



University of Belgrade
Technical Faculty in Bor,
Mining and Metallurgy
Institute Bor

**54th International
October Conference
on Mining and Metallurgy**

PROCEEDINGS

Editors:

Ljubiša Balanović

Dejan Tanikić



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PREFACE

On behalf of the Organizing Committee, it is a great honor and pleasure to welcome all esteemed participants of the 54th International October Conference on Mining and Metallurgy (IOC 2023), scheduled to take place at the picturesque Bor Lake, Serbia, from October 18th to 21st 2023.

The collaborative efforts of the University of Belgrade, the Technical Faculty in Bor, and the Mining and Metallurgy Institute Bor have meticulously organized this year's IOC. Our focus remains unwavering on showcasing the latest research findings and advancements in geology, mining, metallurgy, materials science, technology, environmental protection, and other engineering disciplines. Our primary objective is to foster a dynamic environment where academics, researchers, and industry professionals can come together to share their knowledge, experiences, and innovative ideas while exploring opportunities for collaborative research endeavors.

Our conference agenda is rich and diverse, encompassing plenary sessions, engaging invited lectures, technical presentations, enlightening oral and poster sessions, informative technical tours, a diverse exhibition, and memorable social gatherings. At the heart of this event lies our strong commitment to sustainable development within the mining and metallurgy sector. We are dedicated to exploring ecologically conscious methodologies, responsible resource extraction practices, and cutting-edge technologies that reduce the industry's environmental impact and enhance the well-being of local communities.

The conference proceedings comprise 129 papers authored by individuals from universities, research institutes, and industries in 22 countries. We are proud to welcome participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Croatia, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Libya, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Morocco, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, United States, and, of course, Serbia.

We are excited to host the 8th International Student Conference on Technical Sciences (ISC 2023) as part of IOC 2023. This event offers students from Serbia and the wider region a unique chance to showcase their research and discuss the future of their fields with experts.

We sincerely thank the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia for their generous financial support. In addition, we express our profound gratitude to all our sponsors, exhibitors, and friends of the Conference for their contributions and unwavering support for playing a pivotal role in ensuring the success of IOC 2023.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all authors, committees, reviewers, speakers, and chairpersons for their invaluable contributions in shaping IOC 2023.

We look forward to welcoming you to the 55th International October Conference on Mining and Metallurgy (IOC 2024), which will be held in October 2024.

On behalf of the 54th IOC Organizing Committee,

Prof. dr Ljubiša Balanović

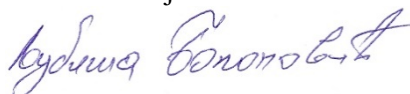


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Plenary Lectures

Velimir R. Radmilović (SERBIA)

Energy: One of the biggest challenges in 21st century 3-3

Jing Yu, Mingshui Luo, Junyi Xiang, Yang You, Zhixiong You, Xuewei Ly (CHINA)

Efficient extraction of vanadium from vanadium slag 4-8

Invited Lectures

Batrić Pešić (UNITED STATES)

The ongoing restructuring of universities to adopt the sophistication offered by internet 11-19

Yaima Filiberto, Alberto Montenegro, Eugenio Alvarez (SPAIN)

Machine learning applied to improving the scrap recycling and melting process in all types of ferrous alloys and steel 20-22

Slobodan Kostić, Qi Fenglai, Savo Pirgić, Nenad Botić, Dobrica Milovanović, Čedomir Sušić, Igor Zlatković (SERBIA)

Construction of a new sintering plant 180 m² within the HBIS Group Serbia Iron & Steel 23-26

Satyananda Patra (INDIA)

Acid activation of bentonite: Physico-Chemical characterization and application in goethitic iron ore green pelletization 27-35

Ridvan Yamanoglu (TURKEY)

Production of metal-based powders by atomization techniques 36-45

Yong Du, Rainer Schmid-Fetzer, Jincheng Wang, Shuhong Liu, Jianchuan Wang, Qiang Lu, Yuhui Zhang, Kai Li (CHINA, GERMANY)

Computational design of engineering materials: case studies for a cemented carbide and a heat resistant Al alloy 46-46

Conference Papers

Ordinartsev Denis, Nadezhda Pechischeva, Svetlana Estemirova, Andrey Rempel (RUSSIA)

Cr(VI) photosorption on composite sorbent of montmorillonite with amorphous TiO₂ 49-52

Mikhail Korovkin, Ludmila Ananyeva, Andrey Zherlitsyn, Sergey Kondratyev, Olesya Savinova (RUSSIA)

Electro-pulse crushing in high-purity quartz production 53-55

Žarko Radović, Nebojša Tadić (MONTENEGRO)

Analytical simulation of EAF dust enrichment 56-59

Nebojša Tadić, Žarko Radović (MONTENEGRO) <i>Thermal and mechanical relaxation of residual stresses in cold rolled aluminium alloy strips</i>	60-63
Dragan Šabaz, Miloš Stojanović, Dejan Petrović (SERBIA) <i>Selection of anchor type using AHP method</i>	64-67
Miloš Stojanović, Veljko Lapčević, Ivica Vojinović (SERBIA) <i>Blast fragmentation analysis in Jama Bor by using WipFrag software</i>	68-71
Veljko Lapčević, Toma Jovičić, Slavko Torbica (SERBIA) <i>Mine ventilation model validation by PQ survey</i>	72-75
Jelena Đorđević, Jelena Stefanović, Sandra Guševac, Ivan Jelić, Stefan Trujić (SERBIA) <i>Life cycle analysis (LCA) of asphalt layers containing recycled asphalt pavement</i>	76-79
Jelena Ivaz, Dejan Petrović, Predrag Stolić, Mladen Radovanović, Dragan Zlatanović, Saša Stojadinović, Pavle Stojković (SERBIA) <i>Occupational injuries in underground coal mining: statistical analysis of data</i>	80-83
Jelena Ivaz, Dejan Petrović, Mladen Radovanović, Dragan Zlatanović, Saša Stojadinović, Pavle Stojković (SERBIA) <i>Prediction of methane emissions in coalmine - Soko</i>	84-87
C. Prochaska, E. Kokkinos, D. Merachtsaki, A. Lampou, E. Peleka, K. Simeonidis, G. Vourlias, A. Zouboulis (GREECE) <i>Recovery of metallic fractions from medical products labelled for single use</i>	88-91
Nataša Sarap, Marija Janković, Vojislav Stanić, Ivana Jelić, Marija Šljivić-Ivanović (SERBIA) <i>Analysis of gross alpha and gross beta activity in samples around former uranium mine Gabrovnica</i>	92-95
Dragan Manasijević, Ljubiša Balanović, Ivana Marković, Uroš Stamenković (SERBIA) <i>Latent heat of some aluminium based phase change alloys for thermal energy storage</i>	96-99
Andelka Stojanović, Ivica Nikolić, Isidora Milošević (SERBIA) <i>Position of European countries in sustainable resource management</i>	100-103
Aleksandar Đorđević, Duško Minić, Milena Zečević, Dragan Manasijević (SERBIA) <i>Mechanical and electrical properties of the ternary Ag-Ge-Sn alloys</i>	104-107
Milena Zečević, Duško Minić, Aleksandar Đorđević, Dragan Manasijević (SERBIA) <i>Effect of chemical composition on the corrosion resistance of the ternary Ag-Ge-Sn alloys</i>	108-111
Tatiana Aleksandrova, Nadezhda Nikolaeva (RUSSIA) <i>Extraction of low-dimensional structures of nonferrous and noble metals from refractory raw materials</i>	112-115
Viša Tasić, Tatjana Apostolovski-Trujić, Bojan Radović, Nevena Ristić, Tamara Urošević, Vladan Kamenović, Zvonko Damjanović (SERBIA) <i>Air quality measurements in the Bor city during the reconstruction of the copper smelter Bor in 2022</i>	116-119

<u>Slavica Miletić, Biserka Trumić, Suzana Stanković</u> (SERBIA) <i>Application of control charts in the laboratory for testing the metallic materials</i>	120-123
<u>Alexey M. Amdur, Sergei A. Fedorov, Andrey A. Forshev, Nikolay V. Grevtsev, Vera V. Yurak</u> (RUSSIA) <i>Technological aspects of the use of peat as a component of pulverated coal fuel for blast furnaces</i>	124-127
<u>Ljiljana Avramović, Zoran Stevanović, Vanja Trifunović, Radmila Marković, Dragana Božić, Daniela Urošević, Silvana Dimitrijević</u> (SERBIA) <i>Hydrometallurgical treatment of mining waste from Bor - Serbia in aim of copper recovery</i>	128-131
<u>Daniel Kržanović, Radmilo Rajković, Ivana Jovanović, Milenko Jovanović, Miomir Mikić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Determination the final contour of the open pit Veliki Krivelj for the mining capacity 23.1 million tons of ore</i>	132-135
<u>Vladan Marinković, Miroslava Maksimović, Milenko Jovanović, Goran Pačkovski</u> (SERBIA) <i>The use of unmanned aerial vehicles for making the precise 3D topo models and orthophoto images</i>	136-140
<u>Dejan Tanikić, Anđela Stojić, Jelena Đoković, Miloš Stoljiljković</u> (SERBIA) <i>Mechanical characteristics of the shape memory alloy Cu-Zn-Al</i>	141-144
<u>Ljiljana Avramović, Vanja Trifunović, Zoran Stevanović, Radmila Marković, Dragana Božić, Dejan Bugarin, Silvana Dimitrijević</u> (SERBIA) <i>Copper recovery from RE-flotation tailings by combined process</i>	145-148
<u>Milenko Jovanović, Daniel Kržanović, Radmilo Rajković, Vladan Marinković, Miroslava Maksimović, Miomir Mikić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Application of hybrid geogrids in mining</i>	149-153
<u>Stefan Trujić, Miroslava Maksimović, Vladan Marinković, Ljiljana Avramović, Vanja Trifunović, Dragana Božić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Geological exploration of the technogenic deposit - old flotation tailing pit - Bor with the possibility of leaching</i>	154-157
<u>Zoran Stevanović, Radmila Marković, Ljiljana Avramović, Vojka Gardić, Jelena Petrović, Dragana Božić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Sustainable and smart mining</i>	158-161
<u>Snežana Ignjatović, Ivana Vasiljević, Branisav Sretković, Milanka Negovanović</u> (SERBIA) <i>Using gravity data to define structural correlation affecting the formation of Neogene basins</i>	162-165
<u>Deniz Eylül Akpınar, Batuhan Turgut, Ugur Gurol, Savas Dilibal</u> (TURKEY) <i>Characterization of wire arc additively manufactured wear-resistant bimetallic component</i>	166-169
<u>Mistreanu Sebastian, Ramona Cimpoesu, Dragoş Achiţei, Mihai Popa, Daniela Lucia Chicet, Vasile Manole, Ana-Maria Scripcariu, Nicanor Cimpoesu</u> (ROMANIA) <i>Sandblasting process influence on stainless steel cutting element properties</i>	170-174

<u>Dorđe Petrović, Katarina Stanković, Latinka Slavković Beškoski, Ksenija Kumrić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Removal of Cu(II) from aqueous solutions using adsorbent based on chitosan hydrogel beads</i>	175-178
<u>Jovan P. Šetrajčić, Siniša M. Vučenović</u> (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA) <i>Modified basic properties of electrons in layered nanocrystals with a complex lattice</i>	179-182
<u>Irena Nikolić, Milena Tadić, Dijana Đurović, Nevena Cupara, Ivana Milašević</u> (MONTENEGRO) <i>Kinetic and thermodynamic aspects of strontium adsorption by steelmaking slag</i>	183-186
<u>Miomir Mikić, Milenko Jovanović, Sandra Milutinović, Daniel Kržanović, Radmilo Rajković</u> (SERBIA) <i>New flotation plant Veliki Krivelj monitoring plan</i>	187-190
<u>Miomir Mikić, Radmilo Rajković, Daniel Kržanović, Sandra Milutinović</u> (SERBIA) <i>Recultivation of open pit Veliki Krivelj</i>	191-194
<u>Farzet Bikić, Khaola Awad, Halim Prčanović, Mirnes Duraković</u> (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA) <i>Analysis of influenced factors on tropospheric ozone content in the city of Zenica during 2020</i>	195-198
<u>Sandra Milutinović, Ljubiša Obradović, Daniel Kržanović, Miomir Mikić, Radmilo Rajković</u> (SERBIA) <i>Flotation tail storage methods</i>	199-202
<u>Sandra Milutinović, Milena Kostović, Ljubiša Obradović, Srđana Magdalinović, Sanja Petrović</u> (SERBIA) <i>Methods of transportation and discharge of tails to flotation tailings pond</i>	203-206
<u>Uğur Gürol, Ceren Çelik, Müesser Göçmen, Mustafa Koçak</u> (TURKEY) <i>Microstructural and mechanical characterization of armor steel joint welded with sandwich design</i>	207-210
<u>Branka Pešovski, Milan Radovanović, Vesna Krstić, Danijela Simonović, Silvana Dimitrijević</u> (SERBIA) <i>Electrochemical characteristics of the anodized titanium oxide films in sulfuric acid</i>	211-215
<u>Duško Đukanović, Nemanja Đokić, Zoran Aksentijević, Daniel Radivojević, Branisl Stakić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Methane as an untapped energy potential of the "Soko" brown coal mine</i>	216-220
<u>Žaklina Tasić, Marija Petrović Mihajlović, Ana Simonović, Milan Radovanović, Maja Nujkić, Milan Antonijević</u> (SERBIA) <i>Electrochemical methods for the determination of tryptophan and caffeine</i>	221-224
<u>Isidora Milošević, Anđelka Stojanović, Sanela Arsić, Ivica Nikolić, Ana Rakić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Circular economy in the era of Industry 5.0</i>	225-228

<u>Almaida Gigović-Gekić, Elvis Agović, Belma Fakić, Hasan Avdušinović</u> (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA) <i>Effect of delta ferrite on microstructure and hardness welded joints of steel S21800</i>	229-232
<u>Radmila Marković, Dragana Bozić, Zoran Stevanović, Tatjana Apostolovski Trujić, Vojka Gardić, Ljiljana Avramović, Vesna Marjanović</u> (SERBIA) <i>Combining neutralization and adsorption methods for metals removal from Saraka stream</i>	233-236
<u>Ana Petrović, Radmila Marković, Emina Požega</u> (SERBIA) <i>CNTs as potential material for wastewater purification: a review</i>	237-240
<u>Zdenka Stanojević Šimšić, Ana Kostov, Aleksandra Milosavljević, Slavica Miletić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Experimental investigations of CuAlNi alloys with 70 at%Cu</i>	241-244
<u>Ana Kostov, Aleksandra Milosavljević, Zdenka Stanojević Šimšić, Ivan Jovanović</u> (SERBIA) <i>Determination of melt properties in Cu-Fe alloys</i>	245-248
<u>Vladimir Nikolić, Milan Trumić</u> (SERBIA) <i>A simple method of determining of bond work index for finer samples</i>	249-252
<u>Ivan Jovanović, Novica Staletović</u> (SERBIA) <i>Management of risk assessment in environmental protection in surface copper mine</i>	253-256
<u>Jovan P. Šetrajić, Stevo K. Jaćimovski, Siniša M. Vučenović</u> (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA) <i>Possibility of localized electron states appearance in ultrathin layered crystalline structures</i>	257-260
<u>Jovica Sokolović, Ivana Ilić, Dragiša Stanujkić, Zoran Štirbanović</u> (SERBIA) <i>Application of VIKOR method for comparison of the washability of coals</i>	261-264
<u>Vladimir Jovanović, Dejan Todorović, Branislav Ivošević, Dragan Radulović, Sonja Milićević, Marija Ercegović, Slavica Mihajlović</u> (SERBIA) <i>The process of obtaining biochar and the development of the products thus obtained</i>	265-269
<u>Jelena Petrović, Marija Ercegović, Marija Simić, Marija Koprivica, Jelena Dimitrijević, Marija Marković</u> (SERBIA) <i>Mg/Fe-modified hydrochar with promoted adsorption performances</i>	270-273
<u>Esra Dokumaci Alkan, Nurdan Ari, Murat Alkan</u> (TURKEY) <i>A coating application of IN718 via self-propagating high-temperature synthesis method</i>	274-277
<u>Murat Alkan, Esra Dokumaci Alkan, Dilan Ugurluer, Aslihan Karakanat</u> (TURKEY) <i>Production of AlCoCrCuXFeNi alloys via self-propagating high-temperature synthesis method</i>	278-281
<u>Jarmila Trpčevská, Iveta Vasková, Katarína Pauerová, Martina Laubertová, Dušan Oráč</u> (SLOVAKIA) <i>Zinc volatilization in the primary and the secondary zinc production</i>	282-286

<u>Dragan Ignjatović, Lidija Đurđevac Ignjatović, Vanja Đurđevac, Katarina Milivojević, Ivan Jovanović (SERBIA)</u> <i>Application of the numerical method in the definition of a substrate of circular cross section</i>	287-291
<u>Dragan Ignjatović, Lidija Đurđevac Ignjatović, Vanja Đurđevac, Mladen Supić, Dušan Tašić (SERBIA)</u> <i>Influence of the subsoil bearing capacity during formation of high landfills</i>	292-296
<u>Bojana Živković, Jelisaveta Marjanović, Jelena Đokić, Maja Petrović (SERBIA)</u> <i>Soil and rock properties as a basis for the sanitary landfill settings</i>	297-300
<u>Milan Gorgievski, Miljan Marković, Nada Štrbac, Vesna Grekulović, Kristina Božinović, Milica Zdravković, Marina Marković (SERBIA)</u> <i>Adsorption kinetics for copper ions adsorption onto onion peels</i>	301-304
<u>Saba Nourozi, Fatemeh Pourasgharian, Ahmad Khodadadi Darban (IRAN)</u> <i>Recovery of copper from low-grade copper ore using organic acid</i>	305-308
<u>Maria Krasteva (BULGARIA)</u> <i>Methodology and equipment for researching corrosion cracking processes in steel 3H14L (BDS 3692-78)</i>	309-312
<u>Jasmina Nešković, Pavle Stjepanović, Nenad Milojković, Dejan Lazić, Klara Konc Janković, Svetlana Polavder, Ivana Jovanović (SERBIA)</u> <i>Testing the Bond work index on limestone from flue gas desulphurization plant in TPP Ugljevik</i>	313-317
<u>Biljana Zlatičanin, Sandra Kovačević (MONTENEGRO)</u> <i>Impact of titanium addition on microstructure and properties of as-cast Al-Cu15 alloys</i>	318-321
<u>Biljana Zlatičanin, Sandra Kovačević (MONTENEGRO)</u> <i>Effect of cooling rate on mechanical properties of binary Al-Cu23 alloys</i>	322-324
<u>Desislav Ivanov, Irena Peytcheva, Marko Holma (BULGARIA)</u> <i>Horizon Europe AGEMERA project - Agile Exploration and Geo-modelling for European Critical Raw Materials: The potential of Assarel porphyry copper deposit for critical raw materials</i>	325-328
<u>Shehret Tilvaldyev, Uzziel Caldiño Herrera, Jose Omar Davalos, Manuel Alejandro Lira Martinez, Marlenne Alejandra Hernandez Lira, Diego Adan Villordo Melendez (CANADA)</u> <i>Problems of anthropogenic pollution of space</i>	329-334
<u>Mohammed Derqaoui, Abdelmoughit Abidi, Abdelrani Yaacoubi, Khalid El Amari, Omar Oabi, Abdelaziz Bacaoui (MOROCCO)</u> <i>Apatite flotation from low-grade sedimentary phosphate ore</i>	335-338
<u>Nadezhda Kazakova, Alexandar Popov, Georgi Chernev (BULGARIA)</u> <i>Influence of the distribution and content of limestone particles on the properties of blended cements</i>	339-342

<u>Daniel Ogochukwu Okanigbe, Shade Rouxzeta Van Der Merwe</u> (SOUTH AFRICA) <i>Rocks of Obafemi Awolowo University and Environ, Nigeria: structural analysis of geological contact</i>	343-347
<u>Vladan Kašić, Ana Radosavljević Mihajlović, Jovica Stojanović, Slavica Mihajlović, Melina Vukadinović, Nataša Đorđević, Ivana Jelić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Study of thermally treated zeolitic tuffs of Serbia, deposits "Zlatokop" and "Općište"-Beočin</i>	348-352
<u>Vesna Grekulović, Aleksandra Mitovski, Milica Zdravković, Nada Štrbac, Milan Gorgievski, Milovan Vuković, Miljan Marković</u> (SERBIA) <i>Electrochemical behavior of copper in chloride medium in the presence of nettle extract</i>	353-356
<u>Marko Pavlović, Marina Dojčinović, Muhamed Harbinja, Atif Hodić, Dragan Radulović, Mirjana Stojanović, Zagorka Aćimović</u> (SERBIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA) <i>Effects of the application of pyrophyllite in the composition of protective coatings</i>	357-360
<u>Tamara Ristić, Nenad Milosavljević, Dobrica Milovanović</u> (SERBIA) <i>Measures for the processing of iron with a higher incoming phosphorus content at the steel shop</i>	361-365
<u>Ivana Mikavica, Dragana Randelović, Milena Obradović, Jovica Stojanović, Jelena Mutić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Microplastic textile fibers in urban soils of Serbia</i>	366-369
<u>Jianbo Zhao, Xinnan Zhao, Donglai Ma, Yang You, Zhixiong You, Xuewei Lv</u> (CHINA) <i>Preparation of ferronickel by semi-molten smelting a mixture of two types of laterite ore</i>	370-374
<u>Mladen Radovanović, Dejan Petrović, Jelena Ivaz, Dragan Zlatanović</u> (SERBIA) <i>Possibility of copper ores exploitation using in situ leaching method</i>	375-378
<u>Ivan Jelić, Nikola Lekić, Nikola Stanić, Miomir Mikić</u> (SERBIA) <i>Selection of an optimal route for relocation of the Čehotina river bed</i>	379-382
<u>Milica Zdravković, Vesna Grekulović, Bojan Zdravković, Nada Štrbac, Milan Gorgievski, Miljan Marković</u> (SERBIA) <i>Electrochemical behavior of steel in 0.1 mol/dm³ HCl in the presence of potato peel juice</i>	383-386
<u>Ivana Marković, Dalibor Jović, Uroš Stamenković, Dragan Manasijević, Ljubiša Balanović, Milan Gorgievski</u> (SERBIA) <i>Microstructure and thermal properties of leaded brass after quenching</i>	387-390
<u>Mehmet Ali Yildiz</u> (SERBIA) <i>Hot strip mill walking beam slab reheating project</i>	391-394
<u>Peter Polyak</u> (SERBIA) <i>Finishing mill automation upgrade at hot strip mill</i>	395-400
<u>Branislav Potić, Ana Arifović</u> (SERBIA) <i>The metallurgical testing results of the boron mineralized material from Valjevo-Mionica basin</i>	401-406

<u>Uroš Stamenković, Ivana Marković, Srba Mladenović, Saša Marjanović, Avram Kovačević, Milijana Mitrović, Filip Basarabić (SERBIA)</u> <i>The influence of quenching media on different properties of C45 carbon steel</i>	407-413
<u>Yang You, Jiabao Guo, Zhixiong You, Xuewei Lv (CHINA)</u> <i>Investigation of the mixing and granulation behavior of iron ore fines in horizontal high-shear granulator</i>	414-417
<u>Jovica Sokolović, Grozdanka Bogdanović, Velizar Stanković, Gracijan Strainović, Ivana Ilić, Milan Gorgievski, Miljan Marković (SERBIA)</u> <i>Investigation on beneficiation of iron from copper ore of Mauritania Copper Mine (MCM) by magnetic separation</i>	418-421
<u>Essen Suleimenov, Rustam Sharipov, Galymzhan Maldybayev, Zhibek Orazaliyeva (KAZAKHSTAN)</u> <i>Investigation of the influence of pulsed electric current on the efficiency of decomposition of aluminate solution</i>	422-423
<u>Lovro Liverić, Tamara Holjevac Grgurić, Sunčana Smokvina Hanza, Wojciech Sitek, Vedrana Špada, Marko Kršulja (CROATIA)</u> <i>Influence of silver content on martensitic transformation of Cu-Al-Ag alloy</i>	424-427
<u>Hasan Ali Taner, Vildan Onen (TURKEY)</u> <i>Evaluation of the efficiency of different collectors in the chalcopyrite flotation</i>	428-434
<u>Vesna Conić, Dragana Božić, Miloš Janošević, Ljiljana Avramović, Vanja Trifunović, Dejan Bugarin, Ivana Jovanović (SERBIA)</u> <i>A pyro-hydrometallurgical process for the recovery of zinc from jarosite waste</i>	435-438
<u>Maria Krasteva, Rumen Petkov (BULGARIA)</u> <i>Research the rate of chemical corrosion of steel 3X14H2 (BDS 3692-78)</i>	439-442
<u>Srba Mladenović, Bojan Novaković, Ivana Marković, Uroš Stamenković (SERBIA)</u> <i>Effect of casting speed and water flow on tensile strength, elongation and microstructure of continuous cast copper wire</i>	443-447
<u>Nadira Bušatlić, Ilhan Bušatlić, Dženana Smajić-Terzić (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA)</u> <i>Dependence of compressive strength of geopolymer based on fly ash and alkaline activator ratio</i>	448-451
<u>Gergana Meracheva, Efrosima Zaneva-Dobranova, Nikolay Hristov (BULGARIA)</u> <i>Hydrocarbon potential of the Lower Paleozoic sediments in NE Bulgaria by geochemistry and well-logging</i>	452-455
<u>Dragana Marilović, Grozdanka Bogdanović, Sanja Petrović (SERBIA)</u> <i>Leaching of flotation tailings with a solution of sulfuric acid and ionic liquid</i>	456-459
<u>Ivana Jovanović, Vesna Conić, Dragan Milanović, Daniel Kržanović, Tanja Stanković, Daniela Urošević, Miloš Janošević (SERBIA)</u> <i>Determination of Bond rod mill work index of a very low-grade copper ore</i>	460-463

<u>Hasan Ali Taner, Ali Aras, Muhammad Hashim Rasa (TURKEY)</u> <i>Investigation of the effect of depressant and collector conditioning times on cobalt recovery by flotation</i>	464-467
<u>Aleksandar Cvetković, Žaklina Tasić, Marija Petrović Mihajlović, Maja Nujkić, Milan Radovanović, Ana Simonović (SERBIA)</u> <i>Microplastics</i>	468-471
<u>Sanja Petrović, Srđana Magdalinović, Ljubiša Obradović, Sandra Milutinović, Bojan Drobnjaković, Slađana Krstić (SERBIA)</u> <i>Tailing management: tailings filtering equipment</i>	472-475
<u>Jelena Stefanović, Jelena Đorđević, Sandra Guševac (SERBIA)</u> <i>XRD analysis of corrosion product formed in industrial aggressive environment</i>	476-480
<u>Muhamad Ghulam Isaq Khan, Filip Rajković, Miljana Popović, Dejan Prelević, Aleksandar Ćitić, Tamara Radetić (SERBIA)</u> <i>Initiation of abnormal grain growth in cold-rolled sheet of AA5182 Al-Mg alloy: role of texture</i>	481-484
<u>Danijela Voza, Hesam Dehghani, Milica Veličković (SERBIA)</u> <i>The dissolved oxygen prediction based on the machine learning techniques</i>	485-488
<u>Hasan Acan, Hasan Ergin (TURKEY)</u> <i>A novel model for minimizing mine closure costs and the optimum final quarry boundry</i>	489-492
<u>Ivana Jovanović, Dragan Milanović, Oliver Dimitrijević, Vesna Conić, Igor Svrkota (SERBIA)</u> <i>Role of wing tank in DMS process. Suspension velocity through the seal leg orifice – case study</i>	493-496
<u>Dejan Petrović, Jelena Ivaz, Saša Stojadinović, Predrag Stolić, Dragan Zlatanović (SERBIA)</u> <i>Risk management and mining machines maintenance – a brief review</i>	497-500
<u>Stefan Đorđievski, Dragana Adamović (SERBIA)</u> <i>History of surface water pollution by mining and metallurgical activities in Bor, Serbia</i>	501-504
<u>Olivera Dragutinović, Vaso Manojlović, Đorđe Veljović, Stefan Dikić, Marko Simić (SERBIA)</u> <i>Investigation of the properties of Co-Cr-W and Co-Cr-Mo alloys coated with hydroxyapatite for use in dental implants</i>	505-509
<u>Zoran Karastojković, Dragoslav Gusković, Ognjen Ristić, Zorica Kovačević (SERBIA)</u> <i>About the “relative plasticity” between steel matrix and non-metallic inclusions</i>	510-513
<u>Aleksandar Jovanović, Mladen Bugarčić, Milena Milošević, Marija Vuksanović, Muna Abdualatif Abdurahman, Miroslav Sokić, Aleksandar Marinković (SERBIA, LIBYA)</u> <i>Modified hybrid cellulose membrane for Nickel(II) ions removal from industrial wastewater</i>	514-517
<u>Elena Todorova, Nadezhda Kazakova, Georgi Chernev (BULGARIA)</u> <i>Structural investigation via SEM analysis of silica hybrid materials</i>	518-521

<u>Tanja Kalinović, Jelena Kalinović, Jelena Milosavljević, Ana Radojević, Snežana Šerbula (SERBIA)</u> <i>Atmospheric bulk deposition as environmental quality indicator</i>	522-526
<u>Gordana Marković, Vaso Manojlović, Miroslav Sokić, Jovana Ružić, Dušan Milojkov (SERBIA)</u> <i>Designing biocompatible high entropy alloys using Monte Carlo simulations</i>	527-530
<u>Tatjana Volkov-Husović, Sanja Martinović, Ana Alil, Milica Vlahović (SERBIA)</u> <i>Application of image analysis for cavitation erosion resistance monitoring of some engineering materials</i>	531-534
<u>Milan Nedeljković, Srba Mladenović, Jasmina Petrović, Milijana Mitrović (SERBIA)</u> <i>Changes in the structure and density of copper during the refining smelting process</i>	535-538
<u>Jasmina Petrović, Srba Mladenović, Ivana Marković, Milan Nedeljković, Milijana Mitrović (SERBIA)</u> <i>Microstructure analysis of EN AW 6061 alloy using a SEM microscope after artificial aging</i>	539-542
<u>Milijana Mitrović, Saša Marjanović, Biserka Trumić, Jasmina Petrović, Milan Nedeljković (SERBIA)</u> <i>Effects of cold rolling and annealing processes on the microstructure and properties of micro-alloyed copper</i>	543-546
<u>Makedonka Dimitrova, Jasminka Dimitrova Kapac (NORTH MACEDONIA)</u> <i>Unlocking energy efficiency: financing preferences for SMEs in the Republic of North Macedonia</i>	547-555
<u>Zoran Štirbanović, Vesna Vojinović, Jovica Sokolović, Maja Trumić (SERBIA)</u> <i>Analysis of the effectiveness of different methods for cutting samples</i>	556-559
<u>Ivica Nikolić, Isidola Milošević, Anđelka Stojanović (SERBIA)</u> <i>Land turnover increases due to mining: An empirical analysis of Bor, Serbia, 2013-2022.</i>	560-563
DONORS	565-590
AUTHOR INDEX	591-596

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POSSIBILITY OF COPPER ORES EXPLOITATION USING THE IN SITU LEACHING METHOD

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Abstract

Underground exploitation takes place at greater depths which causes the need to reduce the operational costs of excavation. That can be achieved by choosing an appropriate mining method. Large scale mining methods are commonly used to excavate deposits with a low content of useful components that lie at greater depths. Sometimes conventional mining methods cannot produce the satisfying results. In that case application of unconventional mining methods or combination of both conventional and unconventional mining methods can be used for exploitation of metal ores. In situ leaching is one of unconventional methods that can be used for exploitation of copper deposits, and which in the near future may become one of the most favorable methods for the excavation of copper ores.

Keywords: (leaching, underground mining, unconventional method)

1. INTRODUCTION

The main characteristic of the exploitation of copper ores over the years is the decreasing of copper content due to the fact that the richer deposits lying closer to the surface have been exploited and as a result of the change in the types of deposits that are exploited. In recent years, the main production of copper comes from porphyry deposits with a lower content of useful components [1,2]. Figure 1 shows the trend of decreasing copper content in ore for the last thirty years.

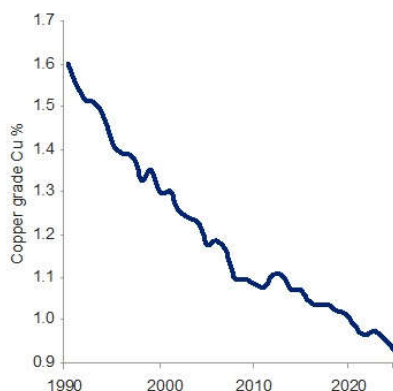


Figure 1 - Copper content in world deposits for the period 1990-2022.

The underground exploitation takes place at ever greater depths. This causes the need to reduce the operational costs of excavation, which can be achieved by choosing an adequate mining method. High mining costs, increasing depths and lower ore grades open the possibility to consider exploitation using non-conventional mining methods.

One of the most commonly used unconventional mining method is in situ leaching. In situ leaching (ISL) is most often used in the exploitation of uranium, and today over 50% of the produced uranium in the world is obtained by applying this method. In situ leaching can also be successfully applied to obtain other metals, especially copper. About 25% of the copper produced annually in the US is obtained using this mining method.

In the exploitation of copper ores, the ISL method is mainly used as a procedure for increasing the recovery of metal from the deposit, for the exploitation of inaccessible parts of the deposit, for obtaining copper from caved ore after the application of caving mining methods, etc.

In situ leaching represents the circulation of liquid through the deposit with the aim of obtaining the desired metal or mineral with the subsequent return of the liquid to the surface for further treatment [3]. In some cases, a lixiviant is used to treat the ore through a system of injection and return wells (Figure 2). In other cases, the lixiviant is flooded or sprayed over residual ore in mines, often after using explosives to fragment and comminute the ore and increase the surface area exposed to the lixiviant [4].

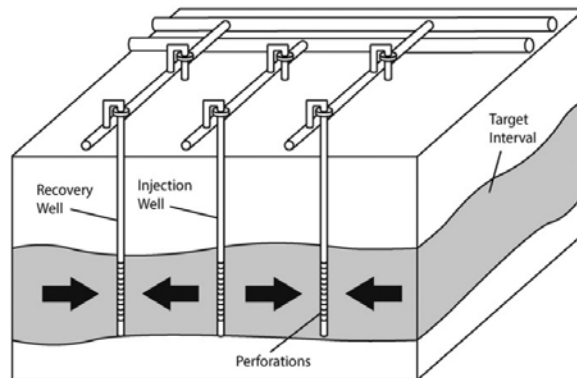


Figure 2 - A system of wells for the application of in situ leaching method

2. EXPERIMENTAL

To apply the ISL method, there are two critical parameters that must be satisfied:

- mineralization must be located in a permeable environment;
- the lixiviant should be suitable for the selective extraction of a certain component from the deposit.

The exploitation of copper by leaching is based on copying the natural processes of dissolution (leaching) and precipitation (precipitation) that took place over millions of years, and are still taking place. Known as supergene enrichment, this natural process has been observed in many of the world's copper deposits. This process takes place when hypogene (ie primary) ores, containing sulphide minerals such as pyrite (FeS_2), chalcopyrite (CuFeS_2) and bornite (Cu_5FeS_4), oxidize over time. During the oxidation process, the iron contained in these minerals turns into red, red-brown, orange and yellow colored iron oxides, while the sulfur combined with groundwater creates a weak solution of sulfuric acid. The copper in the rock is dissolved in acidic solutions while it is filtered (filtered) down to the upper limit of the groundwater (water table), where copper is deposited in the form of chalcocite (Cu_2S) in reduced conditions (the amount of oxygen is reduced). Over time, these processes create an oxidized zone (ie, leach cap, iron hat) above the thick copper-rich overburden zone, known as the enrichment layer. Thus, a solution rich in copper is obtained, which is collected and transported to processing plants, where copper is obtained. The presence of large covers, i.e. layers (rich in copper) for beneficiation in many of the world's porphyry copper deposits, enable the economic extraction of copper from these deposits [5].

The dissolution of oxide minerals is relatively easy and is carried out in simple reactions. The greatest practical and economic importance is the leaching of copper oxide minerals, which can be successfully dissolved in water. As solvents also can be used following compounds: H_2SO_4 , HCl , HNO_3 , NH_3 , $\text{Fe}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3$, FeCl_3 , NaCl and NaOH . Metal sulfides appear in more complex

forms, which makes it difficult to define the oxidation process that precedes the leaching process. The leaching solution must contain an oxidant and there are different leaching systems in which acids or alkali are used as reagents.

Good leaching results to a large extent, are achieved by crushing the ore as much as possible. In order to better "open" of the minerals, the material to be leached is previously subjected to appropriate preparation, when there are prerequisites for this. It consists in shredding by crushing or blasting, and also in the previous chemical processing of the mineral raw material. All this is done in order to convert the metal or its compounds from hard-to-dissolve compounds to easily-soluble ones as much as possible. For this purpose, various chemical procedures are applied: frying, oxidation or reduction, chlorination, sulphation, etc. Beside purely chemical leaching, the so-called bacterial leaching also can be applied, in which the oxidation process of the raw material being leached is improved by using special bacteria.

There are several methods of in situ leaching. Heap leaching is used to treat mineral raw materials with a low content of useful components. The essence of this procedure is the special preparation of the terrain and the disposal of poor ore or mineralized overburden from surface mining, which is then leached in one of the described ways. Underground leaching is the process of converting metal from ore into a liquid state in the deposit itself, and then, usually on the surface, the resulting solutions are processed by cementation, liquid-liquid extraction or some other processes. Underground leaching can provide greater recovery of metals from the deposits thanks to their extraction from poorer ores, which cannot be economically exploited by traditional methods. Underground leaching is based on ion exchange of metals during the directed movement of reagents through a massif with natural permeability or through previously crushed or in different ways stored ore. The basic prerequisite for the successful application of underground leaching is the presence of a useful component in compounds soluble in mineral or organic acids or alkalis, salt solutions, etc. Modern underground leaching facilities consist of an exploitation, pipeline and processing complex. The principle scheme includes a complex of rooms and facilities for carrying out the technological process of obtaining metal extraction solutions. Depending on the method of opening, there are: borehole, pit and combined method of underground leaching.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

ISL can be successfully applied to increase ore recovery in caving mines. After mining has been completed using some traditional sublevel or block caving method, a significant amount of ore may remain in the caved material. Underground leaching can be used for exploitation of remain ore in caving mines. In that case the combination of traditional caving methods and leaching can be used for exploitation of copper deposits on greater depths with low grade ores. In US in situ leaching already takes important place in copper production. Experiences from mines where ISL method are applied shows that this method can be wide use in future for excavation of copper deposits.

In block caving mines exploitation by leaching takes place above in the inactive part of mine. A solution used for leaching is introduced into the deposit using perforated pipes laid on the surface of the ground above the ore body and a series of shallow injection wells. Solutions containing copper are collected in a collector in a pit below the caved part and pumped to the surface, where they undergo further treatment. When ISL is used as a main excavating method, exploitation is carried out by introducing the solution through injection wells to the copper-bearing ores, which should be characterized by intensively fractured rocks. Solution movement through the rock is controlled by pumping from adjacent return wells, which creates a hydraulic gradient that causes introduced solutions to flow from the injection wells to the adjacent return wells. After being pumped to the surface, copper-containing solutions are further processed to obtain the desired product – copper cathode.

ISL enables the exploitation with minimal impact on the environment. Unlike classic surface and underground mining methods, this time there is no degradation of large areas by mines, landfills and depots, no the need to relocate rivers or springs and other objects on the surface of the terrain, the amount of waste water generated by mining and hydrometallurgical activities is significantly lower, and there is also no environmental pollution with dust, noise and exhaust gases.

From an ecological aspect, using the ISL method, there is a risk of soil and surface and groundwater contamination from reagents and solutions used for leaching, however if the process is properly managed, the chances of contamination are minimal [6].

4. CONCLUSION

In situ leaching is one of the most effective available methods that can be used to exploitate ores in inaccessible parts of the deposit, ores remaining in the sides and mined parts of the massif, remaining metals in the caved ore after the application of caving mining methods. In addition, the in situ leaching method achieves lower production costs compared to traditional mining methods, which enables the application of this method for the exploitation of low-grade deposits or their parts.

Although ISL is auxiliary method to traditional mining benefits of ISL usage is large and they are reflected in better economic aspects (less investments for the development of the mine itself, processing plant and infrastructure, the possibility of starting production with low capital costs followed by an increase in production and flexibility of production capacities). Also ISL enables the exploitation of ore with minimal impact on the environment as long as projects are properly planned and managed.

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