

**Twenty-second Session  
New York, 20-29 April 2004**

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**Item 18 of the Provisional Agenda**

**STANDARDIZATION IN MULTILINGUAL AREAS**

**Minority languages in Austria \***

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## MINORITY LANGUAGES IN AUSTRIA, THEIR OFFICIAL STATUS AND THEIR TREATMENT IN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

### 1 Legal aspect

Austria is a unilingual country, and German is the only nationwide official language. But there exist also minority languages, which are of regional importance and play a role in the official maps and gazetteers.

Austria has 6 officially recognized national ethnic minorities – the Slovene, the Croat, the Hungarian, the Czech, the Slovak and the Roma ethnic group (Volksgruppen) - , of which only the Slovene language, the Burgenland-Croat and the Hungarian language is of importance with regard to geographical names.

The legal situation for granting minority rights in our country is the following:

In Art. 7 of the State Treaty (“Staatsvertrag”) that re-established Austria as a sovereign, independent, and democratic republic in 1955, it is stated that, in addition to the German language, the Slovene and Croat language shall be accepted as official languages in certain administrative and judicial districts of Carinthia, Styria and Burgenland with Slovene, Croat or mixed population. The same provision further states that topographical terminology and inscriptions in those districts shall be in the Slovene or Croat language as well as in German. In 1972 the first attempt to put up bilingual signs was set in Carinthia, but it was resisted by certain (nationalist) movements.

So in 1976 the Federal Statute on the Legal Status of National Minorities in Austria was enacted. In contrast to the State Treaty of 1955 it is not confined to Slovenes and Croats only. This statute applies to all recognized national minorities. Paragraph 2 prescribes that dual naming shall appear on topographical signs in areas with a considerable portion (i. e. a quarter or 25%) of people belonging to a national minority. But this clause has been criticized as unconstitutional on the grounds that the State Treaty refers to "mixed" but not "considerable" minority population.

In 1977 the ‘Decree of the Federal Government from May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1977, by which the Slovene topographical inscriptions for populated places are prescribed’ was enacted by the Federal Government in consultation with the Main Committee of the National Council. This decree contains 91 bilingual place names within the bilingual region of Carinthia.

**308. Verordnung der Bundesregierung vom 31. Mai 1977, mit der die slowenischen Bezeichnungen für Ortschaften festgesetzt werden**

Auf Grund des § 2 Abs. 1 Z. 2 und des § 12 Abs. 2 des Volksgruppengesetzes, BGBl. Nr. 396/1976, wird im Einvernehmen mit dem Hauptausschuß des Nationalrates verordnet:

§ 1. In den Gebietsteilen, in denen gemäß der Verordnung der Bundesregierung vom 31. Mai 1977, BGBl. Nr. 306, topographische Bezeichnungen in deutscher und in slowenischer Sprache anzubringen sind, sind die Ortschaften wie folgt zu bezeichnen:

POLITISCHER BEZIRK Gemeinde	Ortschaften	Slowenische Bezeichnung
KLAGENFURT LAND		
Ebental	Kossiach	Kozje
	Kreuth	Rute
	Lipizach	Lipica
	Radsberg	Radiše
	Schwarz	Dvorec
	Tutzach	Tulce
	Werouzach	Verovce
Ferlach	Bodental	Poden
	Loibltal	Brodi
	Strugarjach	Strugarji
	Windisch Bleiberg	Slovenji Plajberg
Ludmannsdorf	Bach	Potok
	Edling	Kajzeze
	Fellersdorf	Bilnjovs
	Franzendorf	Branča ves
	Großkleinberg	Mala gora
	Ludmannsdorf	Bilčovs
	Lukowitz	Koviče
	Moschenitzen	Moščenica
	Muschkau	Muškava
	Niederdörfl	Spodnja Vesca
	Oberdörfl	Zvrhnja Vesca
	Pugrad	Pograd
	Rupertiberg	Na Gori
	Selkach	Želuče
	Strein	Stranje
	Wellersdorf	Velinja ves
Zedras	Sodražava	
Zell	Zell-Freibach	Sele-Frajbah
	Zell-Homölich	Sele-Homeliše
	Zell-Koschuta	Sele-Košuta
	Zell-Mitterwinkel	Sele-Srednji Kot
	Zell-Oberwinkel	Sele-Zvrhnji Kot
	Zell-Pfarre	Sele-Fara
	Zell-Schaida	Sele-Šajda
VÖLKERMARKT		
Bleiburg	Dolintschitschach	Dolinčiče
	Feistritz ob Bleiburg	Bistrica nad Pliberkom
	Gonowitz	Konovece

POLITISCHER BEZIRK Gemeinde	Ortschaften	Slowenische Bezeichnung
	Hinterlibitsch	Suha
	Hof	Dvor
	Lettenstätten	Letina
	Penk	Ponikva
	Pirkdorf	Breška ves
	Rischberg	Rižberg
	Ruttach-Schmelz	Rute
	St. Michael ob Bleiburg	Šmihel nad Pliberkom
	Tscherberg	Črgoviče
	Unterlibitsch	Podlibič
	Unterort	Podkraj
	Winkel	Kot
	Aich	Dob
	Dobrowa	Dobrova
	Draurain	Brege
	Einersdorf	Nonča ves
	Kömmelgupf	Vrh
	Kömmel	Komelj
	Moos	Blato
	Replach	Replje
	Rinkenberg	Vogrče
	Rinkolach	Rinkole
	Ruttach	Rute
	Schilterndorf	Cirkovče
	Wiederndorf	Vidra ves
Eisenkappel-Vellach	Blasnitzen	Spodnja Plaznica
	Ebriach	Obirsko
	Koprein Petzen	Pod Peco
	Koprein Sonnseite	Koprivna
	Leppen	Lepena
	Lobnig	Lobnik
	Rechberg	Reberca
	Remschenig	Remšenik
	Trögern	Korte
	Unterort	Podkraj
	Vellach	Bela
	Weißbach	Bela
	Zauchen	Suha
Globasnitz	Globasnitz	Globasnica
	Jaunstein	Podjuna
	Kleindorf	Mala ves
	St. Stefan	Šteben
	Slovenjach	Slovenje
	Traundorf	Strpna ves
	Tschepitschach	Cepiče
	Unterbergen	Podgora
	Wackendorf	Večna ves

POLITISCHER BEZIRK Gemeinde	Ortschaften	Slowenische Bezeichnung
Neuhaus	Draugegend Hart Heiligenstadt Oberdorf Schwabegg Unterdorf	Pri Dravi Breg Sveto mesto Gornja ves Žvabek Dolnja ves

§ 2. Diese Verordnung tritt mit 1. Juli 1977 in Kraft.

Kreisky	Androsch	Pahr	Moser
Leodolter	Staribacher	Rösch	Broda
Lütgendorf	Haiden	Weißenberg	Sinowatz
Lanc		Firnberg	

(BGBl. Nr. 308/1977)

But we have a different situation in Burgenland. In this Federal Province we have the ethnic minorities of the Croats, the Hungarians and the Roma (we have no reliable data for the Roma population), they are official recognized ethnic minorities. The Croat minority is scattered over six administrative districts of Burgenland, whereas there are only 4 settlements with a considerable number of Hungarians (that is the administrative district of Oberwart with 3 bilingual place names and of Oberpullendorf with 1 bilingual place name). The ethnic minorities, after all the Croats, have been gradually diminishing since the 1930ies, due to assimilation and emigration (many Burgenland Croats emigrated to America). In the last two decades we can observe an increased self-confidence of the ethnic minorities, they cultivate their traditions in a number of cultural societies.

The above mentioned “Federal Statute on the Legal Status of National Minority Groups” was only passed in June 2000 for the Croat and the Hungarian place names. It singles out the populated places where bilingual topographical terminology and signs have to be either in German - Croat or in German - Hungarian.

The Austrian Constitutional Court had to review this “Federal Statute.....” in 2001 and repealed, that the part “considerable portion (a quarter or 25%)” doesn’t comply with our constitution and recommended a census of 10% minority population for the installation of bilingual signs. As consequence of this judgement more bilingual topographic signs need to be erected in Carinthia as well as in Burgenland. The government of Burgenland declared its consent. However, the situation is not cleared at the moment and this judgement gave rise to a new political debate about minority rights.

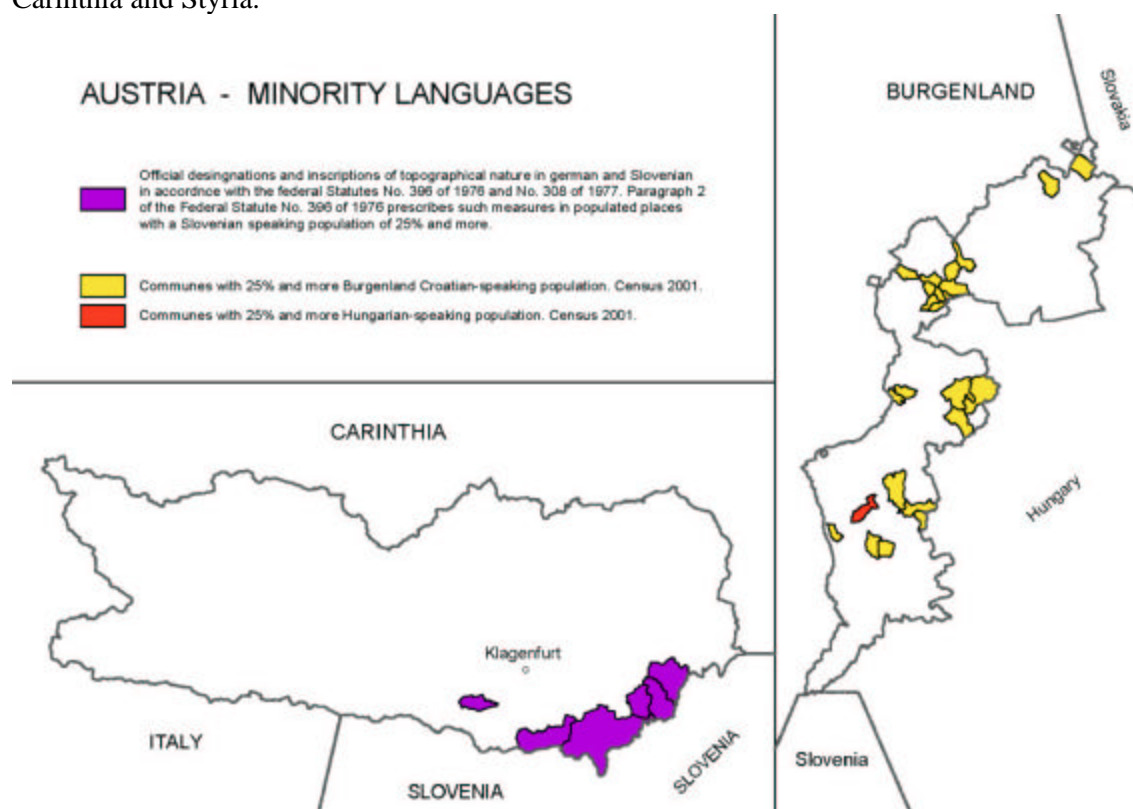
## 2 Linguistic aspects

In the following I want to point out some interesting and at the same time controversially discussed linguistic details in the standardization of place names in the minority language.

### 2.1 Place names in the Slovenian language:

First of all some general remarks: Slovenian, the official language of Slovenia, has in Austria the status of a minority language with all rights. That is to say that a member of this language community may use the Slovene language in administration affairs, at court, he or she can attend a school with Slovenian classes and Slovenian is used at church. The Slovene minority

has its settlement area in the south of Austria, in small regions of the Federal Provinces Carinthia and Styria.



Place names are part of the written language and thus are part of human communication, but they also lie in the field of tension between standard language and regional or independent linguistic developments of that language and thus become a special problem for standardization. Exactly this point led to some irritations concerning the spelling of place names in the Slovenian language in Carinthia in the latest past.<sup>1</sup> The highest principle for the standardization of the Slovene names forms was to fix the place names in their local form. There are a few distinctions between standard Slovenian and the local Slovenian language in Carinthia; I illustrate this by the example of three types of place names (from the list of the 91 standardized Slovene names in Carinthia).

1) There is the largely-debated question of the *vas* / *ves* spelling. This is a basic word in quite a respectable number of compound place names in the south of Carinthia (the list of the standardized names contains 18 names), it is the Slovene term for “village” (in German “dorf”); *vas* is the standard Slovenian form, whereas *ves* the local Slovene form in Carinthia is. The Slovene representatives plead for the standard Slovene spelling, whereas Slavists, that is to say Austrian as well as Slovene scientists hold the opinion that preference should be given to the specific in this region existing form *ves*, which goes back to a long historic tradition, and it complies with the principle of standardizing the local forms. This spelling was standardized and is the present recognized form.

e.g. *Einersdorf*– *Nonca ves*

<sup>1</sup> The Regional Archive of Carinthia in 1972 was entrusted to propose the spellings of 205 Slovene place names in its local forms.

2) Another generic term is the German word *berg* / *berk*, the German etymon for “mountain”. This word is used as basic word in a number of place names and linguists have chosen the standard German form *berg* also for the Slovene names forms: see *Windisch Bleiberg* / *Slovenji Plajberg* (this name on the whole is of German origin). Another example is *Rischberg* / *Rižberg*.

Representatives of the Slovene minority group demand that this word should be transliterated in Slovene as *berk*, because in Slovene there exists also the Slovene derivation *bercan* as name for the inhabitants of such a village.

There is no consistent handling of this rule: *Rechberg* / *Reberca*, *Feistritz ob Bleiburg* / *Bistrica nad Pliberkom* (these Slovenian names forms are contained in the map 1:50 000).

3) The suffix *-nig(g)* / *-nik*: it is originally a Slavic suffix – identical with the German *-er-* suffix. This suffix is typical for names of farmhouses and derived family names, it is mainly used in names which refer to the nature or the landscape. But the type of such names is originally German (in German with the suffix *-er*), and in the bilingual language area the Slovenes copied this type of names with their suffix *-nik* from the German sample. It is characteristic for this region and can be regarded as a typical regional characteristic feature in and for both languages in this area. Therefore both writings were always in use by both ethnic groups, especially in family names. The standardized bilingual place names with this suffix have in the German place name *-nig* and in the Slovene place name the standard Slovene form *-nik*. But a vast number of family names respective names of farmhouses have the Germanized spelling *-nig*.

e.g.: *Lobnig* – *Lobnik*, *Remschenig* - *Remšnik*

4) Generic parts in topographical names

The official recognized names are – as I mentioned above – the 91 fixed names and they are all place names. The situation of the other bilingual geographical names, that are the field names, names of mountains and many other microtoponyms are not officially regulated; in most cases, however, one can find the generic parts translated into the foreign language:

Some examples:

*Goliberg* / *Goli vrh*, *Macenski vrh* / *Matschacher Gupf*, *Sedlo Potok* / *Potoksattel* (-sattel “saddle”), *Sinacher Gupf* / *Sinjski vrh*, *Struglov vrh* / *Struglberg* - all are names of mountains in the south of Carinthia.

But there exist also names with the generic part in German: *Kališnikov turn* / *Kalischniktu rm*.

## 2.2 Place names in the Croat and Hungarian language

At the beginning some informations on the Burgenland-Croat language.:

With the Decree of the Austrian Constitutional court from 12. 12. 1987 the Burgenland-Croat language obtained the status of an official language in Austria. That means that the Burgenland-Coat language was recognized as an independent Croat written language.

The background for this development is, that the Croat language in Burgenland in the course of approximate 450 years took a different development from the Croat language in the south of Europe, in the Republic of Croatia. Therefore in the years 1982-1991 the Burgenland-Croat dictionary in two volumes was elaborated. The Burgenland-Croat language is mainly based upon two dialects, the cakavic and the štokavic dialect, which are spoken throughout this Federal Province.

The Decree of the Federal government, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2000 singles out the municipalities and incorporated villages where bilingual topographical signs have to be installed. The list contains 47 Burgenland-Croat place names and 4 Hungarian place names.

The names were standardized on the basis of the local pronunciation (spoken by a majority of people) and written in a kind of phonetic transcription.

As it can be seen in the list in chapter 1 there are three different transcriptions for the word – *dorf* (“village”):  
-*tof*, -*trof*, -*drof* / *Cogrštof* / *Zagersdorf*, *Kalištof* / *Kaisersdorf*, *Pandrof* / *Parndorf*. All these names forms rely upon the local dialectal pronunciation and are written in a phonetic transcription following to a certain degree the Croat orthography.  
Further transcriptions of local forms are: *Vorištan* / *Hornstein*, *Klimpuh* / *Klingenbach* (in this name the reduced basic word German –*bach*, pronounced by Croat speaking people as –*b?* is written as –*puh*, an adaption to their phonetic system), *Bajngrob* / *Weingraben*.  
Other names are translated: *Neudorf* / *Novo Selo*, *Unterpullendorf* / *Doljna Pulja* etc.

But the Croats adopted also the Hungarian form of a place name and integrated it in the Croat phonetic system: *Filež* / *Nikitsch* (the “German” form *Nikitsch* is derived from a Slavic etymon!).

Burgenland was part of the Kingdom of Hungary until 1921 and is situated on the language boundary, the present Burgenland has been home of Germans and Hungarians since medieval times.

The 4 Hungarian place names in the list are translations of the German names (*Felsopulya*, *Felsoor*, *Alsoor* with the exception of *Orisziget* which is a genuine Hungarian name.

### **2.3 Names of foreign origin:**

Austria lies in the point of intersection of the three large language families of Europe: The Slavic, the Roman and the German language. All these names were germanized in the course of history and don't count as minority names of what we speak here.

From the pre-historical time we have names which cannot be assigned to a specific ethnic group: *Danube*, pre-indoeuropean origin \**danu* - “water, river”. From Celtic times mostly names of rivers (*Kamp*, a river in Lower Austria, celt. \**kambos* “gekrümmt”) were passed on, but also the name of the Federal Province of Carinthia is of Celtic origin (celt. \**karant* - “rock”), from the Roman period (*Lorch* in Upper Austria, *Wiltén* in Tyrol), and many field names and mountain names in the western federal provinces of Austria. Nowadays they are witnesses of Roman agriculture and alpine economy. Names of Slavic origin are mainly to be found in the south, southeastern and northeastern parts of our country: e.g. *Graz*, the capital of Styria and many others.