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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL
NAMES IN THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

Presented by the Government of the Union of
Soviet Socialist Republics

INTRODUCTION

1. The standardization of geographical names in a multinational State such as the Soviet Union is a complicated task. A successful solution of the problem of nationalities is one of the achievements of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. As a result, one can see the all-round development of the languages of all the nations and nationalities of the Soviet Union. Scientific works, fiction, geographical maps and atlases, newspapers and magazines are published in these languages in millions of copies. This leads to the necessity of establishing standard and compulsory forms of geographical names in each officially adopted language of the Soviet Union, all of them being equal in rights. Therefore on carrying out the domestic standardization we face the problems of both national and international standardization.
2. In the USSR, the period after the 1967 Geneva Conference was characterized by further intensive development of toponymic investigations providing scientific and methodical foundation for the practical work on the standardization of geographical names. Such toponymic research concerning both the development of theoretical problems and regional study of selected areas are being carried out in scientific institutions and universities of Moscow, the Urals, Siberia, the Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia etc.
3. As a result of such investigations, a number of monographs and scientific collections have been published recently. All-Union and regional scientific conferences on toponymic problems are held frequently (for example, the Conference

on Oronymy (1967), the Conference on Onomastics of Povolzhye (1968-1970), the Ukrainian republican conference on Onomastic science (1967) and the Conference on Toponymy of the Central Regions of Russia (1972)).

4. The study of vernacular geographical terms and other words giving birth to the toponymy of national districts, regions, autonomous and union republics of the country, as well as of foreign countries, constitutes a substantial part of toponymic investigations. Linguists, geographers, historians, cartographers and other professional people working in central, republican or local scientific institutions and agencies take an active part in it. The work undertaken for the last four years has resulted in the publication of more than 15 glossaries containing the toponymic vocabulary and vernacular geographical terminology of many national territories, such as the north-eastern, eastern and central areas of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic, Byelorussian SSR and Azerbaijan SSR.

A. DEVELOPMENT OF RULES OF RENDERING GEOGRAPHICAL
NAMES OF THE USSR AND FOREIGN COUNTRIES

5. The main principles of the establishment of standard forms of names of geographical entities of the USSR in any official language of the Soviet Union were laid down in the paper "Problems of standardization of geographical names in a multinational State" ^{1/} submitted to the first United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Geneva, 1967. Practical transcription remains as the main method of rendering geographical names of the USSR and foreign countries into the national languages of the peoples of the USSR.

6. Since all the nations and nationalities of the USSR have chosen the Russian language as a common language of international communication and collaboration, the elaboration of the rules for rendering non-Russian geographical names into Russian has become a task of primary importance.

7. A series of special instructions on methods and rules for transferring non-Russian geographical names into Russian is a result of work by the State cartographic and geodetic service. Sixty-two such instructions for the languages of the USSR and 48 for the languages of foreign countries have been elaborated thus far.

8. Since 1968 these instructions have acquired nation-wide status, that is they have become compulsory not only for cartographic agencies but for all the organizations of the USSR dealing with the publication of books, magazines, newspapers and other kinds of works.

^{1/} United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, vol. 2, Proceedings of the Conference and technical papers (United Nations publication, Sales No.: E.69.I.8), pp. 88-90.

9. In connexion with the broadening of the sphere of application of the instructions and, consequently, new requirements, a revision of previously published instructions was undertaken during the last four years using the latest achievements in linguistics and toponymy. The instructions are supplemented with a short description of the language and toponymic structure of the region concerned. The lists of generic terms have been expanded considerably.

10. A new procedure of approval for the instructions for rendering place names of the union and autonomous republics into Russian has been established. The draft instructions are first scrutinized in both central and republican scientific institutions (for example, in the institutes of language and literature of the republican academies of sciences) and then co-ordinated with the republican supreme legislative bodies (Presidium of the Supreme Soviets). After that they are considered by the Permanent Joint Commission on geographical names and lastly, submitted for final approval to the Chief Administration of Geodesy and Cartography, under the USSR Council of Ministers. After completing this procedure, the instructions go into force and are compulsory throughout the country.

11. At present the publication of new instructions for rendering the geographical names of all Union Republics is nearing completion. 2/

12. The instructions for autonomous republics and national districts of the USSR are under preparation. As regards to the instructions for rendering place names of foreign countries, 3/ the renovation of previously published and elaboration of new ones are also in progress now.

13. Similar instructions governing the rendering of Russian and other geographical names into native languages of the USSR peoples are being drawn up in our Union Republics. This is connected with the constantly increasing number of maps, atlases, manuals and scientific works published in those languages. National encyclopaedias which are being issued in the Azerbaijan, Armenian, Byelorussian, Moldavian, Uzbek, Ukrainian and other republics are fundamental works requiring the standardization of geographical names.

14. Taking account of the experience of many years in rendering foreign place names into Russian, republican scientific institutions have approved and accepted the method of practical transcription for transposing foreign names into their native languages. In doing so the non-Roman alphabet languages employ Russian as a mediator language, and Roman alphabet languages (Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian) develop special rules for the immediate transfer of foreign names. The reference book on orthography and orphoepy of foreign proper names in the Latvian literary language prepared at the Institute of Language and Literature of the Academy of

2/ Published in 1970-1971 were: instructions for rendering geographical names of the Azerbaijan SSR, Byelorussian SSR, Georgian SSR, Kazakh SSR, Moldavian SSR, Latvian SSR, Lithuanian SSR, Turkmen SSR and Ukrainian SSR.

3/ Published in 1968-1971 were: instructions for rendering geographical names for Burundi, Ethiopia, Iceland, Ireland, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa (from Afrikaans), Zaire and Zambia.

Sciences of the Latvian SSR can be cited as an example. The reference book is issued in separate booklets, each governing the rendering - into Latvian - of proper names, including geographical names, from a definite language, such as Russian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Finnish, English, German and French. Reference books of this type are now being prepared in the Lithuanian and Estonian SSR.

15. Simultaneously with the development of rules for rendering foreign geographical names into Russian and other languages of the USSR, the investigation and search for better ways of Romanizing Russian place-names has been continued during the last four years. In this connexion a comparative study of different Romanization systems in use in the country was carried out. The subject is especially dealt with in another paper presented under item 11 (a) of the provisional agenda of the present Conference. This work will result in the elaboration of draft State standards which will establish a uniform Romanization system for the Russian alphabet mandatory for all the institutions of the USSR. This system will be recommended by us for international use.

B. COLLECTION AND TREATMENT OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES INFORMATION

16. The most complete initial data on names for geographical features are collected, as a rule, in the course of a topographic survey of a country. With a view towards systematizing this work, guidelines for the collection and establishment of place-names in the process of topographical works was elaborated in 1969-1970 and introduced into practice in 1971. It contains recommendations concerning methods of gleaning initial data about names of geographical features in both densely and sparsely populated areas, the assignment of names to features hitherto unnamed and the alteration of existing names, and ways of registering and co-ordinating collected names with local administrative authorities.

17. When gathering place name information in the field, the instructions for rendering geographical names from different national languages of the USSR mentioned in paragraphs 6-8 and 13-14 of this report are widely used, as well as the glossaries of local generic terms.

18. Considerable work in the field collection of toponymical data is performed by scientific institutions. Toponyms, microtoponyms and vernacular generic terms are being collected in different regions and areas. Of interest in this regard, is the collection of toponyms in the central regions of the European part of the USSR being carried out on the basis of special guidelines drawn up by the Toponymical Commission of the USSR Geographical Society.

19. The office treatment of data about geographical names gleaned from various sources and collected in the field includes the selection of names to be standardized, their analysis and the systemizing and cataloguing of the established names.

20. The names of features to be standardized are usually selected according to the practical needs of the institutions concerned: cartographic services, bodies of administrative control, transport and communication agencies, and others.

21. When analysing the names selected to be standardized, all information obtained during the field work is thoroughly examined and checked. The most complicated thing here is the analysis of place names occurring in the areas with multinational (multilingual) populations. The analysis in such cases should determine: from which language (among several possible) the name should be transcribed; which is its correct original spelling and what variants it can have; the meaning of the name; the standard Russian or other language lettering established in conformity with the rules laid down in relevant instructions mentioned above.

22. The catalogues of established (standard) names of geographical features are usually monitored by the organizations concerned. The volume and form of such catalogues, suitable for practical work, are determined by the organizations themselves. According to the content, the catalogues can fall into two main categories: universal and specialized (thematic). Those of the first kind are usually created and monitored at cartographic services. They contain names of all kinds of features: cultural, economical and natural. Specialized catalogues are created and monitored in individual organizations. These include the names of features of a definite kind only - for instance - those of populated places and administrative units, transport or post offices.

C. COMPILATION OF REFERENCE BOOKS AND DICTIONARIES OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

23. The names of geographical entities of various kinds and categories established on the basis of the compulsory instructions are published, for general use, in special reference books and dictionaries.

24. The names of the USSR populated places and administrative units are listed in official reference books on the administrative and territorial divisions of the USSR, union and autonomous republics and regions. The names therein are given in Russian and national lettering. Since 1968 over 40 reference books of this kind have been issued.

25. The guide for passenger railway communication and directories of the USSR railway stations are issued annually and the names in them are considered as standard.

26. Dictionaries of geographical names of the USSR and foreign countries are published for a wide circle of users. Such dictionaries provide the standard Russian transcription (stress indicated) of many cultural and natural feature names. Standard forms of place names in Russian and Roman script can be found in the indexes of geographical names to the World Atlas. ^{4/} A special current information bulletin issued annually publishes any changes in names.

^{4/} The World Atlas, Index-gazetteer (Moscow, 1968).

27. Nearing completion is a series of gazetteers providing both the Russian and original spelling of the feature names of some Soviet Republics and foreign countries.

D. ORGANIZATION OF WORK ON THE STANDARDIZATION
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

28. In the USSR the general order of naming, renaming and establishing names of geographical entities of various kinds and categories, as well as the responsibility of different State bodies for such work is regulated by special legislative enactments and governmental decrees (decrees of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR and those of the USSR Council of Ministers). According to these decrees, the naming and renaming of populated places of Union and Autonomous Republics is the jurisdiction of the Republic concerned and is performed by special decisions of the Republican Presidiums of Supreme Soviets. The problems connected with the nomination of other cultural or natural features are resolved on the same basis.

29. The Permanent Joint Commission on geographical names is the central body which co-ordinates the work on the standardization of geographical names carried out by different institutions and agencies of the USSR. In accordance with a decision of the Soviet Government, the Commission has been set up under the auspices of the Chief Administration of Geodesy and Cartography (GUGK). It is composed of responsible representatives of all the ministries, agencies and scientific institutions interested in the work.

30. The department of geographical names, Central Research Institute of Geodesy, Aerial Surveying and Cartography, is the executive body which prepares materials to be submitted to the Commission for consideration. The department is also responsible for the elaboration of instructions and the compilation of the dictionaries of place names mentioned above.

31. Republican commissions on geographical names, similar to the central Joint Commission, have been set up and are functioning in most Union Republics.

32. This organization of work on the standardization of geographical names allows the consideration of both the State and national interests of the peoples of the USSR.
