
**United Nations Group of Experts On
Geographical Names
2019 session**

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Item 5 (a) of the agenda ***Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the
standardization of geographical names****Report of Belarus**

Submitted by Belarus**

Summary:

Activities relating to the names of geographical objects in Belarus are regulated by the Belarus Law on names of geographical objects of 16 November 2010. The drafting of the Law took account of the principle of bilingualism enshrined in Belarus through the Constitution (Belarusian and Russian have the status of official languages, while Belarusian is the national language).

Coordination of the work to develop a single approach to the names of geographical objects is carried out by the Toponymic Commission under the Council of Ministers of Belarus, consisting of 24 representatives of ministries, local authorities, scientists of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and higher education institutions and cartography specialists. The current composition of the Toponymic Commission was approved in March 2018.

The State's list of names of geographical objects takes the form of the State catalogue of names of geographical objects of Belarus, which is available to the public at <http://maps.by>.

As at 1 January 2019, the State catalogue contained 36,461 names of geographical objects. In 2018, the experts responsible for the maintenance of the State Catalogue established 50 legal norms (most of them local authority decisions); these resulted in 192 changes to the Catalogue.

Names of geographical objects are recorded in the State catalogue in Belarusian and Russian, as well as in Latin letters, in accordance with the Belarusian romanization system approved at the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held in 2012.

Belarusian geographical names are transcribed into Latin letters on maps produced for foreign tourists. The most recent example of this is the maps issued for the second European Games (Minsk, 21–30 June 2019).

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Information from the State catalogue is used as the basis for annual updates to the “Belarus” section of the electronic newsletter containing changes to geographical names in the participating States of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The newsletter contains changes made to the names of administrative and geographical subdivisions of the Republic of Belarus since 1997. Twenty five entries were added in 2017, and sixty three entries were added in 2018. As at 1 January 2019, the newsletter includes 1,031 names.

Since 2012, the Republic of Belarus has been standardizing names across the road network in order to bring uniformity to the use of names in Belarusian and Russian. The names used across the national road network (by population centre) are recorded in the national register of addresses, available to the public at <http://nca.by>.

The prospects for the development of Belarusian toponymy lie in the standardization and harmonization of all existing names, expansion of the State catalogue and the issuing of reference and regulatory material required for the optimization of work by local authorities and natural and legal persons, including individual entrepreneurs, when carrying out activities involving geographical names

Item 5 of the Provisional agenda

REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

Activities in the Republic of Belarus in the field of names of geographical objects are carried out in accordance with the existing legislation for determination, standardization, assignment of names to geographical objects and their renaming, public accounting and use, as well as preservation of names of geographical objects as a constituent part of the historical and cultural heritage of the republic, which is regulated by the Law of the Republic of Belarus, dated November 16, 2010, “About names of geographical objects” (hereinafter referred to as “the Law”).

The Law has been elaborated by taking into account bilingualism constitutionally fixed in the republic (Belarusian and Russian have the status of official languages, at the same time the Belarusian language is the national language), as well as international experience of legal regulation in the field of names of geographical objects.

The Law establishes the powers of the President of the Republic of Belarus, public bodies and citizens in the field of names of geographical objects. It also determines requirements to names and the procedure of their assignment. The assignment of names to geographical objects relates to authorities of local governments. Conduct of a unified State policy in the field of names of geographical objects is imposed on the State Property Committee of the Republic of Belarus.

In accordance with the Code of the Republic of Belarus on Culture, dated July 20, 2016, place-names have been assigned a high status of non-material cultural values.

To standardize the works in the field of names of geographical objects the following technical statutory and regulatory legal enactments have been elaborated and brought into force:

- technical guidelines on translation of names of geographical objects from Belarusian into Russian;

- technical guidelines on translation of names of geographical objects from Russian into Belarusian;

- technical guidelines on translation of names of geographical objects from Belarusian and Russian into other languages;

- guidelines on the procedure of the public accounting of geographical objects names, development and maintenance of the State Catalogue of names of geographical objects in the Republic of Belarus;

- guidelines on the procedure of determination and normalization of names of geographical objects;

- guidelines on the procedure of determination, assignment of names to geographical objects outside the territory of the Republic of Belarus, discovered by Belarusian explorers, their renaming and use of their names;

- guidelines for transliteration of geographical names of the Republic of Belarus with Latin letters;

- technical code of the established practice “Geographical names: methods and rules of translation of geographical names and terms of the Republic of Poland into Belarusian”;

- technical code of the established practice “Geographical names: methods and rules of translation of geographical names and terms of Ukraine into Belarusian”;

- technical code of the established practice “Geographical names: methods and rules of translation of geographical names and terms of the Latvian Republic into Belarusian“;

- technical code of the established practice “Geographical names: methods and rules of translation of geographical names and terms of the Lithuanian Republic into Belarusian“;

instructions on the procedure of address system maintenance.

Coordination of the work for formation of a single approach to names of geographical objects is provided by the Toponymic Commission under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus (hereinafter referred to as “the Toponymic Commission”), which includes 24 members: representatives of ministries, local councils, scientists of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, higher educational institutions, cartography specialists. The current composition of the Toponymic Commission was approved in March 2018.

Main principles of activities of the Toponymic Commission include: legitimacy of determination, standardization, assignment of geographical objects names and their renaming, public accounting and use, accounting of general public interests, geographical, historical, natural, national, ethnographic, social, cultural and other conditions, as well as opinions of citizens; preservation of geographical objects names as a constituent part of the historical and cultural heritage of the Republic of Belarus.

The public accounting of geographical objects names in the republic is being carried out in the State Catalogues of names of geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus (hereinafter referred to as “the State Catalogue”), which constitutes a public informational resource at Web-site <http://maps.by>. It contains information about names of existing and abolished geographical objects, and it makes it possible to trace the history of names, to identify geographical objects having the same name on the basis of any extra information, including administrative-territorial reference, geographical coordinates, and it includes the following sections:

- names of administrative-territorial and territorial units (provinces, regions, settlements);

- names of transport infrastructure objects (railway objects, airports and airfields);

- names of physical and geographical objects.

The State Catalogue refers informational resources under continuous renew.

As of January 1, 2019 the State Catalogue contained 36 461 names of geographical objects. Over the year 2018 the specialists, who are authorized to maintain the State Catalogue, have worked out 50 regulatory legal enactments (mostly, decision of local councils), being the basis of 192 amendments to the State Catalogue:

- spelling of names of 63 geographical objects has been changed;

- 48 geographical objects have been abolished;

- categories of 13 geographical objects have been changed;

- administrative and territorial belonging of 68 geographical objects has been changed.

The State Catalogue contains the population as of January 1, 2018 by regions, districts, cities and towns (325 objects).

On the basis of the data of the State Catalogue the section “Belarus” is annually renewed in the electronic informational bulletin of amended geographical names of CIS member-states, prepared by specialists of a group for geographical names in the Inter-State Council for Geodesy, Cartography and Earth Remote Sensing of CIS member-states.

The informational bulletin includes amended names of administrative-territorial and territorial units of the Republic of Belarus since 1997.

The informational bulletin includes amended names of administrative-territorial and territorial units of the Republic of Belarus since 1997. In 2017 25 positions were added, in 2018 – 63. As on January 1, 2019 this section in the informational bulletin included 1031 names.

The informational bulletin is placed on Web-sites <http://maps.by>, <https://rosreestr.ru>, and a link to it is also given on web-site <http://gki.gov.by>.

Since 2012 normalization of names of road network components has been carried out in the Republic of Belarus to streamline these names in Belarusian and Russian. The names are brought into line with the requirements of the Instructions on the procedure of address

system maintenance, as well as with orthographic rules in the Belarusian and Russian languages.

Names of road network components in the republic (by settlements) in both state languages are recorded in the Register of Addresses of the Republic of Belarus, which is accessible at the Web-site <http://nca.by>.

The use of data from the State Catalogue and the Register of Addresses of the Republic of Belarus is mandatory for public bodies, other organizations, natural persons, including individual entrepreneurs, who carry out their activities in the field of geographical objects names, including the cases of establishing other public informational resources and organization of interaction among them.

To ensure standardization in the field of geographical names of the world, as depicted in cartographic and other works, a Reference Book of names of states and territories of the world (hereinafter referred to as “the Reference Book”) was prepared in 2012 and printed in 2013, where unified spelling forms were established for names of states and territories of the world, their capitals and centres in the Belarusian, Russian and English languages, names of 194 independent states and 40 territories were given. The data base worked out by a group of UN experts for geographical names was used as the basis of spelling the names in Russian and English.

The Reference Book is intended for public bodies, other organizations and individual entrepreneurs carrying out cartographic activities.

During composing cartographic and other publications intended for the international use, during rendition of names of geographical objects with Latin letters the national Romanization system is applied in accordance with the Instructions for transliteration of geographical names in the Republic of Belarus with Latin letters.

By taking into account the international experience and with the aim of retention of the national forms of place-names, their phonetic identification the transliteration is carried out from the Belarusian form of spelling.

Belarusian geographical names given in Latin letters are used in the publication of maps for foreign tourists. Such maps are currently being issued for the 2nd European games (June 21–30 2019, Minsk). For example, the map “Sports Minsk” (in English).

Cartographic articles in the Republic of Belarus are issued on paper and electronic carriers mainly in Russian and Belarusian. The range of output products comprises more than 700 works of various thematic directions: general geographical and political-administrative maps and atlases of the Republic of Belarus; maps of cities (the capital, province and regional centres); atlases and maps of automobile roads (of the republic, adjacent countries); maps of the world, Europe, individual regions; tourist maps and atlases; maps of lakes and water storage basins of Belarus; historical atlases and maps; maps and atlases for children; educational cartographic works.

One of most important achievements in the field of cartography includes development of “the Big Historical Atlas of Belarus” in four volumes – this is the first republican original and the most complete cartographic edition dedicated to the historical past of the country.

Volume 1 – from the ancient time till the middle of the 16th century (in 1569 the lands of Belarus were included to the United Commonwealth of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania), 248 pages, published in 2009.

Volume 2 – 1569–1795 (the third partition of the United Commonwealth of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania), 352 pages, published in 2013.

Volume 3 – 1772–1795 (the period of Belarus lands inclusion to the Russian Empire) – February 1917, 352 pages, published in 2016.

Volume 3 – from February 2017 till present, 272 pages, published in 2018.

“The Big Historical Atlas of Belarus” was executed in the Belarusian language.

Due attention is paid to the development of maps and atlases for children. Thus, the atlas for preschool-age children “World around Us”, children’s maps “My Motherland Is Belarus” (foldable and wall-mounted options), “Vegetable and Animal World of the Earth”, “Architectural Sights of the World”, “Travelling throughout Minsk” (a foldable option); atlases for children “Countries and Costumes of the World” (along with stickers) were published.

A special place is devoted to preparation and issue of educational cartographic works. Provision of educational institutions with cartographic products refers to the works of public importance, and in accordance with the legislation the preparation work for publication of educational cartographic production may only be fulfilled by the authorized company, which is represented by “Belcartography” Republican Unitary Enterprise.

These works are carried out in accordance with the Subject Schedule of preparation and issue of educational cartographic manuals for general secondary, special and higher educational institutions, to be annually approved by the State Property Committee of the Republic of Belarus jointly with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Belarus.

According to the Subject Schedule in 2018 “Belcartography” works on creation of 16 educational wall maps for higher education institutions, 98 names of cartographic manuals for general secondary educational institutions were carried out.

By taking into account the public bilingualism all new atlases and maps are executed in Belarusian and Russian, and those works, which were issued in one language, are already reissued in both languages. Of course, this fact improves quality of secondary education in Belarus.

Preparation of cartographic manuals for educational institutions is funded by the state.

Representatives of the Republic of Belarus participate in international events with the aim of study of international experience in the field of standardization of names of geographical objects, development, maintenance and practical application of national catalogues of geographical names, solution of the language problem in multilingual states, development of reference materials and gazetteers, determination of possible international cooperation in the field of geographical objects names.

Being a fully legitimate member of the Department of the Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), the Republic of Belarus participates in all meetings of the group within the frameworks of the Interstate Council for Geodesy, Cartography and Earth Remote Sensing of CIS member-states and delivers summary reports on the state of toponymy in Belarus.

By the invitation of the Chairman of the Baltic section of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) the Republic of Belarus participated at meetings of the group as the observer-state, as well as it delivered national reports.

In 2018 at the 19th meeting of the Baltic section of UNGEGN the report on the main directions of further development of toponymy of Belarus was delivered for the participants.

By summarizing the aforesaid it can be pointed out that the standardized legal base and organizational structure have been provided in the Republic of Belarus for performance of works in the field of geographical objects names.

The prospects of Belarusian toponymy development seem to appear in normalization and harmonization of all existing names, filling in the State Catalogue, issue of reference and regulatory literature required for optimization of work by the bodies of state administration, legal entities and physical persons, including individual entrepreneurs, during fulfillment of the activities related to geographical names.