HIGH RESPECT TO THOSE WHO LED US ON THE ROAD OF KNOWLEDGE TO EUROPE - OUR COOPERATION WITH THE FRIEDRICH SCHILLER UNIVERSITY OF JENA IN GERMANY

ALEKO MIHO

Department of Biology, Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Tirana, Albania

e-mail: aleko.miho@fshn.edu.al

Contacts with the University of Jena, Germany, and with Priv.-Doc. Dr. Klaus-J. Appenroth, Institute of General Botany and Plant Physiology, started in1994. At that time, Dr. Appenroth was the contact person of the first Joint European Project (JEP) TEMPUS Project (1993-1996), funded by the European Community. It was focused on the teaching at the Biotechnology and Environment at our Department of Biology at the University of Tirana, Albania. The main representative was Prof. E. van Driessche from the University of Brussels, Belgium, and other partners were from the Universities of Thessaloniki (Greece) and Parma (Italy). Prof. Z. Bajrami, responsible for teaching Genetics at the University of Tirana, was the main contact person from Tirana.

Left, K. Appenroth during a lecture with students of Biology in Tirana. ***Right,*** during a lab session in our Lab of Botany together with the author, AM.

It is worth emphasizing that in the beginning in 1994, the meetings with Dr. Appenroth in our Chair of Botany were during the cold winter days. The room

temperature was about +7ºC. Gathered around a heat reflector that was supposed to warm us, we discussed how teaching could be done better, how the lab and field practices could be improved, improving the quality of the textbooks, etc. Now, almost 30 years later, the situation is completely different with double-glazed windows and a central heating/air conditioning system. Even to us it is hard to remember those days. Lectures, seminars or laboratory courses were developed under extreme conditions, but with our full readiness, wish and belief to improve the situation.

During that Project, the two existing curricula, Biology and Biology-Chemistry were updated and new subjects were developed. Staff mobility and upgrading of staff qualification were started for the first time after the system change in Albania. The first necessary equipment for our labs was purchased, as well as important EU textbooks, that all supported the improvement of the teaching quality in biology-related subjects. As also with other colleagues from Tirana (Dh. Bozo, I. Sherameti, I. Mikerezi), I stayed in Jena for two months in 1996. The preparation of the first manuscript of a Plant Physiology textbook in Albanian language (published in 2015), which is still in use, was started during this visit in Jena, taking advantage of the warm conditions, literature-rich, computerized offices at the Institute of Plant Physiology. Dr. Appenroth did not hesitate to include me and other colleagues in teaching students. It helped not only to train us in the latest lab exercises for biology students, but also to improve our knowledge in English and in German.

In Jena, valuable support for research was also given by Prof. Siegfried J. Casper (12 January 1929 – 13 June 2021). Prof. Casper was head of the Institute of Systematic Botany at that time. Thanks to him, I worked together with Dr. W. Fischer on an electron microscope. Prof. Casper came later twice to Albania and together with our colleagues from the Department of Botany in University of Tirana we visited different places and collected a lot of plant material. The publication in the journal *Wulfenia* 14 (2007), about the distribution of carnivorous plant species of the genus *Pinguicula*, was the first visible product of this cooperation.

Thanks to the high support and special hospitality provided by Dr. Appenroth, the University of Jena became a strong partner and a strong Biology center for us. Young candidates from Tirana started their PhDs under the supervision of Dr. Appenroth (R. Meço) and Prof. R. Oelmüller (B. Shahollari), respectively. Our former colleague I. Sherameti, after her mobility visit within the Project, was soon employed at this institute at the University of Jena, where she continued to work successfully for many years until the end of 2018. Therefore, contacts and cooperation with the University of Jena continued even after the Project.

But there were also some historical reasons for the cooperation with the University of Jena. Starting as early as in the 1960s, Dr. Friedrich Karl Meyer (1926–2012), a botanist from the University of Jena, visited Albania three times, carrying out botanical field trips throughout the whole country accompanied by Albanian botanists. Therefore, a rich collection from the Albanian flora is hosted in the Jena *Herbarium*. Meyer published his findings on the Albanian flora in the journal *Haussknechtia* in 1987, 2006 and 2011.

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We are aware that working with us or in general in Albania is not always easy. Many objective obstacles, but often also subjective ones, may exist. Due to his spirit of cooperation and friendship, Dr. Appenroth belongs to those people with whom most of us would prefer to cooperate or ask for support. Therefore, we trusted Dr. Appenroth as the Chair (PI) of the second JEP TEMPUS project (2003-2006). The University of Jena was the main partner. The second partner was University of Bari with Prof. F. Macchia (Francesco Macchia; 15 November 1933 – 1 November 2019) as the contact person, another important colleague in our cooperation for several years (*cf*. The article about Prof. Macchia in BSHN (UT) 32/2022; *https://api.fshn.edu.al/uploads/In_Memoriam_MACCHIA_2022_italisht_1_778fcba858.pdf*). The reforming the Biology curricula following the Bologna process (in bachelor and master courses: 3 + 2 years respectively, was the main goal this time.

Left, during one of our meetings in Tirana; with us was the cultural representative of the Italian Embassy in Tirana, late colleague Prof. A. Ciani (*right*), who was always helpful to our cooperation with Italy**.** ***Right,*** during the meeting with the Rector of the Bari University in March 2006. From the *left*: F. Macchia, head of the Botanical Garden and project leader of the Italian partner; A. Miho, Albanian project leader, G. Girone, the Rector**,** K. Appenroth, German project leader, and M. Xhulaj, head of the Department of Biology in Tirana**.**

Thanks to these close cooperation with our two partner universities and the project support, there were some notable achievements at the University of Tirana: new bachelor and master curricula were drafted and started to develop; all existing subjects were revised; new subjects were developed; the staff exchange with the Universities in Jena and Bari was enabled in large scale; labs were much better equipped; textbooks were printed; our library was equipped with printed or purchased books. Hence, two bachelor curricula started to be developed since the academic year 2005-2006: Biology and Environmental Biology (each with 180 ECTS (*The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*). This was followed after three years (2008-2009), by three Scientific Masters, i.e. in Molecular Biology, Environmental Biology, and Teaching Biology (120 ECTS). Except the bachelor in Environmental Biology that was not continued after a few years, all the other curricula (bachelor and master) are still active. Instead, a new bachelor in Natural and Environmental Sciences has been started last year (2022-2023), a double degree with the Viterbo University, Italy (in English).

The main labs of Botany, Plant Physiology, Zoology, Animal Physiology, Biochemistry, Cell Biology and Microbiology at our University were equipped with microscopes and stereomicroscopes, with spectrophotometers, centrifuges, weighing balances, refrigerators, glassware and chemicals, practical and demonstration tools, sets of permanent microscopic slides, etc. Up to 40 optical microscopes and 12 stereomicroscopes were shared between labs of Botany, Zoology and Cell Biology. One microscope set was placed in each lab, equipped with camera, connected witha computer and used for didactic demonstrations. A good part of these instruments and slide sets are still in use. Electrical power cuts happened often in that time, therefore the labs and staff workplaces were equipped with UPS that enabled keeping the microscopes and computers working even during power cuts.

The project supported the printing of more than 30 different textbooks in Albanian, from 300 to 2000 copies each, covering the student needs for more than 5 years; some of them are still in use in some biology subjects. Textbooks in biology main subjects (more than 30), that were commonly used in EU universities, were purchased and handed over to the Faculty's library. For many years, we had the latest issues of the international journal “Plant Biology” in our library, sent regularly by Dr. Appenroth. About 50 Faculty members, teaching Biology curricula in Tirana, spent short visits (1 to 4 weeks) mainly in Bari or Jena, aiming in experience exchange either in teaching or research. Young assistants or students spent up to 3 months with the respective colleagues in partner institutions. Also, ca. 20 colleagues from the universities of Jena and Bari visited Tirana, in various workshops, seminars and lectures with students. More than 30 lectures were held by EU colleagues, and 15 of them by Dr. Appenroth.

Several field trips were organized to interesting places with local and foreign colleagues. Dr. Appenroth, Prof. Macchia, Prof. Casper, Prof. Hellwig, Prof. H. Lange-Bertalot (University of Frankfurt), and their German and Italian colleagues visited with us areas of special botanical interest, such as the Albanian Alps (Lepushe, Thethi, Valbona), Lura, Pogradeci, Prespa, Kukesi, and even Prishtina (Kosovo). These joint field trips were an opportunity for the biodiversity approach, for collecting data and sampling, and also to know each other better, exchange experience and discuss further cooperation opportunities, and of course become better informed about history, culture and traditions of the other country. Moreover, these were also good opportunities for young colleagues and students to gather field material and data for their diploma or doctorate research work. Common publication about the genus *Pinguicula* (*mentioned above*) was a good example for the output, but there was much more...

Left, Dr. K. Appenroth (*middle*) with Prof. M. Xhulaj (*left*) and Prof. L. Kashta (*right*) assessing a moss sample in our officeof the Botany department in Tirana. ***Right***, after an adventurous trip in Qafe Thore on the way to Thethi in July 2005.

Besides the strengthening of contacts, the mobility helped to change our mind in general regarding the need to reform the university education and research, especially to change the view of the main representatives, from the university to the central government. Today it seems easy and simple, but at that time it was not easy to follow a different path away from the long-standing tradition. And thanks to our joint contribution and lobbying, the higher education reform process in Albania indeed moved forward. It was then materialized in a new Higher Education Law (2008) and other legal acts, subsequently issued by our Ministry of Education. In this process, we all appreciate the direct support given by Dr. Appenroth and Prof. Macchia during meetings with the dean and the rector, even with the minister of education, or other important representatives, and with the media of that time.

During the meeting with the Minister of Education, Prof. L. Memushi in Tirana in February 2004.

During all the project activities, we found always a good understanding in our leading group, related to lab improvements, staff mobility, textbook printing, etc. Let me stress the very valuable support given by the teaching staff of the Department of Biology of that time. They did their best for the reform, for the activities, not to slow down or obstacle the progress, and the ongoing project itself. Thanks to that atmosphere of cooperation, the TEMPUS project was also rated among the best of that time in Brussels.

In order to face the challenges of those born in Albania after the 1990s, in an increasingly common social and cultural space, the strengthening of knowledge was a necessity for the country´s development and for the strengthening and enrichment of European citizenship. For the whole reform, the new requirements in recent development in Albania and Europe were combined with the real abilities and experience of our teaching staff. That first experience was also a good model towards the reforming of all subsequent curricula in our Faculty, our University, and other institutions of higher education in Albania. Even today, the reforming goes continuously, in accordance with the new development requirements and with the new legislation. However, what we achieved together in that period, this was really a sharp turn in the history of higher education in Albania.

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Jena: Für Albanier das Größte

Jedes Jahr darf ein Schüler aus Tirana die zehnte Klasse des Angergymnasiums besuchen

■ Von Anne Zeuner

Jena. Albanien ist ein Land der Traditionen und der Gegensätze. Doch was weiß man noch über das Land in Südosteuropa? Genau in dieser Frage liegt der Grundgedanke des Projektes „Ein Schuljahr in Jena", das vor zehn Jahren ins Leben gerufen wurde. Jedes Schuljahr darf ein Schüler aus Albanien die zehnte Klasse des Angergymnasiums besuchen. „Die albanischen Schüler zeichnen sich durch eine extrem hohe Motivation aus – Bildung ist in Albanien das höchste Gut", sagt Dr. Klaus-Jürgen Appenroth, der sich um die Organisation des Projektes kümmert. Albanien sei das richtige Land für ein solches Austauschprogramm, denn es ist relativ unbekannt. „Wir wollen den Jenaer Schülern die Kultur eines weniger bekannten Landes näher bringen", sagt Appenroth. Albanien brauche im Umkehrschluss europäische Aufmerksamkeit zur Weiterentwicklung.

Zwischen den Schülern aus der albanischen Hauptstadt Tirana bricht ein regelrechter Kampf um den Platz in Jena aus. Die Schüler müssen eine Klausur und eine mündliche Prüfung bestehen, der Beste darf nach Jena. Wenn die Jugendlichen in Jena ankommen, haben sie bereits zwei Jahre Deutschunterricht hinter sich. Die Sprachkenntnisse zu erweitern, sei aber nur ein positiver Nebeneffekt des Austausches. Vor allem die Persönlichkeit der meist 16-Jährigen entwickele sich enorm.

Dr. Klaus-Jürgen Appenroth, FSU Jena. Foto: Anne Zeuner

Allein und in einem fremden Land lernen sie schnell Selbstständigkeit. Das bleibe ihnen auch lange nach der Rückkehr in die Heimat erhalten. Finanziert werden die Schüler teilweise durch Spenden, aber hauptsächlich von ihren Eltern in Albanien. „Die meisten Eltern würden sich sogar jahrelang verschulden, um ihren Kindern den Aufenthalt in Jena zu ermöglichen", sagt Appenroth.

Die letzte Schülerin ist vor einer Woche nach Tirana zurückgekehrt – die nächste Austauschschülerin ist schon gefunden. Sie wird am 1. August in Jena ankommen. Während ihres Auslandsaufenthaltes werden die Albanier bei Jenaer Gasteltern untergebracht. Das klappe meist so gut, dass die Gasteltern danach zu Besuch nach Albanien kommen.

Dr. Klaus-Jürgen Appenroth kümmert sich unter anderem zusammen mit Bürgermeister Frank Schenker um die Organisation des Projektes. Auch der Direktor des Angergymnasiums, Michael Richter, zeige viel Engagement. Appenroth ist Privatdozent an der Biologischen Fakultät der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena. Über ein Austauschprogramm der Universität kam er zu dem Schülerprojekt. Damals gab es einen Dozentenaustausch – und „schnell wurden aus Kollegen Freunde". Mittlerweile war er schon 25 Mal in Tirana.

Copy of one of the press articles in Jena dedicated to Dr. Appenroth regarding his support given to Albanian students for their one-year stay in Jena.

In addition to the cooperation with us in Biology at the University in Tirana, Dr. Appenroth in parallel was in **close cooperation with the High School of Foreign Languages 'Asim Vokshi' in Tirana.** He made it possible to find support for one student (in most cases girls) per year to stay and study in Jena for one year, selected among the best candidates of the third-year of the German course. Therefore, continuously in 15 years (2000-2015), Dr. Appenroth was in contact with officials in Tirana to select the best candidate of the year, and to find for her a living opportunity in Jena, of course free of charge in a German family, and in school, and then following her progress at school and in everyday life. Through this student project, 15 Albanian school students from the German course were lucky enough to improve not only the German language, but also to get close to the German family tradition, the culture and history at the same time. It was often gratefully reflected in the local press in Jena.

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Dr. Appenroth was lecturer of Plant Physiology, and a dedicated researcher in the field, especially for research on duckweeds (Lemnaceae). You notice pretty soon his straightforwardness, communicative ability, and a pronounced sense of charity, with very fluent English. With similar manner is his wife, Dorothea, a former lecturer in Pharmacology at the Jena University, but with close ties of aid and cooperation with African countries (Mozambique). Now both are retired, but are always alert keeping old contacts. Dr. Appenroth may have visited Albania more than 30 times in all these years; and in several cases he was heavily loaded with some lab instruments, books or scientific journals, some of which are still in use. He never hesitated to

give a lecture to our students or staff members on teaching or about his recent research findings. In addition to the close relationship with Albania, his

humanitarian aspects can be shown even in his continuous dedication to teaching and research in India (e.g. University of Hyderabad) even today. He was and still is very devoted to duckweeds. We went often together around in Albania to collect duckweeds (*Lemna* or *Spirodela*), and the Albanian duckweed collection is still alive and in use in Jena.

Dr. Appenroth, and the colleagues who followed him in Jena, as Prof. R. Ölmüller and Dr. I. Sherameti, continued to be active in Albanian academic life, regularly participating in our scientific conferences and conducting lectures with students. Thanks to this cooperation over the years, with Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, etc…, that we have been able to grow, both in teaching and research, to reform institutionally, and also for most of us to upgrade in our careers. On 19th November 2023, Dr. Appenroth has his 75th birthday. On behalf of all our colleagues and former students, **we wish him a long and healthy life**. Let me express again our endless gratitude towards Dr. Klaus-Juergen Appenroth, German colleagues and all the cooperation in these years, which is truly a source of inspiration not only for us but also for our future generations.

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