

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHERS AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICAL UNION

When in the mid-1950s, the “Iron Curtain” was lifted somewhat, the Soviet Union, through the Academy of Sciences (AS), has joined a series of scientific associations, including the International Geographical Union (IGU). In January 1957 at the Department of Geology and Geography of the USSR AS, the National Committee of Soviet Geographers was formed. The objectives of the National Committee included representation of Soviet geographers in the IGU and other international geographic organizations, development of relations with national committees of other countries, promotion of participation of Soviet geographers in the IGU and other international organizations related to geographical science, and development of scientific ties with foreign geographical institutions.

The National Committee performed its information function through publishing books and magazine reviews of international geographical congresses and of other activities of the IGU. The journal “Proceedings of the USSR AS – Geographical Series” had publications on the activities of the National Committee and translations of the IGU Bulletins and circulars of the geographical congresses and conferences. From 1984 to 1992, there was work on the annotations of new geographical books, translated into the IGU languages, and these materials were regularly forwarded for the inclusion in the International Geographical Bibliography published in Paris.

An important place in the activities of the National Committee in the 1970s was occupied by bilateral seminars with geographers of Poland, Bulgaria, France, and USA. But most important were the contacts of Soviet and foreign geographers

at the IGU meetings in the USSR. These were primarily the 23rd International Geographical Congress in 1976 that gathered 3000 geographers from many countries in Moscow and symposia of the IGU Commissions on: national atlases (Moscow, 1958), the arid zone (Tashkent, 1962), the periglacial morphology (Moscow – Yakutsk, 1969), the coastal morphology (the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus, 1974), etc.

The National Committee of Russia’s Geographers created by the Russian AS in 1992 became the successor of the National Committee of Soviet Geographers. In the 1990s, besides Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Estonia were accepted as the IGU members and they formed their own national committees. Relations with these committees have replaced almost ceased cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe.

At the General Assembly of the IGU in Sydney in 1988, Chairman of the National Committee of Russian Geographers V.M. Kotlyakov was elected Vice-President of the IGU and he worked in that capacity for two terms, until 1996. Among 30 commissions and study groups in 1992–1996, two were headed by Russian geographers: Historical Monitoring Committee chaired by V. Annenkov and the research team on Environmental Management and Environmental Mapping chaired by N.F. Glazovsky.

In 1995, Moscow hosted a large conference of the IGU, which brought together several hundred Russian and foreign geographers. This conference was the first major meeting of the IGU and was the beginning of not only regional, but also of thematic conferences

of the IGU. In subsequent years, the participation of Russian geographers in the IGU life has become more active. For the International Geographical Congress in The Hague, a review of the Russian geography in English was published (Geography in Russia, 1992–1995. V.M. Kotlyakov and V.S. Preobrazhensky (Eds.). Moscow, 1996. 123 p.). Russian geographers assumed the lead on Commissions and groups of the IGU: V.A. Kolosov – Commission of the World Political Map, N.F. Glazovskiy – Special Committee on the Development of the Environmental Map.

Opportunities for regular collaboration with the geographers of the CIS countries increased with the creation of the Joint Scientific Council on Fundamental Geographical Problems of the International Association of Academies of Sciences (IAAS). In 2005 in Russia (Moscow and Barnaul), the IGU organized its major conference that brought together hundreds of geographers interested in geography in Siberia.

In 2009, the Russian Geographical Society (RGS) has significantly transformed. The widely known in Russia politician Sergei Shoigu was elected President of the RGS; the RGS Board of Trustees headed by the V.V. Putin was formed. The National Committee of Russian Geographers began active collaboration with the RGS and both entities co-sponsored participation of Russian geographers in the 32nd International Geographical Congress held in August 2012 in Cologne (Germany).

During the Congress, at the meeting of the supreme body of the IGU – the General Assembly, for the first time ever, a representative of Russia – Professor V.A. Kolosov, Head of the Laboratory of Geopolitical Studies, the Institute of Geography of Russian AS, was elected the IGU President. Previously, he was Senior Vice-President of the IGU. Over the years, several Soviet geographers, namely, F.F. Davitaya, I.P. Gerasimov, V.M. Kotlyakov, and N.F. Glazovskiy, held positions of the IGU Vice-Presidents. The General Assembly of the IGU confirmed its earlier decision to hold

a regional conference in 2015 in Moscow. Preparations for the conference have started in Russia.

On 22–24 October in Amsterdam, the IGU EC held its first session after the Congress in Cologne. This meeting confirmed the consensus in the EC on the IGU priorities. They may be summarized as follows.

1) We should not forget that the IGU is a truly global organization, and its objective is to connect geographers belonging to different national schools and traditions, from the North and the South, in contributing to the development of our discipline and to the increase of its role in society. We need to involve in the IGU activity geographers from the countries with low incomes, re-establish the contacts with national geographical communities that did not really participate in it in the last years, and invite new members. At the same time, we have to make the IGU more attractive for geographers from the “North”, in particular, from the US and the UK, and especially for young geographers, by demonstrating the value of participation in its activities, promoting special sessions, and establishing grants and awards for beginning scholars and publishing their results in international journals. It can be reached through a better dissemination of information on the IGU and its Commissions, sharing of mailing lists, providing cross-references on different web-sites, and creation of a global data base on geographical departments and institutions similar to the global data base and search system on geographical journals already available on the IGU site (it will be regularly updated).

2) The Commissions and the Task Forces are the core of the IGU: each of them represents an autonomous international network community. Their number has recently significantly increased, which makes communication between them and coordination and integration of their work, particularly important. Our priority is to develop interdisciplinary research

through promotion of problem- and region-oriented programs, cooperation of natural and social branches of geography in studying future environmental conditions and their consequences for people, and implementation of institutional, economic, and behavioral changes enabling effective steps toward global sustainability. The Commissions have to provide connections between established and young geographers. The participation in their activity should be a step in their professional career through publications, special awards, etc.

3) The IGU Congresses and Regional Conferences remain an important link between the Commissions and between geography and other disciplines. In the period between the Congresses in Cologne and Beijing, the IGU has scheduled three annual Regional Conferences (Kyoto, 2013; Krakow, 2014; Moscow, 2015). One of its priorities is close cooperation with the local organizing committees to keep high standards established by the Congress in Cologne, to ensure the interdisciplinary character of their scientific programs, to make these meetings more accessible for scholars with limited travel budget, and to look for new flexible formats. The IGU Congress or Regional Conferences should become a platform for dialogue and the development of collaborative research programs on contemporary thematic areas and critical regions by bridging gaps between geographers, policy makers, and community leaders.

4) The cohesion of geography and its better international visibility may be achieved also through cooperation with the leading international coordinating organizations – the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and with other international scientific unions (International Cartographic Association, International Union of Geological Sciences, etc.) Using new opportunities for geography and the IGU, opened by a rising concern about global environmental change

manifested in a number of recent important international documents, participation of the IGU in global research programs and networks should increase.

5) The IGU will continue to support its initiative to promote the declaration of the International Year on Global Understanding (IYGU) by the UN General Assembly. This ambitious and promising project is in the focus of the IGU attention. We will also strongly support the project of making a site on cities' sustainable development created on the initiative of Dutch and Chinese geographers – the world center of information and certification working under the sponsorship of the IGU.

6) Geographical education is one of the major *raison d'être* of the geographical community. The IGU has to continuously show the value of geographical education in various international and national academic and policy contexts. We will pay more attention to the role of geography at school and to geographical education, trying to cooperate with UNESCO and other international organizations in keeping and modernizing geographical curricula. The final objective may be an IGU Manual on Curriculum Development which will include recommendations on a regular curriculum revision incorporating fundamental and modern techniques and contemporary paradigms such as climate change and millennium development goals.

7) The IGU should transform its web site as an important resource of geographic information and contacts for the global geographic community, filling it with information about the activities of national geographical communities, the IGU Commissions and Task Forces, geographical journals and sites, etc. We should also explore the opportunities to use new means of communication, such as Facebook or an on-line journal.

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