

DESCRIPTION**"A HYDROGEN OR OXYGEN ELECTROCHEMICAL PUMPING CATALYTIC
MEMBRANE REACTOR AND ITS APPLICATIONS"****Technical Field**

This invention describes a hydrogen or oxygen electrochemical pumping catalytic membrane reactor, whose purpose is to increase the conversion and/or the selectivity of hydrogenation, dehydrogenation, deoxidation and oxidation reactions, both in liquid or gas phases.

This invention further describes the use of a hydrogen or oxygen electrochemical pumping catalytic membrane reactor for the direct amination of hydrocarbons, particularly for the conversion of benzene into aniline, by reacting it with ammonia.

Summary of the Invention

This invention proposes a new electrochemical catalytic membrane reactor, which increases the yield of direct amination reactions of hydrocarbons by electrochemical pumping of oxygen and/or hydrogen.

One of the purposes of this invention is to disclose a electrochemical catalytic membrane reactor, with means for the electrochemical pumping hydrogen and/or oxygen.

A preferred embodiment of present invention is the description of a electrochemical catalytic membrane reactor, provided with means for carrying out the

electrochemical pumping of hydrogen, and at least a composite membrane, said membrane comprising:

- Two electrodes, an anode (3) and a cathode (1), sandwiching an electrolyte (2);
- Both the anode (3) and the cathode (1) are electrically conductive;
- Said electrolyte (2) does not conduct electricity and forms a layer that is selective to protons;
- A suitable chemical catalyst (4), covering or impregnating the anode (3), preferably as a nanoparticles.

Said composite membrane also comprises:

- an electrochemical catalyst which is suitable for oxidizing hydrogen, so as the resulting protons are able to permeate the electrolyte, and a second electrochemical catalyst suitable to receive protons and to reduce them, or to bring them into reaction with oxygen; said electrochemical catalysts are preferably present in interfaces anode (3) / electrolyte (2) and cathode (1) / electrolyte (2).

Said electrochemical catalyst on the anode side should be preferably deposited as nanoparticles, decorating the chemical catalyst, i.e., deposited on the chemical catalyst surface (4).

In a more preferred embodiment, the hydrogen permeated through the composite membrane can be oxidized to water on the cathode (1) electrode, by adding at least one gas injector (or gas feeder) in the permeated side (i.e., in the cathode (1) side), said fed gas should contain oxygen. This oxidation, which is catalyzed by means of an oxidation

catalyst or an electrochemical catalyst deposited on the cathode, preferably at the interface with the electrolyte, such as, for example, nanoparticles of platinum, enables the generation of an electric current, which in turn can help or even be enough for the electrical pumping of hydrogen, so totally or partly avoiding the need of a voltage difference being established, which otherwise would be necessary for the electrochemical pumping of hydrogen.

In another preferred embodiment, the catalytic membrane reactor with electrochemical pumping of hydrogen can further include at least one power supply, for generating an electrical voltage difference between both electrodes, this voltage difference being preferably 0.5 V.

In another preferred embodiment, the electrode being in contact with the reacting medium, the anode (3), can be palladium or a palladium and silver alloy, which can form a porous or dense film, permeable to hydrogen. In the case of a dense film, the chemical catalyst should be applied on the anode and the electrochemical catalyst should be applied in the anode (3) / electrolyte (2) interface.

In yet another preferred embodiment, the cathode electrode (1), may be of a dense palladium layer, porous palladium or another material being electrically conductive and permeable to hydrogen.

In a yet more preferred embodiment, said composite membrane, known as MEA (membrane electrode assembly) is supported on a ceramic or metallic membrane.

In a yet more preferred embodiment, the operating temperatures of said catalytic reactors with membrane, with electrochemical pumping of hydrogen or oxygen, may range to

600°C, preferably from 200°C to 500°C if electrolyte (2) is made of yttrium-doped zirconium phosphate.

In another more preferred embodiment, the electrolyte (2) may be a polybenzimidazole membrane (PBI) doped with phosphoric acid and the operating temperature should range from 120 °C to 200 °C.

Another purpose of present invention is the description of a catalytic membrane reactor, provided with means for the electrochemical pumping of oxygen and at least a composite membrane, said membrane consisting of:

- Two electrodes, an anode (3) and a cathode (1) sandwiching an electrolyte (2);
- Both anode (3) and cathode (1) are electrically conductive;
- Said electrolyte (2) is non-conductive and is permeable to anionic oxygen, i.e., it forms a layer that is selective to anionic oxygen;
- A catalyst (4), suitable for the chemical reaction and being impregnated in the anode (3), preferably as a nanoparticles;
- At least one gas injector (or gas feeder) in the cathode (1) side, said fed gas containing oxygen.

Said composite membrane also comprises:

- an electrochemical catalyst suitable for oxidizing oxygen ions emerging from the electrolyte, and an electrochemical catalyst suitable to reduce oxygen to anionic oxygen before penetrating into the electrolyte; preferably said electrochemical catalysts are present in interfaces anode (3) / electrolyte (2) and/or

cathode (1) / electrolyte (2) or doping the anode (3) and the cathode (1).

On the anode side, this catalyst should preferably be the same catalyst used in the chemical reaction. So, as soon as hydrogen is formed as a result of the amination chemical reaction it reacts with the oxygen supplied by electro-permeation.

So, as soon as permeated oxygen reacts with hydrogen coming from the chemical reaction, inside said reactor, an electrical potential difference arises, and said potential difference may be enough for the electrochemical oxygen pumping and so it will be not necessary to use an external electrical potential difference.

In another preferred embodiment the catalytic reactor with membrane, with electrochemical pumping of oxygen, also includes a power supply, which applies an electrical potential difference between both electrodes, preferably a potential difference ranging from 0,25 to 1,5 V, yet more preferably 0,5 V, so as to control feeding of oxygen to the reactor.

In a more preferred embodiment, the electrolyte (2) may consist of yttrium-doped zirconium oxide (YSZ).

In a yet more preferred embodiment, said composite membrane consists of three layers, wherein:

- The porous anode (3) may be a nickel and zirconium oxide cermet, stabilized with yttrium oxide;
- The electrolyte (2) may be YSZ;
- And the cathode (1) may be lanthanum strontium manganite.

In another yet more preferred embodiment, said composite membrane may be a typical solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC) membrane.

In a yet more preferred embodiment, the operating temperatures of the above-mentioned catalytic membrane reactors, with electrochemical pumping of oxygen, range from 500°C to 1000°C, preferably from 600°C to 1000 °C.

In another preferred embodiment, said gas fed into said catalytic membrane reactor with electrochemical pumping of oxygen, is the air.

The above-mentioned reactors may be used for the direct amination reaction of hydrocarbons, such as, for example, the benzene amination reaction for aniline production.

In a yet more preferred embodiment, the above-mentioned electrochemical pumping catalytic membrane reactor, with either hydrogen or oxygen electrochemical pumping, may include an assembly of tubular composite membranes. These membranes may contain the amination reaction catalyst as nanoparticles, on their inner surface or impregnated in the anode.

As previously mentioned, the membrane should have a suitable structure enabling the electrochemical pumping of the resulting hydrogen from the reacting medium and its permeation either to permeate side or to a cathode electrocatalyst where the permeating hydrogen will react with oxygen to produce water and electrical potential difference for pumping hydrogen towards to the cathode.

The description of a method for the direct amination of hydrocarbons, preferably benzene for aniline production, by reacting it with ammonia, in one of previously described catalytic reactors with membrane, is yet another purpose of this invention, said method comprising the following steps:

- The use of a catalytic reactor with membrane, working at the operation temperature and pressure;
- The introduction of a hydrocarbon and ammonia flow in the presence of a catalyst;
- The removal of the hydrogen formed in said reaction, by pumping hydrogen or oxygen, such that said membrane should enable the electrochemical pumping of hydrogen formed or the electrochemical pumping of oxygen to the catalyst surface.

In a preferred embodiment, both hydrocarbon and ammonia flows are introduced in stoichiometric amounts.

In another preferred embodiment the ammonia flow includes amounts above the stoichiometric amount.

Background of the invention

The use of electrochemical pumping of hydrogen or oxygen is described in the open literature concerning systems related with energy production such as fuel cells. In the case of hydrogen, electrochemical pumping is present in so called polymeric membrane electrolyte fuel cells or PEMFC, wherein the oxidation reaction on the cathode causes hydrogen permeation, under protonic form, from the anode to the cathode. On the other hand, the so-called solid oxide fuel cell or SOFC, the electrochemical reaction causes ionic oxygen to go from the cathode to the anode.

Cited literature also describes chemical reactions that may be undertaken with advantage in reactors with electrochemical pumping of hydrogen or oxygen, so called electrochemical membrane reactors [Marcano, S. and Tsotsis, T., "Catalytic Membranes and Membrane Reactors", Wiley-VCH, Chapter 2, 2002]. However, it was never considered before the use of said reactors for the direct amination reactions of hydrocarbons and namely the direct amination reaction of benzene to aniline.

This direct amination reaction of benzene was first proposed in 1917 by Wibaut, as mentioned by Dialer et al., 2008 [Dialer, H.; Frauenkron, M.; Evers, H.; Schwab, E.; Melder, Johann-Peter; Rosowski, F.; Van Laar, F.; Anders, Joachim-Thierry; Crone, S.; Mackenroth, W.; Direct amination of hydrocarbons. US Patent 2008/0146846 A1, 2008.]. Ever since, many efforts have been developed to improve the conversion rate of this reaction, which is limited by the thermodynamic equilibrium.

US 2009/0023956 Document discloses an exhaustive description of several advances achieved. One of the most successful approaches was achieved by Dupont, whose description can be found in Documents US3919155, US3929889, US4001260 and US 4031106, revealing the use of a Ni/NiO catalyst, wherein structural oxygen is used to oxidize the hydrogen formed. Both the catalyst and said process, however, present difficulties as far as the catalyst regeneration is concerned, as well as the maximum conversion that can be achieved is lower than 13% when working at 300°C and 300 bars.

More recently, Documents US 2009/0023956 and US 2009/0203941 disclose the addition of oxidizing gases to

the reactor and the use of a suitable catalyst for the internal oxidation of hydrogen to water. Those same patents also describe the use of a catalytic membrane reactor with a palladium or a palladium alloy membrane to carry out the direct amination reaction of benzene. A process is described, wherein hydrogen is removed from the reacting medium owing to the partial pressure difference between the retentate side (reacting medium) and the permeate side, wherein a sweep gas current is applied. This system enables the improvement of the benzene to aniline conversion up to 20 % of conversion.

General Description of the Invention

The electrochemical pumping of hydrogen or oxygen enables, respectively, the removal or the delivery of these reagents on the chemical catalyst surface. The hydrogen removal from the chemical catalyst surface, as soon as this is formed as a result of the direct amination reaction, enables a reaction equilibrium shift towards the products. In the case of the direct amination reaction of benzene, this pumping enables a benzene conversion above 40%.

Dehydrogenation reactions are a very important class of chemical reactions that can benefit from this new technology. The direct feeding of oxygen to the catalyst surface not only improves the reaction conversion rate, since it reacts with the hydrogen formed, but it also improves the selectivity of said reaction.

When the catalytic reactor with electrochemical pumping of hydrogen or oxygen, herein described, is used, a high conversion of benzene into aniline is achieved, by using:

- The electrochemical pumping of hydrogen – so removing hydrogen from the chemical catalyst surface;
- The electrochemical pumping of oxygen – so feeding oxygen to the catalyst surface, forcing oxygen to immediately react with formed hydrogen and improving the benzene conversion rate, so avoiding oxidation and by-products occurrence in the reacting medium, which is the case when oxygen is directly added to the reacting medium.

At present, aniline is typically synthesized from benzene in a reactive method with two steps: the reaction of benzene with nitric acid producing nitrobenzene, and the reaction of nitrobenzene with hydrogen to produce aniline. Aniline can also be synthesized from phenol or from chlorobenzene.

Brief Description of Drawings

For an easier understanding of this invention two figures were added as attachment, both representing preferred embodiments of present invention, without being intended to limit the invention's scope.

Figure 1 – a schematic representation of a composite membrane for a catalytic reactor with electrochemical pumping of hydrogen, wherein:

- (1) – is the cathode;
- (2) – is the electrolyte;
- (3) – is the electrode in contact with the reacting medium – the anode;
- (4) – is the catalyst.

Figure 2 - a schematic representation of a composite membrane for a catalytic reactor with electrochemical pumping of oxygen and reoxidation of the nickel catalyst, wherein:

- (1) - is the cathode;
- (2) - is the electrolyte;
- (3) - is the electrode in contact with the reacting medium - the anode;
- (4) - is the catalyst.

Detailed Description of the Invention

This invention describes the use of electrochemical pumping of hydrogen or oxygen, in a catalytic membrane reactor, with the purpose to increase the conversion rate of a chemical reaction occurring in said reactor and/or the selectivity of a direct amination of hydrocarbons.

The basis of this invention is the electrochemical pumping of hydrogen or oxygen to the catalyst surface, wherein the chemical reaction takes place, targeting to improve the amination reaction conversion and selectivity. The selectivity as well as conversion improvement is here achieved owing to direct removal of hydrogen from the catalyst surface, where said reaction takes place. This hydrogen removal can be obtained by the electrochemical pumping of hydrogen from the catalyst surface or by the electrochemical pumping of oxygen to the catalyst surface, where it reacts with hydrogen and water is formed. For this reaction the chemical catalyst may need to be modified, for example, by decorating the same with a suitable electrochemical catalyst. When electrochemical pumping of hydrogen is used, the electrocatalyst may consist of

platinum, and when electrochemical pumping of oxygen is used, the electrocatalyst may consist of nickel, which simultaneously acts as a chemical catalyst.

The catalytic membrane reactor, with electrochemical pumping of hydrogen or oxygen, makes use a composite membrane, with essentially three layers, the inner one being a suitable electrolyte (2) and both the external layers being the electrodes. The chemical and/or electrochemical catalysts will be deposited on the electrodes or in the interface between the electrode and the electrolyte. The exact electrocatalyst localization depends on whether the electrodes allow the existence of an ionic transport between the electrocatalysts surface and the electrolyte, or not.

In the case of hydrogen, the external layers or the electrodes should be electrically conductive, to collect the electrons formed at or to delivery electrons at the electrocatalyst, and may consist of palladium or a palladium and silver alloy. The cathode, i.e., the external layer, may consist of a porous metallic layer. The electrolyte should be conductive to protons and should be essentially selected according to the reactor operating temperature, and may be a polymer, for example, a perfluorated polymer such as Nafion (for temperatures until 90°C), or phosphoric acid doped polybenzimidazol (for temperatures from 120°C to 200°C), or it can be yttrium doped zirconium phosphate ceramics (for temperatures from 200°C to 600°C). The reactor membrane can further be supported over e.g. a sintered stainless steel membrane. Applying an electrical potential difference between the conductive layers will cause the hydrogen to permeate from inside the reactor to the outside. If oxygen or a gas mixture containing oxygen is present at the cathode side,

this can be used to promote a redox reaction, which in turn causes an electrical potential difference necessary to the hydrogen permeation to arise. For example, in the case of the direct amination reaction of benzene, the hydrogen permeation by electrochemical pumping can be accomplished through the hydrogen oxidation at the cathode side. This redox reaction, which can be catalyzed by platinum nanoparticles deposited in the interface between the electrolyte (2) and the cathode (1), causes a potential difference up to 1 V to arise. This potential difference causes the hydrogen permeation according to a process similar to the one occurring inside a PEMFC.

The oxygen permeation into the chemical reactor, caused by electrochemical pumping, can also be achieved by the redox reaction with the hydrogen formed inside the reactor. In those cases, the application of an external electric potential bias is minimized and may be not necessary at all.

The electrochemical catalysts should be deposited at the surfaces of the electrolyte, so enabling the resulting ions, both protons and oxygen ions, to migrate to inside the electrolyte or from this one. They can also be impregnated in the electrodes, if an ionic bridge with protons or oxygen anions, from or into the electrolyte. On the other hand, the electrocatalysts should be deposited close to the chemical catalyst, so as the resulting hydrogen can be removed or the permeated oxygen can be added. In a preferred arrangement the electrochemical catalyst in nanoparticles form should be deposited decorating the chemical catalyst. The electric current conduction will be provided by the electrodes. These should enable reagents to have free access to the chemical catalyst, both on the anode and on the cathode.

In the case when the electrocatalyst is deposited in the interface between the anode and the electrolyte and the chemical catalyst is deposited on the anode, to make the hydrogen transport more efficient the chemical reaction catalyst may be decorated with palladium. This metal makes the hydrogen transport from the catalyst surface to the membrane surface easier.

The oxygen electrochemical pumping takes place at temperatures within the range from 500°C to 1000°C. Even in the case of oxygen electrochemical pumping, the membrane reactor should consist of three layers: the porous anode (3), which consists, for example, of an electrically conductive yttrium stabilized nickel and zirconia cermet (YSZ) layer; the electrolyte (2), forming a non electrically conductive dense layer, usually a YSZ layer, which is selective to oxygen; and the cathode, consisting for example of a electrically conductive lanthanum strontium manganite (LSM) layer. By applying an electrical potential difference to the electrodes it is possible to control the amount of oxygen added to the reaction medium. Oxygen under ionic form (O^{2-}) goes through the electrolyte (2). When oxygen is added to the reacting medium, where hydrogen is formed, e.g., in the case of the direct amination reaction of benzene, it reacts with hydrogen, so creating an electrical potential difference, similarly to a fuel cell. In this case, external electrical potential bias need becomes minimized and may be not necessary at all.

The oxygen feeding may be controlled applying a suitable electrical potential to the electrochemical pumping catalytic membrane reactor. Oxygen is delivered directly into the chemical catalyst. This membrane is similar to those used in solid oxide fuel cells (SOFC). It consists of

three layers: the porous anode (3), which consists, for example, of an electrically conductive layer of yttrium stabilized nickel and zirconia cermet (YSZ); the electrolyte (2), forming a non electrically conductive dense layer, usually an YSZ layer, which is selective to oxygen ions; and the cathode, consisting, for example, of electrically conductive lanthanum strontium manganite (LSM).

The catalysts for the direct amination of benzene are broadly described on the literature. However, it seems that nickel-based catalysts are the most active ones. Nickel use has two advantages: it is used in the anode (3) as a catalyst for the amination reaction and as an element necessary to this layer. A nickel catalyst, decorated with palladium and/or platinum, can also be used, in order to enable the adsorption of the hydrogen formed during the amination and its further catalytic oxidation with permeated oxygen.

Accordingly, the electrochemical pumping of oxygen is essential for removing the hydrogen formed and so to improve the conversion and the selectivity of said amination reaction. On the other hand, it also enables the continuous regeneration of structural oxygen from said nickel catalyst, through direct supply of oxygen to the catalyst. This process minimizes the production of by-products, which are formed with oxygen is added directly to the reactor feeding flow.

This reactor operates at a temperature between 500°C and 1000°C, which is the temperature range wherein the electrolyte (2) is conductive to oxygen ions.

For a better understanding of this invention, two examples of preferred embodiments of the invention are described below, said examples being not intended to anyhow limit the scope of present invention.

Example 1

A catalytic reactor with membrane, equipped with means for the electrochemical pumping of oxygen, said means consisting of a composite catalytic membrane, wherein the catalyst for the direct amination reaction of benzene is a bimetallic catalyst with nickel/nickel oxide and platinum nanoparticles; the electrocatalyst in the permeate side is a catalyst with platinum nanoparticles; the porous anode (3) consists for example of a nickel and zirconium oxide cermet, stabilized with yttrium oxide (YSZ); the cathode (1) consists for example of lanthanum strontium manganite (LSM); the electrolyte (2) is yttrium-doped zirconium phosphate.

Example 2

A electrocatalytic pumping catalytic membrane reactor, wherein hydrogen can be removed from the chemical catalyst surface by means of electrochemical pumping of hydrogen, comprising a nickel/nickel oxide chemical catalyst to provide the direct amination reaction of benzene to aniline, decorated with platinum nanoparticles, which in turn provide the hydrogen electro-oxidation. The composite catalyst should be deposited in the interface between the anode (3) and the electrolyte (2); the anode (3) consists of a porous palladium membrane with ca. 1 μm thickness; the electrolyte (2) consists of yttrium-doped zirconium phosphate; the cathode (1) consists of a porous palladium

membrane with 0.5 μm thickness. In the interface electrolyte (2) / cathode should be deposited a platinum electrocatalyst as nanoparticles. This is intended either to provide the hydrogen reduction, or its reaction with oxygen.

Example 3

A electrocatalytic pumping catalytic membrane reactor, wherein oxygen is electrochemically pumped to the chemical catalyst surface, comprising a nickel/nickel oxide chemical catalyst to provide the direct amination reaction of benzene and the oxygen electro-oxidation. This composite membrane is made of a porous YSZ anode (3) impregnated with the nickel/nickel oxide catalyst; impermeable YSZ electrolyte (2) layer; lanthanum strontium manganite (LSM) cathode (1) layer.

The following claims provide additional preferred embodiments of this invention.

CLAIMS

1. A catalytic membrane reactor, comprising means for carrying out the electrochemical pumping of hydrogen, said membrane comprising:
 - Two electrodes, an anode (3) and a cathode (1), sandwiching an electrolyte (2); both anode (3) and cathode (1) are electrically conductive; said electrolyte (2) is non electrically conductive and forms a layer which is selective to protons (e.g. do not transport neither reactants nor products);
 - A suitable chemical catalyst (4), deposited on the anode (3), or in the interface between the anode (3) and the electrolyte (2);
 - Said anode (3) containing an electrocatalyst for the hydrogen oxidation, impregnating the anode (3) or deposited in the interface between the anode (3) and the electrolyte (2);
 - Said cathode (1) containing an electrocatalyst for hydrogen reduction, impregnating the cathode (1) or deposited in the interface between the electrolyte (2) and the cathode (1).
2. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in claim 1, wherein said reactor can further comprise a power supply that applies an electrical potential difference between both electrodes.

3. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in claim 1, wherein said reactor further comprises a system for feeding to the cathode a gaseous flow containing oxygen.
4. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of prior claims, wherein said chemical catalyst (4) is present under a nanoparticle form.
5. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein said chemical catalyst (4) is decorated with the platinum or palladium electrocatalyst, both under a nanoparticle form.
6. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein said chemical catalyst (4) is under a nanoparticle form and is deposited on the anode.
7. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein said catalyst is deposited between the anode (3) and the electrolyte (2), said anode being porous.
8. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein said anode (3) consists of palladium or a palladium and silver alloy.

9. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8, wherein said cathode (1) consists of palladium or porous palladium layer.
10. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein the composite membrane is supported on a ceramics or metallic porous membrane.
11. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein the electrolyte (2) consists of a phosphoric acid-doped polybenzimidazole membrane, and the working temperature range goes from 120°C to 200°C.
12. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein the working temperatures go to 600°C.
13. A catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12, wherein the electrolyte (2) is of yttrium-doped zirconium phosphate (YSZ) and the working temperature range goes from 120°C to 600°C.
14. A catalytic membrane reactor with membrane, comprising means for carrying out the electrochemical pumping of oxygen equipped with a composite membrane, said membrane comprising:
 - Two electrodes, an anode (3) and a cathode (1) sandwiching an electrolyte (2); both anode (3) and

cathode (1) are electrically conductive; and said electrolyte (2) is non electrically conductive and is selective to anionic oxygen;

- A suitable chemical catalyst (4), which is present under a nanoparticle form and is impregnated in the anode (3);
- At lest one gas feeder in the cathode (1) side, said fed gas mixture containing oxygen;
- The anode (3) is impregnated, or it contains an electrocatalyst for the oxygen oxidation, deposited in the interface anode (3) / electrolyte (2);
- The cathode (1) is impregnated, or it contains an electrocatalyst deposited in the interface between the electrolyte (2) and the cathode (1).

15. The catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in prior claim, wherein it further includes a power supply that applies an electrical potential difference between both electrodes.

16. The catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in claims 14-15, wherein said composite membrane is a typical solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC) membrane.

17. The catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 14 to 16, wherein the working temperature ranging from 500°C to 1000°C.

- 18.** The catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of claims 14 to 16, wherein the fed gas is air.
- 19.** The catalytic membrane reactor as claimed in any one of prior claims, wherein it comprises a bundle of tubular composite membranes.
- 20.** A method for the direct amination reaction of hydrocarbons, characterized in that it consists of the following steps:
- The use of a catalytic membrane reactor, as the one described in any one of prior claims, at the operation temperature and pressure;
 - The feeding of a hydrocarbon and ammonia flow in the presence of a suitable catalyst;
 - The removal of the hydrogen formed in said reaction, by pumping hydrogen or oxygen, so that said membrane should be able to enable the electrochemical pumping of hydrogen formed in the reaction medium or the electrochemical pumping of oxygen to the chemical catalyst surface for oxidizing the hydrogen formed.
- 21.** A method for the direct amination, as claimed in prior claim, wherein said hydrocarbon and ammonia feed flows are fed in stoichiometric proportions.
- 22.** A method for the direct amination, as claimed in claims 20 to 21, wherein the ammonia is fed above the stoichiometric proportion compared to the hydrocarbon feed.

- 23.** A method for the direct amination, as claimed in claims 20 to 22, wherein said hydrocarbon is benzene and the reaction product is aniline.