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STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

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EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE ON PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED  
IN THE REPORT OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS

Submitted by the Government of the  
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

GE.67-17769

EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE ON PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED  
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(View of the USSR delegation)

RECOMMENDATION I. General Principles of Standardization of Geographic Names.

(a) The delegation of the USSR shares the opinion of the experts and considers it essential to organize national names authorities in each and every country to work on the standardization of geographic names. These authorities should have definite duties and responsibilities stipulated by special documents (principles). They shall meet regularly and work in accordance with a plan.

(b) National names authorities should promote the activities of state bodies, ministries, departments, publishing-houses and other agencies in promulgating standard names in all the publications of the country.

(c) National names authorities should elaborate rules for spelling and rendering foreign geographic names and also uniform dictionaries of standard geographic names (gazetteers) that are of great importance for both national and international standardization. The dictionaries should give both the rendered and the original forms of a name, the kind of the feature, the administrative division it belongs to, and have some brief physiographic information for natural features. Out-of-date names should be inserted side by side with the new names which have come into use. It is more expedient to publish dictionaries in large editions to allow for their extensive use.

RECOMMENDATION II. Uniform Rules for National Standardization of Geographic Names.

The standardization of geographic names within the country should be realized by the national names authorities in accordance with uniform instructions. These instructions, we believe, should include general principles of names standardization and rules for rendering names from different languages (for multilingual countries). They should point out the cartographic, literary and reference sources necessary to ascertain an authentic name of any geographic entity; it should contain information on the dissemination of languages and the rendering of geographic terms, plus rules for the spelling of compound names.

RECOMMENDATION III. Viewpoint on Standardization of Geographic Names.

Standardization of geographic names in any country is possible only if some definite general rules exist. However, each country has its own conventional names, the

spelling of which differs from the general rules of the latter. It is advisable that a number of such names be retained in their conventional form.

While rendering names, translation, as a rule, should be avoided.

RECOMMENDATION IV. Identical Names for Entities of the Same Kind.

Steps should be taken to prevent duplication in naming geographical entities of the same kind within any single administrative unit of a country. Repetition of names already in use should be avoided when giving new ones.

RECOMMENDATION V. Consultation of National Names Authorities during Official Approval of New Names or Alternations of Existing Ones.

It is expedient that the national names authorities state their opinion of the suggestions put forward while naming or renaming a feature before the respective legislative or executive state authorities render a decision.

RECOMMENDATION VI. Several Aspects Based on the Preliminary Discussion Concerning the Determination of Standardized Names or the Choice of One amongst Existing Ones.

It is agreed that public opinion be taken into consideration when establishing a new standard name or choosing one from a number of existing names.

RECOMMENDATION VII. Standardization of Names in Countries with a Multi-national Population.

Names of geographic entities within a country with a multi-national population should be given in the national language of the country concerned. The report of the Soviet delegation treats the problem in detail.

The alphabet of a cognate language or the international phonetic alphabet should be used to register names from a language that has no alphabet of its own.

Countries faced with similar problems are advised to co-operate.

RECOMMENDATION VIII. Standardization of the Names of Extensive Natural Features.

The national names authorities should consult specialists (geographers, geologists, etc.) as well as make use of information obtained from the local population, when determining names for extensive natural features (or their parts).

It is desirable that the standard names of natural features be published in catalogues or gazetteers where the names of parts of a feature should be cross-referenced to the name of the main feature. Names of extensive natural features, in their turn, should be supplemented with the names of their parts.

As to extensive natural features located on the territories of several countries, we consider that they may have their national name in each country, e.g. Dunav - for Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, Donau - for Germany and Austria, Duna - for Hungary, Dunaj - for the USSR and Czechoslovakia, Dunărea - for Rumania.

RECOMMENDATION IX. Standardization of Names of Populated Places Formed by the Merging of Two or More Populated Places.

Dictionaries of geographic names (gazetteers) to be issued should contain the names of the small places that have formed a new (larger) populated place. It is also necessary to include in them names of minor administrative units constituting larger ones as well as information on any changes in administrative division.

RECOMMENDATION X. Names Comprising Optional Parts.

To promote international and national standardization of geographic names every country should determine whether different additional words in a name are integral or optional. Optional parts should be dropped.

RECOMMENDATION XI. Geographic Terms (1) as a Part of a Name, and (2) as an Indication of the Nature of a Feature, not Being a Part of a Name.

It is necessary that qualified specialists in every country determine efficiently the difference between the geographic term which usually constitutes a part of a name, and the geographic term which serves to indicate a geographic feature without being a part of its name.

RECOMMENDATION XII. A Study of Geographic Features and Terms.

It is expedient that specialists bear in mind physiographic peculiarities of an entity while determining its name. This, likewise, concerns the choice of terms indicating the entity.

RECOMMENDATION XIII. Glossaries of Geographic Terms.

The compilation of glossaries of geographic terms is of great significance for the standardization of names. Attention should be directed to the determination and study of local geographic terms.

It would be expedient to discuss the possibilities of compiling an extensive international glossary of geographic terms by the joint efforts of specialists of different countries. The collection and determination of the meaning of national geographic terms for every country should, in our opinion, precede the compilation of such a glossary. Such work is under way in the Soviet Union and some suggestions are mentioned in the report of the Soviet delegation.

RECOMMENDATION XIV. Parallel Syntactical and Grammatical Structures of Names.

The existence of parallel syntactical and grammatical structures of names hinders their standardization. Therefore, after a thorough investigation, specialists from different countries should adopt one of them as an official standard name.

RECOMMENDATION XV. Definite and Indefinite Forms of Names.

The existence of two forms for a single name (with and without a definite article, e.g. Husainiya and Al Husainiya) not only hinders national standardization, but also creates problems for countries borrowing these names. It would be expedient for the specialists in the countries where such phenomena occur, to once and for all determine the names in which the definite article is an integral part. In languages where both forms exist (i.e. with and without a definite article), one of the forms should be standardized.

RECOMMENDATION XVI. Abbreviations in Geographic Names.

Specialists should determine standard abbreviations used in that country and in its languages and give the meaning of these abbreviations. Gender, number and case flexions in abbreviations should be explained.

RECOMMENDATION XVII. Uniform Spelling of Place-Names.

It is necessary for specialists to correct the distorted place-names in accordance with the norms of the national languages, as well as to do away with the different spellings of names of the same type. The spelling of names in all publications should be correct and stable.

RECOMMENDATION XVIII. Location of Geographic Names.

The location of geographic entities within the boundaries of the country should be given in terms that each country considers most suitable.

RECOMMENDATION XIX. Information on the Gender, Number, Stress, Tone and on the Pronunciation of Geographic Names in Dictionaries.

Information on the gender, number, stress, tone and pronunciation of geographic names will aid both national and international standardization of names.

RECOMMENDATION XX. Standardization of Names of Countries Using Arabic, Amharic and Thai Alphabets.

With the purpose of national and international standardization of names it is necessary for specialists in countries using the Arabic alphabet, to represent all the diacritical marks, including vowel points, tashdid, sukūn and hamzah, when spelling names. As to Amharic and Thai names, it is desirable that phonetic transcription be added.

RECOMMENDATION XXI. Standardization of Names of Countries with Idiographic Writing.

It is desirable that specialists of these countries spell names both in idiographic and in Roman characters (the national Roman alphabet in China) or in national syllabic writing (the kana alphabet in Japan).

The Soviet delegation is of the opinion that the Group of Experts has done a great amount of useful work. It would be reasonable if, after the above recommendations have been discussed, the work were continued and the remarks made by the different countries taken into account. It would also be useful to work out recommendations on such problems as: the spelling of compound names, the rendition of geographic terms in names, the inter-relation of local and European names in non-European countries. In the process of completing the above recommendations, it would be helpful to group them according to the main problems and to arrange them consistently, e.g.

- I. General principles of national standardization
- II. Activities of national authorities on standardization of names.
- III. Practice of standardization.