

## HOMAGE TO PROF. LEONARD TOPUZI, ICONIC FIGURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

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Prof. Leonard Topuzi, our dear and respected colleague of Botany, passed away on June 8, 2023, at the age 87, in the City of Durresi, under the care of his nephew's family and close friends.

Prof. Topuzi was born on 03 March 1936 in the city of Elbasani. He grew up and educated in the Kala (Castle) neighborhood of this city - a community full of history and tradition. In Elbasani he completed the pre-university studies. He was one of the distinguished students of the Normal (Pedagogical) School - the first national secondary school for teacher's training in the Albanian language. During 1958-1963, followed the graduate course Biology-Chemistry, for one year at the State University of St. Petersburg "Zhdanov", Russia, and then completed it at Faculty of Natural Science, University of Tirana.



During the ceremony on the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Prof. Topuzi, at FNS, UT, in March 2016.

Since 1962, he started to work as a scientific associate at the Chair of Botany (today the Working Group of Botany), FNS, UT, and soon (since 1963) as a full lecturer, at the same Chair, a position he held until his retirement in

2001. Even after the retirement, the Professor continued to teach for many years afterwards.

Prof. Topuzi has also served for many years as a leader or representative in the forums of the University of Tirana and elsewhere: 1963-65, deputy director of the Pedagogical Institute 'A. Xhuvani', Tirana; 1975-78, director at the Medical High School, in Elbasani; 1988-92, directed the Chair of Botany, FNS, UT; 1984-90, member of the Scientific Council of FNS; 1989-90, member of the Scientific Council of the Department of Biology; 1993-97, member of the Editorial Board of the Bulletin of Natural Sciences. For his tireless work, full of passion, patience and professionalism, whether in teaching, research and administration, Prof. Topuzi was decorated in 1980 with the "Naim Frashëri" Order, Class II, and in 1989 with the Order of Work, also Class II.



During activities at the Faculty of Natural Sciences in the 1980s. Professor Topuzi is marked with a red star (\*).

Prof. Topuzi has never stopped his efforts for the progress and reformation in teaching and research of biological curricula in the Department of Biology. Until he retired, he was the responsible of General Botany, a basic formative subject for biological and pharmaceutical sciences. The direct impact has been in the establishment and strengthening of botanical research and teaching, the Botany laboratory, the teaching program of General Botany, lectures, labs and field practices, etc. Even today, the professor is the co-author of the Textbook of this subject, the only one in the whole Albanian area. As such, this subject has always been liked and appreciated by students.

The scientific activity of Prof. Topuzit started soon after the beginning of work at the Faculty, initially focused on floristic and vegetation assessment of weeds, floristic and geobotanical approach of the genus *Festuca* (grass plant), of chestnut (*Castanea*), in ethnobotany, etc. His PhD dissertation, dealing with floristic and vegetation of weeds in Elbasani district, was completed in 1984. At that time, the Professor was awarded the degree of 'Candidate of Science'; in 1988 he was awarded the title 'Docent', and in 1994 the title 'Professor'. He has published several scientific publications, discussed in several scientific events, and supervised several students of biology in their PhDs and/or Master theses.

Prof. Topuzi has been distinguished throughout his life for his maturity and high intellectual level, but also for his simplicity and modesty, maintaining the proper balances, even in the difficult turns of our history. He has always shown prudence and honesty in his relations with students and colleagues. He kept close and helped with patience and wisdom, especially the young assistants and students, to fulfill their tasks in teaching and research.

The Professor was a distinguished lecturer, capable, model in lecturing, clear and quite methodical. Always smiling and full of humor! He was very patient in exams and fair in evaluating each student, supportive and helpful in solving their problems; but also strict in any unworthy behavior, but this always without angry; he 'killed you with cotton', as the proverb goes in Albanian. All this has been a good experience for all of us, colleagues and students.



*Left*, during a botanical lab session in the 1980s. *Right*, during an activity in Tirana dealing with the nature protection in June 2015.

Moreover, Prof. Topuzi was also engaged in the socio-political activity. In his youth he distinguished himself as a dedicated youth activist. The Professor witnessed the very difficult period of the country, but also with full of passion and ideals towards the progress; to deal with poor and scarcely educated social groups, but eager for knowledge, culture and progress. Many virtues of the strong intellectual embodied in the figure of the Professor originated from his origin, his education in the country and abroad. We that have worked together for years can confirm that throughout his socio-political activity the Professor was always distinguished for his education, moderation and professionalism. He tried to ensure that any directive that came from above (from the political leadership) was not implemented blindly, but served as best as possible teaching, research, but also moral strengthening, education, especially of student youth. It was always more than necessary for that time, if we consider about the deep backwardness that Albania had inherited from the centuries.

In his long career, Prof. Topuzi was a former student and close collaborator of the founders of the Biology Department, FNS, and the University of Tirana itself, such as K. Paparisto, M. Demiri, I. Zeko, I. Mitrushi, S.Mborja, Xh. Qose, L. Gjikhuri, S. Kongjika, etc. All of them are distinguished figures of Albanian higher education, to whom we bow with respect and special gratitude.

The Faculty of Natural Sciences, the teaching, the working with students was everything for Prof. Topuzi. And he did it in quite a natural way, tirelessly, with full of passion and dedication. We have not once seen him angry, or irate, despite the difficult situations, especially in the first years of transition after the 1990s. His excellent memory was not vanished until the last moments. His memories and stories about the past have always helped us to refresh the history of difficulties and achievements over the years.

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The Professor with all his virtues and wisdom has always been present among us, and will remain an honorable figure for all of us colleagues and former students, an example and inspiration in our teaching mission of the

young generations. With this homage, respectfully we bow down, not only as members of the Teaching Group of Botany, but also on behalf of all the other members of the Department, the Botanical Garden, the National Herbarium and the Natural Science Museum, and of many former students and many other collaborators in the Faculty and beyond, too.

Goodbye Professor Leonardi! We will miss your words full of kindness, wisdom and hope! May the soil be light in your beloved Elbasani!