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(54) **Title:** METHOD FOR THE SYNTHESIS OF N-PHOSPHONOMETHYLIMINODIACETIC ACID

(57) **Abstract:** The present invention is related to a method for the synthesis of N- phosphonoalkyliminodiacetic acid or derivatives thereof comprising the steps of: a) forming a reaction mixture comprising an acid catalyst, a compound having the general formula $R^1 - CH_2 - NX - CH_2 - R^2$ and a compound having one or more P-O-P anhydride moieties, to form a compound having the general formula $R^1 - CH_2 - N - CH_2(P(O_3H_2)) - CH_2 - R^2$, its dehydrated forms or their derivatives, wherein - the compound of the formula $R^1 - CH_2 - NX - CH_2 - R^2$ is characterized in that: - X is $-CH_2-OH$ or $-CH_2-COOH$; - R^1 and R^2 are independently selected from the group consisting of nitrile, C1 -C4 alkyl carboxylate, or are both carbonyl groups linked by means of a hydrogen substituted nitrogen atom or a C1 -C4- akyl substituted nitrogen atom; - the P-O-P anhydride comprising compound is characterized in that said anhydride moieties comprise one P atom at the oxidation state (+I II) and one P atom at the oxidation state (+I II) or (+V); and b) hydrolysing the reaction mixture to form N- phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid or one of its derivatives.



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**METHOD FOR THE SYNTHESIS OF
N-PHOSPHONOMETHYLIMINODIACETIC ACID**

Field of the Invention

10 **[0001]** The present invention is related to the synthesis of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid or derivatives thereof.

State of the Art

15 **[0002]** As disclosed in for example EP0595598 patent N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid in general serves as an intermediate in the preparation of N-(phosphonomethyl)glycine, which is an important broad spectrum herbicide,. Furthermore, for N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid itself useful phytotoxicity is reported in for example US patent 3,455,675.

20 **[0003]** A typical process for the preparation of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid is described in example 2, of US patent 3,455,675 wherein aminodiacetic acid hydrochloride is reacted with formaldehyde and phosphorous acid in the presence of hydrochloric acid; the use of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid and some of its derivatives as selective phytotoxicant on grasses and other noxious weeds is disclosed.

25 **[0004]** Many other processes for the manufacture of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid are known and are already subject to numerous publications.

30 **[0005]** CH275435 patent discloses a method for the preparation of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid wherein aminomethylphosphonic acid is reacted with chloroacetic acid at a pH comprised between 9.5 and 11.

35 **[0006]** DE3903715 patent discloses a process wherein N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid is prepared from the calcium salt of iminodiacetic acid. The calcium salt of iminodiacetic acid is obtained from the addition of calcium hydroxide to a reaction mixture comprising an aqueous solution of chloroacetic acid and ammonia. The iminodiacetic acid calcium salt is then heated with concentrated hydrochloric acid. The iminodiacetic acid hydrogen-chloride, thus obtained, is

separated and then dissolved in water and finally reacted with phosphorous acid and with an aqueous solution of formaldehyde.

[0007] DE3903716 patent discloses a method for the preparation of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid and lower alkyl C₁-C₄ acid chloride, simultaneously prepared by reacting phosphorus trichloride and C₁-C₄ carboxylic acid. The phosphorous acidic phase containing carboxylic acid and carboxylic acid chloride, after dilution with water, is reacted with iminodiacetic acid and an aqueous solution of formaldehyde in the presence of a strong mineral acid, preferably hydrochloric acid.

[0008] ES2018746 patent discloses a process for obtaining N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid which comprises reacting methylene-diiminodiacetonitrile in an aqueous solution with formaldehyde, phosphorous acid and a strong mineral acid.

[0009] US patent 4,211,547 discloses N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetonitrile and arylesters and salts thereof, prepared by first forming an alkalimetal salt of aminomethylphosphonic acid and reacting the salt with formaldehyde; thereafter the intermediate product is reacted with potassium cyanide. In a further step, N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetonitrile is converted into N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid by acid hydrolysis in hydrochloric acid.

[0010] WO02055527 patent application discloses a method for producing N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid by reacting an alkali metal salt of iminodiacetic acid with phosphorus trichloride in an aqueous solution, forming iminodiacetic acid hydrochloride, phosphorous acid and corresponding alkali metal chloride. A reaction then takes place with a formaldehyde source and N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid is obtained from the reaction mixture.

[0011] WO0009520 patent application discloses a process wherein N-acetylaminodiacetic acid is either: (1) reacted with a source of phosphorous and a source of formaldehyde in the presence of an acid to form a phosphonomethylation reaction product containing N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid and acetic acid or (2) deacylated and cyclized to form a 2,5-diketopiperazine derivative and then reacted with a source of phosphorous and a source of formaldehyde in the presence of an acid to form a phosphonomethylation reaction product containing N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid and acetic acid. Either way, the N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid is precipitated and the precipitate is recovered.

[0012] DE19909200 patent discloses a method for the manufacturing of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid wherein iminodiacetic acid is reacted with

phosphorous acid and formaldehyde in an aqueous medium in the presence of a strong mineral acid.

[0013] DE19914375 patent discloses a method for the production of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid by: (a) neutralizing an aqueous solution of the sodium salt of iminodiacetic acid with a strong mineral acid; (b) separating iminodiacetic acid; (c) reacting iminodiacetic acid with formaldehyde and phosphorous acid in an aqueous solution in the presence of the strong mineral acid and (d) separating N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid thus obtained e.g. by filtration, the mother liquor from (d) is recycled to stage (a).

[0014] GB2154588 patent discloses a process for preparation of N-(phosphonomethyl)glycine from N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, obtained by reacting phosphorous acid, formaldehyde and iminodiacetic acid in stoichiometric ratio and in the presence of hydrochloric acid and using elevated pressure which may be created by heating the reaction mixture under a closed system.

[0015] GB2154589 patent discloses a process for preparing N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid which comprises reacting an alkali metal salt of iminodiacetic acid in an aqueous strong mineral acid solution with phosphorous acid and formaldehyde and then adding sufficient water to dissolve the alkali metal salt formed during the reaction.

[0016] IE 20020974 patent discloses a process for the manufacture of N-(phosphonomethyl)glycine from N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, comprising the steps of reacting iminodiacetic acid, phosphorous acid and formaldehyde in the presence of water and hydrochloric acid to give N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid.

[0017] US patent 4,657,705 discloses a process for the preparation of an N-substituted amino methylphosphonic acid comprising reacting a substituted amine, urea or carbamate substrate compound with phosphorous acid and formaldehyde in an acidic medium. In example 2 the synthesis of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, obtained from the reaction of an aqueous hydrochloric acid solution of N-acetylaminodiacetic acid, phosphorous acid and formaldehyde, is described.

[0018] US patent 5,312,973 discloses a process for preparing N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid by means of phosphonomethylation of iminodiacetic acid performed by reacting an aqueous solution of phosphorous acid and hydrochloric acid, obtained by hydrolysis of phosphorous trichloride, with iminodiacetic acid and formaldehyde.

[0019] WO0002888 patent application discloses a process for the production of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid wherein an alkali metal salt of iminodiacetic acid is reacted with phosphorous acid and a strong mineral acid, or a source thereof to form iminodiacetic phosphite and the alkali metal salt of the strong mineral acid. After removal of the latter salt, the iminodiacetic phosphite is converted to N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid by reaction with formaldehyde.

[0020] WO0014093 patent application discloses a process for the preparation of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid and N-(phosphonomethyl)glycine wherein an alkali metal of iminodiacetic acid is reacted with a strong mineral acid to convert the salt of iminodiacetic acid into iminodiacetic acid. The iminodiacetic acid is then converted to soluble iminodiacetic acid phosphite salt by the addition of phosphorous acid, and the alkali metal salt of the strong acid is precipitated. The phosphite salt of iminodiacetic acid is phosphonomethylated, such as by the addition of phosphorus trichloride and formaldehyde. N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, thus obtained, is isolated and can further be oxidized to N-(phosphonomethyl)glycine.

[0021] WO9415939 patent application discloses a process for the manufacture of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid which comprises reacting iminodiacetic acid with phosphorous acid and a source of formaldehyde in aqueous solution in the presence of concentrated sulphuric acid and filtering and recovering the precipitated N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid.

[0022] US patent 5,688,994 discloses a process for the preparation of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid comprising simultaneously infusing into a reaction mixture, water, a source of iminodiacetic acid, a source of formaldehyde, a source of phosphorous acid and a strong acid. Phosphorous acid and the strong acid preferably are provided to the reaction mixture from a single source preferably phosphorus trichloride.

[0023] WO9819992 patent application discloses a method for making solution stable salts of iminodiacetic acid, useful as precursors in the manufacture of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid. N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid is prepared by adding a strong acid to the di-salt of iminodiacetic acid in order to prepare a stable solution comprising mono-salt of iminodiacetic acid and further reacting said mono-salt of iminodiacetic acid with additional strong acid, phosphorous acid and formaldehyde. The additional strong acid and the phosphorous acid are provided by adding phosphorus trichloride to an aqueous reaction medium.

[0024] WO2009130322 patent application discloses a method for the manufacture of aminoalkylenephosphonic acids. Pure tetraphosphorus hexaoxide

(P_4O_6) is hydrolyzed in the presence of a homogeneous Brønsted acid catalyst whereby the pH of the reaction medium is maintained below 5 and the free water content of said reaction medium is, after the P_4O_6 hydrolysis has been completed, from 0 to 40 %. The required amine component can be added before, during, or in a preferred embodiment, after the completion of the P_4O_6 hydrolysis. Formaldehyde is then added and the reaction mixture containing the tetraphosphorus hexaoxide hydrolysate, the amine and the formaldehyde is reacted in presence of a Brønsted acid catalyst selected from homogeneous and heterogeneous species. In example 2 the synthesis of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid is described wherein first P_4O_6 is drop wise added to a solution of iminodiacetic acid in aqueous hydrochloric acid whereupon an aqueous solution of formaldehyde is drop wise added.

[0025] WO2010136574 patent application discloses a method for the manufacture of N-phosphonoalkyliminodiacetic acid wherein the iminodiacetic acid starting material is reacted with a considerable amount, in excess of stoichiometric requirements, of phosphorous acid whereupon formaldehyde is added. In a particularly preferred approach, the phosphorous acid is prepared in situ starting from the hydrolysis of liquid P_4O_6 , added to an aqueous reaction medium containing phosphorous acid.

[0026] WO 2011051309 patent application discloses an improved method for the manufacture of N-phosphonoalkyliminodiacetic acid $M_2PO_3\text{-X-N-}(\text{CH}_2\text{COOM})_2$ wherein X is a $C_1\text{-}C_6$ linear or branched alkyl group and M is selected from hydrogen, alkali, earth-alkali, ammonium and protonated amine. The iminodiacetic acid starting material is reacted with a substantially stoichiometric amount of phosphorous acid, in the presence of a large excess of phosphoric acid and formaldehyde to thereby yield phosphonoalkyliminodiacetic acid which is insoluble in the reaction medium and thus can be separated from the reaction medium. In a particularly preferred approach, the phosphorous acid is prepared in situ starting from liquid P_4O_6 , i.e. through the addition of P_4O_6 to the aqueous reaction medium, containing preferably a part of the phosphoric acid, in order to be completely hydrolyzed.

[0027] EP0595598 patent discloses a process for preparing N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid wherein solutions of an alkali metal salt of iminodiacetic acid are reacted with formaldehyde so as to form the alkali metal salt of hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid which subsequently is reacted with a phosphorous source such as phosphorous acid. One example illustrates the preparation of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid starting from an aqueous solution of di sodium salt of hydroxymethyl iminodiacetic acid and phosphorus trichloride. The modus operandi

implies that all phosphorus trichloride is immediately converted completely in phosphorous acid and hydrogen chloride.

[0028] US patent 4,617,415 claims alpha-substituted N-phosphonomethyl iminodiacetic acids while US patent 4,654,429 discloses a process for the preparation of a glyphosate product through contacting an aqueous medium of the alpha-substituted N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid substrate with molecular oxygen in the presence of a catalyst for the oxidative cleavage of a substituent from the imino nitrogen of the substrate. Two processes for the preparation of the N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid substrate are described.

[0029] In a first method a haloacetic acid is reacted in an alkaline medium with an alpha-substituted amino acid to form an alpha-substituted iminodiacetic acid. Phosphonomethylation is preferably carried out by adding phosphorous acid to an acidic aqueous medium containing the alpha-substituted iminodiacetic acid and a mineral acid, and slowly adding a solution of formaldehyde to the resultant mixture. Essentially stoichiometric equivalent proportions of the alpha-substituted iminodiacetic acid, phosphorous acid, and formaldehyde may be used for the phosphonomethylation.

[0030] CN patent 1285600 discloses the preparation of N-phosphonomethyl iminodiacetic acid from the catalytic dehydrogenation of ethylenediamine in the presence of sodium hydroxide and further reacting the iminodiacetic acid, thus formed, with formaldehyde. N-phosphonomethyl iminodiacetic acid subsequently is oxidized with hydrogen peroxide in water, in the presence of sodium tungstate catalyst resulting in the formation of N-(phosphonomethyl)glycine.

[0031] In an alternative method aminoacetonitrile is reacted with a cyanohydrin to produce an alpha-substituted iminodiacetonitrile which is subsequently hydrolyzed to produce the alpha-substituted iminodiacetic acid. The latter in turn is converted into the alpha-substituted N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid intermediate via the phosphonomethylation reaction as described in the first method of the invention.

[0032] The prior art abundantly illustrates the significant difficulties and shortcomings attached to the use of most of the known N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid manufacturing technologies. Major difficulties can reside in the selection of the acid catalyst, usually sulfuric and/or hydrochloric acid, the presence of chlorides, frequently alkali chlorides, the formation of undesirable levels of by-products and the lack of selectivity of the reaction product. In addition, N-

phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid produced in accordance with the art technologies, in general requires special precautions in the conversion to N-(phosphonomethyl)glycine, while the corrosive nature of chloride ions can adversely affect equipment economics.

- 5 While considerable efforts have been spent for the purpose of alleviating quality and economic aspects of the manufacturing technology, marginal solutions, directed to specific shortcomings, have been elaborated.

Aims of the Invention

- 10 **[0033]** The present invention aims to provide a method for the synthesis of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, or derivatives thereof, that does not present the drawbacks of the methods of the state of the art, especially a method that is efficient, economical-attractive, environmental-friendly and safe.

Summary of the Invention

- 15 **[0034]** The present invention discloses a method for the synthesis of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid or derivatives thereof selected from the group consisting of phosphonate esters of N- phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, carboxylate esters of N- phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, phosphonate and carboxylate esters
20 of N- phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid salts, phosphonate esters of N- phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid salts, carboxylate esters of N- phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid salts and phosphonate-carboxylate esters of N- phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid salts, wherein the cation of the salt is selected from the group consisting of ammonium, isopropylammonium, ethanolammonium,
25 dimethylammonium, trimethylsulfonium, sodium and potassium .

comprising the steps of:

- a) forming a reaction mixture comprising an acid catalyst, a compound having the general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ and a compound having one or more P-O-P anhydride moieties, to form a compound having the general formula $R^1-CH_2-N-CH_2(PO_3H_2)-CH_2-R^2$, its dehydrated forms or their derivatives, wherein
30 -the compound of the formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ is characterized in that:

- X is $-CH_2-OH$ or $-CH_2-COOH$;
- R^1 and R^2 are independently selected from the group consisting of nitrile,
35 C_1-C_4 alkyl carboxylate, or are both carbonyl groups linked by means of a

hydrogen substituted nitrogen atom or a C₁-C₄- alkyl substituted nitrogen atom;

- the P-O-P anhydride moieties comprising compound is characterized in that said anhydride moieties comprise one P atom at the oxidation state (+III) and one P atom at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V) and is selected from the group consisting of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide, tetraethylpyrophosphite and the compounds obtained from the combination of one or more compounds comprising;

- one or more P-OH moieties with one or more compounds comprising one or more P-O-P anhydride moieties or one or more P-X moieties, wherein the P atom of one or more compounds is at the oxidation state (+III);

- one or more P-X moieties and water, wherein the P atom of the P-X moiety comprising compound is at the oxidation stage (+III);

- two or more P-O-P moieties and water, wherein the P-O-P moiety comprising compound has a P atom at the oxidation state (+III) and a P atom at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V);

wherein the compounds having one or more P-OH moieties is accessible by tautomerization of a >P(=O)H moiety,

wherein X is a halogenide selected from the group consisting of chlorine, bromine and iodine and

wherein the halogen level in the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound is 1000 ppm or less, preferably 500 ppm or less and more preferably 200 ppm or less.

b) hydrolysing the reaction mixture to form N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid or one of its derivatives.

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[0035] Preferred embodiments of the present invention disclose one or more of the following features:

- the R¹-CH₂-NX-CH₂-R² corresponds to the 4-X-piperazine-2,6-dione or the 4-X-1-(C₁-C₄ alkyl)piperazine-2,6-dione family;

- the ratio of N-X moieties to P-O-P anhydride moieties is comprised between 0.3 and 2.0, preferably between 0.5 and 1.5;

- the compound having the general formula R¹-CH₂-NX-CH₂-R² is selected from the group consisting of N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetonitrile, N-hydroxymethylimino- diacetic

acid, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid dimethylester, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid diethylester, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetonitrile, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid dimethylester and N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid diethylester;

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- the compound comprising the P-O-P anhydride moieties is selected from the group consisting of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide, tetraethylpyrophosphite, and the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound obtained from the combination of phosphorous acid and tetraphosphorus hexaoxide, of phosphorous acid and tetraphosphorus decaoxide, of phosphorous acid and phosphorus trichloride, of dimethylphosphite and tetraphosphorus decaoxide, of phosphorus trichloride and water and of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide and water;

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- the compound comprising the P-O-P anhydride moieties is tetraphosphorus hexaoxide;

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- the acid catalyst is a homogeneous Brønsted acid catalyst selected from the group consisting of methanesulfonic acid, trifluoromethanesulfonic acid, acetic acid, trifluoroacetic acid, p-toluenesulfonic acid, hydrochloric acid, phosphorous acid, phosphoric acid and mixtures thereof;

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- the acid catalyst is a heterogeneous Brønsted acid, preferably selected from the group consisting of:

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(i) solid acidic metal oxide combinations as such or supported onto a carrier material;

(ii) cation exchange resins selected from the group comprising copolymers of styrene, ethylvinyl benzene and divinyl benzene, functionalized so as to graft SO₃H moieties onto the aromatic group and perfluorinated resins carrying carboxylic and/or sulfonic acid groups;

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(iii) organic sulfonic, carboxylic and phosphonic Brønsted acids which are substantially immiscible in the reaction medium at the reaction temperature;

(iv) an acid catalyst derived from:

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- the interaction of a solid support having a lone pair of electrons onto which is deposited an organic Brønsted acid; or

- the interaction of a solid support having a lone pair of electrons onto which is deposited a compound having a Lewis acid site; or
 - heterogeneous solids functionalized by chemical grafting with a Brønsted acid group or a precursor therefore; and
- 5 (v) heterogeneous heteropolyacids of the general formula $H_xPM_yO_z$ wherein P is selected from phosphorus and silicon and M is selected from tungsten and molybdenum and combinations thereof;
- 10 - the acid catalyst is a homogeneous Lewis acid preferably selected from the group consisting of $LiN(CF_3SO_2)_2$, $Mg(OCF_3SO_2)_2$, $Al(OCF_3SO_2)_3$, $Bi(OCF_3SO_2)_3$, $Sc(OCF_3SO_2)_3$;
- the acid catalyst is a heterogeneous Lewis acid obtained from the interaction of a homogeneous Lewis acid catalyst and an organic or inorganic polymer compound;
- 15 - the compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ and the compound having one or more P-O-P anhydride moieties are reacted in step a) in the presence of a solvent selected from the group consisting of 1,4-dioxane, toluene, ethylacetate, acetonitrile, sulfolane, 1-ethyl-3-methyl-imidazolium bis(trifluoromethylsulfonyl) imide, or a mixture thereof;
- 20 - the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound is gradually added to the compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ while maintaining the temperature of step a) below 100°C, preferably at a temperature comprised between 20°C and 70°C;
- 25 - after completion of the addition of the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound, step a) is heated to a temperature comprised between 20°C and 100°C, preferably between 30°C and 90°C and maintained at the said temperature for a period of time comprised between 1 hour and 24 hours;
- 30 - the hydrolysis of step b), is performed at a temperature comprised between 20°C and 120°C, preferably between 40°C and 100°C, for a period comprised between 10 minutes and 24 hours and preferably between 1 hour and 10 hours;
- the hydrolysis of step b) is performed under alkali conditions;

Detailed Description of the Invention

[0036] The present invention provides an efficient, economical and environmental friendly method for the synthesis of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid or its derivatives.

5 **[0037]** Under derivatives the present invention understands salts, phosphonate and carboxylate esters of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid.

[0038] The phosphonate and carboxylate esters comprise one or more substituted or unsubstituted hydrocarbyl groups which may be branched or unbranched, saturated or unsaturated and may contain one or more rings. Suitable hydrocarbyls include alkyl, alkenyl, alkynyl and aryl moieties. They also include alkyl, alkenyl, alkynyl and aryl moieties substituted with other aliphatic or cyclic hydrocarbyl groups, such as alkaryl, alkenaryl and alkynaryl.

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[0039] The substituted hydrocarbyl is defined as a hydrocarbyl wherein at least one hydrogen atom has been substituted with an atom other than hydrogen such as an halogen atom, an oxygen atom to form for example an ether or an ester group, a nitrogen atom to form an amide or a nitrile group or a sulfur atom to form for example a thioether group.

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[0040] The derivatives of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid preferably are obtained as such as an outcome of step a) or step b) or can be obtained by further treatment of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid. Under derivatives the present invention understands salts, phosphonate esters, carboxylate esters, phosphonate ester salts, carboxylate ester salts or phosphonate-carboxylate ester salts of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid. In the present invention it is understood that the expression N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid comprises all derivatives.

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25 **[0041]** The method of the present invention includes the steps of:
a) reacting, in the presence of an acid catalyst, a compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ with a P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound to form a compound having the general formula $R^1-CH_2-N-CH_2(PO_3H_2)-CH_2-R^2$, its dehydrated forms or their derivatives, wherein

30 - the compound of the formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ is characterized in that:

X is $-CH_2-OH$ or $-CH_2-COOH$ and

R^1 and R^2 are independently selected from the group consisting of nitrile, C_1-C_4 alkyl carboxylate, or

R^1 and R^2 are both carbonyl groups linked by means of a hydrogen substituted nitrogen atom or a C_1-C_4 alkyl substituted nitrogen atom, the $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ formula thus

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corresponding to 4-X-piperazine-2,6-dione or 4-X-1-(C₁-C₄ alkyl)piperazine-2,6-dione, and wherein

- the said P-O-P anhydride comprising compound is characterized in that said anhydride moieties comprise one P atom at the oxidation state (+III) and one P-atom at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V); and

b) hydrolysing the said compound having the general formula R¹-CH₂-N-CH₂(PO₃H₂)-CH₂-R², its dehydrated forms or their derivatives to form N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid or one of its derivatives.

[0042] While the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound is preferably selected from the group consisting of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide and partially hydrolysed species of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide obtained through reaction of 1 mole of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide with 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 moles of water respectively, it is understood that all compounds comprising at least one P-O-P anhydride group wherein one P-atom is at the oxidation state (+III) and the other P-atom is at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V) can be used for the purpose of the present invention.

[0043] Suitable P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compounds can either comprise a P-O-P anhydride moiety in the compound itself (e.g. P₄O₆ or pyrophosphites (RO)₂P-O-P(OR)₂) or can be generated in situ by combining reagents that will form the required P-O-P anhydride moiety upon combination before reacting with the compound with general formula R¹-CH₂-NX-CH₂-R².

[0044] Suitable reagent combinations are:

- a) compounds containing a least one P-OH moiety (also accessible by tautomerisation of a >P(=O)H moiety into >P(LP)OH (where LP stands for lone pair of electrons) such as for example is the case for dimethylphosphite (MeO)₂P(=O)H) and compounds containing at least one P-O-P anhydride moiety e.g. P₂O₅ or P₄O₆;
- b) compounds containing at least one P-OH moiety and compounds containing at least one P-X (X = Cl, I, Br) moiety;
- c) compounds containing at least one P-X moiety and H₂O;
- d) compounds containing P-O-P anhydride moieties and H₂O for partial hydrolysis.

[0045] In case a) and b) it is mandatory that at least in one of the utilised compounds the P-atom is in the oxidation state (+III) whereas in case c) each P-atom has to be in the oxidation state (+III) and in case d) the P-O-P anhydride moieties have one P-atom at the oxidation state (+III) and the other P-atom at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V), in order to form the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound, having one P-atom at the oxidation state (+III) and the other P-atom at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V).

[0046] The P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compounds wherein the P-O-P anhydride moiety is already present are phosphorus oxides with the formula P_4O_n with $n = 6-9$, pyrophosphites with the general formula $(RO)_2P-O-P(OR)_2$ wherein R is an alkyl or aryl group, pyrophosphorous acid ($H_4P_2O_5$) and isohypophosphoric acid
5 $(H)(HO)P(O)-O-P(O)(OH)_2$.

[0047] Combinations described under a) are obtained by reacting e.g. phosphorus oxides with formula P_4O_n with $n=6-10$, alkyl substituted pyrophosphites, pyrophosphorous acid, isohypophosphoric acid, metaphosphoric acid or polyphosphoric acid with phosphorous acid, phosphoric acid, mono or disubstituted phosphites with
10 formula $(RO)PO_2H_2$ or $(RO)_2POH$ wherein R is an alkyl or aryl group, phosphate esters $(RO)PO_3H_2$ or $(RO)_2PO_2H$, phosphonic acids RPO_3H_2 or its monoester $RPO_2H(OR)$ with the proviso that such combinations will lead to P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compounds having one P-atom at the oxidation state (+III) and the other P-atom at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V).

[0048] Combinations described under b) are obtained by combining PCl_3 , PBr_3 , $POCl_3$, mono or dichloro phosphites like $(RO)_2PCl$ and $(RO)PCl_2$ with phosphorous acid, phosphoric acid, mono or disubstituted phosphites with formula $(RO)PO_2H_2$ or $(RO)_2POH$ with the proviso that such combinations will lead to P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compounds having one P-atom at the oxidation state (+III) and the other P-atom at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V).
20

[0049] Combinations described under c) are obtained by combining PCl_3 , PBr_3 , mono or dichloro phosphites like $(RO)_2PCl$ and $(RO)PCl_2$ with H_2O . In order to obtain a P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound free of P-X functions the remaining P-X functions are hydrolysed with water. Remaining P-O-P anhydride
25 moieties can also be hydrolysed as long as the required P-O-P anhydride moiety wherein one P-atom is at the oxidation state (+III) and the other P-atom is at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V) remains.

[0050] Most preferred species are tetraphosphorus hexaoxide, tetraethylpyrophosphite, and the combinations of phosphorous acid and tetraphosphorus hexaoxide, of phosphorous acid and tetraphosphorus decaoxide, of phosphorous acid and phosphorus trichloride, of dimethylphosphite and tetraphosphorus decaoxide, of phosphorus trichloride and water and of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide and water.

[0051] The amount of 'reactive' P(+III) atoms that can be converted into
35 phosphonic acids according to this invention is determined by the amount of P(+III) atoms and the amount of P-O-P anhydride moieties. If there are more P-O-P anhydride

moieties than P(+III) atoms, then all P(+III) atoms are converted into phosphonic acids. If there are less P-O-P anhydride moieties than P(+III) atoms, then only a part of P(+III) atoms equal to the amount of P-O-P anhydride moieties is converted into phosphonic acids.

5 [0052] If halogen containing starting materials, e.g. PCl_3 , POCl_3 or PBr_3 , are used, the level of halogen in the P-O-P anhydride comprising compound shall be kept below 1000 ppm, usually below 500 ppm, preferably below 200 ppm, expressed in relation to the P-O-P material being 100%. Therefore all excess P-X functions are hydrolysed before the reactions with the substrate by addition of one molecule of H_2O
10 per excess of P-X function. The formed H-X is removed by e.g. blowing a dry inert gas, like nitrogen or helium, through the solution.

[0053] The tetraphosphorus hexaoxide preferably used within the scope of the present invention may be represented by a substantially pure compound containing at least 85 %, preferably more than 90 %, more preferably at least 95 % and
15 in one particular execution at least 97 % of P_4O_6 . While tetraphosphorus hexaoxide, suitable for use within the context of this invention, may be manufactured by any known technology, in preferred executions it is prepared in accordance with the method described in WO 2009/068636 and/or WO 2010/055056 patent applications under the section entitled "Process for the manufacture of P_4O_6 with improved yield".
20 In detail, oxygen, or a mixture of oxygen and inert gas, and gaseous or liquid phosphorus are reacted in essentially stoichiometric amounts in a reaction unit at a temperature in the range from about 1600 K to about 2000 K, by removing the heat created by the exothermic reaction of phosphorus and oxygen, while maintaining a preferred residence time of from about 0.5 seconds to about 60 seconds followed by
25 quenching the reaction product at a temperature below 700 K and refining the crude reaction product by distillation. The tetraphosphorus hexaoxide so prepared is a pure product containing usually at least 97 % of the oxide. The so produced P_4O_6 is generally represented by a liquid material of high purity containing in particular low levels of elementary phosphorus, P_4 , preferably below 1000 ppm, expressed in relation to the
30 P_4O_6 being 100 %. The preferred residence time is from 5 seconds to 30 seconds, more preferably from 8 seconds to 30 seconds. The reaction product can, in one preferred execution, be quenched to a temperature below 350 K.

[0054] It is presumed that the P_4O_6 participating in a reaction at a temperature of from about 24°C (melting t°) to about 120°C is necessarily liquid or
35 gaseous although solid species can, academically speaking, be used in the preparation of the reaction medium.

[0055] For reasons of convenience and operational expertise, the tetraphosphorus hexaoxide, represented by P_4O_6 , is of high purity and contains very low levels of impurities, in particular elemental phosphorus, P_4 , at a level below 1000 ppm, usually below 500 ppm and preferably not more than 200 ppm, expressed in relation to the P_4O_6 being 100 %.

[0056] In the present invention it is understood that when using the terminology "P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound" it is meant "P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound wherein one P atom is at the oxidation state (+III) and the other P atom is at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V)

[0057] The compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ is characterized in that:

- X is $-CH_2-OH$ or $-CH_2-COOH$
- R^1 and R^2 are independently selected from the group consisting of nitrile, C_1 - C_4 alkyl carboxylate, or are both carbonyl groups linked by means of a hydrogen substituted nitrogen or a C_1 - C_4 alkyl substituted nitrogen atom, the $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ formula thus corresponding to 4-X-piperazine-2,6-dione or 4-X-1-(C_1 - C_4 alkyl)piperazine-2,6-dione.

[0058] The compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ is preferably selected from the group consisting of N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetonitrile, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid dimethyl ester, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid diethylester, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid dipropylester, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid diisopropylester, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid di-butylester, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid diisobutylester, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid di-sec-butylester, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid di-tert-butylester, 4-hydroxymethylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-hydroxymethyl-1-methylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-hydroxymethyl-1-ethylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-hydroxymethyl-1-propylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-hydroxymethyl-1-isopropylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-hydroxymethyl-1-butylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-hydroxymethyl-1-isobutylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-hydroxymethyl-1-sec-butylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-hydroxymethyl-1-tert-butylpiperazine-2,6-dione, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetonitrile, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid dimethylester, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid diethylester, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid dipropylester, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid diisopropylester, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid di-butylester, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid diisobutylester, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid di-sec-butylester, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid di-tert-butylester, 4-carboxymethylpiperazine-2,6-

dione, 4-carboxymethyl-1-methylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-carboxymethyl-1-ethylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-carboxymethyl-1-propylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-carboxymethyl-1-isopropylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-carboxymethyl-1-butylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-carboxymethyl-1-isobutylpiperazine-2,6-dione, 4-carboxymethyl-1-sec-butylpiperazine-2,6-dione and 4-carboxymethyl-1-tert-butylpiperazine-2,6-dione.

[0059] The compound having the general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ wherein X is $-CH_2-OH$ may be prepared by reacting $R^1-CH_2-NH-CH_2-R^2$ and formaldehyde in the presence of an acid catalyst and optionally a solvent.

[0060] The compound having the general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ wherein X is $-CH_2-COOH$ may be prepared by reacting $R^1-CH_2-NH-CH_2-R^2$ and chloroacetic acid in an alkaline medium.

[0061] The acid catalyst preferably used within the scope of the present invention is a homogeneous Brønsted acid catalyst, optionally in the presence of a solvent, or a heterogeneous Brønsted acid catalyst, in the presence of a solvent, or a Lewis acid catalyst, in the presence of a solvent.

[0062] The homogeneous Brønsted acid is preferably selected from the group consisting of methanesulfonic acid, fluoromethanesulfonic acid, trichloromethanesulfonic acid, trifluoromethanesulfonic acid, acetic acid, trifluoroacetic acid, tert-butyl-sulfonic acid, p-toluenesulfonic acid, naphthalene sulfonic acid, 2,4,6-trimethylbenzene-sulfonic acid, perfluoro or perchloro alkyl sulfonic acids, perfluoro or perchloro alkyl carboxylic acids, hydrochloric acid, hydrobromic acid, hydroiodic acid, phosphorous acid and phosphoric acid, and mixtures thereof. The homogeneous Brønsted acid is preferably methanesulfonic acid.

[0063] The heterogeneous Brønsted acid is preferably selected from the group consisting of:

(i) solid acidic metal oxide combinations as such or supported onto a carrier material;

(ii) cation exchange resins selected from the group comprising copolymers of styrene, ethylvinyl benzene and divinyl benzene, functionalized so as to graft SO_3H moieties onto the aromatic group and perfluorinated resins carrying carboxylic and/or sulfonic acid groups;

(iii) organic sulfonic, carboxylic and phosphonic Brønsted acids which are substantially immiscible in the reaction medium at the reaction temperature;

(iv) an acid catalyst derived from:

- the interaction of a solid support having a lone pair of electrons onto which is deposited an organic Brønsted acid; or

- the interaction of a solid support having a lone pair of electrons onto which is deposited a compound having a Lewis acid site; or

5 - heterogeneous solids functionalized by chemical grafting with a Brønsted acid group or a precursor therefore; and

(v) heterogeneous heteropolyacids of the general formula $H_xPM_yO_z$ wherein P is selected from phosphorus and silicon and M is selected from tungsten and molybdenum and combinations thereof.

10 **[0064]** Preferred homogeneous Lewis acids can be selected from metal salts having the general formula MX_n ,

wherein M represents a main group element or transition metal like Li, B, Mg, Al, Bi, Fe, Zn, La, Sc, Yb, or Pd; X in MX_n is typically an anion of an acid or acid derivative like Cl, OTf or NTf_2 , where Tf stands for $CF_3SO_2^-$ and n is equal to the oxidation state of M, which can be from 1 to 5. Possible combinations are e.g. $LiNTf_2$, $Mg(OTf)_2$, $MgCl_2$, $ZnCl_2$, $PdCl_2$, $Fe(OTf)_3$, $Al(OTf)_3$, $AlCl_3$, $Bi(OTf)_3$, $BiCl_3$, $Sc(OTf)_3$, $Ln(OTf)_3$, $Yb(OTf)_3$. Preferably, combinations of a hard metal or a metal on the borderline between hard and soft according to the HSAB (hard soft acid base) concept like Li, Mg, Al, Sc, Zn, Bi, and weakly coordinating anions like OTf or NTf_2 are used. Examples of such preferred combinations are: $LiNTf_2$, $Mg(OTf)_2$, $Al(OTf)_3$, $Bi(OTf)_3$.

20 **[0065]** Preferred heterogeneous Lewis acids can be represented by species of discretionary selected subclasses created by interaction/bonding of homogeneous Lewis acids e.g. metal complexes, metal salts or organometallic species with polymeric organic or inorganic backbones. An example of such subclass is a polystyrene matrix with bonded $Sc(OTf)_2$ groups. Such catalyst can be prepared e.g. by interaction of a polystyrene sulfonic acid resin, e.g. Amberlyst 15, with $Sc(OTf)_3$. The number of equivalents of Lewis acid functions can be determined in this case by different ways e.g. by acid base determination of the unreacted sulfonic acid groups, by quantitative determination of the liberated triflic acid and by ICP measurement of the amount of Sc on the resin.

30 **[0066]** Typical examples of suitable solvents, optionally used in the method according to the present invention, are anisole; chlorinated and fluorinated hydrocarbons such as fluorobenzene, chlorobenzene, tetrachloroethane, tetrachloroethylene, dichloroethane, dichloromethane; polar solvents like diglyme, glyme, diphenyloxide, polyalkylene glycol derivatives with capped OH groups such as OR^{***} where R^{***} is a low alkyl or acyl group, aliphatic hydrocarbons such as hexane,

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heptane, cyclohexane; non-cyclic ethers like dibutyl ether, diethyl ether, diisopropyl ether, dipentylether, and butylmethylether cyclic ethers like tetrahydrofuran, dioxane, and tetrahydropyran; mixed cyclic/non-cyclic ethers like cyclopentylmethylether; cyclic and non-cyclic sulfones like sulfolane, aromatic solvents like toluene, benzene, xylene; organic acetates like ethylacetate; organic nitriles like acetonitrile, benzonitrile; silicon fluids like polymethylphenyl siloxane or mixtures thereof; non-reactive ionic liquids like 1-n-butyl-imidazolium trifluoromethanesulfonate, and 1-ethyl-3-methyl-imidazolium bis(trifluoromethyl sulfonyl)imide or a mixture thereof.

10 **[0067]** In a particular embodiment of the present invention the acid catalyst acts as catalyst and as solvent.

[0068] In step a) of the process of the present invention, the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound and the compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ are gradually mixed at a temperature of about 100°C or less.

15 With the terminology “gradually mixed” the present invention understands:

- the gradual addition of the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound to the compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$,
- the gradual addition of the compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ to the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound,
- 20 - the simultaneous gradual addition of the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound and the compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ each at independent rate into a medium where reaction between both compounds may proceed.

[0069] In general, the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound, preferable tetrakisphosphorus hexaoxide, is gradually added to the compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ while the temperature is maintained at a value of about 100°C or less and preferably at a temperature comprised between about 20°C and about 70°C. Once the addition completed, step a) is maintained at a temperature comprised between about 20°C and about 100°C, preferably between about 30°C and about 90°C for a period of time comprised between about 1 hour and about 24 hours.

30 **[0070]** During the conversion of the compound with general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$, wherein X is $-CH_2-COOH$, one equivalent of carbon monoxide will be formed for each converted $-CH_2-COOH$ equivalent. Carbon monoxide will leave the reaction mixture as a gas of very high purity. This carbon monoxide gas can be used in many applications like e.g. as a fuel, in combination with hydrogen for methanol and Fischer-Tropsch hydrocarbons manufacture, for hydroformylation reactions, for

alcohol carbonylation e.g. carbonylation of methanol to acetic acid or the conversion of methylacetate to acetic anhydride.

[0071] After completion of the conversion of $R^1\text{-CH}_2\text{-NX-CH}_2\text{-R}^2$ into $R^1\text{-CH}_2\text{-N-CH}_2(\text{PO}_3\text{H}_2)\text{-CH}_2\text{-R}^2$ in step a), water is optionally added in step b) in order to hydrolyse unreacted P-O-P anhydride moieties, if present, and to convert, N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetonitrile, N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid di-(C₁-C₄)alkylester, 4-phosphonomethyl-piperazine-2,6-dione or 4-phosphonomethyl-1-(C₁-C₄ alkyl)piperazine-2,6-dione into N-phosphonomethyliminodicarboxylic acid.

[0072] Unreacted P-O-P anhydride moieties may be the result of an incomplete conversion or of an out of stoichiometric amount of P-O-P anhydride group comprising compounds, i.e. an excess of P-O-P anhydride moieties relative to the N-X equivalents.

[0073] Preferably, water is added after completion of step a) and after step a) is cooled down to room temperature. Alternatively step a), after being completed, can be cooled down through the addition of the water.

This hydrolysis is performed at a temperature comprised between about 20°C and about 100°C, preferably between about 40°C and about 100°C, for a period comprised between about 10 minutes and about 24 hours and preferably between about 1 hour and about 10 hours.

[0074] When the hydrolysis is performed under alkali conditions the alkali aqueous solution used is preferably obtained from a base selected from the group consisting of alkali hydroxides, alkaline earth hydroxides, ammonia and primary aliphatic amines; preferably said base is sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide.

[0075] When the hydrolysis is performed under acid conditions the acid aqueous solution used is preferably obtained from a mineral acid; preferably said mineral acid is volatile and most preferable this acid is hydrochloric acid.

[0076] The N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid may be recovered from step b) through precipitation. Precipitation can be facilitated by the cooling of step b). Numerous well known methods, such as for example filtration, can be used to recover the precipitate.

[0077] The method of the present invention can be utilized in any reactor system known in the art including batch reactors, continuous reactors or semi-continuous reactors.

Examples

[0078] The following examples illustrate the invention; they are merely meant to exemplify the present invention, but are not destined to limit or otherwise define the scope of the present invention.

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Example 1.

[0079] In a round-bottom flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer, a thermometer and a condenser 1.53 g (10.0 mmole) N,N-biscyanomethyl glycine and 2.0 g (10.0 mmole of H⁺) Amberlyst 15 were mixed with 5 ml acetonitrile and heated to 60 °C. Slowly, 0.55 g (2.5 mmole) P₄O₆ was added. The reaction mixture was heated for 3 hours at 60 °C. During the addition and reaction time the evolution of CO was observed. 2 ml H₂O was added and afterwards the pH was brought to above 10 by addition of a NaOH solution. The obtained solution was heated for 24 hours at 60 °C. The obtained solution was analysed by ¹H- and ³¹P-NMR spectroscopy. N-Phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid was detected at 80.5 % by weight. The ratio of mmoles N,N-biscyanomethyl glycine to mmoles P₄O₆ equals 4.0; the ratio of milliequivalents Amberlyst 15 to mmoles N,N-biscyanomethyl glycine equals 1.0; the ratio of milliequivalents Amberlyst 15 to mmoles P₄O₆ equals 4.0.

[0080] In table 1 a series of examples (Example 2 to 12), according to the present invention, is reported.

In this table:

- Column 1: indicates the identification number of the example.
- Column 2: indicates the type of compound with general formula R¹-CH₂-NX-CH₂-R²
- Column 3: indicates the number of mmoles of compound with general formula R¹-CH₂-NX-CH₂-R²
- Column 4: indicates the type of catalyst and solvent if present.
- Column 5: indicates the number of mmoles of catalyst.
- Column 6: indicates the number of mmoles of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide.
- Column 7: indicates the ratio of mmoles of R¹-CH₂-NX-CH₂-R² compound to mmoles of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide
- Column 8: indicates the ratio of mmoles of catalyst to mmoles of R¹-CH₂-NX-CH₂-R² compound.
- Column 9: indicates the ratio of mmoles catalyst to mmoles of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide.

Column 10: indicates the temperature (°C) for the gradually mixing the constituents of step a).

Column 11: indicates the temperature (°C) and time (hrs) conditions for completion of step a).

5 Column 12: indicates the temperature (°C) and time (hrs) conditions for completion of step b).

Column 13: indicates the reaction yield, in % by weight, as measured by ¹H-NMR and ³¹P-NMR spectroscopy.

10 Example 13

[0081]

In a round-bottom flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer, a thermometer and a condenser 10.64 g (80.0 mmole) iminodiacetic acid and 2.40 g (26.7 mmole) 1,3,5-trioxane were mixed with 50 ml acetic acid and heated to 100 °C for 6 hours to form a reaction mixture comprising N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid. After
15 cooling to ambient temperature 4.40 g (20.0 mmole) P₄O₆ was added slowly. Then the reaction mixture was heated for 5 hours at to 50 °C. The obtained solution was analysed by ¹H- and ³¹P-NMR spectroscopy. N-Phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid was detected at 19.8 % by weight.

20 Example 14

[0082]

In a round-bottom flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer, a thermometer and a condenser 7.76 g (80.0 mmole) iminodiacetonitrile and 2.40 g (26.7 mmole) 1,3,5-trioxane were mixed with 50 ml acetic acid and heated to 80 °C for 5 hours. After cooling to ambient temperature 4.40 g (20.0 mmole) P₄O₆ was added
25 slowly. Then the reaction mixture was heated for 6 hours at to 80 °C. 10 ml H₂O was added and the mixture was heated for 6 hours to 100 °C. The obtained solution was analysed by ¹H- and ³¹P-NMR spectroscopy. N-Phosphonomethylimino diacetic acid was detected at 18.6 % by weight.

30 Example 15

[0083]

In a round-bottom flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer, a thermometer and a condenser 15.14 g (80.0 mmole) diethyl iminodiacetic acid and 2.40 g (26.7 mmole) 1,3,5-trioxane were mixed with 50 ml acetic acid and heated to 80 °C for 6 hours. After cooling to ambient temperature 4.40 g (20.0 mmol) P₄O₆ was
35 added slowly. Then the reaction mixture was heated for 8 hours at to 80 °C. 10 ml H₂O was added and the mixture was heated for 6 hours to 100 °C. The obtained solution

was analysed by ^1H - and ^{31}P -NMR spectroscopy. N-Phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid was detected at 53.0 % by weight.

Example 16

[0084] In a round-bottom flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer, a thermometer and a condenser, 1.30 g (8 mmole) N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid, obtained as in example 13, was mixed with 5 ml (78 mmole) methanesulfonic acid. Slowly, 4.20 g (16 mmole) tetraethylpyrophosphite was added. Afterwards the reaction mixture was heated to 60 °C for 8 hours. Then 5 ml water was added and the mixture was stirred at 85 °C for 1 hour.. The yield of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid was 52.1 %, as determined by ^1H - and ^{31}P -NMR spectroscopy.

Example 17

[0085] In a round-bottom flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer, a thermometer and a condenser, 6 ml of methanesulfonic acid, 0.97 g (8.8 mmole) of dimethylphosphite and 0.85 g (6 mmole) of P_2O_5 were mixed for 20 minutes at 85 °C. Then 1.63 g (10 mmole) N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid, obtained as in example 13, was added and the reaction mixture was heated to 85 °C overnight. Then 5 ml of water was added and the mixture was stirred at 85 °C for 1 hour. The yield of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid was 42.5 %, as determined by ^1H - and ^{31}P -NMR spectroscopy.

Example 18

[0086] In a round-bottom flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer, a thermometer and a condenser, 6 ml (92.4 mmole) of methanesulfonic acid, 1.8 g (22 mmole) of phosphorous acid and 0.3 ml (2.6 mmole) of P_4O_6 were premixed for 20 min at 85 °C. Then 1.63 g (10 mmole) N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid, obtained as in example 13, was added and the reaction mixture was heated to 85 °C overnight. Then 5 ml of water was added and the mixture was stirred at 85 °C for 1 hour. The yield of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid was 15.7 %, as determined by ^1H - and ^{31}P -NMR spectroscopy.

Example 19

[0087] In a round-bottom flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer, a thermometer and a condenser, 10 ml (154 mmole) methanesulfonic acid, 1.64 g (20 mmole) of phosphorous acid and 2.80 g (20 mmole) of P_2O_5 were mixed for 1 hour above 50 °C. Then 1.63 g (10 mmole) N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid,, obtained as in

example 13, was added and the reaction mixture was heated to 85 °C overnight. Then 6 ml of water was added and the mixture was stirred at 85 °C for 1 hour. The yield of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid was 44.0 %, as determined by ¹H- and ³¹P-NMR spectroscopy.

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Example 20

[0088] In a round-bottom flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer, a thermometer and a condenser, 10 ml (154 mmole) methanesulfonic acid, 1.8 ml (22 mmole) of dimethylphosphite and 2.8 g (20 mmole) of P₂O₅ were mixed for 1 hour above 50 °C. Then 1.63 g (10 mmole) N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid, obtained as in example 13, was added and the reaction mixture was heated to 85 °C overnight. Then 6 ml of water was added and the mixture was stirred at 85 °C for 1 hour. The yield of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid was 61.0 %, as determined by ¹H- and ³¹P-NMR spectroscopy.

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Example 21

[0089] In a round-bottom flask equipped with a mechanical stirrer, a thermometer and a condenser, 0.82 g (10 mmole) phosphorous acid was mixed with 5 ml (78 mmole) methanesulfonic acid. Slowly 1.37 g (10 mmole) PCl₃ was added, followed by 1.63 g (10 mmole) N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid, obtained as in example 13. Afterwards the reaction mixture was stirred for 6 hours at 60 °C. At ambient temperature 0.5 ml water was added and the mixture was kept standing for 1 hour. The yield of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid was 39.7 %, as determined by ¹H- and ³¹P-NMR spectroscopy.

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Table 1.

Ex	R ¹ -CH ₂ -NX-CH ₂ -R ²	(mmole)	Catalyst / Solvent	Cata (mmole)	P ₄ O ₆ (mmole)	X P ₄ O ₆	Cata X	Cata P ₄ O ₆	T ₁ /°C	T ₂ /time °C/hrs	T ₃ /time °C/hrs	Yield
2	N,N-biscyananomethyl glycine	65.4	Methanesulfonic acid	246	16.3	4.0	3.8	15.0	40	70/5	25	39.3
3	N,N-biscyananomethyl glycine	65.4	Methanesulfonic acid Acetonitrile (50 ml)	131	16.3	4.0	2.0	8.0	25	30/2	25	15.1 (1*)
4	N,N-biscyananomethyl glycine	65.4	Trifluoromethanesulfonic acid Acetonitrile (50 ml)	130	16.3	4.0	2.0	8.0	25	30/4	100/7	86.1
5	N,N-biscyananomethyl glycine	65.4	Methanesulfonic acid Acetonitrile (50 ml)	196	16.3	4.0	3.0	12.0	25	40/5 25/16	90/7	97.3
6	N,N-biscyananomethyl glycine	20.0	Trifluoromethanesulfonic acid Acetonitrile (10 ml)	10	5.0	4.0	0.5	2.0	30	30/3	-	13.4 (2*)
7	N,N-biscyananomethyl glycine	10.0	Methanesulfonic acid	77	2.5	4.0	7.7	31.0	25	25/3	60/24	74.0 (3*)
8	N,N-biscyananomethyl glycine	10.0	Trifluoroacetic acid	65	2.5	4.0	6.5	26.0	50	50/3	60/24	74.8 (4*)
9	N,N-biscyananomethyl glycine	10.0	Aluminium triflate Acetonitrile (5 ml)	0.25	2.5	4.0	0.03	0.1	60	60/3	60/24	75.7 (5*)
10	N-hydroxymethyl Iminodiacetic acid	80.0	Acetic acid	873	20.0	4.0	10.9	43.7	25	50/5	-	19.8
11	N-hydroxymethyl Iminodiacetic acid	80.0	Acetic acid	873	20.0	4.0	10.9	43.7	25	80/6	100/6	18.6
12	N-hydroxymethylimino diacetic acid diethylester	80.0	Acetic acid	873	20.0	4.0	10.9	43.7	25	80/8	100/6	53.0

(1*): the oil obtained after completion of the hydrolysis comprises 37.6 % weight of N,N-biscyananomethylaminomethylphosphonic acid and 15.1% weight of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic.

(2*): in the synthesis of Example 6, no hydrolysis step is performed; finally 65.3% weight of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetonitrile and 13.4% weight of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid is formed.

(3*) to (5*): for the hydrolysis, the pH is brought to a value above 10 through the addition of sodium hydroxide.

CLAIMS

1. A method for the synthesis of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid or derivatives thereof selected from the group consisting of phosphonate esters of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, carboxylate esters of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, phosphonate and carboxylate esters of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid, N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid salts, phosphonate esters of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid salts, carboxylate esters of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid salts and phosphonate-carboxylate esters of N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid salts, wherein the cation of the salt is selected from the group consisting of ammonium, isopropylammonium, ethanolammonium, dimethylammonium, trimethylsulfonium, sodium and potassium .

comprising the steps of:

a) forming a reaction mixture comprising an acid catalyst, a compound having the general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ and a compound having one or more P-O-P anhydride moieties, to form a compound having the general formula $R^1-CH_2-N-CH_2(PO_3H_2)-CH_2-R^2$, its dehydrated forms or their derivatives, wherein

-the compound of the formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ is characterized in that:

- X is $-CH_2-OH$ or $-CH_2-COOH$;
 - R^1 and R^2 are independently selected from the group consisting of nitrile, C_1-C_4 alkyl carboxylate, or are both carbonyl groups linked by means of a hydrogen substituted nitrogen atom or a C_1-C_4 alkyl substituted nitrogen atom;

- the P-O-P anhydride moieties comprising compound is characterized in that said anhydride moieties comprise one P atom at the oxidation state (+III) and one P atom at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V) and is selected from the group consisting of tetrakisphosphorus hexaoxide, tetraethylpyrophosphate and the compounds obtained from the combination of one or more compounds comprising;

- one or more P-OH moieties with one or more compounds comprising one or more P-O-P anhydride moieties or one or more P-X moieties, wherein the P atom of one or more compounds is at the oxidation state (+III);

- one or more P-X moieties and water, wherein the P atom of the P-X moiety comprising compound is at the oxidation stage (+III);

- two or more P-O-P moieties and water, wherein the P-O-P moiety comprising compound has a P atom at the oxidation state (+III) and a P atom at the oxidation state (+III) or (+V);

wherein the compounds having one or more P-OH moieties is accessible by
5 tautomerization of a $>P(=O)H$ moiety,

wherein X is a halogenide selected from the group consisting of chlorine, bromine and iodine and

wherein the halogen level in the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound is 1000 ppm or less, preferably 500 ppm or less and more preferably 200 ppm or less.

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b) hydrolysing the reaction mixture to form N-phosphonomethyliminodiacetic acid or one of its derivatives.

2. The method according to claim 1 wherein the $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-$
15 R^2 corresponds to the 4-X-piperazine-2,6-dione or the 4-X-1-(C₁-C₄ alkyl)piperazine-2,6-dione family.

3. The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the ratio of N-X moieties to P-O-P anhydride moieties is comprised between 0.3 and 2.0, preferably
20 between 0.5 and 1.5.

4. The method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the compound having the general formula $R^1-CH_2-NX-CH_2-R^2$ is selected from the group consisting of N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetonitrile, N-
25 hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid dimethylester, N-hydroxymethyliminodiacetic acid diethylester, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetonitrile, N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid dimethylester and N-carboxymethyliminodiacetic acid diethylester.

5. The method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the compound comprising the P-O-P anhydride moieties is selected from the group consisting of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide, tetraethylpyrophosphite, and the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound obtained from the combination of phosphorous acid and tetraphosphorus hexaoxide, of phosphorous acid and
35 tetraphosphorus decaoxide, of phosphorous acid and phosphorus trichloride, of

dimethylphosphite and tetraphosphorus decaoxide, of phosphorus trichloride and water and of tetraphosphorus hexaoxide and water.

6. The method according to any of the preceding claims,
5 wherein the compound comprising the P-O-P anhydride moieties is tetraphosphorus hexaoxide.

7. The method according to any of the preceding claims,
wherein the acid catalyst is a homogeneous Brønsted acid catalyst selected from the
10 group consisting of methanesulfonic acid, trifluoromethanesulfonic acid, acetic acid, trifluoroacetic acid, p-toluenesulfonic acid, hydrochloric acid, phosphorous acid, phosphoric acid and mixtures thereof.

8. The method according to any of the preceding claims
15 wherein the acid catalyst is a heterogeneous Brønsted acid, preferably selected from the group consisting of:

- (i) solid acidic metal oxide combinations as such or supported onto a carrier material;
- (ii) cation exchange resins selected from the group comprising copolymers of
20 styrene, ethylvinyl benzene and divinyl benzene, functionalized so as to graft SO₃H moieties onto the aromatic group and perfluorinated resins carrying carboxylic and/or sulfonic acid groups;
- (iii) organic sulfonic, carboxylic and phosphonic Brønsted acids which are substantially immiscible in the reaction medium at the reaction
25 temperature;
- (iv) an acid catalyst derived from:
 - the interaction of a solid support having a lone pair of electrons onto which is deposited an organic Brønsted acid; or
 - the interaction of a solid support having a lone pair of electrons onto which
30 is deposited a compound having a Lewis acid site; or
 - heterogeneous solids functionalized by chemical grafting with a Brønsted acid group or a precursor therefore; and
- (v) heterogeneous heteropolyacids of the general formula H_xPM_yO_z wherein P is selected from phosphorus and silicon and M is selected from tungsten and
35 molybdenum and combinations thereof.

9. The method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the acid catalyst is a homogeneous Lewis acid preferably selected from the group consisting of $\text{LiN}(\text{CF}_3\text{SO}_2)_2$, $\text{Mg}(\text{OCF}_3\text{SO}_2)_2$, $\text{Al}(\text{OCF}_3\text{SO}_2)_3$, $\text{Bi}(\text{OCF}_3\text{SO}_2)_3$, $\text{Sc}(\text{OCF}_3\text{SO}_2)_3$.

5 10. The method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the acid catalyst is a heterogeneous Lewis acid obtained from the interaction of a homogeneous Lewis acid catalyst and an organic or inorganic polymer compound.

10 11. The method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the compound with general formula $\text{R}^1\text{-CH}_2\text{-NX-CH}_2\text{-R}^2$ and the compound having one or more P-O-P anhydride moieties are reacted in step a) in the presence of a solvent selected from the group consisting of 1,4-dioxane, toluene, ethylacetate, acetonitrile, sulfolane, 1-ethyl-3-methyl-imidazolium bis(trifluoromethylsulfonyl) imide, or a mixture thereof.

15 12. The method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound is gradually added to the compound with general formula $\text{R}^1\text{-CH}_2\text{-NX-CH}_2\text{-R}^2$ while maintaining the temperature of step a) below 100°C , preferably at a temperature comprised between 20°C and 70°C .

20 13. The method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein after completion of the addition of the P-O-P anhydride moiety comprising compound, step a) is heated to a temperature comprised between 20°C and 100°C , preferably between 30°C and 90°C and maintained at said temperature for a period of time comprised between 1 hour and 24 hours.

25 14. The method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the hydrolysis of step b), is performed at a temperature comprised between 20°C and 120°C , preferably between 40°C and 100°C , for a period comprised between 10 minutes and 24 hours and preferably between 1 hour and 10 hours.

30 15. The method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the hydrolysis of step b) is performed under alkali conditions.

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/EP2013/065119

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. C07F9/38

ADD.

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

C07F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, CHEM ABS Data, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	EP 0 595 598 A1 (HAMPSHIRE CHEMICAL CORP [US]) 4 May 1994 (1994-05-04) cited in the application	1,3-5,7, 12-15
A	example 6	2,6,8-11
A	----- WO 2009/130322 A1 (STRAITMARK HOLDING AG [CH]; NOTTE PATRICK [BE]; DEVAUX ALBERT [BE]) 29 October 2009 (2009-10-29) cited in the application example 2 -----	1-15



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

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"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

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"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

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