

SHORT STORY OF UFO RESEARCH IN A FORMER SOVIET UNION AND IN UKRAINE INDEPENDENCE TIME

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КОРОТКА ІСТОРІЯ ДОСЛІДЖЕНЬ НЛО У КОЛИШНЬОМУ СРСР ТА ПРИ НЕЗАЛЕЖНОСТІ УКРАЇНИ

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Abstract: This article briefly described the history of official UFO research in the former Soviet Union and during the independence of Ukraine, from forties years of XX century to the nowadays.

Аногація: У статті коротко описано історію радянських і пострадянських офіційних досліджень НЛО, з рокових років XX століття і по нинішній час.

It is wellknown that modern UFO era started in the year 1947, when Kenneth Arnold saw nine very strange objects over Cascade Mountains. Soon in the United States began so-called «UFO wave» – sharp increase of «flying saucer» sightings, stirred up by sensational articles in the media. Soviet press almost immediately stated that it was a dirty trick of «American warmongers», who want to fire away a new war. This is one of such news items entirely quoted: «American press, which, with small exception, is located in the hands of capitalists, give an enormous aid for the warmongers. Each day newspapers printed some fictional stories about Soviet Union by the orders of their owners. Here is only one example. During this summer newspapers raised a terrible noise about so-called «flying saucers». Each day newspapers reported on the first pages, under the enormous titles that people in the different places of America supposedly saw flying objects in the sky. They have an oval form and approximately aircraft size. Newspapers explained to their readers that this is, obviously, some projectiles, sent from the Soviet Union toward America through the north pole. American doctors unanimously stated that all «flying saucers» are only fruit of the people's imagination, agitated by talks about the war, or simply someone's idle fabrications. And actually, if these «saucers» existed in reality, they must to fall somewhere. However, no such «saucers» was ever found. Nevertheless newspapers continued to made noise around this matter during several months. Special forces with the high-speed aircrafts were created with the aim to pursue «flying saucers». It's clear that they shot down nothing» [1].

Such point of view was repeated by one of the top Communist Party leaders, M. G. Pervukhin. At the speech on a meeting celebrating the 35th anniversary of the Revolution, in November 1952, he raised merry excitement when saying that the Americans fancied «flying saucers» and «green fire balls» in the sky. Of course, he stated that all sightings was caused by «loss of mental peace» because of «military psychosis» [2].

When Soviet citizens with some courage reported about UFO sighting to the scientific organization or media, they received only answers in the debunking style. For example, the Moscow Planetarium had a standard reply letter for all «strange» cases: «Dear Comrade! The phenomenon you observed was, in all probability, due to an experiment that was conducted to measure the density of the atmosphere on high altitudes with the aid of a sodium cloud».

Position of the Soviet officials was unequivocal: our people don't see any mysterious objects in the sky, but even when they sometimes do, specialists can always convincingly solve such events. Information about UFO in the 1950s was mostly confined to official agencies. Some cases were leaked decades later, when the talks about UFOs again became possible. After the Stalin's death some enthusiasts, notably Yury Fomin, senior instructor at the Food Institute, Moscow, who was also lecturer of the Society for Propagation of Political and Scientific Knowledges (later Knowledge Society), began to collect information on UFOs and give lectures on this topic. His activity evoked great public interest, but official bodies decide to stop it. On January 8, 1961 «Pravda» («Truth», main newspaper of Communist Party) publishes an article of academician L. A. Artsimovich, entitled «The Flying Saucer Myth». He stated that «so-called flying saucers» do not exist: «All talk on this issue... stems from the same source, namely unscrupulous and antiscientific information contained in lectures made in Moscow by some irresponsible persons. These reports tell fantastic tales borrowed mainly from the American press, dating from a time when flying tableware was the main sensation in the United States... The saucers and other material objects, which are said to appear in the sky exist only as reflections on water or as rainbows exist, as the play of light in the atmosphere. All the rest is either self-deception or falsification» [3].

The «irresponsible» Y. A. Fomin was expelled from the Knowledge Society, his lectures were forbidden. Of course, Artsimovich know about Menzel's mirage theory and even mentioned Donald Menzel in his article. During the next year was issued a Russian translation of his book «Flying Saucers». It was the first book about UFOs in Russian [4].

There wasn't a direct prohibition for the mention of UFOs in Russian media, but editors still preferred to repeat the same old story about «American psychosis» and malicious «warmongers». The situation began to change only in 1966, when the young Vladimir Rubtsov published a first article that treated the UFO problem as worth of a serious consideration. His article appeared in the Ukrainian-language magazine «Znannia ta Pratsia» («Knowledge and Work»), 1966, # 9. This article encouraged the readers to report their observations [5]. Some letters arrived and were also published in this magazine.

It was the first set of Soviet UFO reports, published in the Ukrainian SSR (USSR). People saw «silent fiery ball» without trail, cylinder-shaped object «three times larger than an airplane», something «shaped like a flattened ball», «a moving ring, shaped like an automobile tire» and so on. One reader even mentioned a case from 1914, when «several brilliant cigar-shaped objects» passed through the sky with a great speed from the north to the south [6].

In April 1967 appeared the first pro-UFO article written by now famous Dr. Felix Zigel for the popular magazine «Smena» [7]. During the next months it was followed by other articles about this topic various journals and newspapers.

On May 17, 1967 in the Central House of Aviation and Cosmonautics took place the first meeting of Initiative Group for the UFO Studies. 45 attendants, mostly science and military persons, selected Major-General P. A. Stolyarov as a Group leader. The basic purpose of this Group was to prepare ground for creating a scientific UFO organization.

In October 1967 there was formed in Moscow the first Soviet public organization designed to collect and analyze UFO reports: the UFO Department of the All-Union Space-Exploration Committee of the USSR Voluntary Society of Support to the Army, Aviation & Navy (DOSAAF). It embraced more than two hundred scientists, engineers, military, journalists, etc. Its elected head was Major-General P. A. Stolyarov, his Deputy for Science was Dr. Felix Zigel. The first session of the new Department take place in October 18. Stolyarov and Zigel spoke on Central TV about the new organization and invited UFO observers to send their reports. Such reports arrived and were used by Zigel to prepare the first volume of his typewritten collection «UFO Observations in the USSR» (1968). But in the meantime backstairs forces were at work, and in November the Central Committee of DOSAAF disbanded the UFO Department.

Some time later the Branch of General & Applied Physics of the USSR Academy of Sciences passed a resolution against UFO research in the Soviet Union.

On February 29, 1968 «Pravda» stated that «flying saucers» just don't exist: «All objects flying over the territory of our country are identified either by scientists, or by the people responsible for security of our Motherland» [8]. Since this date pro-UFO articles were forbidden by Glavlit (Soviet censorship). Some people from the disbanded UFO Department write some so-called «open-letters» to the «Pravda» and Academy of Science, in which were emphasized the importance of UFO study for the defense of USSR and the possible harm for the science itself. An official answer was signed by academician A. Shchukin: «The question about nature of so-called flying objects was examined with the aid of many competent organizations, associated with USSR AS Presidium, Administration of Hydrometeorological Service, Ministry of Defense ets. As a result of this examination it has been established that the nature of the flying objects, observed under different circumstances, can always be established by competent experts. At this time organizations, which carried out study of the atmosphere and space, have the instruction to record and study cases of unknown flying objects appearance for the purpose of their identification. General supervision for this task is accomplished by USSR AS, so there is no need for creating any special organization for the UFO study» [9].

It was the very low-profile «study»: The Branch of General & Applied Physics of the USSR AS appointed several researchers, headed by the scientific secretary of the division, V. A. Leshkovtsev (one of the authors of the anti-UFO article in the «Pravda», February 29, 1968), to work with the letters and military reports on this topic. Their task consisted of registering the received letters and reports, consulting with the specialists in corresponding scientific areas, analyzing the data, and replying to the authors – something like the «Blue Book» actions in the USA. Pro-UFO enthusiasts, including Rubtsov and Zigel, were forced to continue their UFO studies almost underground, without access to the media or public lectures. In the late 1960s throughout the entire Soviet Union there were no more than 25-30 people actively engaged in UFO studies. In general, they knew each other quite well, exchanging letters and meeting from time to time personally.

In 1975, Dr. Zigel finally succeeded in opening a state-financed project for UFO studies at Moscow Aviation Institute (MAI). Top officials of the Institute approved a preliminary report for the project and applied to the Civil Aviation Ministry, the State Committee of the Council of Ministers of the USSR on Hydrometeorology, the Institute for Space Research and other organizations for cooperation. It was intended to set up a Scientific and Technological Council for the UFO problem. But this project was also disbanded when the shortened text of Zigel's UFO lecture at the military plant «Kulon» leaked to the Samizdat. As a result, Zigel was expelled from the Knowledge Society and criticized in the Soviet newspaper «Komsomolskaya pravda» [10].

Only after the so-called «Petrozavodsk phenomenon» (September 20, 1977 UFO sighting over the capital of the Karelian Autonomous Republic, later explained as the launch of the «Cosmos-955» satellite from the Plesetsk launching site) the UFO phenomenon was considered as a worth topic for serious investigations. Top Soviet officials, including the same academician A. Shchukin, began a wide program for the study of so-called «anomalous phenomena» (words like «UFO» or "flying saucers" was almost prohibited even among its participants). The program was composed of two parts - civilian and military.

«Setka-AN» («AS Network») was a civilian study of «physical nature and development mechanisms of anomalous atmospheric and space phenomena». Its head organization was the Institute of Terrestrial Magnetism, Ionosphere & Radio Wave Propagation of the USSR AS (IZMIRAN).

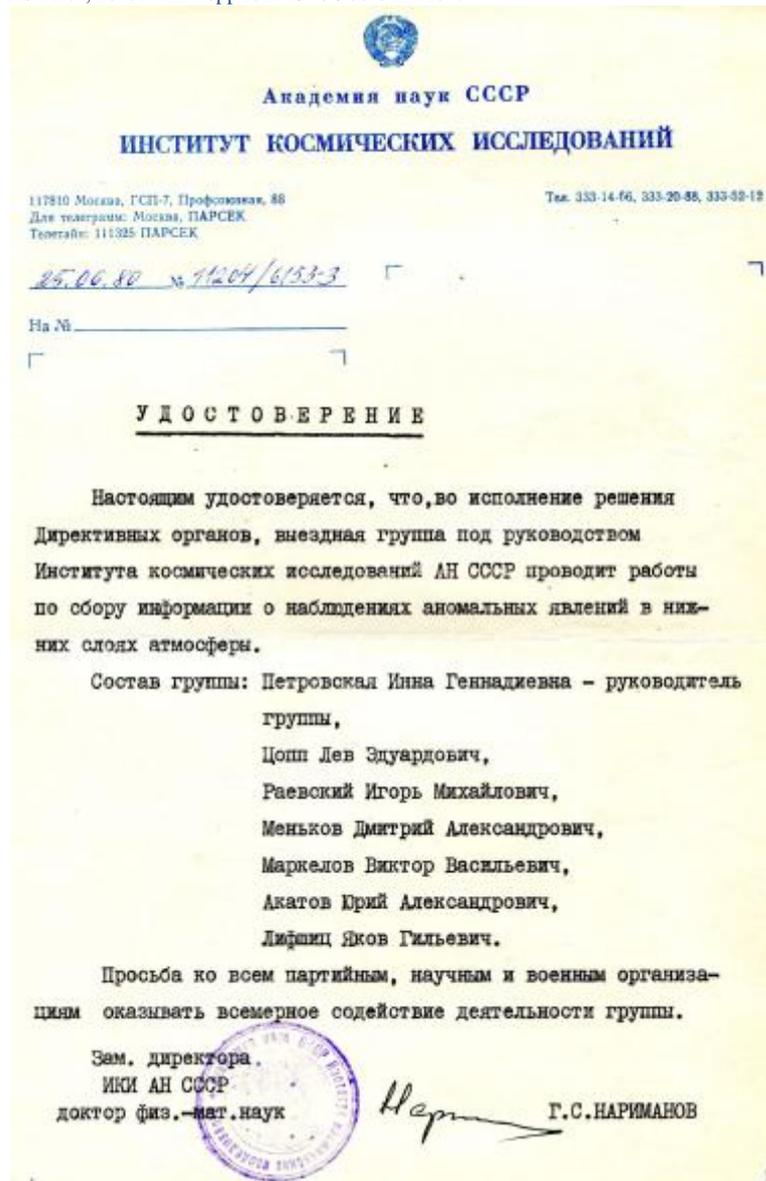


Fig.1. Certificate for the «Setka-AN» scientific group that gather information about sightings of anomalous phenomena in the lower atmosphere

«Setka-MO» («MoD Network») was a military study of «anomalous atmospheric and space phenomena, and of their effects on the performance of military hardware and the status of personnel». Its head organization was a NII 22 (Institute of Anti-Aircraft Defense), located in Mytishchi, near Moscow. Both parts of this program was connected via Military-Industrial Commission. All its activities were secret because of three reasons - the necessity to ensure «abatement of public response», the closeness to the defence-related themes and possibilities that in case of successful completion of the tasks some discoveries could be used for the military purposes. The program changed twice its name during the last periods: at first to the «Galaxy», then to the «Horizon».

«Goskomgidromet» (State Committee of the Council of Ministers of the USSR on Hydrometeorology) took an active part in this program since 1979, when all Soviet meteorological stations and personnel engaged in the field studies received instructions and long questionnaires about so-called «anomalous phenomena» (AP) sightings. In the Ukraine this instructions is still active, but filled questionnaires now send to the Kyiv instead of Moscow.

In the 1980 government censorship rules about UFOs were changed. Now all articles, books etc. must have an additional approval sign from the «Setka-AN» authorities. To publish any pro-UFO article was still impossible: such articles haven't any chance to go through double censorship.

By the early 1980s, the number of UFO enthusiasts increased sharply. In Moscow, Leningrad, Kyiv, Kharkiv, and elsewhere, various scientific and technical societies and journals organized public clubs for investigation of Anomalous Phenomena (AP). When the first Ukrainian meeting on AP was held in Kyiv in 1981, there were twelve doctors of sciences and 40 candidates of sciences participating.

The resolution of the Kyiv meeting stated that «in the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, on the ground surface and also in the near space a large group of complicated phenomena are constantly observed, by means of physical instruments and visually, which defy being simply explained as well-known natural phenomena or as being due to the human technological activities. This group of phenomena referred to as anomalous phenomena in the environment is to be studied profoundly in the interests of the science and practical activities of the human society» [11]. Ukrainian Academy of Science (especially academician G. S. Pisarenko, who became a chairman of the local Commission for the AP Studies), give an important support for the local UFO investigations.

In February 1984 all scientifically oriented UFO enthusiasts united into the Commission on Anomalous Phenomena of the Committee on the Problems of Environmental Protection of the All-Union Council of Scientific Technical Societies. Of course, they obtained the permission from the «Galaxy-AS», including from the main person behind this study – V. V. Migulin, director of IZMIRAN. They intended to use enthusiasts for the «primary job» in ufology - collecting raw reports from the people and studying them on the places of events. The chairman of this Commission was the corresponding member of the USSR AS V. S. Troitsky from Gorky, head of the Gorky Commission for AP Studies. His deputies was N. Zheltukhin, the same G. S. Pisarenko, and the Major-General P. R. Popovich, former astronaut. A. Mordvin-Shchodro from Leningrad became a scientific secretary of the Commission. News about the Commission appeared in the biggest Soviet newspapers: «Sovetskaya Rossiya», «Izvestiya», «Socialisticheskaya Industriya» and «Trud». All these newspapers provided a postal address to the UFO witnesses: 101000, Moscow, P.O. box 764.

On a January 30th, 1985 «Trud» published a long article about a recent UFO case, which had been studied by the Commission on AP. This article created a big stir among the Soviet people, because it had been written from the pro-UFO position and depicted a very striking incident involving an Tu-134 plane. Its author V. Vostrukhin deceived the censorship as he replaced the officially approved article by his one. Of course, Vostrukhin was fired, but his article «Exactly at 4.10...» became a big sensation even abroad. After this event the Commission on AP received 12 000 letters from witnesses. Some of them (especially letters that were sent for investigation to the Leningrad branch of Commission) were recently digitized by the author of this article. Analysis showed that approximately 60% of this letters contained some misidentifications (bright stars, rocket launches etc), 8% hadn't any value (general reasonings, theories). All remained cases have a definite interest, although some of them contained too little information.

On February 7 and 8, 1986 in the Gorky took place the First All-Union seminar «Technical Methods of AP Research». This meeting was described only in the local press from the anti-UFO positions.

In January 1987 amateur Yaroslavl UFO Research group (it wasn't part of Commission on AP) started to publish its periodical, the first monthly UFO bulletin in the Soviet Union. This «samizdat» bulletin had a very small circulation - about 50 copies.

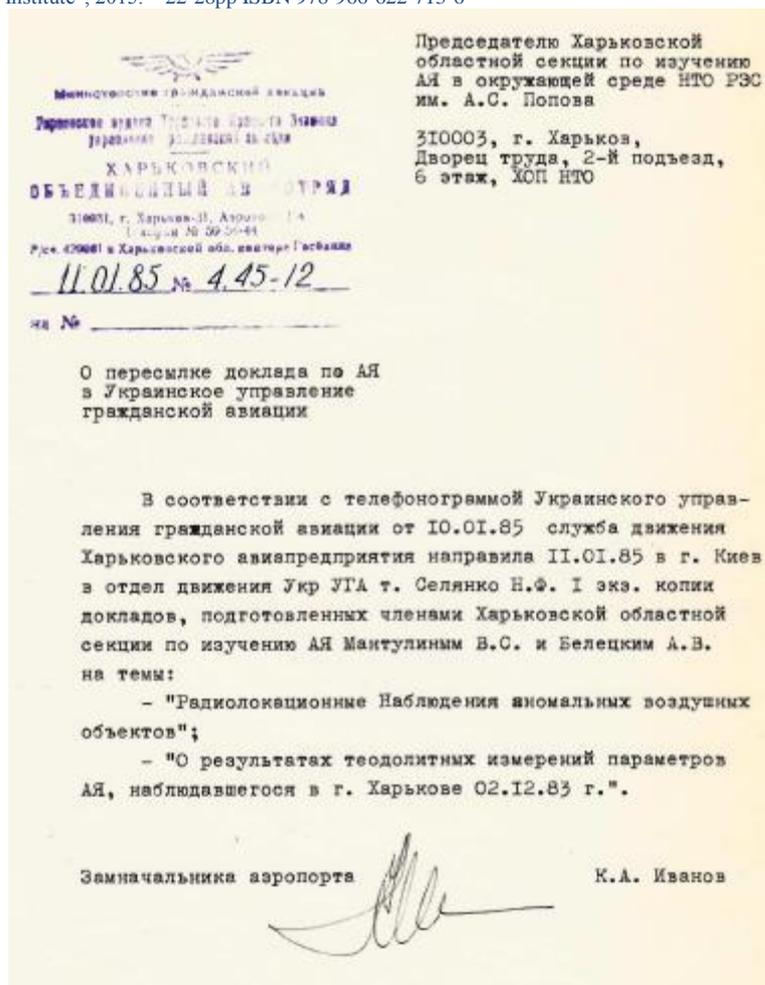


Fig.2. The confirmation letter about forwarding reports on anomalous phenomena to the Ukrainian Civil Aviation Authority in 1985

Since 1988, the strict censorship started weakening. On the movie screens appeared the first Soviet documentary about UFOs and life in the Universe, entitled «In search of the aliens». It was made by the studio «Kyivnauchfilm». Among the script writers was A. I. Mordvin-Shchodro, the scientific secretary of the Commission on AP.

At the end of 1988, the Leningrad branch of Commission created a separate amateur association for the UFO studies, named «Fakt». Its main aim was a «wider attraction of people toward the UFO problem». «Fakt» was disbanded in 1990; part of its archives were saved and recently digitized.

In 1989 all censorship restrictions about UFOs were broken. In the Soviet press immediately appeared many articles about recently forbidden topics. Since 1990 appeared new magazines and newspapers, entirely devoted to the UFOs and paranormal phenomena. Some of them exist till nowadays. Most famous of them, the newspaper «Anomaliya» («Anomaly») from Leningrad (St-Petersburg), recently celebrated its 25th anniversary, but however circulation dropped from 150.000 copies to 1000 through the years.

The Main Soviet UFO research program «Horizon» was closed in 1991, after the collapse of USSR. Some participants of this continued working with UFO reports, albeit at a low level, especially so-called «Group for the AP Research» inside the IZMIRAN. In 1996 this group was also discontinued, due to financial reasons. All archives of «Horizon-AS» are currently be kept in a wet IZMIRAN basement, and unfortunately could be lost in the near future due to the very bad storage's conditions.

The NII 22 also continued to study military UFO reports from time to time, as a low priority. The head of this study, A. Plaksin (now Colonel) often appeared on TV or give an interview for the various media. For example, in May 2002 Plaksin stated that he had never obtained any direct proof that there were alien civilizations active on our planet. There had not been no UFO crashes in the USSR, and all rumours about secret UFO storages places were only hoaxes. But 20% of UFO sightings are of physical origin that is still unknown to us. Our laws of physics cannot explain such objects, said Plaksin [12].

Part of the military archives («Horizon-MoD») were stolen by Colonel B. A. Sokolov from the Military-Industrial Commission. The most interesting documents, about 400 cases, were later sold for the UFOlogists Brian Gresh and George Knapp in 1993. These documents are still unavaliable to the UFO researchers, and we know about their content only via articles written by these persons and also the ufologist Antonio Huneus, who owns a full copy of this documentation [13].

The Commission on AP was also disbanded in 1990. The main part of its archive was lost after an accident in the storage facility. The remaining documentation is now the property of private individuals. Some participants of the former Commission later took part in the pseudoscience UFO organization «Soyuzufocenter» («All-Union UFO Center»), created by ill-famous V. Azhazha. The organization was disbanded in 1995 because of hard economical situation.

The Leningrad branch of Commission on AP began afterwards an independent life without orders from Moscow. Their UFO research activities continued on the basis of Russian Geographical Society in St-Petersburg (all its members have a Society membership card). Nominally the branch of Commission on AP still exists nowadays, but in reality the Commission has stopped its activities due to the decision of its new management authorities of new Society authorities. The same fate also stroke the UFO Study Commission of Russian Geographical Society, which was established in 1981.

Some other branches of Commission on AP and amateur UFO groups also continued their work after the collapse of USSR. Most notable of them was an Ukrainian groups. They even attempted to merge into one organization, the Ukrainian UFO Association, and successfully established their own newspaper «Ukrainian Ufologist» but however it was disbanded in 1993 because of inner conflicts. Members of this Association, including astronomers A. Pugach and A. Arkhipov, created a new group, The Ukrainian Commission for the AP study problems (chairman – A. Beletzky).

Ultimately all attempts to unite UFO researchers in this country was unsuccessful until 2004. On October 21, 2004 was created the Ukrainian Scientific Research Center for Analyses of Anomalies «Zond», the direct successor of local Comissions on AP study, eventually became the biggest research center in the country. SRCAA «Zond» have some connections with a couple of Ukrainian official organizations, including Hydrometeorology Center – successor of Soviet «Horizon-AS» program.

Nowadays SRCAA «Zond» undertakes an attempt to collect, save and digitize not only Ukrainian UFO archives, but all ex-USSR UFO heritage [14]. All saved paper archive documents were gathered and located in State's Archives with safety admission. All digitized documents, if possible, will be uploaded on the web with open access [15]. The fate of UFO studies in the ex-USSR countries is in safe hands now.

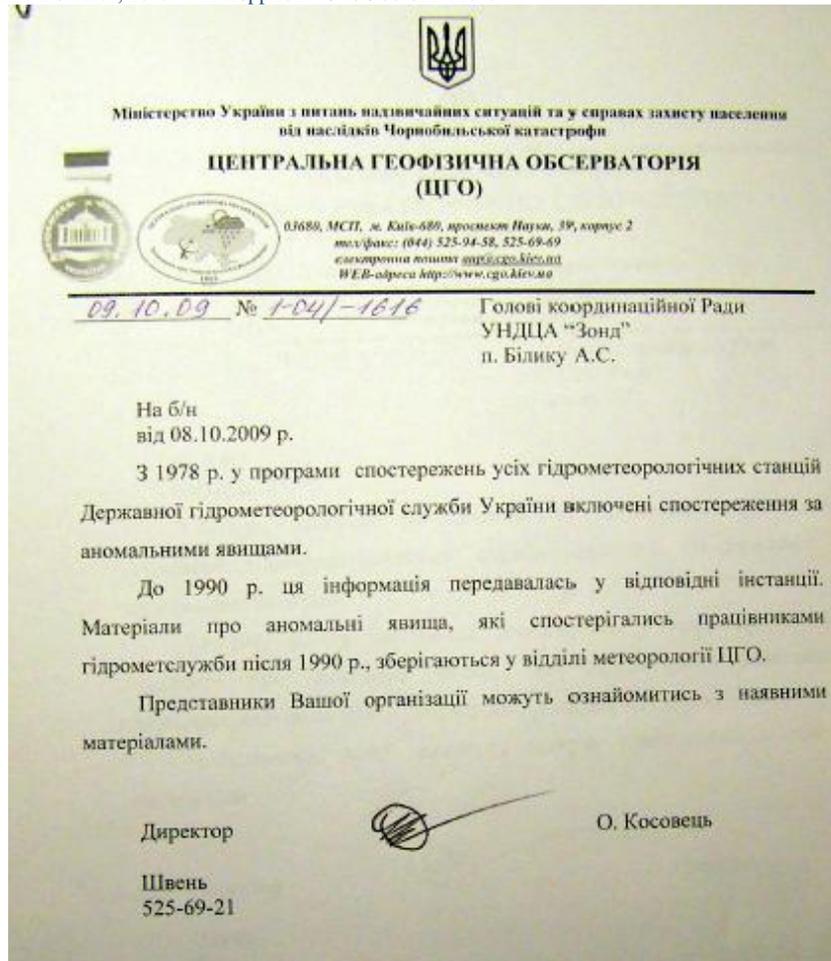


Fig.3. Since 1978 all meteorological stations of Ukraine State Hydrometeorological Service includes part in the program of anomalous phenomena observations

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