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

**Information concerning the works in the field of
standardization of geographical names in Belarus**

Submitted by Belarus**

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** Prepared by the State Committee of the Property of the Republic of Belarus.

1. National organs of standardization of proper geographic names

Belarusian geographic proper names have been formed for centuries in the close connection with life and cultural activities of allied and unrelated tribes and people inhabited our land. In total they compile national Belarusian toponymy.

Toponyms reflect the singularity of national language and typical features of national culture, facts and events, connected with the history of its people and are pertinent to historical and cultural memorials and that is why are worth solicitous attitude like other creations of human spirit and hands.

Fulfilling such an important task as address and being an obligatory element of the contents of cartographic production as well as an important part of national cultural heritage toponymy must be constantly and reliably protected and controlled by the state jurisdiction. It also has take into account the opinion of scientific establishments, which are competent in linguistics issues.

For decades the work concerning improvement and regulation of geographical names especially in Belarusian language used to be casual. As a result of it the entire list register of Belarusian toponymy turned out to be uncared for: a lot of proper names lost its original national form and are presented distorted. In some cases the toponym form in Belarusian spelling does not correspond to its equivalent in Russian spelling (e.g. Belarusian *Zaslaue*- Russia *Zaslavl*, Belarusian *Karniushkau Zastsenak* – Russian *Korniushkin Zastenok*)

In 1998 the government of Belarus passed a Law – “On Administrative and territorial division and on regulation of issues of Administrative and territorial structure”.

To advance this Law the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus adopted the resolution # 1238 of August 5, 1998 “ On confirmation of normative

acts, necessary for the realization of The Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Administrative and territorial division and on regulation of issues of Administrative and territorial structure”. This resolution is pertinent to the order of registration of administrative and territorial units of the Republic of Belarus and the order of how to name and rename enterprises, establishments, organizations, railway stations, airports and other objects, located on the territory of the Republic of Belarus as well as physical geographic objects.

At present the body, which coordinates the activity connected with the formation of the unified approach of naming and renaming the geographical objects located on the territory of Belarus is the Toponymic Commission under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus (further *Toponymic Commission*).

The activity of the Toponymic Commission within its competence is aimed to realization of the following primary tasks:

- The betterment of organization of carrying out the national standardization of geographic names;
- The development of legislative and normative base of standardization of geographic names;
- Producing of normative dictionaries and reference books on geographic names;
- Forming catalogues of geographic names;
- Cooperation with foreign countries organizations, including the UNO Expert Group on Geographic names.

Resolutions and decisions taken by Toponymic Commission within its competence are mandatory for all state authorities as well as enterprises, agencies and organizations.

2. The status of legislative, normative, methodical and managerial base of the works in the field of naming geographical objects

During past years normative legislative acts which regulate the works in the field of normalization and registration of geographic names were carried out and introduced.

Among them are: Instructions for conversion into Russian language names of geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus, Instructions for the creation and conducting of National catalogue of geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus, Instructions for registration of the names of physical and geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus.

The Instructions for conversion into Russian language names of geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus has been worked out taking into account the recommendations of UNO Expert Group on Geographic names and it determines the unified rules concerning transmission into Russian language names of geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus.

The Instruction for the creation and conducting of National catalogue of geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus determines the structure of the National Catalogue and the contents of information concerning proper names of geographical objects and establishes the order of its creation and conducting.

The Instructions for registration of the names of physical and geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus determines the contents of the works concerning registration of physical and geographical objects located on the territory of Belarus.

The problems concerning the establishment of national form of the spelling of Belarusian toponyms are the most complicated, because previously all

the official names of geographical names in Belarus were used in Russian language only. The names of settlements underwent particularly big distortions.

Decisions of many questions without legislative basis in the field of national standardization, normalization and usage of geographical names seem to be difficult.

3. Current status and perspectives of development of works on creating the national geographical names data base

The problems posed by the Instructions for the creation and conducting of National catalogue of geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus are of long duration that is why their realization will be carried out in several stages.

The National catalogue of geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus is represented by the electronic data base which is constantly updated on the basis of official information sources regarding geographical objects.

Proper names of geographical objects are represented in the National Catalogue in Belarusian and Russian languages since both languages are official. Geographical names are also represented in the letters of the Roman alphabet. It is especially important due to the fact that Belarus has been penetrating into world's information space more and more actively and more Belarusian geographical names get into foreign texts.

The use of information on the names of National Catalogue will provide the unified and correct use of the names of geographical objects in normative legislative acts, mass media, reference books, students' text books and in cartographic production.

At present in Belarus planning works on registration of proper geographic names are being carried out which compiles one the divisions of the National Catalogue of the names of geographical objects.

The fulfillment of works is supposed to be held in two stages. The first stage is the registration of the names of physical and geographical objects within the reference map on duty on the scale of 1 : 100 000 and the second stage – within the topographic map on the scale of 1: 10 000.

At present more than 9 thousand names of physical and geographical objects have been registered within the map of the scale of 1: 100 000 in Russian language. The names in Belarusian and Russian and in the letters of the Roman alphabet transliterated from Belarusian are being entered in the registration and account cards.

For all the registered names in the registration card the following attributes have been put: the kind of object, geographical coordinates, nomenclature of the topographic map, within which the object is located, the administrative and area tie-in is defined, as well as the binding to the nearest geographical objects.

The sources of information in the registration of physical and geographical objects are directly topographical maps, normative legislative acts, dictionaries and other reference resources.

However there is a problem with the establishment of the national form of the names of physical and geographical objects, and hydronyms in particular.

Hydronymy is the least catalized and irregular category of geographical objects. The absence of a full list-register of Belarusian hydromyns is especially painful for the cartographic and various practice.

It has been settled in such a way that the initial registration was fulfilled mainly in Russian language without stress marks. That is why while establishing

the national form of hydronyms one has to be guided by the only one single source – the Encyclopedia *Blakitnyaya Kniga (The Blue Book)*, published in 1994 and which contains only 5,5 thousand of articles-facts about rivers, streams, lakes , storage pounds and canals.

At the same time there are more tan 10 thousand lakes and 20 thousand rivers which do have their proper names on the territory of Belarus. It goes without saying that plenty of them remained outside the book.

That is why the main source of establishment of the national form of the names of physical and geographical names still remains information on the practical use of the name.

4. National system of geographic names transmission into letters of the Roman alphabet

Since 2001 in the Republic of Belarus the Instructions for Transliteration of Geographic names into the letters of the Roman alphabet of the Republic of Belarus has been in use and are mandatory while producing cartographic and other works designed for international use. The Instructions were approved by the State Committee for Land Resources, Geodesy and Cartography of the Republic of Belarus on the 23d of November, 2000 (# 15) and registered in the National List Register of Legal Statements of the Republic of Belarus in 2001, # 3, 8/4488.

The Instructions establish the rules of transliteration of geographical objects from Belarusian spelling into the letters of the Roman alphabet while producing in foreign languages cartographical and other works intended for international use.

In accordance with the Instructions cartographic works intended for foreign use are produced in Belarus as well as the normative reference books “Proper names of settlements of the Republic of Belarus” according

to the regions (oblasts), in which the names of settlements in Belarusian language are represented in the letters of the Roman alphabet.

Since the official acceptance of the system of Romanization of Belarusian geographic names The Instructions have stood the test of time in general. However some separated details needed to be added and corrected.

That is why it was necessary to adopt the project of regulation *“Concerning submissions of changes and additions to the Instructions for transliteration of geographic names of the Republic of Belarus into letters of the Roman alphabet”*.

In accordance with the Instructions for transliteration into the letters of the Roman alphabet from Belarusian language the cartographic works are published. Among them are: the atlas “Look at Belarus”, the map “Belarus”, miniature map “Minsk”, the map of the automobile roads “The Republic of Belarus”, the folding map for tourists on a scale of 1:2 000 000 “The Republic of Belarus” and other maps and atlases.

5. Dictionaries and Reference-books on geographical names of the Republic of Belarus

In the Republic of Belarus the names of geographical objects in Belarusian and Russian languages are an obligatory element of the contents of the state topographical maps, thematic maps and cartographical school-books. They are used in acts of legislation, other normative lawful acts of the state authorities, local authorities and self-governments. They are necessary for the implementation of political, foreign-economic and cultural connections.

Special attention is paid to the uniform, correct and reasonable usage of the geographical names of objects in the Republic of Belarus in Belarusian and Russian languages.

In this connection in 1998 the Toponymic Commission under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus took a decision of carrying out and publication of the normative reference book “The names of settlements of the Republic of Belarus”. The issuing and publication of the reference book was initiated by the Committee for the Land Resources, Geodesy and Cartography under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, which finances all the works connected with the documentation preparation for the publication and duplication.

The text processing of the reference book is being carried out together with the State Toponymic Commission under the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus with the participation of the executive committees of the districts and community members (officials of the regional museums of local lore, history and economy, school teachers, faculty members of higher educational establishments and students).

The normative reference book “The names of settlements of the Republic of Belarus” is a many-sided one on the issues of Belarusian toponymy. It consists of 6 books, according to the 6 administrative regions (oblasts) – the biggest political division units of the Republic of Belarus).

Four of the total amount of books, devoted to Minsk, Grodno, Gomel and Mohilev regions have been already published, the rest two for Brest and Vitebsk are in execution. All the books are identical in structure and procedure performance. Their contents consists of eight structural components:

- preface;

- general data (on the territory of the region),
- the full list-register of the names of settlements in Belarusian and Russian languages and their transliteration in Roman letters;
- grammar characteristics of gender and number;
- most commonly used case endings;
- variants of official names;
- the list of gone or forfeited for some reasons settlements;
- indexes of the names in three graphical variants (Belarusian, Russian and Roman letters).

In the Belarusian part of the reference book in all the names and in the declension paradigm the stress-marks are provided. The detailed preface provides the full idea about modern status and historical destinies of Belarusian toponymy, reasons for many versions and renaming, about normative tasks of the reference book and the ways of their implementation, rules of the transliteration of Belarusian names into Roman letters and Russian language, about the tasks for the future.

The reference book is intended for using by state authorities, legal entities and population of the Republic of Belarus.

6. Participation in the International cooperation

The international cooperation in the field of standardization of geographical names is carried out in two directions: participation in the activity held by the group of UNO experts on geographical names and information exchange of cartographic and geodetic agencies-members of the Union of Independent States.

The Republic of Belarus is a member of the Department of Eastern Europe, Northern and Middle Asian Group of the UNO Expert Group on

geographic names. It took part in the 5th and the 6th Sessions of the Department (Moscow, March, 2004; Kiev, May, 2005). During the same period of time the Republic of Belarus took part in the work of the Working Group on geographic names of Inter-State Soviet on Geodesy, Cadastre, Cartography and Remote Sensing of the state-members of the Union of Independent States.

Such cooperation duly promote the development not only national, but also international standardization.