



Photo: archive of S. Vosika

Interview with Dr. rer. nat. Slavomír Vosika, Head of the Secretariat of the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe River in Magdeburg

Mr. Vosika, why did you choose the topic of water and what were your beginnings in the field of water management? What was the impulse to apply for a position of the Head of the Secretariat of the ICPER?

I got into water and water management through working in the Secretariat of the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe River – ICPER. At the end of 1990, they were looking for employees for their Secretariat in Magdeburg. It was an opportunity for me to use both my professional and language knowledge. I studied chemistry with a focus on analytical chemistry at the Technical University of Merseburg, about 30 km west of Leipzig. In August 1991, I joined the Secretariat as a clerk, in October 1995 I took over

the position of researcher, and on 1st January 2004, the position of Head of the ICPER Secretariat.

If I am not mistaken, the ICPER Agreement was the first negotiated international agreement for the Federal Republic of Germany after reunification. In addition to the water sector, the agreement thus has special significance for Germany itself.

Yes, that's right. The ICPER Agreement, signed on 8th October 1990 in Magdeburg, was the first international treaty concluded by Germany after its reunification on 3rd October 1990.

Do you remember the first task you worked on at the Secretariat?

One of my first tasks was to support the activities of the "Accidental water pollution" (H) ICPER working group and to prepare the relocation of the Secretariat from the building of the former Water Management Directorate of the Middle Elbe, in which the State Assembly of Saxony-Anhalt had shown interest, to the premises of the Water and Navigation Authority Magdeburg, where the Secretariat is still located today.

During more than thirty years of ICPER's existence, many projects have passed through the Secretariat. Which one has stuck in your mind the most?

There were a lot of projects related to the Elbe, especially in the 1990s. Both the European Union and Germany significantly supported financing of these projects. Projects were always managed by relevant ministries or research institutions. The effort of the working groups and the ICPER Secretariat was to implement the outputs of these projects into the ICPER recommendations. If I had to mention one activity in particular, then it would be the improvement of water quality in the Elbe. At the end of the 1980s, the Elbe was one of the most polluted rivers in Europe. In order to improve this situation, an agreement was negotiated in the early 1990s to monitor water quality in the Elbe basin based on an agreed international measurement programme. The cornerstone of monitoring the development of water quality in the Elbe and its tributaries was the network of water quality measuring stations, and their comparability was an important prerequisite for the common interpretation of the measured values.

On the ICPER website it is possible to read about the functioning of individual ICPER working groups and their presidents. An important part of the ICPER is its Secretariat, but we cannot read anything about it anywhere, or about you, which is a pity.

The ICPER Secretariat supports the Commission's activities from a professional, language, and organizational-technical point of view. The eight-member team consists of three researchers, two translators-interpreters, two administrative workers, and the Head of the Secretariat.

What are the current topics that the ICPER and its Secretariat are currently dealing with?

The analysis of the low water period 2014–2020 in the Elbe basin has been completed. In cooperation with the flood forecasting centres in Prague, Dresden and Magdeburg, information channels with cross-border significance are being checked and updated between the flood forecasting centres on the Elbe. The International Elbe Monitoring Programme for 2024 and the International Elbe Monitoring Programme for Monitoring Water Quality in Extreme Hydrological Situations are being prepared, as well as an update of the International Elbe Warning and Alarm Plan. Work continues on the extension of the Elbe Alarm Model (ALAMO, a model for forecasting the spread of harmful substances in the Elbe) by the Bílina tributary. We are supporting the main organizer, Povodí Ohře state enterprise, in the preparation of the 20th Magdeburg Seminar on Water Protection, which will take place on 11–12th October 2023 in Karlovy Vary.

The ICPER Secretariat has been involved in the preparation of the Magdeburg Seminar for a long time. Do you remember the first of them, and can you briefly describe the development of this important water management event?

The tradition of Magdeburg Seminars on Water Protection was established in 1988 in Magdeburg. The first Czech-German Magdeburg Seminar

on Water Protection, in which ICPER participated for the first time, took place in September 1992 in Špindlerův Mlýn. Since 1992, the seminar has been held alternately in the Czech Republic and in Germany, and over the years it has gained a reputation as one of the most important professional and scientific events in the field of water protection in the Elbe basin. It became a platform for representatives from the field of science, practice, and state administration to exchange the latest knowledge and experience. Due to its connection to the Elbe basin, the seminar is unique and has no parallels in the context of large European river basins.

This year's Magdeburg Seminar will take place under the title "Extreme hydrological phenomena and their impacts in the Elbe basin". What can we look forward to?

As part of the 20th Magdeburg Seminar on Water Protection, on 11–12th October 2023 in Karlovy Vary, a total of 26 lectures will be given in five specialist blocks. The seminar also includes presentations of about 30 posters and three excursions.

What do you think is the future of ICPER, or rather what will ICPER look like in 2050?

The principle of a coordinated cross-border procedure in dealing with water protection issues in river basins has been the basis of Czech-German cooperation within the framework of the ICPER since its inception. This principle is an integral part of European legislation, for example the Water Framework Directive and the Flood Directive. In view of the future challenges facing river basins, this approach will not change fundamentally. As proven instruments of international cooperation, commissions for protection of water in river basins will certainly be an important part of its future implementation.

Dr. Vosika, thank you for taking the time to talk to us.

Ing. Josef Nistler

Dr. rer. nat. Slavomír Vosika

Dr. rer. nat. Slavomír Vosika, the Head of the Secretariat of the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe River (ICPER) in Magdeburg, studied chemistry with a focus on analytical chemistry at the University of Technology in Merseburg. In August 1991, he took up the position of clerk in the Secretariat of the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe River (ICPER) based in Magdeburg; in October 1995 he took over the position of researcher, and in January 2004 the position of Head of the ICPER Secretariat.



✉ vosika@ikse-mkol.org
www.ikse-mkol.org