

Description

The present invention relates to an apparatus separating a dispersed liquid phase from a continuous liquid phase by electrostatic coalescence and to a process in which use is made of such an apparatus, in particular a process for dehydrating hydrocarbon liquid emulsions in which such an apparatus is employed.

The term "coalescence" may be defined as the coming together of small droplets of liquid to form larger droplets permitting easier and more rapid phase separation. One of the methods for achieving coalescence of liquid droplets comprises subjecting a liquid emulsion to a suitable electric field of sufficient intensity to cause the dispersed liquid phase to coalesce. It will be understood that such an electrical treatment is only suitable if the dispersed liquid phase is relatively conductive and the continuous liquid phase is relatively non-conductive. The technique of electrostatic coalescence is well known and is widely applied, in particular in processes for dehydrating hydrocarbon liquid emulsions, such as crude oil desalted by washing with fresh water.

A large variety of different types of electrostatic separators have been proposed in the past and are commercially applied. Some of these separators are designed to produce uniform electric fields for effecting droplet-coalescence, whereas other separators are provided with internals to produce a non-uniform electric field for generating droplet-coalescence. In a uniform electric field the lines of forces are parallel to one another and the field strength is constant throughout the space between the electrodes. In a non-uniform electric field, however, the lines of forces are not parallel to one another and the field strength will therefore be a function of the location in the field.

The known electrostatic separators for liquid/liquid separation are normally equipped with electrodes having such a configuration that during operation uniform electric fields are generated. US-A-3,582,527, for example, describes a system for resolving an emulsion by electrostatic coalescence, in which a vessel is used provided with electrode means extending over the entire cross-section of the vessel to guarantee that the emulsion is completely subjected to a uniform electric field. The major part of various types of electrostatic separators used for treating liquid emulsions is of the so-called uniform electric field type. The electrostatic separators for separating solids from a continuous liquid phase or a gas phase, on the contrary, are normally provided with electrode means enabling the generation of non-uniform electric fields. Although the latter type of electric field is less prone to maloperation due to short-circuiting, a problem in particular occurring in separators for liquid emulsions, this type of electric field is hardly applied in liquid/liquid separators.

U.S.-A-3,577,336 is one of the relatively few publications describing an electric treater for

liquid emulsions provided with rod-like electrodes in combination with electrode surfaces that are substantially planar to generate non-uniform electric fields.

An object of the present invention is to further improve the known type of electrostatic separators in order to increase the separation efficiency, whilst simultaneously the risk of short-circuiting is eliminated or at least substantially minimized.

The apparatus for separating a dispersed liquid phase from a continuous liquid phase by electrostatic coalescence according to the invention thus comprises an elongated vessel with an inlet conduit, down-stream of the inlet conduit in series at least a first compartment and a second compartment, and outlet conduits down-stream of the second compartment, said compartments being in fluid communication with one another and being each provided with a plurality of substantially parallel, substantially cylindrical and open ended cathodic elements arranged in the main flow direction, and a plurality of rod-like anodic elements, each anodic element being substantially concentrically arranged inside a cathodic element, wherein cathodic elements of an up-stream compartment have cross-sectional areas being substantially larger than the cross-sectional areas of cathodic elements of a down-stream compartment, the vessel further comprising an exit compartment provided with a mechanical separating device comprising a plurality of substantially parallel surfaces arranged at an inclination with respect to the main flow direction.

During operation of the afore-mentioned apparatus, a liquid mixture of a continuous liquid phase with droplets of a second liquid dispersed therein is caused to flow via the inlet conduit of the vessel in longitudinal direction through the cylindrical cathodic elements of the first compartment and subsequently through the narrower cylindrical cathodic elements of the second compartment and through the cathodic elements of further compartments, if any are present. In the first compartment the large droplets in the continuous phase will first tend to coalesce under the influence of the electrical forces generated. The large droplets, especially if they coalesce with one another, might form a risk for short-circuiting between the cathodic and the anodic elements. The distance between the cathodic elements and the accompanying anodic elements in the first compartment should therefore be chosen relatively large. If the coalesced droplets are large enough, they will begin to separate from the continuous liquid phase by gravitation. The continuous liquid phase leaving the first compartment will contain only a minor amount of dispersed liquid phase in the form of only small droplets. In the second compartment, the liquid is for a second time subjected to electrical forces, promoting a further separation of the dispersed liquid phase by coalescing and subsequently gravitation. Since the risk of short-circuiting in the second compartment is less pronounced due to

the reduced number of oversized liquid droplets, the distance between the cathodic elements and accompanying anodic elements in this second compartment may be substantially smaller than the corresponding distance in the first compartment. Smaller distances between the cathodic and the anodic elements involves that the further compartments can be more effectively filled with such elements, which in its turn means that higher separation efficiencies are obtainable.

The cathodic elements are preferably grounded via the body of the vessel. Said elements are suitably formed by substantially cylindrical perforated cages to enable an easy removal of coalesced liquid droplets from the continuous liquid phase. It should be noted that adherence of liquid droplets to the cathodic elements might adversely affect the electrical fields generated between the cathodic elements and the anodic elements. By perforating the cathodic elements such adherence of liquid can be largely eliminated.

The rod-like anodic elements are preferably coated with a thin layer of insulating material, for example PERSPEX* or TEFLON*, to prevent direct contact of the anodic elements with the liquid mixture. The use of an electrically insulating material on the anodic elements reduces the loss of charge which can occur by short-circuiting through the liquid dispersion. It should be noted that for the same reason the cathodic elements might also be coated with such a thin layer of insulating material. As already mentioned hereinbefore it is however preferred to apply perforated cathodic elements so that not only loss of charge is prevented but also an escape for dispersed liquid from the cathodic enclosures is created. In addition to the perforations of the cathodic elements, these elements may be further provided with a thin layer of insulating material for further reducing the risk of short-circuiting.

In the proposed apparatus, both continuous AC and pulsed DC can be used. It has been found that a pulsed DC field is superior to a continuous AC field, in particular at low voltages applied. For both the continuous AC and the pulsed DC apparatus the field strengths are in the order of tens to hundreds of kilovolts/m.

It has further been found that the separation efficiency is dependent on the concentration of dispersed phase, in that fluids with a relatively low concentration of dispersed phase should be subjected to electric fields of relatively high strength.

The apparatus according to the invention is further provided with an exit compartment provided with a mechanical separator device formed by a plurality of parallel, flat or corrugated, surfaces arranged at an inclination with respect to the flow of liquid from the previous compartment. The advantage of having such a mechanical separator device in addition to the electrostatic

separator elements may be explained as follows. Electrical forces are on the one hand advantageous for promoting the formation of enlarged droplets, but they are on the other hand particularly detrimental in the exit region of an electric field. Under the influence of electrical forces the droplet dispersal mechanism is such that the droplets produced are much smaller than the original droplet. When produced in the exit region of an electric field these droplets do not recombine and are generally of such a small size that quite long retention times are required for their gravitation if settling distances are appreciable. By providing a further mechanical separator unit the retention times can be significantly reduced.

The invention will now be described by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 shows a schematic view of a vertical section of a first apparatus according to the invention;

Figure 2 shows a cross-section of Figure 1 taken along the lines II—II;

Figure 3 shows a schematic view of a vertical section of a second apparatus according to the invention; and

Figure 4 shows a cross-section of Figure 3 taken along the lines IV—IV.

Referring to Figures 1 and 2, a horizontally extending version of an apparatus according to the invention is shown. The shown apparatus comprises a horizontally extending elongated vessel 1 having an inlet conduit 2 at one end thereof for a liquid dispersion and two outlet conduits 3 and 4 at its opposite end for separate withdrawal of liquid forming the continuous phase of the introduced dispersion and of the liquid forming the dispersed phase of the introduced dispersion, respectively. The interior of the vessel 1 is divided into three compartments, indicated with reference numerals 5, 6 and 7, the compartments being bounded by substantially vertically extending baffles 8, 9 and a perforated baffle 10. Near the inlet conduit 2, the vessel is provided with a liquid distributor formed by a substantially vertically extending perforated baffle 11. The compartments 5 and 6 are each provided with a plurality of vertically extending cylindrical and open ended elements 12 with perforated walls, said elements being grounded via the body of the vessel 1 so as to create the cathodes. Said elements may for example be formed of expanded metal. The elements 12 of the first compartment 5 have a larger diameter than the elements 12 in further compartment 6, in view of the higher risk of short-circuiting occurring during operation in the first compartment. The shown apparatus further comprises a plurality of anodic elements 13 in the form of elongated rods extending substantially concentrically with the cathodic elements 12. The anodic elements 13 are connectable to a not shown, high-voltage source. The anodic and cathodic elements 12 and 13 are provided with a thin layer

* Registered Trademark

of insulating material, such as TEFLON, not separately indicated in the Figures.

Exit compartment 7 of the apparatus is provided with a mechanical separator unit 14 consisting of a plurality of parallel plates arranged at angle with respect to the horizontal. The main flow direction of liquid through the apparatus has been indicated in the Figures 1 and 3 with arrows.

The separation of a dispersed liquid phase from a continuous liquid phase using the above apparatus will now be described for a water-in-hydrocarbon emulsion. The water-in-hydrocarbon emulsion is introduced into vessel 1 via inlet conduit 2, is distributed over substantially the full height of the vessel via the perforated baffle 11 and flows subsequently in downward direction through the spaces enclosed by the cathodic elements 12 of the first compartment 5. In this compartment the water-in-oil emulsion is subjected to pulsed DC fields generated via the anodic elements 13. The electrical fields cause formation of the water into drops of increased size. Part of them are large enough to initiate their coagulation into a body of water in the lower part of vessel 1. After having passed through compartment 5, the hydrocarbon liquid, already dehydrated to a considerable extent, will flow in upward direction through the interiors of the cathodic elements of the second compartment 6. In this second compartment the hydrocarbon liquid is subjected to a further electrostatic treatment. Since the cathodic elements in compartment 6 are substantially smaller in diameter than those in compartment 5, the electric fields generated via the anodic elements in this further compartment are substantially stronger enabling a further coalescence of dispersed liquid droplets. The liquid is subsequently caused to flow along the parallel plates of the mechanical separator unit 14. Small water droplets, still present in the continuous hydrocarbon phase, contact the surface of the plates and travel along said surfaces while additional coalescence takes place. The water leaves the surfaces of the plates with droplet sizes large enough to gravitate downward towards the bottom part of the vessel 1. The hydrocarbon liquid ascends to join the collected liquid in the upper part of exit compartment 7. The separated hydrocarbon liquid and the separated water are subsequently recovered via outlet conduit 3 and outlet conduit 4, respectively.

Reference is now made to Figures 3 and 4 showing an alternative of the apparatus shown in Figures 1 and 2. Identical elements shown in both sets of Figures have been indicated with the same reference numerals. The further shown apparatus, being of the so-called vertical type, comprises a substantially cylindrical, vertically extending vessel 20. The vessel is subdivided into a plurality of compartments 21, 22 and 23 arranged above one another and formed by substantially horizontal partition walls 24, 25 and 26. The partition walls 24, 25 and 26 are of such a shape that passages 27 are left between edges of said walls and the inner surface of vessel 20,

allowing the downward flow of liquid during operation of the vessel. The lower compartment 23, in which the mechanical separator device 14 is arranged, is further provided with a substantially vertically extending baffle 28 provided with perforations for the distribution of liquid over the full height of separator device 14.

For the operation of the apparatus shown in Figures 3 and 4, reference is made to the description of the first shown apparatus.

It should be noted that although the Figures show only two electrostatic separator compartments an apparatus according to the invention may be provided with more than two compartments provided with electrostatic separator means.

Claims

1. Apparatus for separating a dispersed liquid phase from a continuous liquid phase by electrostatic coalescence which comprises an elongated vessel with an inlet conduit, down-stream of the inlet conduit in series at least a first compartment and a second compartment, and outlet conduits down-stream of the second compartment, said compartments being in fluid communication with one another and being each provided with a plurality of substantially parallel, substantially cylindrical and open ended cathodic elements arranged in the main flow direction, and a plurality of rod-like anodic elements, each anodic element being substantially concentrically arranged inside a cathodic element, wherein cathodic elements of an up-stream compartment have cross-sectional areas being substantially larger than the cross-sectional areas of cathodic elements of a down-stream compartment, the vessel further comprising an exit compartment provided with a mechanical separating device comprising a plurality of substantially parallel surfaces arranged at an inclination with respect to the main flow direction.

2. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the cathodic elements are grounded via the body of the vessel.

3. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the cathodic elements are formed by substantially cylindrical perforated cages.

4. Apparatus as claimed in any one of the claims 1—3, wherein the anodic elements are provided with a thin layer of insulating material.

5. Apparatus as claimed in any one of the claims 1—4, wherein the cathodic elements are provided with a thin layer of insulating material.

6. Process for separating a dispersed liquid phase from a continuous liquid phase by electrostatic coalescence, in which process an apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims is used.

7. A process as claimed in claim 6, wherein the liquid phases are subjected to pulsed DC fields.

8. Process as claimed in claim 6 or 7, wherein the dispersed liquid phase is water and the continuous liquid phase is a hydrocarbon liquid.

of insulating material, such as TEFLON, not separately indicated in the Figures.

Exit compartment 7 of the apparatus is provided with a mechanical separator unit 14 consisting of a plurality of parallel plates arranged at angle with respect to the horizontal. The main flow direction of liquid through the apparatus has been indicated in the Figures 1 and 3 with arrows.

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Reference is now made to Figures 3 and 4 showing an alternative of the apparatus shown in Figures 1 and 2. Identical elements shown in both sets of Figures have been indicated with the same reference numerals. The further shown apparatus, being of the so-called vertical type, comprises a substantially cylindrical, vertically extending vessel 20. The vessel is subdivided into a plurality of compartments 21, 22 and 23 arranged above one another and formed by substantially horizontal partition walls 24, 25 and 26. The partition walls 24, 25 and 26 are of such a shape that passages 27 are left between edges of said walls and the inner surface of vessel 20,

allowing the downward flow of liquid during operation of the vessel. The lower compartment 23, in which the mechanical separator device 14 is arranged, is further provided with a substantially vertically extending baffle 28 provided with perforations for the distribution of liquid over the full height of separator device 14.

For the operation of the apparatus shown in Figures 3 and 4, reference is made to the description of the first shown apparatus.

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1. Apparatus for separating a dispersed liquid phase from a continuous liquid phase by electrostatic coalescence which comprises an elongated vessel with an inlet conduit, down-stream of the inlet conduit in series at least a first compartment and a second compartment, and outlet conduits down-stream of the second compartment, said compartments being in fluid communication with one another and being each provided with a plurality of substantially parallel, substantially cylindrical and open ended cathodic elements arranged in the main flow direction, and a plurality of rod-like anodic elements, each anodic element being substantially concentrically arranged inside a cathodic element, wherein cathodic elements of an up-stream compartment have cross-sectional areas being substantially larger than the cross-sectional areas of cathodic elements of a down-stream compartment, the vessel further comprising an exit compartment provided with a mechanical separating device comprising a plurality of substantially parallel surfaces arranged at an inclination with respect to the main flow direction.

2. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the cathodic elements are grounded via the body of the vessel.

3. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the cathodic elements are formed by substantially cylindrical perforated cages.

4. Apparatus as claimed in any one of the claims 1—3, wherein the anodic elements are provided with a thin layer of insulating material.

5. Apparatus as claimed in any one of the claims 1—4, wherein the cathodic elements are provided with a thin layer of insulating material.

6. Process for separating a dispersed liquid phase from a continuous liquid phase by electrostatic coalescence, in which process an apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims is used.

7. A process as claimed in claim 6, wherein the liquid phases are subjected to pulsed DC fields.

8. Process as claimed in claim 6 or 7, wherein the dispersed liquid phase is water and the continuous liquid phase is a hydrocarbon liquid.



Patentansprüche

1. Vorrichtung zum Abtrennen einer dispergierten flüssigen Phase von einer kontinuierlichen flüssigen Phase durch elektrostatische Koaleszenz, umfassend ein langgestrecktes Gefäß mit einer Einlaßleitung, stromabwärts der Einlaßleitung in Reihe wenigstens eine erste Kammer und eine zweite Kammer, und Auslaßleitungen stromabwärts der zweiten Kammer, wobei die Kammern sich in Fluidverbindung miteinander befinden und jede mit einer Mehrzahl von im wesentlichen parallelen, im wesentlichen zylindrischen kathodischen Elementen, die offene Enden haben und in der Hauptströmungsrichtung angeordnet sind, und einer Mehrzahl von stangenartigen anodischen Elementen versehen ist, von denen jedes im wesentlichen konzentrisch innerhalb eines kathodischen Elementes angeordnet ist, wobei die kathodischen Elemente einer stromaufwärtigen Kammer Querschnittsflächen haben, die beträchtlich größer sind als die Querschnittsflächen der kathodischen Elemente einer stromabwärtigen Kammer, wobei das Gefäß weiterhin eine Austrittskammer aufweist, die mit einer mechanischen Trenneinrichtung versehen ist, welche eine Mehrzahl von im wesentlichen parallelen Flächen aufweist, die mit Bezug auf die Hauptströmungsrichtung in einer Schräglage angeordnet sind.

2. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 1, bei welcher die kathodischen Elemente über das Gehäuse des Gefäßes geerdet sind.

3. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, in welcher die kathodischen Elemente durch im wesentlichen zylindrische perforierte Käfige gebildet sind.

4. Vorrichtung nach irgendeinem der Ansprüche 1 bis 3, in welcher die anodischen Elemente mit einer dünnen Schicht aus Isoliermaterial versehen sind.

5. Vorrichtung nach irgendeinem der Ansprüche 1 bis 4, in welcher die kathodischen Elemente mit einer dünnen Schicht aus Isoliermaterial versehen sind.

6. Verfahren zum Abtrennen einer dispergierten flüssigen Phase von einer kontinuierlichen flüssigen Phase durch elektrostatische Koaleszenz, bei welchem eine Vorrichtung gemäß irgendeinem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche verwendet wird.

7. Verfahren nach Anspruch 6, bei welchem die flüssigen Phasen impulsförmigen Gleichstromfeldern unterworfen werden.

8. Verfahren nach Anspruch 6 oder 7, in welchem die dispergierte flüssige Phase Wasser,

und die kontinuierliche flüssige Phase eine Kohlenwasserstoffflüssigkeit ist.

Revendications

1. Appareil pour séparer une phase liquide dispersée d'une phase liquide continue par coalescence électrostatique qui comprend un récipient allongé avec un conduit d'entrée, en aval du conduit d'entrée en série au moins un premier compartiment et un second compartiment, et des conduits de sortie en aval du second compartiment, ces compartiments étant en libre communication entre eux et étant pourvus chacun de plusieurs éléments cathodiques sensiblement parallèles, sensiblement cylindriques et à extrémités ouvertes disposés dans la direction principale d'écoulement, et plusieurs éléments anodiques en forme de tiges, chaque élément anodique étant disposé de manière sensiblement coaxiale à l'intérieur d'un élément cathodique, où les éléments cathodiques d'un compartiment situé en amont ont des sections sensiblement plus grandes que les sections d'éléments cathodiques d'un compartiment situé en aval, le récipient comprenant en outre un compartiment de sortie pourvu d'un dispositif de séparation mécanique comprenant plusieurs surfaces sensiblement parallèles présentant une inclinaison par rapport à la direction principale d'écoulement.

2. Appareil selon la revendication 1, dans lequel les éléments cathodiques sont mis à la terre par l'intermédiaire du corps du récipient.

3. Appareil selon la revendication 1 ou 2, dans lequel les éléments cathodiques sont formés par des cages perforées sensiblement cylindriques.

4. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1—3, dans lequel les éléments anodiques sont pourvus d'une couche mince de matière isolante.

5. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1—4, dans lequel les éléments cathodiques sont pourvus d'une couche mince de matière isolante.

6. Procédé pour séparer une phase liquide dispersée d'une phase liquide continue par coalescence électrostatique, dans lequel on utilise un appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes.

7. Procédé selon la revendication 6, dans lequel les phases liquides sont soumises à des champs de courant continu pulsé.

8. Procédé selon la revendication 6 ou 7, dans lequel la phase liquide dispersée est de l'eau et la phase liquide continue est un liquide hydrocarboné.

