

DR. ȘTEFAN ANDREI SZOBOTKA (1949 - 2013)



On the morning of May 24, 2013, our beloved colleague and friend Istvan (Ștefan) passed away, after a long and unjust suffering, in "Sf. Ioan" hospital in Bucharest. Until his last moment, he hoped for alleviation of his suffering and for full recovery, wishing to put his personal affairs in order and go on with his work in the research institute. Unfortunately, it was not to be, the disease defeating him, eventually.

He was born on October 18, 1949, in Timisoara, in a family of intellectuals - his father was an architect and a sculptor, and his mother was a lyrical artist. Ștefan started elementary school in Bucharest (1963-1967) and went on to the Hungarian high school, where he graduated with a baccalauréat degree. A passion for Earth sciences led him to attend the Technical School of Geology (1968-1970), and, after military service, he studied (1972-1977), at the University of Bucharest, and received his BS in Geology.

Upon graduation, he was hired, by government decision, by the Geological Prospecting Enterprise for Solid Mineral Substances (currently, SC "Prospecțiuni" SA). From September 1977 to April 1983, he worked at the Department of Geochemical Prospecting, as a prospector.

In the fall of 1983, he changed jobs and started working at the Institute of Geology and Geophysics (now, the Geological Institute of Romania), as a scientific researcher and, then, as a senior scientific researcher, at the Laboratory of Marine Geology and Sedimentology (LGMS), led by Prof. Nicolae Panin. In 1985, Prof. Panin recommended him for a Soviet oceanographic expedition to study the North Pacific polymetallic nodules, in the Clarion-Clipperton fracture zone. For five months, he lived intensely aboard "Acad. A. Karpinsky" research vessel and thus fulfilled his childhood dream: to see the ocean and explore its mysteries hidden in the depths!

This journey helped crystallise his thoughts for the doctoral dissertation.

LGMS became a "research institute of national interest" – at first, the Romanian Centre for Marine Geology and Geology (1993-1994), and, afterwards, the National Research and Development Institute for Marine Geology and Geology (GeoEcoMar); the research was diversified, several national and international projects were implemented and thus, the researcher Ștefan Szobotka showed strong commitment to his work, putting his skills to full use, either as a regular member of the team or as a project - or theme - manager. Ștefan proved true managerial skills; he was tactful, friendly, affectionate, sentient and had a brilliant sense of humor. Well-educated and refined, Ștefan had lots of expertise and was dexterous – presumably, an inheritance from his paternal grandfather, an armourer in the old Austro-Hungarian army.

He specialized in geochemistry, sedimentology and sedimentary petrography. In the academic year 1986-1987, he taught sedimentary petrology, as an assistant, associated to the Department of Mineralogy/University of Bucharest, and coordinated students' practical work. In 1990, he became a PhD student, passed the preliminary examinations (1992), wrote the required specialty papers (1994) and, in 1998, he publicly defended his thesis called "Petrological and geochemical studies of abyssal sediments of the Central Pacific, with special attention to polymetallic nodules" ("Studiul petrologic și geochimic al sedimentelor abisale din zona centrală a Oceanului Pacific, cu privire specială asupra nodurilor polimetali"). Thereon, Ștefan Szobotka became the only qualified Romanian researcher in the field; he took part in conferences, at the Geological Institute of Romania, at the Enterprise for Geological Prospecting and Exploration/

IPEG "Harghita" (in Miercurea Ciuc), and taught students from the Faculty of Geology and Geophysics, at the University of Bucharest.

He was a member of the Geological Society of Romania, a member of the Scientific Council at GeoEcoMar, and the recipient of "Grigore Cobălcescu" Prize of the Romanian Academy.

Ștefan was a man of character, particularly affable, to those close to him; he was a man of his word, the perfect teammate, he showed respect for other people's opinion, and, when supporting his own views, he had strong arguments. His undisguised, open way made him loved and respected. Passionate about water and boats of all kinds, he thoroughly prepared the annual expeditions on the Danube and the Danube Delta (particularly, its main branches), attentive to details and, especially, careful to build a harmonious team governed by understanding and mutual respect. He suffered

when he witnessed or heard about unpleasant scenes, unable to see why the enjoyable time we spent together, as a team, may be overshadowed by pride and meaningless claims. He would not offend anybody and did not bear grudge; yet, he developed a three-point evaluation system: the persons who accumulated all the three points were blackballed from among those he generously trusted!

Ștefan's disappearance leaves a void in our hearts.

May his blue eyes and his smile be there forever, on endless waterways and roads, surrounded by a halo wreath of white flowers, swaying on the seawaves for eternal remembering!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author takes this opportunity to thank Dr. Sorin-Corneliu Rădan for substantial improvement of the List of Publications.

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