**The role of Finland in the creation and development of Rotary clubs in Russia (1983-2006 years)**

**Personal attitude to the topic**. Charter member Leningrad-Neva RC (1993-2003), coautor book “St.Pet&Rotary”(2003) ; RC founder and PP for “St. Pet. Intl.” (Nov. 2004).

Finished membership in RI at 2006 in protest over the decision of RI to create a new D2220 and transfer Nordwest RCs of RF to Moscow jurisdiction contrary to the decision of 10 Rotary NW Russian clubs (votes result 10: 1) to remain in the Finnish district supported by DG 1430 (53 Finnish and 11 Russian) by letter to the RI with a proposal to extend the membership of Russian clubs by at least for 8-12 years for optimal formation Rotary in Russia.

Restored membership in Rotary this year due to an unexpected acquaintance with a member of RC “St.Pet.-White Nights” and an invitation to the club as a speaker. This club is currently the undoubted leader not only in St. Petersburg, but also in the Russian Federation.

**Motivation for presentation**. First of all, this is the lack of any information on the history of the creation first Rotary clubs in the Russia and their formation in various, but primarily Finnish districts, over a considerable period from 1990 to 2006. For the first time we paid attention to this fact at 2003 in our book SPb & Rotary, however, even today, not a word is mentioned about this on the website of Russian Rotary ?! At the same time, the initiative itself to promote Rotary to Russia belongs exclusively to the Finnish Rotarians, our closest neighbors, It is worth dwelling on this very difficult way, as it continued on a regular basis for about 23 years ! In addition, your kind invitation to speak at Kallio RC on a topic very close to me as for Rotarian has been in charge of Russian-Finnish relations through StPet Neva RC for a long time, was also important for me.

1. The first known attempts to create Rotary in Russia were initiated by three Finnish PDG D143 Pentti Saaksjärvi, Yuryo Kaukiainen and Teivo Ilmonen, when in 1983 they informed the RI GSecr. of their interest in creating Rotary in Russia, primarily in the Leningrad region!

 This initiative was supported in 1985 by the President of RI M.A.T. Kapras and already in August 1986, the press officer of the Soviet embassy in Finland, Yuri Popov, received materials about Rotary, followed by an invitation to the consulate, during which the Penthouse Saaksjärvi explained to the Soviet cultural attache Johansson the principles of Rotary. On his advice, they wrote about this to the ambassador of the USSR in Finland V.M. Sobolev. Later, assurances were received about arousing interest in Rotary from the Soviet side.

In February 18, 1988, representative Ambassador Sobolev sent his representative, Peter Lillenurma, to Kouvola to learn more about Rotary. Materials were sent to Moscow, to the Kremlin, to a person who had the necessary powers to decide on the establishment of Rotary in Russia. Obviously, the steps taken by Peter Lillenurma were crucial for the spread of Rotary in Russia.

The start for Rotary was that in April 1989, when Yuri Popov became Secretary of the embassy in Helsinki, he turned to the Helsinki RC with a request to sponsor the first Moscow RC. These decisions were also supported in 1989/90 on the initiative, first of all, of RI PP1980/81 Rolf Klarich from Finland, who, together with RI President Hugh-Archer from the USA, managed to obtain the necessary guarantees from the USSR government to support Rotary's ideas and to promote its activities.

2. After such support, at first everything went quickly: in early 1990, RI adopted the concept of creating Rotary development in the USSR: one club for the largest 10-12 cities. As a result, Moscow RC appeared in June, Irkutsk RC in July, RC Leningrad RC in October ! Our old friend Jorma Lampen (at that time DG 142, and later Director of RI) took an active part in creating the last one. Moscow and Leningrad were in Finnish D142, and Irkutsk in American Alaska (D5010).

3. What happened next? But then everything went completely autonomously! Our group of scientists, members of Gorky’s House of Scientists, who, on the basis our personal contacts, learned about Rotary’s existence abroad and Y. Kholkin even managed to visit one of the USA RC in early 1990 about which he informed us in November and already Dec.25th the first meeting of initiative group was held. It was decided to create a club with Rotarian intentions on the basis of the House of Scientists. It is not difficult to guess that at the same time, we had no idea what was happening at that time in this part in our own country ?!

In March 1991, we finally found out that there was already one Leningrad RC in our city and met Ibragimov. In April, the first composition of our group Council was elected, where I entered as Intern. Serv-Committee Director . We have already started weekly meetings, we have begun to issue information sheets, booklets, etc. Already in May, we even suddenly were visited by the Pres. RI Paolo Costa !

Active correspondence with the American Rotarians ended in the fact that already in October 1991, DG607 William Mack Govni invited us to Heart of America, Kansas city area for two weeks to get rnowlrdges about Rotary and RCs of this region. We selected 5 people, our founder of the club, Y. Kholkin could not go and sent me as team leader. This was the first unofficial visit of Russian group with Rotarian intentions to the United States in the framework of the RI. Results: 10 publications in local newspapers, crazy meetings in RCs ... but the main was letter to RI with recommendations about our support in registration, which RI did by sending a corresponding letter of recommendation to Finnish D142.

In 1992, an important meeting was held at our House of Scientists with representatives of your D142, according to the results of which we received fundamental approval for our actions: the Finnish representatives said that you have your own face and we will support the idea of creating a second club in St.Petersburg. Let me remind you that at that time it was completely contrary to the concept of RI just adopted at that time about the initial creation in the USSR only one RC in major cities of the country. In addition, they made us some comments, including the importance of the right selection of club members (at that time most of us were scientists and we believe that this is normal for Rotary Club ?!). We started our first projects, started the registration procedure. At that time, our special representative from Kallio RC was Urpo Oksanen, who visited us many times. Soon, the first big group from Kallio RC members visited our club.

As a result, in May 1993, another RI Pr Cliff Doktermann came to us and handed us a charter. 3 RCs became our sponsors: Helsinki (Kallio-Berghall), Ohio and Colchester. Close cooperation was established with everyone, but for Finland , smart founder of our club, Yu. Kholkin, asked me to track all contacts with Finland, as with our closest geographical neighbor ! Contacts soon grew into a friendship that continues to this day. My personal friend Erkki Vauramo has been and remains the curator of contacts with Russia from your club for all these years.

4. However, the further way was not at all simple. After such a virtually unscheduled registration of our Neva RC, serious changes took place in the RI policy towards Russia. Already in July 1993. we received from RI a letter signed by the new president of RI, Robert Bart, addressed actually to six clubs that had appeared in the territory of the former USSR by that time (Moscow, St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg-Neva, Kiev, Lviv and Yerevan). Irkutsk remained to D5030, Alaska. According to the decision of RI, all the listed clubs on the territory of the former USSR west of the Ural Mountains, as well as the clubs of Ukraine and Armenia, are subordinate to the Administrator of the President and are not included in any district of RI ! I must say that the reason for this was the appeal of the leadership of D1420 with a request to release him from the further implementation of such a crucial task on a vast territory. Our administrator becames Nikolai Elers PDG from Wuppertal (Germany), who later also did a lot to approve of our young RCs.

To the honor of your D1420, it is important to note that such significant changes did not affect on three Russian clubs, which actually remained under the full support of Finland, and furhermore the D1430, which is closest to us geographically, also became connected with us !

5. May sence now just briefly discribe our at the first Finnish-Russian initiatives in Rotary for years 1992-6 Application 1 (8 Contacts)

As a result of joint initiatives, the formation of new clubs began to be actively supported by RI: clubs appeared in Vyatka, N. Novgorod -1994, Murmansk, Tolyatti - 1995... RCs also began to appear very actively in the rest of the Russian Federation, beyond the Urals, curated by D 5030 (USA) - Yakutsk, Novosibirsk, Khabarovsk, Naryan Mar . It is interesting that in Moscow and St. Petersburg the process of further development of Rotary was rather inhibited: the second RC in Moscow “Moscow-Rossika” appeared only in 1996, and the third stable RC in St. Petersburg just in 2000; it was “White Nights” RC, which I represent today and which, as noted above, is one of the leaders among Russian clubs. It is worth noting that the reason for this stability of that club is, in my opinion, quite simple: at that time, this club had a special principle of formation: its first members were participants in International economic development programs. This initially allowed them to properly build relations in the club, create a very democratic club management system and make it attractive for a new Rotary members.

6. The next RI initiative in our Rotary, came in 2000, when a new decision was made to consolidate the RCs of the North-West of the Russian Federation (8 RC- Murmansk, Kandalaksha, Novgorod, St. Russa, Kaliningrad (later) and 4 from St. Petersburg) for D1430 Finland, and other RCs from European part of Russia were distributed between D2350, 2370 Sweden. Thus, by 2003, there were 65 RCs in D 1430 (54 Finnish with 2086 members and 11 Russians with 215 members).

7. Year 2003 was the peak of the activity of the Neva Club in Rotary: we completed important projects with the Swedes, the British, and successfully completed the PublRelation Project book “St. Petersburg &Rotary”, dedicated to the 300th anniversary of the city and 10th anniversary of our club, which was aimed precisely at strengthening the image of Rotary in Russia and St. Petersburg convincingly showed that even the initiative of a small group of Rotarians and their friends can cause significant resonance in society if it is based on international cooperation. The project received the RI PR Award, and the Rotarian magazine published relevant materials on our affairs. D 1430, headed by DG Erkki Pasanen, also did not remain indifferent to such publicity and at the end of the year recognized the Neva club as the best club in the district ... can you imagine what it was necessary to do for a couple of thousands Finnish Rotarians to vote for such a decision in their district ?!

8. In the wave of such success of Neva RC and at the same time, without any support from the rest of the club’s leadership (?!), we became close in the frames of the Neva RC and in February 2004, with the support of PD RI Jorma Lampen, we agreed with our D1430 to make a gift for 100 anniversary of RI: we proposed to create a new club in our city (at that time in St. Petersburg there were just 92 Rotarians ?!!) and 4 RCs ! PDirector RI Jorma Lampen signed a corresponding letter to the Neva RC, supporting the idea of ​​creating the first in our country St. Petersburg-International RC, i.e. club with wide international participation; representatives of 8 countries have united in the new club! The idea of ​​this type of club was not actually new: there were already 11 of them in Europe (incl.Finland).

It turns out very attractive both to foreigners who come to Russia under contracts for their early adaptation in Russia and participate in club projects, and to our compatriots who get the opportunity directly participate in International humanitarian projects.

With such support, everything quickly spun and the new Finnish DG1430 Pertti Sarkomaa made his first international visit in 2004/5 to our new club in July 2004. And already in November of the same year, RI President Glen Estes (USA) signed our charter! So our commitments to the 100th anniversary of Rotary were complited ahead of schedule and on February 19, 2005 the charter itself was solemnly handed to us in the Angleterre Hall by our old friend DG Pertti Sarkomaa in the presence of 58 guests from 5 countries. There were 11 guests from Finland ! Congratulations came from 17 countries. Publicity was very significant and we received literally a sea of guests in our suitable hall of the Angleterre hotel.

9. However, at the same time as this pleasant event, we got news about new RI plans of RI to pick out Russian clubs from the European part into a single district with the center in Moscow. The prematureness of this decision was already evident from the very beginning, primarily because of the completely insufficient number of clubs for this, their small number and training, their remoteness, that is in complete violation of the key principles of Rotary. We immediately responded to this and wrote a detailed letter on behalf of the Neva RC and sent it to the RI through our district. In response just silence ... DG1430, Pertti Sarkomaa, whom we asked for support, asked us urgently organize a survey of the opinions of all 11 clubs of the North-West of the Russian Federation. We did this by November 2004 and handed him all the necessary materials. The voting results of the clubs were actually 10: 1 for staying in Finnish D 1430 to continue our very positive experience of working with experienced Finnish Rotarians who at that time already had 75 years experience in Rotary ... Pertti Sarkomaa presented all his thoughts at the Conference in Moscow December 11-12, 2004

***For reference: The outcast turned out to be St. Petersburg RC in the face of Ibragimov, who has not yet satisfied his own ambitions... It would seems, however, that the question after such votes results was removed. However, logic and practice did not become an obstacle for such people as Ibragimov and Danilenko (last one finally became fisrt disctrict govtrn for new Ruassian District) They found a link in RI, which is out from any rotation, it was RI Gen.Secr. Ed Futa (already 12 years old at this position ...)They promised him next year to increase the number of clubs in the European part of the Russia to 65 and in a year to 80?!?!) Quite soft speaking it was «mouth service» only !***

Realizing that his proposals are being ignored, what did the Finnish DG Pertti Sarkoma did in response ? On the eve of Christmas in December 2004: he sat down with our documents and summarized all the available materials and sent his scientifically based proposal to RI: to postpone the creation of an independent Russian district for at least 10 years to full development of the Russian Rotary.

However, in response, silence again ...?!?! It turned out that according to Evanston’s internal rules, this process, which was launched in October under a new district, could be stopped by letters from all clubs only until December 1, 2004?!?! And of course, only Ed Futa knew about this!

Later we received copies of all documents, including an ambitious transit plan for the formation of a new district and a protocol of intentions, which authors Ibragimov and Danilenko tried to sign at a conference in Moscow ... To the honor of the Finnish Rotarians, all DG 1430 past : Errki Pasanen, active: Pertti Sarkomaaa and elect : Seppo Sinkko refused to sign a protocol of intentions to create a new district based on the results of a vote by Russian clubs ...

Everyone was very deeply shocked by everything that happened! The Finnish DG Pertti Sarkomaa in protest against that, simply left Rotary ... I must say that the Swedish districts for which it was difficult indeed to manage the central and southern clubs simply because of the remoteness, signed the protocol easily, without consulting very much with own Rotarians, however, after understanding, also filed a protest against the false governor Danilenko, who was unknown to anyone (?!?!) and against all this haste, but the train had already left ...

Thus, the rights of many-many Rotarians were violated, and cheap ambitions won. Many experienced Rotarians from Russian clubs simply lost all interest in Rotary and left the clubs ... I have dozens of such letters from Rotary leaders from all three districts ... We also did the same a little bit later in 2006 ( «St. Petersburg Intl.» RC was too young ...): simulteneously 8 Rotarians stopped their membership in Rotary in protest ...

10. What is happening in the Russian Rotary today? Number of RCs&members in Russian Federation today has not actually increased at all after 13 years: despite the new district and ambitious promises, Rotary remains as it was a little-known organisation in Russia with the same representation about 76 Rotary clubs for all Russia from Europe to the Far East with just 1072 Rotarians. 13 years ago there were even a few more about 80 clubs with 1492 Rotarians ! Some new RCs were born, but significant part from them quickly dyed... and first of all because still we have lack of management and the real interests of club members are not taken into account...

Instead of that, this year a new initiative of RI cames: uniting from 2019 all the RCs of Russia into a single D2223 from Europe to the Far East (in total just 1072 Rotarians) ?! Who is the author of such a new experiment on Russian clubs ? I asked this question recently directly to PDG 2220 Kutsenko. He replied to me that he did not know (?!).Thus, we got another solution from above that was in no way oriented towards our realities and was not discussed in advance ...

Despite all of the above, I would like to finish my speech on a positive note. In my presentation, I briefly shared with you little-known, in principle, but also well-forgotten facts of the appearance and formation of the first Rotary clubs in the USSR and Russia. At all stages of this long process, starting with the formulation of the very idea of ​​the appearance of Rotary in Russia, Finnish Rotarians took priority !

The years of working together in Rotary have not gone in vain for us: we have significantly expanded our range of interests, made new friends and become much more adapted to International life !

Six months ago, I made a similar report by the invitation of the «White Nights» RC; I was simply amazed how attentively experienced Russian Rotarians listened these unknown historical facts about first steps Rotary in Russia and how they welcomed my message, after which they simply invited me to become a member of their club. And I could not disagree!

I suppose that among you, also available the Rotarians who are not indifferent to the preservation of the history of Rotary, who will be able to complement the presentation I made and publicize these pages in Rotary !

Taking this opportunity, I would like to pass greetings to you from my new club (I returned to my usual position at the Intl Service Commitee) and pass our banner to your RC President. Welcome for any kind of cooperation. In addition, I would like to present him our bilingual book of «St. Petersburg & Rotary», the materials of which formed the basis of this report.

Thanks for your kind attention.