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Reports: Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names

Report of Estonia

Submitted by Estonia **

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**Prepared by the Place Names Board of Estonia

Summary

The report covers activities in Estonia concerning the standardization of geographical names. Information is provided on the Place Names Act, activities of the Place Names Board, the administrative reform of 2017 and its consequences to geographical naming, Handbook for the Management of Address Data, the Estonian Topographic Database, navigational charts, the National Place Names Register, databases and the web dictionary of place names.

The report covers activities in the field of the official standardization of geographical names from 2017 till 2019.

NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

The **Place Names Act** continues to be the legal basis of geographical names standardization in Estonia. Some improvements into the Act have been considered lately but no changes have been made.

The **Place Names Board** (*kohanimenõukogu*) is the main names authority in Estonia, being a consultative body that is under the responsibility of the Minister of Public Administration who is working in the framework of the Ministry of Finance. The Board's meetings have been regularly taking place with a pace of two or three physical meetings per year, at the intermediate periods decisions have been taken through e-mail correspondence.

Regarding administrative changes, the year 2017 marked the completion of the **administrative reform in Estonia** whereby local municipalities that did not correspond to the set criteria (5,000 inhabitants as a minimum) were merged with others. The number of municipalities was reduced from 213 to 79, of these 15 are cities. More information will be given in a separate document submitted to the Session.

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. Some of the 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. After the 2017 administrative reform about a hundred names of populated places were considered as identical names within a municipality. To reduce the number of renamings it was mostly decided to keep the name of the populated place that has the larger number of inhabitants and to rename the smaller one. As a result, names of 50 populated places were changed or modified, and 9 populated places were merged with others, also two new populated places were formed from areas formerly belonging to the city of Kohtla-Järve (Sirgala and Viivikonna). Independently from the administrative reform, during 2017–2019, 9 more populated places were added to the list, and 2 populated places renamed.

The Place Names Board has the authority to confirm **lists of geographical names** provided no other authorities have done so, mainly this provision concerns names of natural features. In 2018 the Board confirmed the list of bridge names (647 bridges), water source or spring names (372 water sources) and names of various isolated natural features (493 features). Most of the names were confirmed as unofficial names for the Place Names Register. Work is continuing with names of various protected sites.

During 2017–2019 the Board has handled requests from local governments and citizens to rename some features, like streets and squares or parts of waterstreams, or giving new names

to parks, etc., and given its opinion. One of the topics for discussion has been the names of artificial islands in the capital Tallinn.

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 Paide (2017) and Narva (2018). 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. A continuous process that is being supervised by the Land Board is the check on the validity of cadastral names.

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.

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 Topographic Database (ETD) is the central database to produce and provide topographic data covering the whole territory of Estonia. The Estonian National Topographic Database was established in 2007. The most important products are maps and services. Data is continuously being updated. One of the main objectives of ETD is to provide state and local government databases with topographic spatial data for objects managed in these respective databases. So far, ETD has successfully met the needs of national databases, such as Road Register, Address Data System, Environmental Register, National Place Names Register, etc. The cadastral registrar is entitled to correct cadastral data based on the topographic database and land cover data for each parcel will also be determined from topographic data starting from 2019. We hope that the landowners' feedback on land cover data will launch the largest crowd-sourced spatial data verification project in the history of the topographic database, thus further improving the quality of spatial data. To better meet the

society's demand for high quality spatial data, topographic data and cadastral data are available in Estonia as open data since 1 July 2018.

Navigational charts. The Estonian Maritime Administration (EMA) has produced 66 sheets of navigational charts on Estonian territorial waters (scale 1 : 250,000, 1 : 100,000, 1 : 50,000, etc.). To facilitate navigation for smaller ships and recreational boating 4 chart folios have been produced. Since 1998 EMA produces digital charts – ENC's. Digital charts cover all coastal areas in scale 1 : 45,000 1 : 90,000 and 1 : 180,000. Chart compilation is based on hydrographic information system. To date 133 electronic navigational charts (cells) have been compiled, covering berthings (69), harbours (17), approaches (26), coastal areas (14) and general scale (7). 23 of these charts cover inland waters.

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 (<https://kaart.delfi.ee/>) includes a search engine with about 4000 place names.

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 2018 the register contained 206,319 place names, incl. traffic features (streets and squares, etc.) – 17,035; land roads – 8,485; minor address units (areas) – 625; lakes – 4,626; islands – 2,349; rivers, etc. – 3,034. In 2017–2018 the register has been increased with 2,766 new records, the biggest part of which were the names of bridges (652) and names of protected single objects of nature (567), but also names of land units (311), bus stops (277) and traffic features (200), 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. 155,000 features with more than 490,000 names at present, <http://www.eki.ee/knab/knab.htm>) is being compiled at the Institute of the 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 (<http://heli.eki.ee/kohanimed/>), 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 **dictionary of Estonian places names** („Eesti kohanimeraamat“) was published in 2016 by the Institute of the Estonian Language in collaboration with the Võru Institute and the Estonian Literary Museum, as well as several organizations, including other onomasticians, historians, geographers, etc. In February 2018 the web version of the dictionary (<http://www.eki.ee/dict/knr/index.cgi>) was published with an updated content. More information is given in a separate document submitted to the Session.

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). The

list of names of countries of the world (<http://www.eki.ee/knab/mmaad.htm>) is regularly updated. In 2018 the Dictionary of Standard Estonian (ÕS) was published, with a supplement of geographical names but there were no major changes.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Representatives of Estonia have actively participated in all meetings of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN, attending the 19th meeting of the Division in Vilnius (May 2018). Experts are also involved in some of the working groups of UNGEGN.