat...

"Definitely not. I have no interest in politics or state affairs. My place is in science and in the academic world, but I am fully aware of the great power these fields have in other spheres, and am resolved to use this power for the benefit of Israel and its society."

The academic world: No longer an ivory tower

Zvi Arad, 75, was born in Petah Tikva to parents of Polish origin who came to Israel in 1935. "My parents built their home in a provincial town that developed into a city. This is where I grew up and where I live to this day."

His alma mater was Bar Ilan University, where he developed his mathematical skills and followed an academic career that led to his simultaneous appointment as president and rector – the university's two highest positions.

Along with groundbreaking research in algebra, Prof. Arad has always been aware of ongoing changes in Israel's academic world, reflecting processes of growth, development, construction and buildup in the state and its society. "A strong academia means that our society, economy and state are strong," says Prof. Arad, pointing at the steep graph that shows Israel's academic growth. In 1926, the International Zionist Organization took a decision to establish the Hebrew University and the Technion. The Jewish yishuv numbered about 50,000 people, and about 1,600 students enrolled in academic institutions. Today Israel has a population of about eight million, about 70 higher-education institutions and about 300,000 students. This situation, where growing numbers of people wished to acquire an academic education for various individual reasons, clearly called for a massive increase in the number of higher education institutions and in the student capacity of each.

With this in mind, Bar Ilan University opened regional branches in the periphery: In Safed, Kineret in the Jordan Valley and Ashkelon. The branches were meant to allow students who lived in remote places to begin their undergraduate studies near

their homes. However, the students eventually had to complete their studies at Bar Ilan University in order to graduate. Not surprisingly, this hindered the smooth operation of the branches, consequently creating financial difficulties that burdened the university. In 1985, a decision was taken to close them down.

"I was a senior professor at that time, and this decision appalled me. I openly opposed it and expressed my opinion before the university heads. They replied, "If you feel you can restore the branches – go ahead."

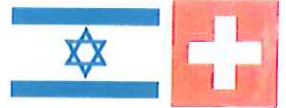
For four years, I was in charge of the branches. I changed the structure of the curriculum to enable completing the studies and graduating in them. Later, when I was appointed the university's rector and president, they were allocated extra resources with a view to strengthen them. Nowadays, the branches finance themselves independently, and receive from the Ministry of Education the funds allocated to them by the late minister of education Zevulun Hammer."

Why were you so keen on resolving the issue of the regional branches?

"The reason for this was simple: I had learned that about 20,000 Israeli students intended to study abroad because they were not accepted at Israeli universities. I considered this a national oversight. I was shocked by that number, and even more so by the thought that this huge power was about to leave us, feeling disappointed and frustrated, and perhaps even without intention to return. I attached the greatest importance to designing other options, because that made it possible to increase the number of students being accepted, and even embrace those who were a little below the strict acceptance threshold of the universities, which acted at that time as a powerful, inflexible, arrogant and anti-social monopoly.

I willingly admit that I acted to lower the acceptance threshold, and where a grade of 100 was required, I would admit a student who, heaven forbid, achieved 98. The delta is marginal compared with the benefit and the moral value. Chances are that a "weak" student, one who "stands no chance" would be the one to pioneer a change in his field. I definitely believe this could happen".





An academic college in Netanya: Once upon a time, it was in the periphery...

Prof. Arad's worldview and the need to establish a countrywide system of academic colleges to meet the growing number of potential students applying to different universities, were behind his agreement to take on an unusual challenge with an aura of pioneering Zionism: Setting up an academic college in Netanya. "At that time, Netanya was regarded as part of the periphery", says Prof. Arad with a smile, recalling the city's demographic makeup and the swampy wilderness on its eastern side that was offered to him as the future location of a new academic campus.

In 1993, Prof. Arad gave his consent to Netanya's senior officials, attorneys Yoel Alroi and Zvi Poleg, and Miriam Feierberg, then head of the municipal education department. He founded the college with his colleagues, Prof. Bernard Pinchuk, vice-president and rector of the college, and Prof. Sinai Deutsch, executive vice-president of the college and dean of its law school.

Establishing the college has been a visionary journey that combines social thinking, business enterprise and farsightedness, all pointing to the importance of the college within Israel's consolidating academic landscape.

Behind the curriculum stands a pragmatic approach that interfaces closely and significantly with Israel's economy and society. For example, one can obtain a BA in insurance from the Ernest and Margot Hamburger school of insurance, complete BA and MA studies in the Mickey Feldman school of banking and capital market, receive an MA from the real-estate school or attain an MA in health system management through a unique program intended for executives, doctors and other senior personnel who seek a future in this field. Other options are the law school, the Ernest and Margot Hamburger business administration school, the communication school, as well as the Ami and Teddy Sagi school of computer sciences and mathematics, and behavioral sciences programs.

In the 2016-2017 school year, the green and meticulously tended campus hosts 3,600 students, of whom 1,200 are new ones (out of about 1,800 candidates every year). "In 1995, 21

years ago, we had 450 students", Prof. Arad recalls.

Over the years, the college has developed, and in addition to its original goal of making education more accessible, its heads have turned it into a productive venue for broad-perspective research and initiative. Following Prof. Arad's vision, for example, international centers have been set up in the campus, such as the Center of Strategic Dialogue headed by Dr. Efraim Sneh, where academic and security figures join leaders in various fields to gain insights and jointly formulate position papers dealing with ways to bridge over and resolve regional and international conflicts.

Another interesting initiative was the establishment of an Institute of Sefardi and Anousim Studies, to complement the work of the college's Jewish Heritage Center. According to Prof. Arad, the Iberian peninsula and the forced converts (anousim) were chosen with the intention of tracking down their estimated tens of millions of descendants the world over, who strive to find a link to their ancestors. "Other than preserving the great heritage of Sefardi Jews, we also aim to delve deeper into one of the most traumatic experiences in the history of the Jewish people – the expulsion from Spain, and help the descendants connect to their obscure past".

An academic campus founded on vision and generosity

The story of the Netanya Academic College establishment should be studied at the business administration school, but no less so at the behavioral sciences school. The budget allocated to setting in motion this tremendous enterprise was tiny. To this day, the college leans on a generous and rare group of contributors, who identify with its values and goals. "One remarkable example is the Hamburger family. Brothers Gideon and Yair, and their sister Nurit Manor have played an essential role in establishing the college and outlining its path. The generous contribution made by the family commemorates their parents through growth, learning, development and initiative. We are grateful for this association. Not only does it ensure financial support but it also offers an interface with the thriving business operations of the family in the fields of insurance and business".

