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## Marcian D. Bleahu (1924 – 2019)

Bogdan P. Onac 

School of Geosciences, University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Ave., Tampa, FL 33620, USA  
"Emil Racoviță" Institute of Speleology, Clinicilor 5, 400006, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Marcian (Matty) D. Bleahu, an influential earth scientist, researcher, public servant, and longtime advocate for open science who had a profound effect in shaping Romanian geology, especially karst science, died on July 30, 2019. He was 95 years old and left an exemplary and productive legacy of scientific achievements in fields such as geology, karstology, geography, and ecology. He was an avid conservationist, outdoorsman, photographer, and critical observer of the natural world. Moreover, he worked tirelessly, both in academic/research organizations and public environs, to ensure that the results of his extremely broad field of studies were communicated and had the widest possible impact.

Dr. Bleahu earned two college degrees (Natural Sciences and Geography) from the University of Bucharest in 1949. Between 1949 and 1961 he taught Structural Geology and Quaternary Geology at his *Alma Mater*, while also working for the Geological Institute of Romania (GIR), overseeing the geological studies of two ambitious projects: the Danube-Black Sea Channel and the Bucharest Subway. Nevertheless, his main accomplishments in the GIR, where he was Director from 1970 to 1974 and a field geologist until his retirement in 1994, were in the area of geological mapping. Throughout his entire career, he was part of teams that produced over 50 sheets of the geological map of Romania on a scale of 1:200.000 and 1:50.000, mainly in the Apuseni Mountains. He became an expert in Mesozoic and Paleozoic sedimentary formations, most of them limestones, so naturally, he joined the researchers of the "Emil Racoviță" Institute of Speleology in Cluj and conducted months-long field campaigns during which several large cave systems were discovered and/or mapped (e.g., Barsa, Neagră, Coiba Mare, and Vârtope).

In 1974, Bleahu received his doctoral degree from the "Babes-Bolyai" University in Cluj, with a dissertation on karst and cave morphology. In the same year, he published a benchmark monograph, *Karst morphology*, that not only included the results of his doctoral studies, but also a thorough worldwide review of the most important karst- and cave-related research. Due to the political climate, the book was published in Romanian, and it thus had less of an impact in the international karst community. Two

years later, Bleahu, along with a group of cave researchers from the "Emil Racoviță" Institute of Speleology, published *Caves of Romania*, another important book, that describes 374 caves and shafts. The scientific papers and the books Dr. Bleahu published contributed greatly to the advancement of geology and karst science in Romania. He was a pioneer in disseminating scientific writing for the general public. Books like *The beauty of karst regions*, *Karst morphology*, *The conquerors of the darkness*, *Karst landscape*, *The Man and the Cave*, *Global tectonics*, and *Beyond the landscape* inspired many generations of students and cavers to pursue a career in geology or speleology.

He was co-founder of the Ecological University (1990), the first private academic institution of the new Romania, where he taught Dynamic Geology, Geology of Romania, Nature Protection, and various other subjects. After retiring from teaching in 2001, Dr. Bleahu continued his long-time interest in speleology and ecology, publishing several other books.

Dr. Bleahu served two terms as a Senator in the Romanian Parliament and became the Minister of



Marcian D. Bleahu in 1992 (M. Bleahu photo archive).

the Environment, the position from which he was appointed as vice-president of the 1992 United Nations Conference for the Environment and Development in Rio. Throughout his lifetime, Dr. Bleahu was the recipient of 10 awards and decorations, including the 2009 "Star of Romania" as Knight and the 2011 award of the "Percival Allen" Medal of the Association of European Geological Societies. One honor that was especially important to him, although received late in life, was his 2018 election as Member of Honor of the Romanian Academy.

Matty was a scientist who was filled with humanity and passionate about art and music. We were all very sad to learn of his passing, and we will certainly treasure the memory of our many field campaigns and conversations for years to come.

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