The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Data Bank Task Group

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Three decades ago, the Data Bank Task Group (DBTG) was created within the USSR State Committee for Science and Technology (SCST). Initially, the DBTG was part of the Interdisciplinary science and technology commission on computer software, but was later (in 1984) granted independent status as the USSR SCST Science and Technology Commission on Data Banks. This commission continued to operate until 1987. However, among the members of the commission and the wide circle of experts involved in its work, the commission has always been referred to unofficially by the name of its predecessor, the DBTG.

The DBTG was created with the aims of promoting the advancement of database technologies in the development of Russian information systems, coordinating work on the development of software for databases, providing professional consultancy and expertise in the development of database systems, and establishing and expanding contacts with foreign scientific centers and other organizations working in the field of database technologies.

The DBTG included researchers from academic institutions in several Soviet republics, officers from government agencies, and university teachers from different regions of the country where research in the field of databases has being carried out. This helped greatly to involve many professionals interested in the creation of databases, and from different regions of the country, in the DBTG's work.

To ensure the efficiency of DBTG functioning, the number of the group's participants was limited to 25 members and about 20 observers. The work of those participating in the DBTG proceeded within the framework of target subgroups, each of which dealt with separate aspects of the database domain, such as terminology, DBMS architecture, data models, data security, DBMS estimation methods, the methodology of database design, information support of DBTG operations, and the like. The work of the target subgroups was coordinated by a DBTG Bureau consisting of DBTG executives and the chairs of the subgroups.

Throughout the period it was active, the DBTG executives were its chairman, G.K. Stolyarov (Institute of Mathematics, Belarussian Academy of Sciences, Minsk); Deputy Chairmen L.A. Kalinichenko (Institute of Electronic Control Machinery; later the USSR Academy of Sciences' Institute of Informatics Problems), V.M. Savinkov (USSR Central Bureau of Statistics; later, the Research Institute for the Problems of Organization and Control, Moscow), and A.A. Stognii (Institute of Cybernetics, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences; later, the Institute of Applied Informatics, Kiev); and Scientific Secretary V.P. Dribas (Institute of Mathematics, Belarussian Academy of Sciences, Minsk). The chairs of the target subgroups and members of the DBTG Bureau were at different times V.N. Afanas'ev (Kiev), I.V. Brusenkov, V.I. Budzko (Moscow), V.P. Dribas (Minsk), A.I. Ilyushin, L.A. Kalinichenko, M.R. Kogalovsky, V.S. Minaev, A.V. Maklakov, N.V. Skrydlov (Moscow), G.K. Stolyarov (Minsk), F.L. Fridlender (Moscow), and others.

Thanks to the great enthusiasm and energetic and ambitious work of the DBTG executives (which was supported by the majority of group participants, by the scientific and engineering society, and by the administration of the USSR SCST), and to the clear procedural rules, the DBTG played an important role in the development of database technologies in USSR, quite immature area of informatics at that time. The DBTG actively promoted their practical use, stimulated scientific studies of them, and consolidated the community of professionals in this field. The most striking scientific studies inside Russia in the field of databases, the designing of industrial and experimental software for data management, and the development of large applied database systems were all done with the immediate participation or leadership of DBTG members at the institutions where they worked.

The DBTG and the USSR Academy of Sciences Presidium's Commission on Data Banks and Information Retrieval Systems (formed in 1978) jointly organized all of the largest nationwide scientific conferences from the 1970s through the early 1990s (Tbilisi, 1980; Tashkent, 1983; Tallinn, 1985; Kalinin, 1989; Lvov, 1991). They also worked together to organize schools and workshops on databases and information

systems. The wide geographical distribution of these meetings, and the participation of specialists from the regions where they took place, promoted the dissemination of knowledge and the training of professionals in the field of databases in various regions of the country.

The DBTG has done a great deal of work to develop Russian terminology in the new field of informatics: it has created bilingual and terminological database dictionaries; translated and published a number of foreign journal papers, scientific reports, and monographs written by renowned scientists; and has provided Russian experts with access to the proceedings of international conferences and papers in foreign journals.

The DBTG has issued a number of methodological documents on the creation of database systems, taken part in the creation of State research and development programs in the field of database technologies, and provided expertise for domestic projects.

The DBTG secretariat regularly published information bulletins to support the task group's work.

The DBTG has represented Russia in the international community of experts in the field of database technologies and has initiated scientific contacts with CODASYL and other international organizations. Members of the DBTG have prepared a number of proposals on developing specifications for the CODASYL data definition language and forwarded them to the CODASYL committee.

Taking part in the work of the DBTG has become a true school for a large number of the USSR's specialists in the field of database technologies. Its activities have substantially facilitated the development and practical implementation of this important line of information technologies.

The exotic term "data bank," borrowed from the Western literature and incorporated into the name of the DBTG at the time when the Russian terminology in this area only started to be formed, is no longer used. However, thanks to the work of this public scientific organization, the term "database" is now widely used in Russia, and database technologies have become standard tools in the development of various information systems.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Moscow ACM SIGMOD chapter was organized, the core of which is the Russian members of the DBTG. This organization is largely carrying on the traditions of the Russian database community that were originated by the DBTG.

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