

7 July 2017

Original: English

**11th United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**
New York, 8 -17 August 2017
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
**Reflection on the past, present and future, the fiftieth anniversary
of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of
Geographical Names**

**Brief insight in the history and activities of the Baltic Division of
UNGEGN**

Submitted by the Baltic Division**

* E/CONF.105/1

** Prepared by Vita Strautniece (Latvia) and Peeter Päll (Estonia)

Brief insight into the history and activities of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN

The Baltic Division was established in 1992, by the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Resolution VI/1). The Division is composed of experts from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland (since 2012) and the Russian Federation.

The starting point for the creation of the Baltic Division was the Baltic Regional Meeting on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held in Tallinn, 7–8 May 1992, by the invitation of the Estonian National Language Board. The meeting was attended by linguists and cartographers from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and an observer from Finland, Eeva Maria Närhi. Participants exchanged information, opinions and experience on all the main topics of the geographical names standardization. There was a lively debate and useful contacts were established. Discussing the participation of the Baltic states in divisional activities of the UN conferences on the standardization of geographical names, the delegates agreed that a separate Baltic Division should be formed at the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. A draft resolution proposed to the Sixth UN Conference was adopted by the meeting and submitted to the conference later.

Unforgettable moments in the history of the Baltic Division were the International Training Courses in Toponymy of the Baltic Division organized in Riga, April 22–24, 1997. The courses were attended by 65 participants from 5 countries. With lectures delivered by experienced and enthusiastic experts Helen Kerfoot (Canada), Randall E. Flynn (USA), Botolv Helleland (Norway), Hans Ringstam (Sweden), Eeva Maria Närhi and Sirkka Paikkala (Finland), the courses became a significant factor in the maturation of the Baltic Division and the development of geographical names standardization work in the region.

The Baltic Division has been represented in all UNGEGN sessions since 1992. Experts of the division's member states have been active participants of UNGEGN working groups (e.g. WG on Romanization Systems, WG on Exonyms, WG on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers) as well as of UNCSGNs.

18 divisional meetings have been held during the **25 years of the Baltic Division**. The division has not had any joint projects during that time but the principle of duties' and responsibilities' rotation between the member states, openness and keeping contacts with neighboring countries, UNGEGN divisions and experienced UNGEGN experts are amongst the best traditions of the Baltic Division. Almost every divisional meeting held in periods between the UNCSGNs and UNGEGN sessions has been an event bringing together parties interested in geographical names, involved in names standardization, usage, investigation, collecting, preservation etc. Lively exchange of information, experience and opinions on all actual topics on geographical names standardization has been carried out during every meeting. The number of participants has been from about 20 up to 66 persons. Observers and guests from non-member countries are always welcome.

The coordinating countries and Chairs of the Baltic Division have been the following: 1992–1998 Estonia (Peeter Päll), 1998–2002 Latvia (Juris Kavacs, Vita Strautniece), 2002–2007 Lithuania (Danut Mardosienė), 2007–2012 Estonia (Aule Kikas). Since 2012 the division is coordinated by the Russian Federation (Marina Morozova), and the Vice-Chair from Latvia (Vita Strautniece).

All activities of the division are well represented on the **web page of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN** at <http://www.eki.ee/knn/ungegn/>, established in October 13, 1997, hosted by the Institute of the Estonian Language.