Obituary
Valentin Antimirov (1961–1995)

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Our colleague and friend, Ukranian computer scientist Valentin Antimirov died on May 31 in Nancy (France) after a severe illness. He was only 34 years old and he was working virtually until his last day.

He was born on 4 May, 1961 in Grozny (Russia). He studied in Moscow in one of the strongest of the Moscow Institutes – the Institute of Physics and Technics. After his graduation he lived and worked in Kiev (Ukraine). So, he was a son of this strange big country which ceased to exist in 1989, but which left so many evil traces in so many people’s lives. He lived in Kiev already in 1986, the year of Chernobyl explosion which, who knows, might have been fateful to him.

In 1989, when two of the present authors visited the Glushkov Institute in Kiev, Valentin was heading a dynamic research group working on equational reasoning and algebraic specification. At that time, only few scientific connections existed between the West and the former Soviet Union, but our clear feeling was that Valentin’s work deserved a much better recognition. The contrast between the high quality of research and poor working conditions was striking. The whole group of about ten people shared a single room and three East German PC’s, on which they were developing very interesting and innovative software, implementing the newest ideas of algebraic specifications.

In March 1991 Valentin made a visit to Nancy which gave rise to a tighter collaboration with the Nancy group. He also established contact with Aarhus (Denmark) the same year, and held a post-doc position there for 12 months, during which he started what was to be his last passion: an intense study of the theory of regular expressions, reading everything there was to read on the subject, and finding novel techniques for implementing decision problems. In April 1993 he moved to Copenhagen to continue this work. In January 1994 he took a position of visiting scientist in Nancy and began to work in France. Once one of us proposed that he should write a little survey on the complexity of various regular expression problems. He said that he liked the idea but...
he had rather to work on new results. He was in hurry. Despite the disease, he worked more and more. He gave a talk at STACS’95 (his picture at STACS’95 appeared in the EATCS Bulletin 56). Those who participated at RTA’95 should remember him discussing, questioning, arguing. Finally, he had a paper accepted for the FCT Conference in Dresden in August 1995 that he did not have chance to present.

Valentin loved discussing. On various topics, scientific or not. Among scientific topics there was one to which he was especially partial throughout his career: algebraic specifications. He taught algebraic specifications to students of Kiev University. He was very devoted to this scientific idea and carried such an amount of conviction that other people easily got convinced too.

Those who knew Valentin beyond his scientific life will recall him and his wife Tatiana playing guitar and piano and singing. His repertoire was composed of Okudjava, Nikitin, and other such authors so familiar to the Soviet intelligentsia. These songs belong to the so-called “amateur song” movement that started at the end of Khruschev’s “thaw” and was pursued during almost 20 years of Brezhnev’s era. This was a form of protest, escape, revelation, intellectual food for a whole generation.

He was struggling against his disease until his last days, despite the knowledge that there was no escape. Last time he came to work in the office was on May 18. That day he escaped from the hospital in order to send the final version of his FCT paper. After that he continued to work in the hospital on his powerbook. On May 31 he passed away.