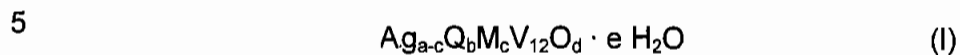


Abstract

A novel metal oxide of the general formula (I)



where a has a value from 3 to 10, Q is an element selected from P, As, Sb and/or Bi, b has a value from 0.2 to 3, M is a metal, c has a value from 0 to 3, with the proviso that (a-c) $\geq$ 0.1, d is a number which is determined by the valency and frequency of the elements in the formula (I) other than oxygen, and e has a value from 0 to 20, which is present in a crystal structure whose powder X-ray diffractogram is characterized by reflections at at least 5 interplanar spacings selected from d = 7.13; 5.52; 5.14; 3.57; 3.25; 2.83; 2.79; 2.73; 2.23 and 1.71 Å ($\pm$ 0.04 Å). The multimetal oxides are used to prepare precatalysts and catalysts for the gas phase partial oxidation of aromatic hydrocarbons. The multimetal oxides are converted by heat treatment to silver-vanadium oxide bronzes which are the catalytically active component of the catalysts.