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“Whitenights Conference” *St Petersburg, Russia, May 27 - June 2, 1992*

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MEETING REPORTS

"Whitenights Conference"

St Petersburg,
Russia,

May 27 - June 2, 1991

*Conference Summary from E I Riiumtsev
and F M Aliev, St Petersburg, Russia*

Progress & Problems in Liquid Crystals — Workshop & Conference

The Conference was held on a comfortable ship, cruising on the famous Russian lakes Onega and Ladoga. The liquid crystal community from 10 European countries was represented by 180 delegates.

The scientific programme was divided into four topics: Applications — Molecular Physics of Liquid Crystals — Optics of Liquid Crystals — Interface & Surface Phenomena, and 35 invited talks were given. Many of the papers were on different aspects of surface and interface layers of liquid crystals. L Blinov (USSR) presented a paper on electrooptic effects in the surface layer of a liquid crystal. Bistable surface anchoring and nematic displays were described by G Durand (France), and a general view on thin films was given by E Aero (USSR). F Simoni (Italy) and F Aliev (USSR) reported non-linear optical properties and general physical properties of dispersed liquid crystals. A few papers were presented on problems in liquid crystals, thus S Lagerwall (Sweden) talked about prospects and problems in the application of S_C^* and S_A^* . Two reports from A Buka (Hungary) and L Kramer (Germany) were devoted to morphological phase transitions of patterns and convective patterns in liquid crystals. Other papers were on a variety of topics — blue phases, polymer liquid crystals, liquid crystals in laser optics, photonics of liquid crystals, new materials for "Q-Z" displays and palladium-containing liquid crystals.

This Workshop and Conference was the first and last international meeting on liquid crystals organised in Leningrad. The last because now the name of the city "Leningrad" is changed to its native name of St Petersburg.

Summer European Liquid Crystal Conference

Vilnius, Lithuania, August 19-23 1991

Conference Summary from Waclaw Witko, Institute of Nuclear Physics, Krakow, Poland.

The Summer European Liquid Crystal Conference (SELCC) was held in Vilnius, Lithuania, from August 19-23, 1991. This Conference was also the last one of the series formerly called "Liquid Crystal Conferences of Socialist Countries" — previous conferences were held at Hallé, Budapest, Tbilisi, Odessa, Pardubice and Krakow. According to the decision taken in Courmayeur earlier this year, the Winter European Liquid Crystal Conference will join the Liquid Crystal Conference of Socialist Countries, forming a new series of European Liquid Crystal Conferences.

The Conference in Vilnius consisted of about 280 participants, among them 40 from the countries outside the former Soviet Union — 24 from Poland, 6 from Germany, 4 from Japan and people also came from Norway and Belgium. Many other contributors to the scientific programme did not come, because of the difficult situation in Lithuania at that time. Maybe they received some extra signals, as actually on the morning of the inauguration of SELCC the Janaev putsch in Moscow was declared! In Vilnius people already considered Lithuania as an independent state, but they were afraid of foreign invasion, as the OMON troopers had been occupying the TV station since January '91 and the local KGB headquarters all the time. Nevertheless the Organising Committee decided to go ahead with the programmes (scientific and social) in full. The patience of the organisers headed by Professor Pouilas Adomenas was enormous, encouraging the participants to stay in Vilnius despite the unclear situation. In the end only a few participants decided to leave early.

The scientific programme of SELCC covered many aspects of liquid crystal research and applications: from synthesis of new compounds and molecular orbital calculations for some chiral smectic molecules (T Inukai, Yokohama) to LCD repair techniques (A Smirnov, Minsk); from liquid crystal thermography in vessel disease diagnosis (S Markelov, Tselinograd) to timescales of molecular motions in liquid crystals (J Janik, Krakow). Among topics mentioned were: electrostriction in blue phase III (H Stark, Stuttgart); light modulation by polymer dispersed ferroelectric liquid crystals (V Zyryanov, Krasnoyarsk);

comb-shaped liquid crystal polymers (V Shibaev, Moscow); destabilisation of smectic phases in mixtures (R Dabrowski, Warsaw); and many others. Besides oral sessions held in the Vilnius drama theatre there were also poster presentations in the lobby. Many exciting ideas and interesting results were discussed. However a considerable number of the submitted posters were absent, most likely because of the situation. In particular the absence of people from former east-bloc countries was noticed, due to the economic changes related to hard currency. The conference started with a party on Sunday evening organised in the old University premises, which are about 400 years old. The party was enlivened by a folk ensemble in the baroque courtyard. Among other social activities were a chamber choir concert of classical and modern music with organ recital, a beautiful excursion to Trakai, and a banquet organised in one of Vilnius' traditional restaurants.

The visit to Trakai was especially remarkable. This small town located among lakes and forests was the site of an attractive medieval castle belonging to the Lithuanian Dukes. The visit was preceded by a short visit to the occupied TV tower area, where small monuments were dedicated to people who had died during the OMON takeover of the tower. On the way down to Trakai one could see tanks ready to defend Vilnius as well as antitank barricades around the downtown area. This was history speeded up — the next day participants could observe the OMON withdrawal from the TV station. Only one day later the huge Lenin monument in the centre of Vilnius came down — this was only about 300 metres from the conference site! This day, which was the last day of the conference, ended in a huge celebration of the liberty of Lithuania, which was held overnight around the parliament building (about 500 metres from our place).

So the participants of SELCC were at the centre of history, beginning with the gloomy announcement of the Janaev coup and ending with happy Lithuanians celebrating their expected victory in the battle for independence. Ending this report one should point out the perfect organisation of the meeting and the enormous patience of the organisers at this momentous time.