

Piotr Nowaczyk

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Good afternoon. Dear friends, dear colleagues and guests. Дорогие товарищи!

It is not easy to speak in public. It is not easy to speak to lawyers. It is even more difficult to speak to hungry lawyers, especially if it is not a seated lunch but a standing buffet. The lunch speaker has a difficult role to play here and the challenge is big: At the end the lunch speaker may at least expect a standing ovation.

A speech should be like a mini skirt. Short enough to be attractive. Long enough to cover the essentials.

It is always good to start with a joke. Every time I am in the US people offer me jokes about lawyers. There are plenty of them and I don't like them at all. I always tell my American colleagues that these are jokes about them, about American lawyers, not about Polish lawyers and I am from Poland. Then, in return, they want to offer me Polish jokes.

For a long time I was looking for jokes about arbitrators. Are there any jokes about arbitrators? Does anybody know one?

From my younger days I know a joke about judges. It goes like this:

The courthouse in a small town catches fire at night. Firemen arrive and start fighting the fire. The bailiff runs to the house of the judge and wakes him shouting. “The court is on fire, Sir!!! – What should I do?”

“Hmm, let me think” - says the judge - “I know” – he says on reflection – “Take the files lying under my bed and throw them into the fire!”

Now, once again, have you ever heard any jokes about arbitrators? No? I recently heard the first one:

Question: What is the first symptom of schizophrenia?

Answer: The sole arbitrator drafting his dissenting opinion.

Why are there so few jokes about arbitrators? Is arbitration not funny? It is. I could tell you many stories about how funny it might be. So why are there no jokes?

My answer is: because people still respect arbitrators! People have always respected the “wise man of the village” - usually the old man called to resolve the disputes between neighbors. There are no jokes about professions people actually respect. So we have thousands of jokes about lawyers, but very few about judges and arbitrators.

In our country we have a never ending discussion about: “who bears the crown of the legal professions?” The judges want to bear it. The journalists want to crown them even now. A lot is being said that the profession of a public judge should be “the crown of all legal professions”. But judges are poorly paid. Not only in this country. So far I think that the crown belongs to us. To the international arbitrators. Few colleagues from our law schools travel more. Few have a more interesting life. This is the job or mission many of our younger colleagues want to follow.

Two days ago I was interviewed by the Global Arbitration Review. They asked me: Why Warsaw? Is this the first major international arbitration conference in Poland? If so, why now?

Good question. I answered it by reverting it: “Warsaw - why not?”

Conferences are organized everywhere. Every week I receive invitations by mail and e-mail. Every week there are 2 or 3 arbitration conferences somewhere. An enormous industry of conferences exists. Participants pay conference fees. Not you. Not here. This one is free of charge.

Arbitration conferences are often attended by more lawyers than there are arbitration cases in the host country. In many countries there are more conference participants than arbitrators on the lists of recommended arbitrators of a given institution.

This is not our case. We have ca. 220 participants in this room. The Court of Arbitration at the Polish Chamber of Commerce had 350 cases last year. Warsaw has one of the best arbitration centers in Europe. Here in Warsaw, the number of cases is still higher than the number of arbitrators and participants of the conferences.

We have a long tradition of arbitration dating back to the time of king Casimir the Great. The first historical records of arbitration in Poland are 700 years old. The Court of Arbitration at the Polish Chamber of Commerce will celebrate its 60 anniversary this year. An event to mark the occasion will be held in November at the Royal Palace.

The ICC statistics proof that Poland is in the TOP-20 of the roughly 120 nations using ICC arbitration every year. In all possible categories: number of parties, number of cases, number of Polish arbitrators, Polish law governing the dispute and even the language of arbitration, Poland is in this TOP-20. Warsaw is more and more frequently used as a venue of arbitration. So, my answer to the Global Arbitration Review was easy: in Warsaw we have more arbitration cases than conferences. In many other places there are more lawyers interested in arbitration than there are cases to be heard.

I can see a lot of young lawyers in this room. Various programs and organizations are open to young lawyers. You have: Young International Arbitration Group (LCIA), you have Young & International (ICDR), Young Arbitration Forum (ICC), Young Austrian Arbitration Practitioners (YAAP), Young International Arbitration Group (YIAG), Circle of Young Professionals (FIDIC), ASA Below 40. Finally we have Arbitral Women and many other “pet projects”.

What it is that young lawyers see in arbitration? Are they drawn to the tradition, culture, fashion, money, fame, a chance for the future or the active lifestyle arbitrators now have?

It is not easy to start out as an arbitrator. Arbitrators are late starters. Actually, it is hard to start out as arbitrators. At first, you have to establish yourself as a barrister, solicitor, judge, academic, diplomat, businessman, politician or expert. It is only later in life that you become an arbitrator. Meanwhile, young people are dying to get their first case. However the client asks brutal questions: “How often have you acted as arbitrator?” “How many awards have you made?” “What is your experience with arbitration?” Young candidates have no good answer.

Imagine a patient asking a young orthopedist eager for his first knee operation: “How many knee operations have you conducted, Doctor?” If the young doctor says “Not even one, but I’d love to make a start,” the patient will go to see a real specialist, preferably one with more than 100 knee operations to his name.

What should you do to get the first case? The arbitration community is well aware of the brain power and potential of young lawyers. How can we retain these enthusiastic people? The answer is the following: take part in conferences, write articles, go and act as arbitration counsel as often as possible. After all, the first nomination will come when you are about 40, and you usually do not become a full time arbitrator before you turn 50.

Was this speech like a mini skirt? Short enough to keep your attention and long enough to cover the essentials?

Let me repeat the essential points: It is great to have you here in Warsaw! Warsaw is a worthy venue of arbitration events! And you, dear friends, you are more than welcome to revisit Warsaw as your next arbitration venue.

I wish you well for the rest of this conference.

Thank you for your attention.