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**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in
the standardization of geographical names since the Tenth Conference (for distribution
only)**

Report of Estonia

Submitted by Estonia**

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**Prepared by the Place Names Board of Estonia

Report of Estonia¹

In the period from 2012 till 2017 there have been several steps taken regarding the official standardization of geographical names in Estonia.

NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

The **Place Names Act** continues to be the legal basis of geographical names standardization in Estonia. In 2013 amendments to the Place Names Act were adopted by Parliament. The changes mainly concern the requirements of the National Place Names Register. The register will now have a clear mandate to include all unofficial geographical names in the register and to function as the single source of geographical names data to all other registers. Some other clarifications to the approval and use of geographical names were also made.

The **Place Names Board** (*kohanimenõukogu*) is the main names authority in Estonia, being a consultative body that until 2015 was responsible to the Minister of Regional Affairs. An important organizational change in the standardization of geographical names was due to the new structure of the Government formed after elections in 2015. As the Department of Regional Administration was reassigned to the Minister of Public Administration who was working in the framework of the Ministry of Finances, the department was transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Finances starting 1 September, 2015. So the whole responsibility over the national standardization of geographical names rests now with that Ministry and the Place Names Board works under its auspices. The Board's meetings have been regularly taking place with a pace of two physical meetings per year, at the intermediate periods decisions have been taken through e-mail correspondence.

Regarding **administrative changes** in Estonia, there is an ongoing process at the moment of merging local municipalities that do not correspond to the set criteria (5,000 inhabitants as a minimum). The voluntary stage in 2016 has now been passed and during 2017 the mergers on the initiative of the Government will be taking place. All this process must be completed by mid-2017, so that the local elections in October 2017 could take place with newly defined municipalities. The overall number of municipalities in Estonia is expected to be 79, of these 15 are cities. More information will be given in a separate document submitted to the Conference.

There is a gradual process of new **populated places** being formed or some places being renamed. The Minister of Public Administration has the right to approve names of populated places, based on the applications of local governments and the opinion of the Place Names Board. During 2012–2017, 24 new populated places have been formed, 9 populated places renamed and 2 populated places merged with others. The renamed populated places include three cases whereby only the generic term (status) of the place was changed (e.g. *alevik* 'hamlet, small borough' instead of *küla* 'village'). Some of the

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changes were due to administrative rearrangements as according to the Place Names Act there can be no identical names for populated places within one municipality. So after three municipalities, Kaarma, Kärla and Lümända on the island of Saaremaa merged into one (*Lääne-Saare vald*) in 2014 there were four pairs of identical names in the new municipality. Most names were retained by adding a differentiating adjective to the name, e.g. of the two places called Kulli one was named Kärla-Kulli and the other Lümända-Kulli. More renamings are expected later in 2017 due to the current administrative reform.

The Place Names Board has the power to confirm **lists of official geographical names** provided no other authorities have done so, mainly this provision concerns names of natural features. In June 2014 the Board made some changes to the official list of lake names and island names and confirmed the list of names of water streams (1646 names + some names still awaiting approval from either the Ministry of the Environment or local governments). In 2014–2015 several categories of place names were linguistically checked and recommendations given prior to their official entry into the National Place Names Register. These include 14,073 names of public transportation stops, 16,226 names of heritage sites and objects, 1291 names of springs, 985 names of bridges and 2295 names of various isolated objects. One of the aims of this work was to identify which of the source data constituted proper place names and which were either descriptions or contained no names at all. The lists were extracted from various registers held by other departments.

A new development in recent years has been **name disputes** that have reached the court. There have been two widely publicized cases of name arguments. One concerned the renaming of a part of a street in Tartu in which case some of the inhabitants resisted the renaming itself – which was due to the address system requirements – and disliked also the proposed name *Madruse tänav* ('sailor street'). The other case involved also the renaming of a part of a street in Kadrina municipality. The Place Names Board was involved in both cases. Judicial processes are still continuing in both cases.

Since 2003 the Board has continued its annual public events, **place names days**, for wider audience that deal with issues of place names standardization. These are meant primarily for local officials but are open to all interested persons. The events take place in different locations, place names days were held in Kärdla (2012), Põlva (2013), Pärnu (2014), Tallinn (2015) and Jõgeva (2016). Papers delivered at seminars deal with the implementation of the Place Names Act, principles of names standardization, information on the Place Names Register and with the place names of the local region.

Important for the understanding of the principles of geographical names standardization is training and providing assistance to names authorities. The Estonian Land Board is continuously updating an online **Handbook for the Management of Address Data**. This includes 259 pages of instructions, one third of which concern directly geographical names. As a body responsible for the maintenance of the National Place Names Register, the Land Board is checking the validity and conformance to the Law of all names entered into the register. There are sometimes problems related to the spelling and choice of new place names, in which case advice is sought from the appointed Office of Onomastic Expertise, the Institute of the Estonian Language. A continuous process that is being supervised by the Land Board is the check on the validity of cadastral names. These names were hurriedly registered in the 1990's using old lists containing many orthographic errors, and names that still reflect the old spelling (used until the 1870's). Sometimes the revision of spelling causes controversy with land owners, and one such case was vividly reported by the media in August–September 2013. Many high officials expressed their opinion on that matter, so the attention to place names must in general be considered as positive.

All the documents concerning the activities of the Place Names Board have been published on its **website** (<http://www.eki.ee/knn/>), mainly in Estonian but also with English and Russian summaries. News on the current activities of the Board are regularly updated in all three languages.

Minority names

The Place Names Act supports the use of minority place names, in some cases two parallel names are officially established. For example, there are parallel Estonian and Swedish names in the municipality of Noarootsi and since 2011, on Naissaar.

In south-eastern Estonia the names of populated places in several municipalities of the counties of Võrumaa and Põlvamaa have been standardized in their local form, i.e. in the Võru variety. This has been done with the aid of the Võru Institute. The use of local, or dialectal names has also been spreading in other regions, e.g. on the island of Kihnu which has a peculiar variety. The Basic Map of Estonia (printed version) uses almost exclusively local name forms for natural features. Differences with the formerly used name variants are mainly phonetic.

Cartographic programmes and training courses

The Estonian National Topographic Database is the central database that contains basic topographic data for services and topographic maps. The initial core was formed of the digital data of the Estonian Basic Map at scale 1 : 10,000. The Estonian National Topographic Database was established in 2007. The most important products are digital maps in different scales. Exchange of data between the Estonian National Topographic Database and other databases improves the quality of data. Every year some layers and some parts of the territory are updated. Updating of the core database is not automatically accompanied by the renewal of map products. The digital topographic map 1 : 10,000 is updated once a year and the printed version of the Basic Map 1 : 20,000 is published approximately at the rate of 10 sheets per year. Updated core data is however directly available through Public Web Map Services offered by the Estonian Land Board.

Nautical charts. The Estonian Maritime Administration (EMA) has produced 66 sheets on Estonian territorial waters (scale 1 : 250,000, 1 : 100,000, 1 : 50,000, etc.). Since 1998 the production of charts is done digitally. Digital charts cover all coastal areas (scale 1 : 90,000 and 1 : 180,000). To facilitate navigation for smaller ships 4 folios have been produced. Chart compilation is based on digital hydrographic database. To date 124 electronic navigational charts (cells) have been compiled, covering berthings (53), harbours (14), Narva river (5), Emajõgi (6), Võrtsjärv (4), Lake Peipsi (8), approaches (21), coastal areas (14) and general maps (7). 23 of these charts cover inland waters.

EMA web application *Nutimeri* displays Estonian Maritime Administration's official electronic navigational charts above the background of orthophoto or base map from the Estonian Land Board. Data layers from Hydrographic Information System and/or spatial data objects like aids to navigation, fairways and harbours can be added on the chart layers. The application works on all platforms, allowing GPS positioning, making queries of data objects, using measuring and drawing tools and sending feedback on the application to Estonian Maritime Administration.

The Estonian Maritime Administration has also launched a new application that enables the user to display local navigational warnings either according to the nature of the warnings or their location. The application can be found at <http://gis.vta.ee/navhoiatused/en.html> (the warnings are published both in Estonian and English). It requires Internet connection and can be used with all operating

systems and connected devices.

Other maps. The most comprehensive privately produced cartographic work is the Estonian Road Atlas (1 : 150,000) by AS Regio (since 2016 Regio OÜ and Reach-U), which is annually updated. The atlas includes an index of over 11,000 place names, it is also available on a CD. An online-version (<http://regio.delfi.ee/>) includes a search engine with about 4000 place names.

There have been several **courses on onomastics** at the Universities of Tartu and Tallinn which deal with topics like applied toponymy and names standardization.

Gazetteers and databases

The **National Place Names Register** is maintained since July 2008 by the Estonian Land Board that has integrated the register with its other spatial data, especially the Address Data Register. The register has the status of national supporting register. By the end of 2016 the register contained 157,762 records, incl. traffic features (streets and squares, etc.) – 16,815; land roads – 8448; minor address units (areas) – 637; lakes – 4459; islands – 2138; rivers, etc. – 2499. In 2015–2016 the register has been increased with 4,233 new records, the biggest part of which (2,671) were the names of bus stops, most of the rest has been entered from the printed version of the Basic Map of Estonia (1 : 20,000). The spatial extension of the named features is constantly under review.

The National Place Names Register is available at <http://xgis.maaamet.ee/knravalik/knr> in Estonian and English.

A database of standardized place names, including names from Estonia and abroad **KNAB** (appr. 145,000 features with more than 430,000 names at present, <http://www.eki.ee/knab/knab.htm>) is being compiled at the Institute of Estonian Language. The Institute has also the largest collection of Estonian place names, collected in field work. The collections of geographical names held at the Institute of the Estonian Language were completely scanned by 2013, currently the work is going on to manually enter the headword names to the database, so that the 652,198 cards can be queried online.

The project of compiling a one-volume **dictionary of Estonian places names** (2009–2015) undertaken by the Institute of the Estonian Language in collaboration with the Võru Institute, as well as several organizations, including other onomasticians, historians, geographers, etc, was successfully completed and the dictionary was published in June 2016. It contains 6,211 articles covering some 11,000 places. More information is given in a separate document submitted to the Conference.

EXONYMS

Recommendations on the spelling of foreign geographical names are given by the Estonian Language Committee at the Mother Tongue Society jointly with various institutions (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Geography Institute at the University of Tartu, BNS News Agency). As in 2013 the publication of the Dictionary of Standard Estonian was due, the Committee also briefly handled the topic in 2012–2013. There were minor changes with some exonym preferences in Estonian but the overall principles still apply. The recent UN-approved romanization for Bulgarian (2012) was recommended for use in Estonian, while for others the Committee will await further implementation of the UN systems (for Ukrainian there is an Estonian system of transcription in use). For the Republic of Korea geographical names it was recommended to use the system approved in that country (2000).

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Representatives of Estonia have actively participated in all meetings of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN, attending the 16th meeting of the Division in Tallinn (September 2013), the 17th meeting in Warsaw (June 2015), and the 18th meeting in Saint Petersburg (August 2016). Experts are also involved in some of the working groups of UNGEGN.