UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
Geneva, 4-22 September 1967
Item 7 of the provisional agenda

REPORTS BY GOVERNMENTS ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN
THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Submitted by the Government of the
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

GE.67-17705

ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a multi-national state.
Nearly 130 nationalities live in its vast territory. The largest of them
are grouped in union and autonomous republics, autonomous regions and
national districts. Before the Great October Socialist Revolution the vast
majority of nationalities had no written languages of their own. It especial-
ly concerns the nationalities of the Far East, Siberia and the Far North.
After the victory of the October Revolution all the peoples of our country
have obtained equal rights, their national languages have been recognized
and begun developing freely. Our country was faced with the primary task
of creating national alphabets for the peoples who had no written languages
of their own and introducing national languages for school-education as
well. The linguists of the Academies of Sciences, higher educational in-
stitutions and research institutes of the national republics have created
alphabets for a number of national languages of the USSR; have written
new school text-books, grammar-books and compiled national-Russian and
Russian-national dictionaries, and have studied the national phonetic
systems. All these achievements have made it possible to begin a systema-
tic standardization of both Russian and national geographic names on a
scientific basis by comparing the writing and phonetics of the national
languages and those of Russian.

To transplant names of one language into another using the same
alphabet the method of direct adoption is employed which, as is known,
is widely used in Roman-writing countries. When rendering names from lan-
guages with other alphabets a method of practical transcription is used.
In Russian the method of practical transcription is usually used when
rendering names from all languages, including those using the Cyrillic

writing. In the latter case the letters that do not exist in Russian or carry different phonetic values undergo change.

The Russian practical transcription is intended for rendering foreign geographic names, as close to their pronunciation as possible, by the Russian characters without any additional marks.

The establishing of a stable uniform spelling of geographic names in the official language of any country, as well as uniform rendering of foreign geographic names, i.e. a standardization of geographic names, is a very complicated problem, especially for countries with a multilingual population.

The need for authority in spelling geographic names induced many states to set up special boards whose duty is to approve geographic names. In the Soviet Union the establishing of a uniform spelling of names on maps in Russian is assigned to the Chief Administration of Geodesy and Cartography (Glavnoje Upravlenije Geodezii i Kartografii - GUGK) under the Council of Ministers of the USSR.

To solve the problem GUGK set up special Permanent Transcription Committee (Postojannaja Komissija po voprosam transkripcii) to whose work contributed representatives of the main cartographic agencies. At present a permanent Joint Committee on Geographic Names (Mežduvedomstven-naja Komissija po geografičeskim nazvanijam) has been created. The member-ship of this Committee has been enlarged as compared with that of the previous one. It consists of representatives of various ministries, departments and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. The Committee has been authorized to consider and decide method problems in naming and renaming populated places and natural features as well as in transferring foreign names into Russian; to consider and submit for approval by GUGK of instructions and dictionaries of geographic names, compulsory through -

out the USSR.

A uniform spelling of geographic names may be established only with the help of compulsory special instructions, i.e. rules for rendering foreign names into Russian, and gazetteers and standard maps as well.

The rules for rendering names from languages of the Soviet Union and foreign countries are of great significance for the standardization of geographic names. They are worked out for any language in accordance with a definite scheme. One can find in them information on language-areas, new cartographic, literary and reference works on the territory and language concerned, alphabets and rules for rendering foreign characters (or sounds) into Russian. They also contain principles relating to geographic terms, rules for writing compound names and lists of conventional names and nomenclature terms in geographic names. By now we have 103 sets of instructions, 58 for the Soviet Union and 45 for foreign countries. Besides, there have been issued general rules for spelling the names of the USSR on maps and general rules for rendering geographic names. By now we have rules for rendering names from the following languages:

Indo-European languages: Belorussian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, Czech and Slovak, Polish; Latvian, Lithuanian; Bengali, Hindi, Urdu; Tajik, Ossetic, Persian, Pushtu; Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Faeröese; English, Dutch, Afrikaans, German; Moldavian, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Rumanian; Armenian; Greek; Albanian;

Caucasian languages: Abazin, Abkhasian, Avars, Adigei, Georgian, Darghin, Kabardian-Circassian, Ingush, Lak, Lesghin, Tabasaran, Chechen;

Turkic languages: Azerbaijan, Altai, Bashkir, Kazakh, Karakalpak, Karachaevo-Balkar, Kirghiz, Kumik, Nogai, Tatar, Touvinian, Turkish, Turkmen, Uzbek, Uigur, Chuvash, Khakass, Yakut;

Finno-Ugrian languages: Hungarian, Komi, Mansi, Mari, Mordvinian , Udmurt, Finnish, Khanti, Estonian;

Samodian languages: Nenets, Selkup;

Chinese-Tibetan languages: Burmese, Vietnamese, Chinese, Laothian, Thai;

Mon-Khmer languages: Khmer;

Mongolian languages: Buryat, Kalmuk, Mongolian;

Tungus-Manchurian languages: Nanai, Evenk, Even;

Paleo-Asian languages: Koryak, Chukot, Eskimo;

Semitic languages: Amharic, Arabic, Hebrew;

Malay-Polinezian languages: Indonesian, Malagasy, Tagal;

Bantu languages: Swahili.

Russian geographic names in their modern form are spelled in accordance with the existing rules of Russian orthography adopted in 1956, and the rules (issued by GUGK in 1961) for writing geographic names of the USSR on maps.

Geographic names in the national languages of the USSR are rendered from their modern lettering in their literary pronunciation. Dialectal differences are retained when rendered if they are consistantly fixed in official and other materials.

Geographic names of foreign countries are rendered from their modern spelling in the official language of a country. If there are two or more official languages in a country their language-areas are fixed and geographic names are rendered in accordance with their location. For instance, in Belgium the boundary between the Flemish and French language areas is taken into account; in Switzerland four language-areas are fixed: German, French, Italian and Romansh. In case a foreign country has

administratively detached national districts the names of these districts
are rendered, if possible, from the local languages.

However, there is a group of non-Russian geographic names that is
an exception to the rules mentioned above. We mean conventional Russian
names. They are mostly the names of states, capitals and the most widely-
known physiographic features. The Russian form of these names differs
from their authentic form as they have long been established in the lan-
guage and are familiar through long usage. For instance, we write " Буха-
рест " instead of "Букурешти ", "Рим " instead of "Рома ", "Копенгаген "
instead of "Кёбенхавн " as it should have been according to the rules.
Conventional names are usually related to a single feature, e.g. the
name "Сидней " is used only for the Australian city while the populated
places carrying the same name in England and the USA are reffered to as
"Сидни ", which is in accordance with the rules for rendering English
names.

Compound Russian names are spelled in accordance with Russian
orthography: separately, with a hyphen and in one, e.g. Белые Берега,
Волоста-Пятница, Анжеро- Суджеиск ,Среднеуральск, etc.

Compound names in languages employing a Roman alphabet are represent-
ed in Russian according to their spelling in the national language. If the
original is spelled in one, the rules provide the same spelling in
Russian; if the original is spelled separately or with a hyphen, it is
hyphenated according to Russian orthography, e.g. Niederlausitz (GDR)-
Нидерлаузиц , Big Springs (USA) - Биг-Спрингс , Catán-Lil (Argentina)-
Катан-Лиль.

Compound non-Roman alphabet names are usually spelled in one.
The case is typical of names, rendered from Chinese, Japanese, Korean,

Tibetan, Burmese, Khmer, Hindi, as well as from the languages using
an Arabic alphabet: Persian, Pushtu, Urdu. E.g. देरादून (India) - Дехрадун,
山 川 (Japan) - Ямагава , 袞 州 (China) - Яньчжоу , 수 원 (Korea)-
Сувон , ‌‌‌‌‌‌ (Iran) - Деррегорг . It is also true of compound names in
the majority of the Turkic, Finno-Ugrian languages and the languages in
the North of the USSR, e.g. Кӧрт Кӧрос (Komi ASSR) - Корткерос , Байрәкә
Тамак (Tatar ASSR) - Байрякитамак , Пужымо Йыл (Udmurt ASSR) - Пужмоил.

Nomenclature terms in geographic names (mountain, lake, bay, channel,
island, point etc.) are translated or transcribed in accordance with the
morphological and syntactical structure of a language, the strength of
connection between the nomenclature term and the proper name, and estab-
lished practice. It is agreed that generic terms be transcribed if they
go with an adjective or a numeral. In such cases their connection with
the proper name is the strongest. Examples: колодец Кырккуи (well)
(Turkmen SSR) where " кырк " means "forty" and " куи " - "well"; Сефидруд
(river) (Iran) where " сефид " - "white", " руд " - "river", Сноуи-Ривер
(river) (Australia) from Snowy River.

It is established practice while rendering names into Russian to retain
terms in some oriental languages and to translate them in others. They
are retained when they come after the proper name,

as is the case with the Chinese река Сицзян (Sikiang) where
" цзян (kiang)" means "river", or the Korean залив Йонилман (Yongil
Man) where " ман (man)" means "bay". They are translated when they
precede the proper name as is the case with the Arabic, Vietnamese,
Indochinese, Khmer, Laothian, Thai names. We write река Эль-Касимия
(Al Kasimiya River), not Нахр-эль-Касимия   (Nahr al Kasimiya) where

" Haxp(Nahr)" means "river" (Iraq); we write река Лебам (Lebam River), not Сунгей-Лебам(Sungei Lebam) where " сунгей (sungei)" means "river" (Indonesia).

The role of gazetteers and standard maps in effecting a uniform spelling is essential. In recent years much have been done in our country in this direction. The administrative authorities issue reference books on the administrative-territorial division of the USSR, union republics, autonomous regions and regions. These reference books contain the names of administrative units and populated places.

GUGK has issued dictionaries of geographic names in the territory of the USSR and foreign countries, a dictionary of geographic names of Iran, a dictionary of geographic names of the Latvian SSR, etc.

The Academies of Sciences of some union republics and research institutes of autonomous republics issue dictionaries of geographic names in their own areas in their own national languages: a dictionary of geographic names of the Azerbaijan SSR, the Kazakh SSR, the Touvinian ASSR, a glossary of river names of the Ukrainian SSR etc.

The reference-books on the administrative-territorial division of the USSR and the union republics as well as dictionaries of geographic names approved by the Joint Committee and sanctioned by GUGK, are compulsory for all institutions.

Besides, we issue glossaries of geographic terms and words found names.They are of great in geographic significance as they enable field-workers to avoid mistakes in recording names on topographic maps. Geographic names are being studied by specialists individually, as well as by the department of geographic names of the Central Research Institute of Geodesy, Air Surveying and Cartography under GUGK. This department systematically

collects geographic terms and issues lists of them as appendixes to the instructions for rendering names into Russian and as separate publications.

There have been issued by now glossaries of the geographic terms of the Kazakh SSR, the Yakut ASSR and a glossary of Even and Evenk geographic terms. A number of terms have been published in the appendixes to the World Atlases (1954 and 1967).

In GUGK preparation of standard maps for spelling geographic names is under way. A standard map is a map with the approved spelling of the names on it which are to be used on maps and atlases to be issued. To keep such maps current they are closely monitored and any changes in the names are published in special current reports.

To achieve better results in establishing a uniform spelling of geographic names throughout the entire world, it is necessary, in our opinion, that standard gazetteers embracing all the geographic names found in national atlases, at the minimum, be issued in every country; that all the countries be kept well - informed through the agency of the United Nations of the changes in geographic names. It is desirable that non-Roman alphabet names be represented in national script and transcribed in Roman.

We are faced with the task of completing the work on the rules for rendering foreign geographic names into Russian, of compiling dictionaries of geographic names whithin the territory of the Soviet Union and the out-lying countries so that the scientifically - grounded form of a name sanctioned in these dictionaries might become uniform and binding for all the institutions and agencies of the Soviet Union.