

Ana Cornelia Bulai, Romania

Ana Bulai was in fifth grade when the accident in Chernobyl happened. While she and her school mates joked about the accident, her parents were, of course, more worried. Today, Professor Ana Bulai teaches at the University of Bucharest and shared her thoughts about nuclear energy with Marius Drasovean.

Ana Cornelia Bulai was born in 1973. She spent her childhood in Râmnicu Vâlcea where she lived with her family (her parents and her brother). She attended primary and secondary school and high-school in Râmnicu Vâlcea and she spent most of her holidays in Brezoi (the place where her grandparents lived), 30 km far away from Râmnicu Vâlcea on the Olt River.

She has a Ph.D in Sociology. Ana Bulai is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at the Bucharest University and at the National School for Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest. She is also the general manager of the marketing research company AB Research Group. She is married and has one daughter.

At the time of Chernobyl accident she lived in Râmnicu Vâlcea with her family. She was in the 5th grade. Her parents were professors of Chemistry and Physics (her mother) and Mathematics (her father).

She remembers that the teachers' demands regarding curricula had suddenly fallen and most of them, during the classes, explained the effects of the accident. Her mother being a Chemistry teacher was much tensioned and worried those days. She took Ana and her brother to a medical consultant in order to find out whether there were any changes in regarding the children's health. She remembers the Potassium Iodide pills given by the school's doctor and the request to drink a lot of milk.

For her and her classmates and friends it was an interesting experience. They considered the fact that everybody around them seemed to be worried as being quite funny. They were making jokes about the fact that some classmates will certainly have goiter very soon, that due to radiation they will become all blond, a fact which was considered good from the girls' perspective, that girls' breasts will grow and that the sexual organs of boys and girls will grow too.

Parents were talking a lot about the fact that the Romanian Communist Party was covering-up the reality and that the effects of the accidents must be more dramatic. There were rumors that Ceausescu will hold a speech about the Chernobyl accident and the celebration of the 1st of May will be canceled in order to avoid people's presence in the streets, and thus possible riots.

People were talking about hundreds and thousands of victims at Chernobyl. There were rumors. But in the end Ceausescu made a speech but on the occasion of the 1st of May which was celebrated without problems for the regime. Not a long time after, the interest in the accident fell. The list of priorities suddenly changed.

She considers that the TASS Agency and afterwards the Romanian regime didn't hide the fact that at Chernobyl there was an accident because the events with a negative character were easily managed by the Communist regimes: something negative happened. The effects were minimized by the number of victims. In this case just a few. The culprits were maximized. They were presented as negligent and those who not only put the community in danger but also the country and the Party. The Communists knew that the rumors have a bigger conflict potential than the official news. And that's why they acted normally presenting the event. They presented it in their own manner, but in spite of this aspect, everybody around the world knew that at Chernobyl was an accident.

The authorities from the Western countries reacted more democratically when they decided to organize referendums on the nuclear issue. Ana considers that the West affords to shut down mostly from economic reasons. On the other hand, Romania, up to the construction of NPP Cernavoda, wasn't capable of being energetically independent and couldn't cover all her energetic necessities from alternative sources of energy. In this view, Romania can't afford to shut down the NPP Cernavoda. It is somehow constrained to develop this type of production.

She associates the term nuclear threat with nuclear explosion both because of Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs and the Chernobyl accident. At this point of the discussion she told me about the struggle against nuclear arms and the fact that Ceausescu had a very active politics against the nuclear weapons.

She first heard about NPP Cernavoda from her parents who used to show them the location of the NPP on their way with the car to the Black Sea on their holidays. Otherwise, there were no mentions about Cernavoda in the newspapers or in people's daily conversation. It simply was not a topic of interest.

The first thought that comes into her mind when she hears NPP is Cernavoda, the Romanian NPP. She knows that the second reactor was operated recently and the fact that the construction of the NPP last too much. At that moment Cernavoda was considered the Romanian rematch for Kozlodui, the Bulgarian NPP.

She knows that the NPP Cernavoda was constructed in partnership with Canadian companies because there was a Canadian neighborhood in Cernavoda. It was considered a great achievement in the period.

I asked her which might be her first fear as inhabitant of Cernavoda city. She told me that this will probably consist on long term effects of the poor storage of nuclear waste. These might generate explosions, radiation and medical problems. As a young student in Sociology she remembers that Romanian National Institute for Statistics at the beginning of 90's used to present separate data about Cernavoda regarding births, infantile mortality, types of cancer etc. They wanted to illustrate that there was no difference compared to the national average.

She has a rather favourable position on the production of energy using nuclear combustible. Ana considers that the nuclear way of producing energy will be even more valorized in the following years because maximize the effects: produce more energy in fewer resources.

She thinks that we cannot talk about serious social protection in this matter. In a very short time period it is quite difficult to take efficient measures. We are not prepared to act in this particular type of intervention as we are not prepared in any other interventions (e.g. earthquakes).

Regarding the emergency plans in case of a nuclear accident she remembers that at the end of the 80's a film was very popular: the film about the small scoop of marines that can save your life. One was advised to dig a hole in the ground when the radioactive nuclear cloud approaches and to cover himself with ground and to get out only when the cloud passed. A very eloquent example that the state was not prepared to such catastrophes.

She stated that the ecologist movements have undoubtedly arguments, and Chernobyl is one of them. But behind all these ecologist movements certainly are groups of economic lobbyists with specific targeted interests. She considers that the ecologist movements are generated by an economic comfort that enhances the green energy as less invasive way of using the natural resources.

She doesn't believe that any of the countries will shut down all the NPP in favor of wind turbines or solar panels simply because these energies are not suitable everywhere and important investments are needed.

Chernobyl is not only an argument for the ecologist movements. Chernobyl became a tourist attraction. Ana considers this as a marketing expression of the Eastern countries. This model was created in the West and adopted in East too. It was expected that Ukrainians sell something that Westerners considered a curiosity. It is an attraction due to its unprecedented example. Is the only one of this type and has very significant effects even today.

Ana considers that Chernobyl is first a turning point and redefining moment of the security rules. In the East, for the first time, the issue of the technical failure was

discussed. The attempt to create "New Man" can generate victims of this type. For the moment the idealistic vision of a very bright future has been questioned. On the other hand, in the West existed a social pressure doubled by a medical issue more visible: the incidence of cancer cases and genetic anomalies.