

## BALTIC STATES TEACHER UNION AND ITS ACTIVITIES 20TIES AND 30TIES OF 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

**Abstract.** On the basis on LLS newspaper “Musu Nakotne” and Latvian Ministry of Education monthly “Izglitibas Ministrijas Menesraksts” in this research reflecting about international cooperation of the teachers – the activities of the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian teachers within the Teachers Association of the Baltic States. Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian teacher unions in the 20ties and 30ties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century formed Teachers Union of the Baltic States or the Association of Baltic States Teacher Unions, within which substantial organizational pedagogically – ideological exchange work was carried out thus helping teachers understand not only narrow educational issues of their own country but also discover their international context. Teachers’ Union of the Baltic States focused on mutual conferences and congresses – 11 conferences and 3 congresses took place.

**Keywords:** Teacher’s union, congress, conference, education.

### **Aim of the research**

Aim of the research – to research the coverage of the Baltic States Teacher Union’s activities in Latvia’s Pedagogy journals of 20<sup>th</sup> century 20ties and 30ties

**General methodology and specific methods** – hermeneutics and content analysis.

The main theme of interest for me in the history of pedagogy is the widespread voluntary social activity on Latvian teachers and education workers in 20ties and 30ties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that is reflected in active formation and movement of teacher societies and associations.

Researching the two biggest and the most influential Latvian teacher associations – LSS (Teachers Association of Latvia) and LNSS (Latvia’s National Teacher Association) and their performance, one of the major areas of activity was revealed to be the organization and coordination of the international cooperation of the teachers. In education Latvia’s National Teacher Association was representing traditional and national values while Teachers Association of Latvia was accenting socio democratic vision of an individual society and education. In the 20ties Teachers Association of Latvia took active part in the formation of the Teacher Association

of the Baltic States or The Union of the Teacher Associations of the Baltic States, that primarily consisted of the teacher associations from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. There was no full unification, at least not on the part of Latvia and Lithuania, as Teachers Association tended to ignore its ideological opponent Latvia’s National Teacher Association while in Lithuania so called socio-democratic teachers were conflicting with the teachers from catholic wing, thus not all teachers were represented in The Teachers Association of the Baltic States. For the most part as the basis for this research LLS newspaper “Musu Nakotne” and Latvian Ministry of Education monthly “Izglitibas Ministrijas Menesraksts” that among other things reflect international cooperation of the teachers – the activities of the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian teachers within the Teachers Association of the Baltic States.

On the 24th of February, even before the coup by K. Ulmanis professor A. Piips in his article “The idea of The Baltic States Association” [10] recalls the main stages or the node points of creating such a association. In a certain way the overall background of relationships between Baltic states also influenced the cooperation between the teachers of these countries. Professor notes that the idea of the necessity to cooperate between the Estonia and Finland was already realized in the cooperation treaties made on the 23rd of December 1918 and in the treaty between Latvia and Estonia made on the 20th of February 1919. Also he notes other notable talks between Baltic States: 1) Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland meeting in Tallinn on the September 15th 1919 when the peace treaty with Russia was discussed. 2) First Baltic conference on the January 15th 1920, where without above mentioned countries Poland also took part. 3) So called Bulduru conference, that took place from the 6<sup>th</sup> of August till the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1920, in which the plans between the Baltic states were made – all nations that live on the eastern coast of the Baltic sea want to cooperate in a cultural and to certain extent political way; 4) however Lithuania’s and Latvia’s good intentions were chilled by a political and territorial strife about the possession of Mažeiki, Ilūkste, Palanga and Sventaja in the second half of 1920 [10, p. 28].

As a successful example of the cooperation the securing of a military union between Latvia and Estonian on the 1st of November of 1923 is mentioned. [10, p. 29.] However, despite the conflicts and absence of treaties Lithuanian Latvian and Estonian teachers implemented various forms of cooperation – educational congresses, conferences, tours, exchange visits, etc.

Overcoming the terminological frivolity informality and inaccuracies in 20th century Latvian pedagogical press it turns out that in 1931 the Baltic States Teacher union or the Union of the Teacher Associations of the Baltic States has been in fact been working for 9 years [3]. LSS monthly states that in course of its existence this union managed to meet in many conferences (it is believed that in 1933 that 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference took place) and soon its 3rd congress will take place. Analysing such information one must conclude that in that case Union of the Teachers Association of the Baltic states must have been founded in 1922, however it contradicts the facts that show that the union statutes were discussed and could be passed in the 3rd Baltic Teacher conference that took place in Lithuania on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1924, before 2nd Lithuanian Teacher congress that took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August [2]. Hence one must assume that the unknown author of the article considers the first Baltic Teacher conference that took place in 1922 the unofficial beginnings of the Union of the Teachers Association of the Baltic states. However its official foundation dates are connected with the 3rd Baltic Teacher Conference in Lithuania that took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1924, when the project on Union statutes was discussed. In this conference the opening speech on the unification of the teacher's organizations, was delivered by the Lithuanian representative Žigelis but another delegate from Lithuania Hviaskas, presented Association (or Union) statute project. The main theme of this conference was the discussion and definition of the teacher's unification possibilities, a small extract from the conference transcript gives an insight into this: "[Hviaskas begins the discussion] <...> from which countries the teacher organizations can be members and from which movement the teacher organizations will be accepted. In the statute project that is developed by the Lithuanian teacher Union it is said that only the central teacher organizations of the small Baltic states can take part in the union, and only those organizations whose goals are to defend the legal and economic rights and needs of the teachers. But already at the first question appears strong a disagreement. The need for a cooperation is stressed

by all of the delegates but once the topic turns to how to formulate it the opinions diverge. Lithuanian delegates stress that union might consist only from the organizations from the small countries, Estonian delegates think that words "small countries" must be taken out. Latvian delegates are divided, however it is apparent that they want to find a solution that would be readily acceptable to both Lithuanian and Estonian delegates. In further discussions it is proposed to note which countries can be considered big and which can be considered small, but no agreement can be achieved as the opinions are voiced that it would be wrong to decide at the very beginning that only these and these countries can take part in the union. P. Kūla suggests to adjourn the meeting for about an hour so that national delegates can discuss and come forward with new propositions. This proposition is accepted. After the intermission Latvian delegation proposes that Union is formed by the teacher organizations from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and that decision to accept new members in every concrete case will be considered in Union conferences. After that the statute project is passed without further debate." [2,485]

### **Baltic Teacher Congresses**

Until 1933 the most massive and thematically most comprehensive Baltic Teacher Unions events were three Baltic States – Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian three teacher congresses.

The events of the first Baltic Teacher congress is widely reflected in Latvian press. 1. Baltic Teacher Congress took place in Riga on the 21st and 22nd of June 1925 and was attended by about 600 teachers. Latvian Teacher Union periodical "Musu Nakotne" writes: The three Baltic States – Estonia, Latvian and Lithuanian teachers convergence has been taking place all these years. <...> This years for the first time the teachers from all three countries came together in a greater numbers in Riga; in the following years similar congresses will take place in Revel [Tallinn] and Kaunas. In the early morning of the 21st of June teachers from Riga greeted their colleagues from Lithuania and Estonia. They were greeted with songs and greetings that from Latvian side were announced by P. Kūla, from Lithuanian side by Žigelis and Estonian side by Trefners. From Lithuania arrived 107 teachers but from Estonia – 168 [4, p. 419]. Congress venue was Latvian National theatre and it was opened by P. Kūla that worked that is done here is important to organize the education in all countries. Congressional agenda there are three issues – the single school, teacher education and organizing. Estonian representative Trefner

concludes that common battles in the past unite the teachers in the past and will continue to do so in the future, thus the main job for the teacher is to teach young citizens in such a way that they could fight for freedom. On the behalf of the Lithuanian teachers the delegates are greeted by Zigelis, who reminds that in this congress will be expressed ideas that general public will listen to. One of such ideas is about a united school that is the foundation of nation's education, besides the "China Wall" that is built between brother nations will be torn down not by the diplomats but by the teachers. Reporter notes that all three speakers first speak in their own language but after that they themselves translate their speech into Russian. Congress is congratulated by: Minister of Education A. Kalnins, J. Rainis, representative Riga's Education department J. Aberbergs, International Education Congress in Paris, Esperanto Congress, representative of Zemgale teachers G. Odins Latvian Education Association Representative Mrs. Lieknis, Jewish Teacher Association representative J. Bers who notes that Latvia allowed free development of the culture for the minorities, Riga Teacher union representative I. Ritins, II Secondary School Teachers Association representative Neibergs, Belarus and Russian delegates, Estonia's temperance union representatives, on the behalf of Lithuanian pedagogical writers speaks Busilas, Latvian teachers sickness fund representative Steins, teachers' cooperative representative Straubergs. Also the congratulation telegrams from Minister of Foreign affairs Z. Meirovic, Riga city mayor Anderson and others. In the presidium of the congress from Latvia P. Kula, K. Dekens I. Ritins and Odins are elected, from Lithuania – Zigelis, Cigleris, and Plausnaitis; From Estonia – Trefner and Rummo; in the secretariat; from Latvia Ivanovskis, Tomass, Veidenbaums, Ritmans; from Lithuania - Smulksnis and from Estonia Puskars are elected.

In the afternoon the participants of the congress in two boats that were lended by the Riga city council went to Jurmala [4, p. 420]. On the second day of the congress Trefner read a report about Estonian school system, K. Dekens about Latvian and Busilas about Lithuanian school system. Consideration was also given for the preparation of teachers and teachers' organizations. A presentation about the activities of the teacher organizations in Lithuania was given by Zigelis: Before the war (1st World War – E. V.) in few regions there was not a single Lithuanian teacher. Later a teacher union with sections was formed. In the independence period catholic teacher union was formed with whom they struggle to free the

schools from the influence of the catholic priests. The directors of the teacher courses are catholic priests. The private schools are being opened, even the Jesuit order has them; the country gives them money. "Teacher union's outlook on the current situation is optimistic. In the whole world new democracy stands against the reaction, and the democracy will also win in Lithuania. Union also supports secondary schools and organizes courses for teachers. He urges the congress to support Lithuania's democratic teachers in their struggle against reigning reaction and clericism, that congress supports with a tremendous applause" [11, p. 490]. According to the facts provided by Rummo it can be concluded that Estonian colleagues were in the most convenient position, because in Estonia there existed teacher union that united not only primary but also secondary school teachers. The union includes county and town unions and minority teacher organizations. Union unites. 70 % of the Estonian teachers (~ 3500 pers.)" [11, p. 490].

Congress adopted the following resolutions:

1. Implementation of a united school taking into account specifics of every country is the most important task for the public authorities and teacher unions.
2. It is necessary to unite all the teachers of the country in one common professional teacher organization.

According to the organizers of the congress it achieved its goal in bringing closer together in one community the teachers from all three Baltic states [11, p. 490].

2nd Baltic Teachers Congress took place in Tallinn on the June 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> 1927. (It was planned to take place in 1927 but it did not – E. V.) From Estonia 355, from Latvia 70 and from Lithuania 40 teachers took part in it. In this congress different questions were discussed including further unification of the teachers from the Baltic States and integration into the European teacher community.

3rd Baltic Teachers Congress took place in Kaunas on the June 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 1931. From Estonia around 90 participants took part in it, from Latvia 130, together Lithuanian teacher it reaches 500 participants. In the presidium of the congress were elected: from Lithuania – prof. K. Slezevicus; from Latvia R. Liepins; From Estonia Kuks in the secretariat; from Latvia J. Ivankovskis, A. Lielausis; from Lithuania – Cizunas and Pranaitis, from Estonia Markovs and Sikveru; members of the mandate commission – Muga and Smits (Estonia), Sprīvulis and Malins (Latvia), Ruzgas and Gerulaitis (Lithuania); editorial commission: Nurm and Stalberg (Estonia),

I. Zugzda and Genusas (Lithuania), E. Ritmanis and K. Petersons (Latvia). [6,3.]

Among the one to congratulate the congress were – director of the 1st department of Lithuanian Ministry of Education Voketaitis, Latvian ambassador Liepins, Estonian ambassador Lepiks, chairman of the Cultural Union doc. Tomasaitis, Lithuanian Union of the Vilnius district, Latvian–Lithuanian association, Lithuanian National Teacher Union, students from Vytautas University, former president K. Grinius, Lithuanian Social Democratic Workers' Party Central Committee member eng. Kairis, representative of the Lithuanian teacher's professional union I. Zugzda. Latvian Teacher Association representative Fr. Vitenbergs, representative of the Estonian teachers dir. Kuks, Atheist society, Youth union, Student society "Varpa" and others. The ranks of the congress congratulators show that it integrated representatives of different political views, that is important in Lithuania's domestic context as A. Smetona's moderate authoritarian regime allowed the existence and operation Socio-democratic workers party. One must think though what is the use of any party in a country where the parliament is dissolved.

After the congratulations rector of the Vytautas University professor V. Cepinskis read extensive lecture on the tasks of a modern school. When talking about the relationship between the student and the teacher professor Vabalas-Gudaitis points out that ancient power based relationship must be replaced by a new relationship based on evaluating child as autonomous and equal person [6, p. 3]. After the lectures the participant of the congress went to the Lithuanian War Museum where general Nagevixus introduced guests with Lithuania's century long battle for self-support and independence.

Unanimously following resolutions were passed:

1) At the moment when there are many obstacles to nation's desire for independence and self-support one must devote special attention to the realization of the idea of a free democratic school that is the only thing that allows to raise the youth in the real spirit of the democracy.

2) noting the damage done to nations economy and morale in the course of many wars and especially in the last one, as well as noting increased arming as a preparation for new wars congress condemns similar activities that threaten with a similar devastation and admits that special attention must be devoted to spreading the idea of cooperation and peace between the nations among the masses and especially among the school children, teaching them in the spirit of pacifism and national solidarity. Thus congress urges

teachers to fight against all phenomena that can lead to the militarization of the school.

3) to achieve these socially humane aims special attention must be devoted to the school reform, that is based new education principles – activity, solidarity, and fair mutual trust based relationships between teachers, students and parents.

This is the last Baltic Teachers Unions congress, because the 4<sup>th</sup> congress was planned to take place on the 2nd, 3rd and 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1934 but after the coup of May 15<sup>th</sup> 1934, unlike in Lithuania all socio-democratic activities including teachers, were ceased. On the 15th of May last issue of LSS journal "Mūsų Nėkotne" was published. Thus it is reasonable to assume that Baltic Teacher's Union activities were interrupted after the events in Latvia (K. Ulmanis's authoritarian regime) as the Estonian side united all teachers of Estonia but Lithuanian side during the A. Smetona's regime was not hindering socio-democratic activities of the teachers.

### **Baltic Teacher Conferences**

The conferences among Baltic teacher organizations were taking place since 1922. The initiator for them was moderately left side tended Latvian Teachers Union that tended to shut out from their circle of cooperators nationally or right side tended Latvian teacher organizations, thus Latvian Association of Secondary School Teachers that was at that time strongest supporter of national views was not invited to the first Baltic Teachers conference that took place in Riga.

1st Baltic Teachers conference took place in Riga on June 18th, 19th, and 20<sup>th</sup> 1922. In conference participated representatives of teacher organizations from Finland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. From Finland participated school inspector A. Jotuni and teacher M. Havulin, from Estonia – Adult school headmaster M. Valbe and Secondary school headmaster doc. J. Kūvēts, from Lithuania – Gymnasium headmaster V. Kvieska, editor of the pedagogical journal "Mokyklos ir Gyvenimo" Lithuanian teachers professional associations, the Deputy Chairman A. Tamosaitis and school inspector L. Kairunaitis; from Latvia–Latvian Teachers Union board members [8, p. 414]. This was also first and only conference to which the representatives of Finland arrived. Further while unsuccessfully trying to include in its activities the teachers from Poland, teachers from the Baltic states merge in the context of three countries – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Estonian Teachers Union that organized the second Baltic Teachers conference, was not politically

and ideologically divided thus it invited organization represented outside Latvian Teachers Union and catholic teachers from Lithuania. In the second Baltic Teachers conference that took place in Tallinn (Revele) on the June 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 1923. The Panel was convened, organized and led by the Estonian Teachers Union (*Eesti Opetajate Liit*), which was also extended the number of participants. The initiator and organizer the previous year's meeting Latvian Teachers Union had only invited only common teacher unions from neighbour states, but Estonians seeing that that both in Latvia and Estonia there are other teacher organizations that do not fall under common unions, also extended invitations to Latvian Secondary School Teacher Union and Lithuanian Catholic Teachers Union" [9,963,] In the conference participates: Delegates from Estonian Union of Teachers and Tallinn Teachers Association (Valbe, Janson, Rummo, Annuson Kiivets and others) Latvian Teachers Union's board members (P. Kula, J. Ritins and K. Dekens), delegates from Latvian Secondary School Teacher Union L. Adamovics and P. Dreimanis, delegates from Lithuanian Teachers Union: V. Kvieska (Teacher in a gymnasium and a member of Saeima) and teachers Sauli teacher seminar [9, p. 964].

The Baltic Teachers conferences took place in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania:

3rd conference: Kaunas – August 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 1924 [2];

4th conference: June 21st and 22nd – Riga

5th conference: June 29<sup>th</sup> and 30nd – Tallinn

In this conference the issues of strategic importance to Baltic Teachers Union were discussed: Union's programme for 1926–1927, budget, election of the secretariat and revision commission, preparation for union's 2nd Congress. The last issue was delegated to the newly elected Baltic Teachers Union Secretariat that was based in Riga. Secretariat consisted of: P. Kula and F. Vitenbergs (Latvia), Zigelis and Paleckis (Lithuania), Janson and Rummo from Estonia. Newly formed secretariat was tasked issues pertaining to communication between teacher unions as well as organizing the conferences and congresses.

6<sup>th</sup> conference: Kaunas – August 21st and 22nd 1928 [7];

7<sup>th</sup> conference: September 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>, Riga;

8<sup>th</sup> conference: Tallinn – August 16th and 17<sup>th</sup>, 1930;

9<sup>th</sup> conference: 1931 – Kaunas;

10<sup>th</sup> conference: Riga – August 21st and 22nd, 1932;

11<sup>th</sup> conference: Tallinn – June 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>, 1933 [5].

### Discussion of the data and results

To evaluate the cooperation between the teachers of the Baltic states in the context of Baltic Teachers Union in the 20ties and 30ties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a very complicated task. In any case there is no reason to say that these activities did not matter, because it would be an external assessment of today's point of view. Teachers saw significant importance in fostering international relationships and voluntary activity of teacher's organizations, that is proved with their practical work. On the eve of the 3rd Baltic Teacher Union's congress, one of the representatives of the Latvian Teacher Union considers that BTU activities up to that point was mainly connected with organising and coordinating the teachers of the Baltic states and in the future attention must be devoted to educational issues [3], however his assessment is an "inside assessment". The present study shows that the Baltic teachers voluntary cooperation was sufficiently broad and massive, that it can be considered a significant phenomena to describe educational environment (discourse) of the said era.

### Conclusions

1. Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian teacher unions in the 20ties and 30ties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century formed Teachers Union of the Baltic States or the Association of Baltic States Teacher Unions, within which substantial organizational pedagogically – ideological exchange work was carried out thus helping teachers understand not only narrow educational issues of their own country but also discover their international context.

2. The analysis of the Baltic Teacher unions, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian teacher union activities and organizational style allows to conclude that from the mass stand point the simplest and the most effective teacher unification took place in Estonia, where it was not influenced by political and ideological contradictions, in Latvia and Lithuania however, formed contradictory teacher groups that were competing among themselves, this however unlike in Estonia allowed for productive discussions to unfold.

3. Teachers' Union of the Baltic States focused on mutual conferences and congresses - 11 conferences and 3 congresses took place. Such a merger forms of work, however, are localized in time and space, because they have very short time, which means that the remainder of the time the cooperation is absent.

4. Activities of The Teacher Union of the Baltic states stops with the 15th of May 1934 and the



advent of K. Ulmanis's authoritarian regime, as it stops Latvian Teacher Unions activities, Latvian link in Teacher Union of the Baltic states. No obstacles were put for Estonian and Lithuanian Unions in the 20ties and 30ties of the 20th century.

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### Santrauka

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## BALTIJOS ŠALIŲ MOKYTOJŲ SAJUNGA IR JOS VEIKLOS XX A. TREČIAJĀ–KETVIRTAJĀ DEŠIMTMETĪ

Tyrimo tema – Baltijos šalių mokytojų sąjunga ir jos veiklos trečiajį–ketvirtąjį XX a. dešimtmetį. Tyrimo pagrindas: Latvijos mokytojų sąjungos savitraštis „Musu Nakotne“ ir periodinis Latvijos

švietimo ministerijos leidinys „Izglībitas Ministrijas Menesraksts“, kurie gana plačiai atspindi Lietuvos, Latvijos, Estijos mokytojų tarptautinį bendradarbiavimą, Baltijos šalių mokytojų sąjungos liniją. Oficialiai Sąjungos nuostatai priimti 3-iojoje Baltijos mokytojų konferencijoje Lietuvoje, vykusioje 1924 m. rugpjūčio 18–19 d., bet faktiškai patys atstovai laikėsi požiūrio, kad Sąjunga veikia nuo 1922 m. konferencijos.

Tyrimas atskleidė, kad Latvijos mokytojų sąjunga, kuri išsiskyrė savo socialdemokratiškomis pažiūromis į visuomenę, žmogų ir švietimą, be kitos veiklos, taip pat vykdė aktyvų tarptautinį organizacinį darbą. Latvijos, Lietuvos ir Estijos mokytojai Baltijos šalių mokytojų sąjungos veikloje taikė įvairius bendradarbiavimo būdus: pedagoginius kongresus, konferencijas, ekskursijas, keitimąsi darbo patirties išvykomis ir t. t.

Masiškai ir tematiškai išsamiais reikėtų pripažinti trijų Baltijos šalių – Estijos, Latvijos ir Lietuvos – mokytojų kongresus. Iki 1933 m. galima įvardyti tris tokius kongresus: 1-asis Baltijos šalių mokytojų kongresas vyko Rygoje 1925 m. birželio 21–22 dienomis; 2-asis kongresas įvyko Taline 1928 m., o 3-iasis – 1931 m. birželio 28–29 d. Taline. 4-asis Baltijos šalių mokytojų kongresas buvo planuotas 1934 m. birželio 2, 3 ir 4 d., bet po valstybinio 1924 m. gegužės 15-osios perversmo Latvijoje visas socialdemokratų, tarp jų ir mokytojų, aktyvi veikla buvo nutraukta. Tuose kongresuose dalyvaudavo net iki 600 mokytojų iš trijų Baltijos šalių. Nuo 1922 iki 1933 m. kasmet vykdavo ir Sąjungos konferencijos.

Galima teigti, kad Baltijos šalių mokytojų sąjungos veikla nutraukiama dėl autoritarinio režimo Latvijoje, kadangi pastarasis nuo 1934 m. gegužės nutraukė Latvijos mokytojų sąjungos, kuri buvo trijų šalių Sąjungos koordinatore Latvijoje, veiklą. Lietuvos ir Estijos mokytojų sąjungų veiklai niekas nekludė.

Baltijos šalių mokytojų sąjungos veiklą vertinti vienareikšmiškai negalima. Viena vertus, ši veikla apima to laikotarpio diskursą, kai laisvanoriški žmonių jungimaisi į įvairias sąjungas siekti bendrų tikslų buvo labai populiarūs visuomeninio gyvenimo forma. Antra vertus, šiame mokytojų tarptautinio bendradarbiavimo procese keitimasis informacija ir patirtimi vyko iš esmės tik kongresuose ir konferencijose, laikotarpiams tarp jų bendradarbiavimo nebuvo.

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