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Exonyms

Exonym use: globally common characteristics and criteria

Summary**

In its resolution VIII/4, adopted at the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held in Berlin in 2002, the Conference created the Working Group on Exonyms of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and developed guidelines for ensuring a politically sensitive use of exonyms as one of its major tasks. The Working Group undertook many efforts to comply with that task, including at the:

- (a) Second meeting of the Working Group, held in Prague in 2003;
- (b) Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held in New York in 2007, at which a detailed list of criteria for the use of exonyms was presented and discussed;
- (c) Eighth meeting of the Working Group, held in Timișoara, Romania, in 2008, at which the list of criteria was again discussed and modified;
- (d) Twenty-fifth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, held in Nairobi in 2009, at which the attempt to propose a reduced version of the list as a model for a resolution failed;
- (e) Tenth meeting of the Working Group, held in Tainach, Austria, in 2010, at which the aim was no longer to prepare a resolution, but to produce an advisory handout or brochure.

At the seventeenth meeting of the Working Group, held in Zagreb in 2015, after an exhaustive discussion, the Working Group reaffirmed the preference expressed at the tenth meeting of avoiding a normative approach. To that end, it was found to be necessary to depart from empirical studies on the use of exonyms in various parts of the world, and, in that regard, at the nineteenth meeting, held in Prague in April 2017, 16 papers were presented. Based on its findings, the Working Group developed, in a general debate, a list of globally common characteristics and criteria for exonym use.

The criteria primarily note the circumstances in which exonyms are currently used, but may also serve as guidelines for exonym use in future.

* E/CONF.105/1.

** The full report was prepared by Peter Jordan (Austria), Convener, Working Group on Exonyms. The report is available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEgn/ungegnConf11.html>, in the language of submission only, as document E/CONF.105/16/CRP.16.

