

Preface

Bulgaria is a small country. It is hardly noticed on the world map. But it is located on the cross-roads between East and West. The main highway connecting Europe with Asia passes through our country. And as there were no airplanes in the past, people traveling between the two continents used the roads, i.e. they passed through Bulgaria. Due to this strategic geographical position of our country we have come into contact with the culture and traditions of many other nations, which have influenced our own development and have enriched the culture of Bulgaria and shaped our national character. From this windy place between Europe and Asia we have often stopped the spread of infectious diseases and the progress of invaders in both directions. Sometimes, this has cost us our freedom and independence. Of its 13-century old national history, Bulgaria has been under foreign yoke for about 7 centuries. But even during these hundreds of years under foreign oppression, the Bulgarian national spirit was preserved. The people and the national institutions merely moved up in the mountains, where the oppressors did not dare and could not afford to go. Numerous monasteries were built up in the mountains, which became the centers of the Bulgarian religious, cultural and political activities thus preserving our national identity.

We, the members of our team, love to have guests. That is why we all of us are full of enthusiasm while starting the preparations for the LABAT conference and spare no efforts to turn this meeting into a really festive occasion.

The 5th International Conference on Lead-Acid Batteries, LABAT'02 was held in the same conference hall in which the first LABAT conference was held in 1989. Since then, some very important achievements have been realized in the field of electrochemical power sources.

- VRLA batteries have won recognition as the basic type of stand-by and traction batteries.
- New 36/42 V battery types for hybrid electric vehicle applications have appeared.
- Lithium and nickel-metal hydride batteries have gained new positions on the market of electrochemical power sources and are now invading markets, which belong traditionally to lead-acid batteries.
- Fuel cells have also undergone intensive development.

Regretfully, the major financial funds earmarked for the development of electrochemical power sources are allocated to lithium, nickel-metal hydride batteries and fuel cells, and there were times when lead-acid batteries had been

studiously ignored. The only organization that has been fighting hard to find financial resources to support the development of lead-acid battery science and technology is the International Lead Zinc Research Organization through its ALAB consortium in the USA and its European branch. The efforts of these organizations deserve our deep admiration and sincere gratitude.

The technical program of the LABAT'02 conference included 49 lectures presented by prominent speakers from all over the world. Nineteen companies exhibited their products and services. The LABAT'02 conference was attended by 186 battery scientists, technologists, manufacturers and suppliers from 28 countries from 5 continents. During the 4 days of the conference we all felt like a big family whose members not only work in the same field of science, but also have much fun together.

If I have to summarize the basic characteristic features of the LABAT'02 conference, these will include the following:

Firstly, the scientific level of LABAT'02 was very high. Many of the lectures presented new information about the phenomena that proceed during lead-acid battery manufacture and operation. Secondly, LABAT'02 was a conference of young people. More than half of the lecturers were young researchers and specialists. This is a very positive and encouraging tendency, which shows that the old lead-acid battery is still interesting. And thirdly, we heard a number of young ladies presenting successfully the results of their work. We all gained a lot of new knowledge and heard many original ideas from these young and beautiful researchers. Their participation gave spirit and emotion to this conference.

The organizers of LABAT'02 thank all exhibitors for having chosen our conference to exhibit their products and services. We hope that the exhibition held in conjunction with the LABAT'02 conference has been of benefit to both the companies, which took part in the exhibition and to their potential customers.

As on previous LABAT conferences, this year, too, the Gaston Planté Medal was awarded by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences to the recipient selected by the International Planté Medal Committee.

The LABAT'02 conference was prepared with the active contribution of all members of the local organizing committee, including: Dr. G. Papazov, who did the whole work related to the scientific program of the conference and also prepared all conference documents for print, the secretariat headed by Mrs. M. Gerganska, who did enormous work

coordinating all activities and contacts with the delegates both before and during the conference, Dr. S. Ruevski, who organized the exhibition, Dr. B. Monahov, who was responsible for the accommodation of the delegates, Dr. T. Rogatchev, who took care of all financial issues, Dr. V. Naidenov, who helped everybody with their transportation to and from the conference venue, Dr. S. Vassilev who was in charge of the technical equipment during the conference sessions, Dr. G. Petkova, who organized all excursions and the visits to our institute in Sofia both before and after the conference. The efforts of M. Matrakova, D. Ivanova, L. Bogdanova, Dr. B. Banov, Dr. A. Kirchev, Dr. A. Momchilov, Dr. M. Dimitrov and G. Sheytanov should also be acknowledged.

The organizers of LABAT'02 extend their sincere thanks to the general sponsor of this conference, Monbat Starter Batteries (Bulgaria) and especially to brothers Plamen and Atanas Bobokovi, for their valuable financial and organiza-

tional support. The conference was held in Grand Hotel Varna, the pearl of the complex St. Elias, comprising several 5- and 4-star hotels, based in the picturesque Black Sea resort of St. Constantine and Helena. The complex offered us excellent conditions for our work and also for business and personal contacts.

The next LABAT conference will be held during the second week of June 2005 in this same resort. Let us get ready for LABAT'05 with new ideas and experimental results and thus contribute to the development of lead-acid battery science and technology.

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(Chairman of LABAT'02 Conference)

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