

Donald Polfliet, Belgium

Andrej Cebela is from Slovenia but studied in Belgium for a while. He talked to his fellow student Donald Polfliet about Chernobyl after their classes. In 1986, Donald was 16 and went to a technical high school in Gent.

Donald was born in 1970 and he lives in Gent, Belgium, outside the city center with a lot of gardens and the area is nice. He has two brothers, his father was a plumber and the mother was working in a school. He studied architecture and right now he is working in Public relations in Brussels.

In 1986 he was a technical high school student outside the Gent. He was 16, a teenager who was enjoying life and didn't care about adult problems...

He knows that in Belgium exist at least 2 nuclear power plants, one in Wallonia (French speaking part), close to Dinant and the other in Flanders (Dutch speaking part). They were opened a long time before the Chernobyl accident.

He told me that they never discussed this problem about nuclear energy in school. The most information he got was from television. At that time also Outgate happened in Belgium and the first reaction was "It happened in Russia why not here"! But the government calmed him down saying that their NPPs have better installation, they are well protected.

When the accident happened he didn't talk with his parents about that but he talked about general problems in Soviet Union. His parents were not so concerned because Belgium is small and more protected, controlled...

The attitude of the people at that time was neutral; some were pro and against this energy, for example Greenpeace. But he can't remember any protests that happened in Brussels. He also does not remember any other accidents before this one.

Emergency plans existed, like ones in case of floods or terrorist attacks. Several organizations and ministries were responsible for certain plans in case of radiation accident, like the Ministry for internal affairs and also Civil protection was responsible for the reaction on this kinds of accidents.

After the Berlin wall came down in 1989, the Soviet Union became more open in different levels; politically, culturally,... They are more open with other countries now because they have more connections with Europe. That was not the case at the time of the Chernobyl accident. Also the information that was published wasn't exactly true. Not the whole truth was published, mostly to protect the Soviet Union.

As he said before he heard the news from television. He could hear some news on the radio. His reaction was a surprise because the Soviet Union control and security in NPPs wasn't on such a high level as in Europe. We have little more rules and we do it. He was talking about that with his friends and people who were the same age like he was. In these days you go and check the internet first before you talk with your friends and family.

His parents didn't talk with him about the accident but they talked with their friends. He thinks that they had the same feeling about the accident. "Did it happen in our country or maybe in France, Nederland?" They were concerned about their nation. Government on the other hand created a unit in case of radiation and also control of NPPs installation became more frequent and they replaced some old parts in the factories. The accident happened and what we can do in the future to avoid it. Government provided him information about the details about the accident and how to protect himself. But he thinks that there is never enough information and he would like to know more.

The change in the environment was the wind because there was a radiation coming from the accident but he doesn't remember any changes in animal behavior. And something that is very interesting is that the first thought that he remembers about Chernobyl is a view of old buildings, industry because of such an old installation.

His life didn't change afterwards, not in the details, but he can't recall the memory because he was a teenager and also his parents didn't change the way of living. He told me that he realized at that moment that they also have it in Belgium; they have an NPP in their country. His reflection on safe use of nuclear energy was that he trusts the government and the organization in Europe. They had strict regulations before and they've become stricter after the accident. But he didn't engage in any organization that was dealing with nuclear energy issues. And he does not know if any relative or friend joined such organization. After the accident they adapted the installation inside already working plants but they didn't build any new NPP.

The Chernobyl accident is important for today's generations because we have to know how to use, make, and create safe energy. The good side of the production of nuclear energy is that it is better for the environment but on the other side you have nuclear waste and the risk is higher. This accident shouldn't be forgotten and young generations should know the real information, the objective information about the Chernobyl accident. "Les and londs" something that happened in the past, you have to learn about it and you have to know it, to avoid it in the future. As examples he gives the First and Second World Wars.

He is sure that in all European countries is a high level of technology, trained engineers and there is no difference in dealing with nuclear energy. Maybe in the small details.

This accident has to be remembered like every other major event, Second World War for example. Also the media should talk about it. Government is not giving enough information; you have to search it by yourself on the internet or in science and engineering magazine... For safety and security of NPPs he is not sure but he hopes, counts on professionalism of the government and the people who work in the factory and organizations like "Nucleair Atoomschap". This accident changed the way to deal with nuclear energy, to create and to use it for different cases.

His final thought about Chernobyl's 25th anniversary was that it is very important to remember this accident, to tell the people why the nuclear energy is still important. We will still use it in the future and if not, something else can be created. But they have to think far ahead in the future. The amount that we use it right now is less because of all the alternative systems, energy. Maybe one day the nuclear energy will be just a small part of production of the energy.
