

## **Aims of the Leopoldina Symposium on Russian-German Cooperation in the Scientific Exploration of Northeastern Eurasia: A Personal and Eclectic View**

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This Leopoldina Symposium on the Russian-German cooperation in the scientific exploration of Northeastern Siberia and the adjacent Arctic Ocean at the Saint Petersburg State University (SPbGU) is a contribution to the Russian-German Year of Education, Science, and Innovation 2011/2012, which has been organized to promote and further develop the excellent scientific relations and contacts between two countries which – simply because of geographical and geological reasons – will stay neighbours forever and which have been good neighbours for a long time, albeit with brief unhappy interruptions due to wars or unfavourable political conditions. The scientific contacts between our two countries have a long, friendly, and proud history that has rested mainly on the shoulders of senior and established scholars.

The recent situation is different because the activities of the modern joint scientific exploration of Northern Siberia and the adjacent Arctic Ocean is still followed benevolently by directors and senior scholars at scientific institutions as well as funding agencies in both countries, but the brunt of the field activities is borne by a generation of junior scientists who jointly organize expeditions to very extreme regions of high northern latitudes. The first of these expeditions in the early 1990s led a small group of German marine scientists to a Russian polar station on Kotelný, one of the New Siberian Islands, because we wanted to study this area where much sediment is incorporated into the sea ice transporting it across the Arctic Ocean. The vehicle that was used for forays onto the ice was the carriage of a Russian tank, though without the gun.

The decision to hold this Leopoldina Symposium is based on the following considerations:

- Most contributions to this symposium come from junior or middle-aged scientists – complying with the aim of the Russian Ministry of Education and Science, the German Ministry of Education and Research, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina to motivate the incoming generation of scientists.
- Many of the contributions were submitted with joint Russian-German co-authorship, a consequence of the joint expeditions. If you do your work in the field or at sea together, you will also team up in the laboratory and in proposals for funding, fostering a lot of joint interests which sometimes go beyond the pure scientific work.
- The joint studies have led to the establishment of state-of-the-art infrastructure examples of which will be presented in the reports contained in these volumes.

- There is reason to believe that the established cooperation will continue long into the future because understanding the impact of the on-going changes in the high northern latitudes is of high importance for all of Eurasia and thus for the future of our societies.

This symposium also gives me an occasion to express some words of gratitude that this development could happen at all. This was not a given in 1989 when I came to Russia for the first time, in difficult times for this country and shortly before East Germany changed its political status. At that time I was working at GEOMAR, a small and young institution at Kiel University holding a lot of promise. These first visits were sometimes strange, in part funny, but you could sense a smell of change in Russia, and the directors and senior scientists at the institutes I visited had obviously done their homework. They knew where I came from, opened their institutes to me, and relatively freely discussed possibilities and perspectives of future cooperation. They also helped us with acquiring the necessary permits from the responsible ministries in both countries and liked the idea of cooperation within these fields of basic science.

It was remarkable for me that I was getting access to large academy institutes and to the Arctic-Antarctic Research Institute (AARI) of Roshydromet and their scientific staffs, that they offered us access to remote regions which had largely been inaccessible to Western scientists, and that they expressed their willingness to share their robust infrastructure, which, despite the difficult times, were still functioning reliably in the remote polar regions. Let me mention in this context in particular the Vernadsky Institute of Geochemistry of the Russian Academy of Science (RAN), where the present director Academician Eric GALIMOV received me. He also helped me establish close contacts to Academician Alexander Petrovich LISITZIN from the P. P. Shirshov Institute of Oceanology of RAN. These were times when conditions in Russia were quite unusual. A remarkable experience was the visit to the office of the director (Acad. Valeri BARSUKOV at that time) of the Vernadsky Institute of RAN, an institution of old traditions and great scientific weight with more than 4000 employees, where I – the director of a then small group of marine geoscientists from a provincial university in northern Germany – was seated on the other side of a long table covered with green cloth for hours of discussions of future possibilities. Later, I visited the AARI in Saint Petersburg and was hosted by Sergey PRIAMIKOV. We had lavish meals in Moscow and Saint Petersburg despite the difficult times. The results of these visits were agreements on cooperation, which led to joint funding and numerous joint expeditions, almost 60 to date, with numerous young scientists from both sides. Later we established contacts in Murmansk, Yakutsk and many other academic places in Russia. Nowadays, we can rely on a dense network of Russian research institutions and universities that facilitate joint scientific activities and allow for an intense exchange of young scientists between our two countries. To hold the Leopoldina Symposium in Saint Petersburg gave me the chance to officially acknowledge the friendly welcome which the German scientists have received in this great country ever since.

In the earlier times mentioned above, senior and established Russian scientists led the Russian institutions, most of whom were from the same city. I came from a young environment, had worked in other countries, and I made the observation to my Russian colleagues that the Russian scientific institutions would only become “normal” if they invited foreign scientists into positions of responsibility in their research institutions. Back then, they smiled politely and invited me for some vodka. Times have changed, and I have the privilege to be responsible for one of the purely Russian financed “megagrants” here in Saint Petersburg, a

situation which I share with some other 70 foreign scientists in this country, a substantial number of them coming from Germany. I am sure this is still strange to many people in Russia, but still it reflects a major change and it will have a major impact on the research system in this country.

The Leopoldina Symposium documented in this volume will demonstrate the great potential of this cooperation. It will reveal exciting perspectives for jointly exploring the extreme environments in the high northern latitudes which are expected to impact the on-going global climate change more than any other area of the world.

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