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THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE  
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Athens, 17 August-7 September 1977

Items 7/8 of the provisional agenda.

Reports by divisions and Governments on  
the situation in their regions and  
countries and on the progress made in  
the standardization of geographical  
names since the Second United Nations  
Conference on the Standardization of  
Geographical Names.

National standardization

STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN THE USSR: THE WORK  
CARRIED OUT BETWEEN THE SECOND AND THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS  
CONFERENCES ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
(1972-1977)\*

Paper presented by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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\* Paper prepared by A. M. Komkov, Vice Chairman, Permanent Joint Commission on  
Geographical Names, USSR.

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In the period from 1972 to 1977 a considerable work was carried out in the USSR in the field of standardization of geographical names. These activities have been and are carried on under three main directions.

The first is aimed at provision of correct and unified rendering of the USSR and foreign geographical feature names into Russian and into other languages of the USSR peoples in all kinds of the Soviet publications. Conducting in this field the Lenin's national policy we try to treat the national names as carefully as possible and not to allow any distortions to them. Thus we meet the requirement to reflect most accurately and exhaustively the phonetic, graphic, grammar and, if possible, lexical characteristics of the names transposed. This objective is being achieved by elaboration of not only general principles but also of specific rules for rendering geographical names developed on the basis of profound and comprehensive studies of the original (national) spelling features and investigation of possibilities of the receiver-language to reflect them.

In the Soviet socialist multinational State, celebrating this year its 60th anniversary, the equal nations and nationalities inhabiting our country use over 60 literary languages. Under these conditions Russian is accepted by all the peoples of the USSR as a mutual language for international exchange and co-operation: Russian enables people of any nationality to get access to scientific and cultural progress of all other peoples of the USSR. That is why elaboration of rules for rendering non-Russian geographical names into Russian provides for the general basis for the national standardization of geographical names in the USSR. These rules become also the core of the instructions for the transfer of geographical names into other languages in all Soviet publications issued in Russian.

Each of the instructions is comparatively small in volume, but a very pithy work incorporating the following sections: general principles; sources for name identification; rules for name rendering; transfer of geographic terms and spelling of compound names; conventional names. Appendices include: short information on the language and toponymy of a country, republic or province concerned as well as a glossary of geographical terms and other words forming geographical names.

In 1972-1977 more than 30 instructions of this kind were worked out and published; the total number of acting instructions including those published earlier is 65. The list of the most important instructions vide in the annex.

Publication of all instructions (except one) on Russian rendering of geographical names of all the Federal Republics and the majority of the Autonomous Republics is completed.

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Compilation of glossaries of geographical terms forming the toponymy of the USSR and some other countries has been carried on.

Taking into consideration vast development of international relations and connected with this process increase in demand for correct rendering of foreign geographical names, 18 instructions on Russian rendering of foreign countries' geographical names were elaborated in recent years. Instructions on rendering into Russian of geographical names from the mostly spread occidental and some oriental languages: English, French, Spanish, German, Vietnamese, Japanese and others were elaborated. Simultaneously we were solving a complicated problem: it was necessary to adjust the rules of rendering of foreign language geographical names into Russian to the norms of foreign modern literary languages while different pronunciation and spelling of a number of non-Russian geographical names are deep rooted in Russian. A number of such names that entered the classical Russian literature and became current were preserved without alteration as conventional ones.

Elaboration of instructions incorporating scientifically based and unified for each language rules of geographical name rendering is a necessary and a basic element for standardization of geographical names. But even the most sophisticated instruction can not foresee all the cases emerging in practical transcription of geographical names belonging to another language. Gazetteers compiled on the basis of the above mentioned instructions are the means that enables to fully escape possible discrepancy in name rendition. More and more of our personnel is switched over to the solution of this complicated and labour consuming problem as the elaboration of the instructions is over. Nine dictionaries of geographical names for the Federal and Autonomous Republics of the USSR and for a number of foreign countries were elaborated and published. From now on compilation of gazetteers becomes our main objective.

This is the situation in the field of normalization of Russian transposition of geographical names belonging to other languages.

Transposition of geographical names to national languages of other peoples of the USSR is conducted in compliance with the rules of orthography and orthographic dictionaries compiled by institutes of literature and language under Academies of Sciences of each of the Soviet Federal and Autonomous Republics. Application of such rules and dictionaries and utilization of Russian as the intermediate language facilitates to transfer geographical names of the USSR and those of foreign countries to national languages of the USSR peoples, in all kinds of publications including maps, manuals, reference and scientific materials as well as many volume encyclopaedias published by all the Federal and many of the Autonomous Republics of the USSR.

The legal aspect of geographical name standardization means that the established rules of name rendering and names of specific geographical features fixed in gazetteers must get the compulsory status for application in official documents, maps, educational, scientific, reference and other materials published

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by all institutions, organizations and establishments of the country. In the USSR it is conducted on the basis of legislative acts and the governmental notifications regulating the general procedure for naming and renaming of features within the USSR and determination of geographical feature names belonging to other countries. In order to co-ordinate the activities connected with determination of names in Russian a Permanent Joint Commission on geographical names was set up under the Main Administration for Geodesy and Cartography. The Commission includes representatives of the range of the Soviet ministries, organizations and establishments concerned. The Commission considers and makes recommendations on all propositions concerning naming and renaming of objects of all-Union (central) subjection and physical-geographical features. After that the proposals are approved by the corresponding governmental departments. Drafts of instructions on Russian rendering of names belonging to other languages of the USSR and foreign countries are discussed at the Commission sessions as well. After concordance of the instructions and gazetteers with all the organizations concerned and endorsement by the Commission the drafts are approved by the Main Administration for Geodesy and Cartography under the Council of Ministers of the USSR and become compulsory for the whole territory of the USSR.

The same procedure is accepted for establishment of geographical feature names in other national languages of the peoples of the USSR. There is a Permanent Joint Commission on geographical names in each of the Federal Republics acting the same way as the all-Union (central) one.

Success in standardization of geographical names depends in many ways on organizational and technical aspect, on conditions and organization of labour and technical equipment provided for the specialists. Elaboration of scientific-methodological documents, preparation of materials to be considered by the Joint Commission, current operative work (regular maintenance of geographical name catalogue, determination and examination of names by request of mapping agencies, replies to requests of other organizations concerned) require concentrated and continuous efforts of a large team of specialists. Such a team, which actually presents a permanent service for geographical names in Russian, works in the system of the USSR State Cartographic-Geodetic Service.

Many participants of the XXIIIrd International Geographic Congress and the VIIIth International Cartographic Conference held in Moscow in August 1976, visited our Service for geographical names and got acquainted with its activities.

Since no higher school trains and can train universal specialists ready to solve all the complex of problems connected with standardization of geographical names, the service for geographical names is a combined team incorporating scientists and specialists in different fields, i.e. linguists on Slavic, Germanic, Roman, oriental and other languages, toponymists, geographers, cartographers. Organization of all those specialists co-operation is the main condition and pledge of successful solution of scientific, methodological and applied problems of geographical name standardization.

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Annex

List of the acting instructions for Russian rendering of non-Russian geographical names, dictionaries of geographical names and glossaries of geographical terms (situation on July, 1977)

Instructions for Russian rendering of geographical names of:

- Armenian SSR. M., 1975
- Azerbaijan SSR. M., 1971
- Byelorussian SSR. M., 1971
- Estonian SSR. M., 1972
- Georgian SSR. M., 1972
- Kazakh SSR. M., 1971
- Kirghiz SSR. M., 1975
- Latvian SSR. M., 1972
- Lithuanian SSR. M., 1971
- Moldavian SSR. M., 1971
- Tajik SSR. M., 1976
- Turkmen SSR. M., 1971
- Ukrainian SSR. M., 1971
- Abkhazian ASSR. M., 1977
- Kara-Kalpak ASSR. M., 1977
- Komi ASSR. M., 1974
- Mari ASSR. M., 1977
- Mordovian ASSR. M., 1971
- Udmurt ASSR. M., 1973
- Yakut ASSR. M., 1977
- Khakassian AO. M., 1977
- Arab-speaking countries M., 1967
- Burundi, Zambia, Kenya, Congo (Kinshasa), Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and South Rhodesia. M., 1969
- Cambodia. M., 1967
- Chinese People's Republic. M., 1967
- Denmark. M., 1974
- English-speaking countries. M., 1976
- Ethiopia. M., 1971
- France. M., 1975
- German-speaking countries. M., 1975
- Indonesia. M., 1977
- Ireland Republic. M., 1970
- Italy. M., 1977
- Japan. M., 1975
- Korea. M., 1972
- Laos. M., 1967

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- Malagasy Republic. M., 1967
- Maory. M., 1974
- Norway. M., 1974
- Poland. M., 1975
- Portugal and Brazil. M., 1974
- Somalia. M., 1976
- South-African Republic. M., 1968
- Spanish-speaking countries. M., 1975
- Sweden. M., 1976
- Viet Nam. M., 1973
- Wales. M., 1976

Dictionaries of geographical names of:

- The USSR. M., 1968
- Orographic Features of the USSR. M., 1976
- Ukrainian SSR (in 4 volumes). M., 1977
- Komi ASSR. M., 1976
- Mordovian ASSR. M., 1976
- Foreign Countries. M., 1970
- Arab Countries (in 2 volumes). M., 1973
- Ethiopia. M., 1974
- GDR (in 2 volumes). M., 1976
- Korea. M., 1973
- The Countries of Latin America (in 4 volumes). M., 1975

Glossaries of geographical terms of:

- Azerbaijan SSR. M., 1971
- Buryat ASSR. M., 1969
- Chukchi, Koriaks and Eskimo toponymy. M., 1971
- Dagestan ASSR. M., 1972
- Even and Evenks toponymy. M., 1967
- Gorno-Altai AO. M., 1969
- Khakassian AO. M., 1968
- Komi ASSR. M., 1968
- Mansi, Khanti and Selkup toponymy. M., 1973
- Nanai toponymy. M., 1968
- Nenets toponymy. M., 1971
- Tajik SSR. M., 1975
- Tuva ASSR. M., 1971
- Iran. M., 1971

Under publishing:

Instructions for Russian rendering of geographical names of:

- Uzbek SSR.
- Buryat ASSR.
- Dagestan ASSR.
- Gorno-Altai AO.
- Burma
- Czechoslovakia
- Finland

Dictionaries of geographical names of:

- Byelorussian SSR.
- Dagestan ASSR.
- Tuva ASSR.
- Uzbek SSR.
- FRG
- USA