



Tracking Down Environmental Polluters

Modern analytical methods are the basis on which environmental protection is built. Summer schools organised by the university partners in Novi Sad, Belgrade, Sofia and Dortmund are providing students with practical training in these methods. The Head of the Institute of Environmental Research at the University of Dortmund, Prof. Dr. Michael Spittler, explains the effect that the summer schools have.

How environmentally aware is South Eastern European society?

There is an environmental awareness, above all among students. But, analysis equipment and technical know-how were lacking for a long time. When our university cooperation began five years ago, the DAAD donated a mass spectrometer. This device is also able to detect small amounts of toxic substances in soils and water. In terms of precision, it can be compared with modern doping analyses. In the near future we will also get an infrared spectrometer. Both devices are located at the University of Novi Sad, which is home to the South Eastern European Centre for Applied Spectroscopy. The devices can be jointly used for teaching and research by scientists from the centres in Novi Sad, Belgrade and Sofia.

How strongly is the environment polluted?

At some places still, regrettably, very much so, because of a lack of financial resources. For example, removing the oil-polluted soils around the refinery in Novi Sad would cost several million euros. But we don't have the international sponsors for this. In addition, some of the oil pipelines continue to leak. Meanwhile, however, the waterworks are able, with the help of the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW), to keep the drinking

water so clean that it presents no immediate danger to the population.

How is your university cooperation contributing to this?

In the summer schools held in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Sofia we give students practical training in the most modern analytical methods so that they can independently identify and solve emerging environmental pollution problems.

The summer schools last just a week – do they really have a sustained effect?

Yes and in many ways. The Universities of Novi Sad, Belgrade and Sofia have integrated the contents of the practice-oriented (applied) summer schools into their curricula for chemical engineers. We see that as a success. We also have an impact in other countries: the summer schools are each attended by 15 to 20 students from throughout South Eastern Europe. When they return home, they take what they have learnt with them as impetus to their universities and so contribute to the changes taking place there. This is how I came to be in discussion with the Universities of Maribor, Banja Luka and Skopje, where the course contents and curricula are also to be brought into line with modern methods. Another point: many students continue to keep in contact with each other after the summer school and so form a network. And, last but not least, the graduates also improve their career prospects with the additional qualification they gain, even though the situation on the labour market continues to be very difficult.

How will the cooperation continue now?

We have initiated a process with our partner universities that will hopefully develop its own inherent impetus. We're already on the right path as far as content is concerned. And in terms of financing, the signs also give me reason to be positive. For example, the Serbian Ministry of Science and Environment Protection is also contributing towards keeping the South Eastern European Centre for Applied Spectroscopy running. And we will continue to work at our partner universities to introduce our students to scientific topics and to provide doctoral and postdoctoral students with continuing training and further qualifications.

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