

SYMPOSIUM ON PHYSICS OF IONIZED GASES: 60 YEARS OLD AND STILL GOING STRONGZORAN LJ. PETROVIĆ^{1,2}¹*Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Kneza Mihaila 35, 11001 Belgrade, Serbia*²*School of Engineering, University of Ulster, CO Antrim BT37 0QB UK
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Abstract. A chance meeting of prof. B. Perović from the Vinča Institute and prof A von Engel has completely transformed national conference on Physics of Ionized Gases (Symposium on Physics of Ionized Gases-SPIG). Von Engel has suggested and brought top level invited speakers from the leading laboratories. For its third installment SPIG has become a truly international conference. Throughout its initial thirty years SPIG has quickly established certain principles and modus operandi. First it was a marriage of four distinct fields that may have been together in the past but were becoming separate. Those were atomic and molecular collisions; Collisions with surfaces; Low temperature plasmas and (high temperature) Plasma physics. Top experts in some fields commented that they liked SPIG for providing them an opportunity to hear news from the fields that are not their specialization but are still highly relevant to them. Originally there were mainly invited lectures (by foreign speakers) and progress reports by young scientists that recently defended their Ph.D. That provided an opportunity for young scientists from former Yugoslavia to measure their performance against the top experts in their respective fields and also to gain experience in presenting their own results. In addition, many young students were able to negotiate visits to the leading international laboratories thus gaining experience and bringing back topical science and techniques to their original laboratories. But both professional and personal connections were made at all levels and from all locations. Soon, upon the initiative from the leading foreign scientists leading scientists from Yugoslavia were offered invited lectures, while the institution of progress reports was extended to young scientists from many countries. Number of participants from around the world increased rapidly even overtaking number of scientists from the former Yugoslavia. This may have been helped by the beautiful locations at the Adriatic coast that are no longer available to SPIG. Another important SPIG characteristic was that all invited speakers were asked to split their presentation into introductory and historical part (thus ‘Summer school and...’ was often part of its moniker) and a more technical up to date section. That was time when invited lectures were written up in extension and were amazing pedagogical texts. The big blue books with invited lectures were sought after in many centers by young and experienced scientists alike. SPIG has perhaps maintained the institution of the written up invited lectures much longer than the other conferences in the field but eventually it had to turn to special issues of technical papers in respected international journals such as European Physical Journal D. That development was not for the better but it was due to the necessity. SPIG has survived breakup of the former Yugoslavia and is now centered in Serbia, it has followed numerous changes in the fields that it represents and is now one of three or four conferences with the longest lasting tradition in the field of the physics of ionized gases. SPIG has shared the destiny of science in former Yugoslavia, Serbia and also followed the topical research in the world. It is the main reason why fields related to SPIG are more developed and with a higher relative percentage of the overall science than elsewhere in the world.