

## End of the year interview with Oudi Recanati

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Although we have all grown accustomed to the ideology and platform of the RRIS as a Zionist international school that strives for excellence, the majority of students are unaware of the school's early development years. This past week the Avantgarde had the opportunity to sit down with Oudi Recanati, the chairman of the IDC's board of directors and the primary donor of the International school, to get some of the history that went into the school's creation, and some insight into the current and future aspirations of the IDC.

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Raphael Recanati was born in 1924 in Salonica Greece. His father was a businessman and also led the city's large Jewish community. As the situation for Jews in Europe began to deteriorate, Raphael's father decided to leave. In 1935 the family moved to Palestine where he founded what would later become Israel Discount Bank. During the pre-state years Raphael, was a member of the *Haganah and Palmach*, and worked strongly for the creation and defense of a Jewish state. In 1947' when Raphael was only twenty three years old, David Ben-Gurion asked him to buy two ships from the Americans, which were then used to transport wheat and arms to Palestine in support of the Jewish cause. After the state was formed, Ben Gurion told him that there was no longer a military need for the ships, and Raphael was instructed to use them in the creation of the Israel-America shipping line. As the company grew and evolved, Raphael's business prowess also carried him into fields of banking and high-tech development. In addition to his business successes, Raphael Recanati is remembered for his philanthropic commitment to a number of causes in America and Israel. Raphael passed away in 1999 and it was in honor of his passion for strengthening the connection between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora that his

sons, Oudi and Michael Recanati together with their mother Dina, attached his name to the school.

When describing the development of the IDC, Oudi recalls the first time that Professor Reichmann, the school's current President and founder, invited him to visit the campus. Before it became a school, the campus was used a military base, not only by the Israeli army but also in the pre-state era by British forces. Oudi laughs as he describes Professor Reichmann leading them around the old dilapidated base and, while pointing to buildings that were in shambles, explaining that "this one would be the library" and "this one the law building". Indeed, Professor Reichmann had a true vision, and this was a trait that attracted Oudi, and many others to work with him in the creation of one of Israel's first private colleges.



Oudi Recanati together with Prof. Reichman



In 1999, through the combined vision of Professor Reichmann and Oudi the IDC began working to develop an international school, taught in English with students and staff from all around the world. When it began the RRIS had 36 international students, however it was later that year that the second *Intifada* broke out. Oudi vividly recalls one night when he was sitting outside the Ofer auditorium and Professor Reichmann came to inform him that almost 20 of the international students had left. Oudi confesses that he was devastated, and had begun to consider the possibility that the project had been a mistake. However, Professor Reichmann was not discouraged and assured Oudi that if he continued to have faith, the school would be a success. Sure enough, less than a decade later, the RRIS has grown to far surpass anyone's initial expectations and continues to grow in size, academic caliber, and prestige.



Recanati at the Honorary Fellowships Ceremony at IDC

Oudi then turned the conversation towards the difficulties that the IDC faced from the Israeli government. Since its creation, the school had only made one request

from the notoriously difficult academic bureaucracy, to not give them any money. In this way the school freed itself from the weight of “bureaucratic Bolsheviks”, and earned the freedom to grow and succeed. Although the government continues to make problems in terms of accreditation and building permits, the IDC has found clever ways of overcoming these obstacles, truly earning their title of “bureaucracy busters”.



Recanati with the class of 2009

When speaking about the current status of the school, Oudi emphasized the recent national academic report on which IDC scored first in 16 out of 20 categories. This in and of itself is an unbelievable achievement, however, on the next survey Oudi explained that Professor Reichmann's vision and motivation would most likely propel the IDC to win 22 out of the 20 categories! These successes are a product of the IDC's overall experience. Oudi brought up his time at Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University, and confessed that he really does not remember very much at all from his days in school. It was what he described as an industrialized University experience, go to class get passing grades and move on. The goal of the IDC and the RRIS was to go further, and to create a sense of community while instilling values and life skills in its students. With the results of the academic survey and the



enormous successes of its students, the IDC has clearly exceeded this initial goal.



Recanati with RRIS student and Jonathan Davis, head of the RRIS and VP for External Relations

Finally, the discussion turned towards the future prospects of the school. Oudi explained that the RRIS has a strong foundation because the initial donation for the creation of the school was committed over a period of 20 years. Now, only in its eighth year, the RRIS has tremendous financial security to continue its rapid growth, and provide new and exciting facilities for its students. However, Oudi was quick to point out that this growth would have to remain controlled because an enormous student body would contradict the basic ideology of the program. Although he did not give any specifics, Oudi also talked about the addition of new study tracks. "The school is constantly listening to the feedback of its students," he explained. "If there is enough demand for a specific program, its likely to pop up." Oudi hinted at the potential for a school of economics, and also commented on the growing importance of clean energy and green development.

Our meeting ended far beyond the scheduled time, as Oudi continuously found additional aspects of the school that he was excited to discuss. With the vision of Professor Reichmann and

the strong backing of the Recanati family and a long list of other, donors, supporters, and board members, it is clear that the IDC will continue its trend of academic and ideological success.