



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General

2 July 2007

Original: English

Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

New York, 21 - 30 August 2007

Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries
and on the progress made in the standardization of
geographical names since the Eighth Conference**

Report of Latvia

Submitted by Latvia**

* E/CONF.98/1.

** Prepared by Vita Strautniece (Latvia), Geospatial Information Agency.

Summary

The legislation of the Republic of Latvia declares the general principles of treatment of geographical names and responsibilities of different bodies in establishing the official names. However, the lack of national standardization programme and weak co-ordination of the efforts between different authorities prevents the progress. Cases of erroneous officially approved place names and inadequacy between the official names and those in local usage are serious problems. The preservation of national geographical names heritage and local peculiarities, as well as spelling traditions of names in different regions of Latvia is among the most important tasks, too.

The main achievements during the reporting period in Latvia:

- 1) constant and successful collaboration between cartographers and geographical name specialists in framework of all state mapping programs (civil and military);
- 2) completion and publishing of the Topographic map of Latvia scale 1:50 000 (toponymy of the map is compiled by geographical names specialists);
- 3) maintenance and development of Geographical Names Database of Latvia (contains 115700 names for 97600 objects);
- 4) participation in the European geographical names infrastructure project (EuroGeoNames);
- 5) continuous work on compiling national and local gazetteers and geographical names dictionaries (serving as sources of information, aid for place names standardization, popularizing the place names as a national cultural heritage); the most significant – Latvian Village Names Dictionary, published in 2007 (comprises 14012 names for 8879 villages).

I. National standardization

1. Names authorities

There is no centralized geographical names authority in the Republic of Latvia. According to the legislation:

the Parliament (*Saeima*) names and renames the cities and districts of Latvia;

the Cabinet of Ministers names and renames other administrative and territorial units (including towns) of Latvia (naming or renaming has to be reposed on the decisions of concerned local governments);

corresponding ministries name and rename ports, navigation aids, airports, railway stations, railroads and state roads;

local governments name and rename villages, hamlets, farmsteads, dwelling houses and other buildings, pieces of land (parcels), cemeteries and streets.

The list of official village names is available on <http://www.vzd.gov.lv/aris/> (in Latvian). However, a number of village names are approved in an inexactly spelled or even wrong form. In addition, the criteria for establishing the status of village for populated places remain to be different from one local government to another.

The State Land Service of the Republic of Latvia (SLS) used to be the authority of natural feature names until the end of 2005, when re-organization took place. The Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA), a state mapping and geodesy authority under the supervision of the Ministry of Defence, was established in January 1, 2006, on the basis of Cartography, Large Scale Mapping and Geodesy Boards of SLS. Thereof the rights and responsibilities of the SLS in standardization of geographical names (except the maintenance of the State Register of Addresses and the Register of Real Estates) are moved to the LGIA and the Ministry of Defence. The maintenance of the Latvian Geographical Names Database, gazetteer compiling and other activities concerning toponymy is stated officially in the strategic documentation of LGIA.

A consultative expert body with recommendatory rights – the Place Names Sub-commission (consists of specialists in linguistics and geography) of the Latvian Language Experts Board, the State Language Centre, works since 2002 as advisor appraising the official names and name proposals, drafting legislative acts and instructions, working out Latvian terminology for geographical names standardization.

Unfortunately, the geographical names experts' advice and control is not stated as obligatory, therefore the process of official naming and renaming is lacking the experts' opinion quite often in Latvia. The experts have too little opportunity to influence the decisions in the field of official names. Result of this is the growing amount of erroneous official toponymy.

Latvia does not have a national place names standardization programme yet. The process of standardization, being implemented by particular institutions, suffers from the lack of co-ordination and clearly stated national guidelines. Local and dialectal name forms are not legally protected. The financing of scientific research work in toponymy is insufficient. Applied toponymy and field collection of names make a progress mainly due to the state mapping programmes and continuous support from the SLS (until 2006) and LGIA (since 2006).

2. Legislative Acts

The draft of a Law on Geographical Names was prepared and renovated several times. The last version has been prepared by the Place Names Sub-commission in year 2005 and submitted to the Government in 2006.

A chapter regarding geographical names standardization is elaborated in the Concept of Development of Cartography in Latvia.

3. Field collection of place names

The field collection of place names has been closely related to the state mapping programmes *Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:50 000* (which replaced the *Satellite Map of Latvia*) and *Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:10 000*. Lately, the field collection includes mainly consulting the local governments. The work is carried out by the Laboratory of Toponymy (SLS, since 2006 – LGIA).

In addition, the Laboratory of Toponymy is continuing the field collection also for the Geographical Names Database of Latvia as well as for local and regional place names dictionaries.

The field collection of place names is continued also as a scientific research work at the University of Latvia and some other institutions of higher education.

4. Office treatment of geographical names (names on the maps, in the official registers, etc.)

4.1. Cartography

The SLS (until 2006) and LGIA (since 2006), have continued the state mapping:

- 1) the Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:50 000 (is going to be completed at the end of 2007);
- 2) the Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:25 000;
- 3) the Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:10 000;
- 4) military mapping projects at scales 1:500 000–1:25 000.

The LGIA, following the practice of the SLS maintains the Laboratory of Toponymy – a body for field collection, processing and checking the geographical names for cartography and other purposes. The toponymic data for all above-mentioned projects are compiled or checked by the specialists of the Laboratory.

The official and unofficial names are used on the state maps. Names of cities, towns, administrative-territorial units are always in their official, standardized forms. For village names, the officially approved forms are preferred (except if the officially approved ones are erroneous), local and adapted dialectal forms can be used additionally, in brackets. For natural features, the local and adapted dialectal forms prevail. The Laboratory of Toponymy constantly tries to implement the principle of place names standardization, based on a local usage of the local place names forms, collected through the field work (stated in the UN resolution VII/5 in 1998).

The private map publishing company “Jāņa sēta Map Publishers” is continuing the production of regional maps of Latvia and Lithuania (scale 1:100 000 and 1:200 000), city and town plans (scale 1:10 000–1:20 000), school maps and atlases, road maps of foreign countries. The new version (May 2007) of the CD-ROM “JS Baltija”, containing all the latest maps of the Baltic states produced by “Jāņa sēta Map Publishers” and a database containing information about settlements, natural objects and points of interest, has been issued.

Compilation of the “Great Atlas of the World” in Latvian has been started. The database containing more than 100 000 geographical names, created simultaneously with the “Great Atlas of World” in Estonian (ordered by publishing house “Estonian Encyclopaedia”, published in 2005), is a serious basis for that. Rules for rendering the geographical names of the World using IPA alphabet to create Latvian forms are being worked out for this project, in collaboration with linguists.

4.2. State registers

The official state registers, such as the Register of Addresses, the Register of Real Estates (both managed at the SLS), the Register of Residents maintains the officially approved place names. Only the Register of Addresses asks for the advice of place name specialists.

The main problem is the lack of harmonization of geographical names information between the different registers, private and state mapping enterprises, geographical reference books publishers, etc. The quite frequent changes of village names that are carried out by local governments are not of a big help to the system either. The errors in officially approved names are a problem as well.

II. Toponymic data files and gazetteers

The Card Index of Place Names at the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia, now containing approximately 1.5 million entries, is being elaborated. The cards comprise mainly linguistic information.

The Geographical Names Database of Latvia, created at the SLS, is now maintained by the Laboratory of Toponymy, LGIA. It contains 115 700 names for 97 600 geographical objects. The LGIA is also a member of the reference group of the European geographical names infrastructure project – EuroGeoNames.

A dictionary of village names of Latvia “Latvijas ciemi. Nosaukumi. Ģeogrāfiskais izvietojums” was published by the LGIA in 2007. It contains 14 012 names for 8 879 villages, recommendations for the usage of the names, pronunciation, Livonian and Latgalian village names, coordinates of the names on the Satellite Map, and other data.

Local dictionaries of Sēlpils civil parish (Sēlpils pagasts) and Zaube civil parish (Zaubes pagasts) have been published by the SLS. Both have cartographic supplements, are illustrated and rich in information regarding geography and local history.

Two volumes of comprehensive linguistic dictionary of Latvian place names “Latvijas vietvārdu vārdnīca” have been published by the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia.

The updated gazetteer of Latvia, scale 1:1 000 000, is available on the LGIA website – the gazetteer at:

http://www.lgia.gov.lv/upload/geogr_nos_miljonai.pdf;

the cartographic supplements at:

http://www.lgia.gov.lv/upload/rajoni_2-pielikums.pdf;

http://www.lgia.gov.lv/upload/lv_fizgeo_pielik3.pdf;

http://www.lgia.gov.lv/upload/lv_admin_pielik4.pdf.

III. Standardization based on local use of place names

In 2003, recommendations for standardization of civil parish and village names based on their local use were prepared by the Place Names Sub-commission, Latvian Language Experts Board, and presented to local authorities.

IV. Exonyms and principles of writing foreign place names

Foreign place names in their original or romanized forms are used on all state topographic maps, road maps and atlases for international use, except school maps and atlases.

Names in standard Latvian have to be declinable. For that reason almost all foreign place names in Latvian can be used only after adding a suitable ending (which inevitably makes them different from the original). Besides that, the Latvian writing system is a phonetic one, and that is why foreign place names in Latvian should be written according to the phonetic principle. Therefore particular rules for rendering proper names of each foreign language are necessary.

Recommendations on spelling Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish proper names containing also lists of geographical names were published in 2003.

In 2006, rules for rendering Chinese proper names including a list of geographical names were published.

The list of country names according to ISO-3166 was revised and published in 2006.

The Latvian forms of foreign geographical names (exonyms) are used in different publications, mass media, school maps and books.

The Latvian Language Experts Board, the State Language Centre, is responsible for the standardization of the Latvian forms of foreign geographical names. Consultations on the spelling of foreign geographical names etc. are available at the Consultation Department, State Language Agency.

V. Terminology

Preparation of the Latvian version of the United Nations Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names is being carried out by the Place Names Sub-commission of the Language Experts Board, the State Language Centre.

VI. Toponymical education

Lecture courses on Latvian and Finno-Ugric Onomastics and Toponymy are being delivered at the University of Latvia and the Pedagogical Academy of Liepāja. Student's papers on toponymic topics are being compiled each academic year.

An event disseminating the information about the standardization of geographical names was the 9th meeting of the Baltic Division of the UNGEGN organised in Latvia by the SLS, October 11–13, 2005. The most actual topics were geographical names registers and databases, rendering geographical names, place names on national maps, legislative acts concerning geographical names. Meeting was attended by wide circle of experts, officials and people having an interest in geographical names.

The main publications

- Ruta Avotiņa. Sēlpils pagasts. Novadpētnieciska vietvārdu vārdnīca. Daba. iedzīvotāji, apdzīvotās vietas, vēsture. — Rīga: VZD, 2003. Papildināts un precizēts izdevums 2005. — 183 lpp. (in Latvian).
- Latvijas ciemi. Nosaukumi, ģeogrāfiskais izvietojums. — Rīga: LĢIA, 2007. — 648 lpp. (in Latvian, with summary in English).
- Zaubes pagasts. Vietas un vārdi. — Rīga: VZD, Zaubes pagasta padome, 2005. — 240 lpp. (in Latvian).
- Latvijas Republikas ģeogrāfiskie nosaukumi kartēm mērogā 1:1 000 000 / Concise Gazetteer of the Republic of Latvia, scale 1:1 000 000.— Rīga: VZD, 2004.. — 95 lpp. (in Latvian and English).
- Latvijas vietvārdu vārdnīca. *Paaglis – Piķu-*. / Sakārtojusi V. Dambe, atb. red. O. Bušs. — Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts, 2003. — LIV + 381 lpp. (in Latvian).
- Latvijas vietvārdu vārdnīca. *Pilaci – Pracapole*. / Sakārtojusi V. Dambe, atb. red. O. Bušs. — Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts, 2006. — LXI + 352 lpp. (in Latvian).
- Jeļena Staburova. Ķīniešu valodas īpašvārdi un to atveide latviešu valodā. Teorētiskie un praktiskie aspekti. — [Rīga:] Jāņa Rozes apgāds, 2006. — 112 lpp. (in Latvian).
- Dāņu, norvēģu, zviedru un somu īpašvārdu atveide latviešu valodā. — Rīga: "Norden AB", 2003. — 430 lpp. (in Latvian).
- Par pasaules valstu un teritoriju nosaukumiem latviešu valodā. — Latvijas Vēstnesis, 19.07.2006. — 13.–15. lpp. (in Latvian).

Further information may be obtained from:

Latvijas Ģeotelpiskās informācijas aģentūra, Toponīmikas laboratorija
(*Laboratory of Toponymy, Latvian Geospatial Information Agency*)
Ojāra Vācieša iela 43
LV-1004 Rīga
Latvia
(Mrs. Vita Strautniece, phone: +371 29449690;
e-mail: vita.strautniece@lgia.gov.lv)

„Karšu izdevniecība Jāņa sēta”
(*Jāņa sēta Map Publishers*)
Stabu iela 119
LV-1009 Rīga
Latvia
Phone: +371 67 317 540;
fax: +371 67 317541;
<http://www.kartes.lv>

LU Latviešu valodas institūts
(*Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia*)

Akadēmijas laukumā 1

LV-1050 Rīga
Latvia

Phone: +371 67227696

(Mr. Ojārs Bušs, phone: +371 67213606;
e-mail: latv@lza.lv)

Valsts valodas centrs
(*State Language Centre*)
Merķeļa iela 13
LV-1050 Rīga
Latvia
Fax: +371 67221258;
e-mail: lrvc@delfi.lv
(Mr. Agris Timuška, phone: +371 67221258)

LU Reģionālās ģeogrāfijas un toponīmikas zinātniskā laboratorija.
(*Scientific Laboratory of Regional Geography and Toponymy, University of Latvia*)

Raiņa bulvāris 19

LV-1586 Rīga
Latvia