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**Eleventh United Nations Conference on the  
Standardization of Geographical Names**

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Item 5 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 Tenth  
Conference (for distribution only).**

**Report of Latvia**

Submitted by Latvia\*\*

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\* \* E/CONF.105/1

\*\* Compiled by Vita Strautniece (Latvian Geospatial Information Agency) using data provided by  
Latvian Geospatial Information Agency; Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia; State Land  
Service (Address Register Section); State Language Centre; Jāņa sēta Map Publishers

## Summary

The Report covers the period between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> UNCSGN.

The Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA) has continued to participate in the project **EuroGeoNames** on geographical names infrastructure and services.

The **geographical names authorities** are the same as during the previous reporting period. The decision makers are: Parliament and Government; several ministries, LGIA and municipalities. Controlling and advisory body is the State Language Centre. Consulting and scientific bodies are: LGIA, the Latvian Language Agency and the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia. The responsible authority for **standardization of the Latvian forms of foreign geographical names** is the Latvian Language Experts Board at the State Language Centre.

The specialized Place Names Sub-commission of the Latvian Language Experts Board, was re-established at the State Language Centre in 2012. In 2014-2017 the State Language Centre has been working on a voluminous conclusion regarding the official names proposals (for more than 4.000 natural features) submitted by LGIA.

**Changes in legislation.** The updated version of the Regulations of the Addressing System (namely Regulations on Addressing) came into force on December 11, 2015.

In 2015/2016 the situation on the field of geographical names information has been analyzed by the involved ministries and other institutions. This resulted in an informative report containing proposals for elaboration of relevant legislative acts. Preparing and agreeing amendments to these acts is going on.

**Field collection of place names** has continued mainly in a framework of student tutoring and a scientific research work at some institutions of higher education. A nationwide crowd-sourcing action – the **Place Names Bee** – on the initiative of the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO and the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia, is announced for the period February 23 – September 30, 2017. Special website <https://vietvardi.lv/talka> is launched.

**Toponymic data files and gazetteers.** The most significant data repositories are: Geographical Names Database of Latvia (157.4 thousand names of 120.3 thousand features), the **National Address Register** (names of 248.969 features), the linguistic **Latvian Place Names Card index (or card file)**, maintained by the Latvian Language Institute (approximately 1 million names, under digitization now). Work on compiling linguistic toponymic dictionaries has been continued.

**Toponymic education** has been carried out mainly as lecture courses at some universities. The section “Vietv rdi” (Geographical names) of the LGIA Website of Products and Services <http://map.lgia.gov.lv> deals with different issues regarding geographical names.

**Geographical names in cartography, exonyms.** LGIA has continued the cartographic projects: the **Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:50 000**, the **Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:10 000** etc. The LGIA web map browser “*L IA Karšu P rli ks*” offers a geographical names search on the latest maps of Latvia at scales 1: 1 000 000 – 1: 10 000. The most extensive Latvian database comprising Latvian exonyms and renderings is maintained by the private Map Publishing Company “J a s ta Map Publishers”. It contains 218.000 geographical names in their original languages, as well as exonyms and renderings: 91.000 – into Latvian, 34.000 – into Estonian, 14.000 into Lithuanian, 10.000 into Russian (no public access).

Concise rules for rendering the place names from **Greek** and **Portuguese** into Latvian have been worked out and published.

## **REPORT OF LATVIA**

The report covers the period between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> UNCSGN.

### **I International activities**

The Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA) has continued to participate in the project **EuroGeoNames** developing the European geographical names data infrastructure and services based upon the decentralizedly kept and maintained national names databases, providing a gazetteer service for Europe.

### **II National activities**

#### **1. Names authorities**

The decision makers (having rights to adopt the official names) are: Parliament and Government; several ministries, the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA) and all municipalities. Controlling and advisory body is the State Language Centre. Consulting and scientific bodies are: the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia, LGIA, and the Latvian Language Agency.

A consultative expert body with recommendatory rights, the Place Names Sub-commission of the Latvian Language Experts Board, the State Language Centre, was re-established in 2012. The Sub-commission appraises the official names proposals, takes care of straightening out Latvian toponymy and protection of geographical names as a cultural heritage. It consists of 9 experts in linguistics, geography and cartography. The Sub-commission should be in session at least once per 2 months, the consulting and conclusion-making via e-mail is being practiced, too. There are no changes regarding the structure and responsibilities of other Latvian geographical names authorities during the reporting period.

In 2014-2017 the State Language Centre has been working on a voluminous conclusion regarding the official names proposals (for more than 4.000 natural features) submitted by LGIA. Accordingly the Regulations on the Toponymic Information, the conclusion is a basis for approving official names for nature features.

#### **2. Legislative acts**

The main legislative acts regarding the geographical names standardization in Latvia are: the State Language Law, the Geospatial Information Law and the Regulations on the Toponymic Information. The Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas (stating the administrative and territorial division of Latvia) and the Regulations on the Address System have also an impact on the geographical names standardization.

The Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas has been amended several times during the reporting period. The borders of some administrative and territorial units have been slightly modified by the Government and relevant municipalities. The updated version of the Regulations of the Addressing System (namely Regulations on Addressing) came into force on December 11, 2015.

In 2015/2016 the situation on the field of geographical names information has been analyzed by the involved ministries and other institutions. This resulted in an informative report containing proposals for elaboration of relevant legislative acts. Two working groups were established in 2017 to prepare amendments to the Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas and to the Regulations on the Toponymic Information. Draft amendments to the Regulations on

the Toponymic Information are submitted to the Government already. The amendments to the Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas should expand the criteria for recognizing official villages to fit also small settlements with disperse built-up areas, not having specific urban elements, to keep their names in the National Address Register.

### 3. Field collection of place names

The field collection of place names has continued mainly in a framework of student tutoring and a scientific research work at the University of Latvia, Latvian Academy of Culture and at some other institutions of higher education.

The **Place Names Bee** – a nationwide crowd-sourcing action on the initiative of Latvian National Commission for UNESCO and Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia, is announced for the period February 23 – September 30, 2017. Special website <https://vietvardi.lv/talka> is launched. More than 3000 place names have been already collected within two months in the “Database of National Place Names”. It is open for any interested and enables to register place name, its spelling and pronunciation, localization (in the parish and on the map), cultural, historical and linguistic data of the place names. The link with Geographical Names Database of Latvia maintained by the Laboratory of Toponymy, LGIA, is being planned in the future.

The most active participants are being nominated monthly. For finalizing of the results of the almost a year long names collecting work, a solemn event – The Place Names Day – is scheduled for October 20, 2017.

### 4. Toponymic data files and gazetteers

The **Geographical Names Database of Latvia** maintained by the Laboratory of Toponymy, LGIA, contains 157.4 thousand names of 120.3 thousand features (data on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2017). The location of named features basically is characterized by the coordinates of the point and areal objects centers, and mouths of flowing water features. Besides that:

- water features are characterized by rough geometries (lines)
- drawing of areal feature geometries (mainly villages, occasionally forests and bogs) was launched in 2013-2014

The concise public version of the Geographical Names Database (7<sup>th</sup> edition, containing 127 thousand names of 99 thousand geographical features located in Latvia) is available at <http://vietvardi.lgia.gov.lv> (user interface in Latvian only, a brief description in English is available at <http://map.lgia.gov.lv>).

The **National Address Register** maintained by the State Land Service includes names of all administrative territories and territorial units of Latvia (110 counties, 497 civil parishes, 76 cities and towns), 6.329 officially recognized villages (number of official villages is decreasing), 17.428 streets, 224.529 houses, other buildings and land units intended for buildings (data on May 1, 2017). Names search in the State Address Register is available on the data distribution portal of the State Land Service of Latvia at: <https://www.kadastrs.lv/> (in Latvian and English). Data harmonization with other registers – Land Registry, Population Register, Register of Enterprises etc. has been continued. Address maintenance system is currently being under the serious improvement aimed to automate and shorten the process of address registration in the State Address Register.

The **Latvian Place Names Card index (or card file)** (approximately 1 000 000 domestic geographical names) is maintained by the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia (since the very beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, no public access). The cards comprise mainly linguistic

information. Digitizing of the Latvian Place Names Card Index (~1 million domestic geographical names) started in 2014. Scanning of the basic part of the Card Index – 842 thousand geographical name cards – is completed. The work is continuing on digitizing duplicates, additional card indexes (a few thousands of units) and expedition notebooks with place names data. The tools for displaying linguistic data have been elaborated. Additionally, the crowd-sourcing tool for collecting place names has been created. It is being used for the Place Names Bee now.

The Card Index serves as the main source for compiling the comprehensive **linguistic dictionary “Latvijas vietvārdu vārdnīca”** (Latvian Place Names Dictionary, in Latvian). The volume of the dictionary, comprising toponyms beginning with “R”, was published by the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia, in 2014. A new volume, comprising toponyms beginning with “S”, is being prepared now.

In 2017, the Electronic Historical Latvian Dictionary (<http://www.tezaurs.lv/lvvv>) based on the “Corpus of Early Written Latvian Texts” (<http://www.korpuss.lv/senie/>) was opened. More than 480 historical proper names from historical sources (the Lord’s Prayer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, dictionaries of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, texts of oaths and laws, religious texts, so-called dedication poetry) have been processed and included in the dictionary so far (search query for place names is *nloc.* ‘nomen loci’).

A popular etymological dictionary **“From Abava to Zilupe. The Origin of Latvian Geographical Names. A Short Dictionary”** comprising the names of the ~100 most significant settlements, natural features, etc. was compiled by Ojārs Bušs and Laimute Balode, researchers of the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia. The dictionary, a bilingual (Latvian/English) book, was published by the Latvian Language Agency in 2015.

## 5. Toponymic education

Lecture courses on Toponymy have been delivered at some universities. The section “Vietvārds” (Geographical names) devoted to the different aspects of toponymy (in Latvian) is being maintained on the Website of LGIA, products and services: <http://map.lgia.gov.lv>

## 6. Geographical names in cartography, exonyms

The LGIA has continued the topographic mapping projects. The most significant projects regarding the geographical names are:

1) the **Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:50 000** (157 sheets) is being prepared in digital and printed versions; the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition is completed in 2012 and is published in the LGIA Map Browser (<https://kartes.lgia.gov.lv>), preparation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition started in 2012 (50 % were completed until May, 2017). All the toponymy for this map is being compiled and updated by the Laboratory of Toponymy;

2) the **Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:10 000** (2792 sheets) is being prepared in digital format only; the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition was started in 2009, completed in April, 2017 and is published in the LGIA Map Browser, the 4<sup>th</sup> edition started in September, 2016, the first 14 sheets are compiled already. The toponymy for this map is being compiled and updated by cartographers using the Geographical Names Database of Latvia and advice and assistance of the Laboratory of Toponymy, if needed. Toponymic work at LGIA as far as possible follows the principle stated in the UN resolution VII/5 in 1998 - geographical names standardization, based on a local usage of the local place names forms (collected through the extensive field work during 1990-s).

The **map browser “Latvijas Karšu Portāls”** (<https://kartes.lgia.gov.lv>) maintained by LGIA offers search of geographical names on the latest versions of different maps of Latvia in scales 1: 1 000 000 - 1:10 000 (central part of Riga at scale 1: 2 000) prepared by LGIA. The

toponymic layer from the Topographic map scale 1:10 000 along with the National Address Register data can be used for the search. Rough linear geometries for watercourse names from the Geographical Names Database are also accessible there. The Map Browser is available at <https://kartes.lgia.gov.lv> (user interface in Latvian and in English).

The private mapping company “J a s ta Map Publishers” is the only enterprise in Latvia preparing world and national atlases and cartographic editions for schools. The **map viewer of Baltic countries “Baltic Maps”** offers geographical names search on the maps prepared by “J a s ta Map Publishers” (<http://www.balticmaps.eu>) (user interface in English and Russian).

As Latvian is a flexive language, it is impossible to use most of the foreign geographical names without endings. Moreover, the cultural-historical value of traditional Latvian exonyms is recognized, Regulations on the Toponymic Information has stated the preservation of them. The responsible authority for **standardization of the Latvian forms of foreign geographical names** is the Latvian Language Experts Board at the State Language Centre. The State Language Centre’s website (section „Valstu un valodu nosaukumi” (Names of countries and languages)) maintains lists of standardized Latvian names of the countries and languages and regions of the European Union Member States („Eiropas Savienības dalībvalstu reģioni”) at <http://vvc.gov.lv/index.php?route=product/category&path=240>.

The most extensive Latvian database comprising Latvian exonyms and renderings is maintained by the private Map Publishing Company “J a s ta Map Publishers”. It contains 218.000 geographical names in their original languages, as well as exonyms and renderings: 91.000 – into Latvian, 34.000 – into Estonian, 14.000 into Lithuanian, 10.000 into Russian (no public access).

Concise rules for rendering place names from **Greek** into Latvian have been worked out by linguist Ilze R mniece and were published by the Latvian Language Agency in 2012.

Concise rules for rendering place names from **Portuguese** into Latvian have been worked out by linguist Alla Placinska and were published by the Latvian Language Agency in 2015.

Consultations on the spelling of foreign geographical names etc. are available at the Consultation Department of the Latvian Language Agency.

## **Further information may be obtained from:**

**Latvijas ģeotelpiskā informācijas aģentūra,**  
(*Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA)*)

Ojāra Vīcieša iela 43  
Rīga, LV-1004, Latvia

[www.lgia.gov.lv](http://www.lgia.gov.lv)

e-mail: [info@lgia.gov.lv](mailto:info@lgia.gov.lv)

(Ms Vita Strautniece, Laboratory of Toponymy,

phone: (+371)29449690;

e-mail: [vita.strautniece@lgia.gov.lv](mailto:vita.strautniece@lgia.gov.lv))

**Valsts valodas centrs**

(*State Language Centre*)

Eksporta iela 6

Rīga, LV-1010, Latvia

[www.vvc.gov.lv](http://www.vvc.gov.lv)

Phone: (+371)67331814, fax: (+371)67336038

e-mail: [info@vvc.gov.lv](mailto:info@vvc.gov.lv)

**LU Latviešu valodas institūts**

(Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia)

Akadēmijas laukums 1

Rīga, LV-1050, Latvia

[www.lulavi.lv](http://www.lulavi.lv)

Phone: (+371)67227696

e-mail: [latv@lza.lv](mailto:latv@lza.lv)

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phone: +371 67213606)

e-mail: [sanda.rapa@inbox.lv](mailto:sanda.rapa@inbox.lv)

**Valsts zemes dienests**

(State Land Service)

11. novembra krastmala 31

Rīga, LV-1050, Latvia

[www.vzd.gov.lv](http://www.vzd.gov.lv)

Tel.: (+371)67038608, fax: (+371)67038829

e-mail: [vzd@vzd.gov.lv](mailto:vzd@vzd.gov.lv)

**„Karšu izdevniecība Jāzāsta”**

(Jāzāsta Map Publishers)

Krasta iela 105a

LV-1019 Rīga, Latvia

<http://www.kartes.lv>

Phone: (+371) 67317540

Fax: +371 67317541

e-mail: [kartes@kartes.lv](mailto:kartes@kartes.lv)

**Some useful links (not mentioned above)**

1. Geospatial Information Law (“Ģeotelpiskās informācijas likums” in Latvian):

<http://www.vestnesis.lv/?menu=doc&id=202999>, English translation:

[http://vvc.gov.lv/index.php?route=product/category&path=60\\_109\\_111\\_112&page=5](http://vvc.gov.lv/index.php?route=product/category&path=60_109_111_112&page=5)

2. Regulations on Addressing („Adresācijas noteikumi”, in Latvian only):

<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/278402-adresacijas-noteikumi>

3. Official Language Law (“Valsts valodas likums” in Latvian):

<http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=14740>, English translation:

<http://vvc.gov.lv/index.php?route=product/search&search=L%20Language%20law>

4. Data on administrative and territorial division of Latvia: Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas (“Administratīvā teritoriju un apdzīvotību likums,” the actual version in Latvian with Annex 1 (list of cities), Annex 2 (list of municipalities and the territorial divisional units thereof): <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=185993>, English translation of the previous version of the law):

<http://vvc.gov.lv/index.php?route=product/search&search=Administrative%20>