

**Group of Experts on  
Geographical names**

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Agenda Item 3

Report of the Chairman



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Whereas divisional meetings continued to be held by those divisions, which already developed a certain tradition in this respect (e.g. the East-Central and South-East Europe Division or the Dutch- and German-speaking Division), new developments took place elsewhere.

From 10 to 14 December 1984 the Latin America Division held its first meeting in Habana. As Chairman of the UNGEGN I had been invited to attend this event, the importance of which cannot be overestimated in view of the extent of the continent involved and of the many problems for name-standardization that occur in this region.

The National Committee for Geographical Names of Cuba took care of the organization of the meeting with the greatest efficiency and with grand-style hospitality.

Though the attendance of this First Divisional Meeting was not overwhelming, it nevertheless fulfilled its purposes for a great deal. The reports of the member-countries, the important contributions made by specialists and the serious and businesslike discussion of some of the main issues have laid a sound foundation for future work.

As may be seen in the report of the meeting, this future work was one of the main themes of the discussion. A provisional agenda for a Second Meeting was established and a working programme for the next year was adopted. With this the framework, the divisional organization was built, of which the creation of three so-called "focal points" - in Colombia for South-America, in Mexico for Central America and in Spain for the Caribbean - was in my opinion a very lucky innovation. This may be the best way to organize a division of so huge a size and may serve as an example for other divisions.

The fact that some weeks ago the Second Meeting of this division took place in Mexico, proves that the initiative taken

by our vice-chairman, Mr.Velasquez, is taking roots.

An important meeting of the Romano-Hellenic Division took place in Lisbon from 5 to 7 June 1985. The Chairman of the Division, our colleague Mr.Ramondou, very obligingly sent me the Report of this meeting, which among others gives a detailed account of the organization and structure of the name-giving authorities in the respective countries. An interesting project was announced, to wit, a combined list of exonyms that will create the possibility of comparing the frequency of the use of different types of exonyms.

Perhaps the most important achievements during the last two years were the publication of six Toponymic Guidelines (a publication to which I will return under item 9 of the agenda) and of course the publication of World Cartography Vol.XVIII, devoted to the subject of Toponymy. In his Report our Secretary will give you further details.

During this period I had correspondence with several members of our Group.

On the request of the Group made during the Eleventh Session, I wrote on november 21 1984 to Mr.Földi, asking him if he would be able to continue as a convenor of the Working Group on a Single Romanization System for each Non-Roman Writing System. I reiterated my request on 7 January, 1985, but up to now I got no reply.

I corresponded with Mr.Ormeling on the Training Course in Toponymy held in Rabat and on the Third Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas, where he acted as one of the representatives of the UNGEGN.

The Corine-Programme for Gathering, Coordinating and Ensuring the Consistency on Information on the State of the Environment and Natural Resources in the European Community asked me for information on the Geographical Names Authorities in Europe.

With our Secretary I had many contacts, among others on Volume XVIII of World Cartography, on the Third Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas, for which I made a Report on the abovementioned meeting in Habana, and on the Organization of the Twelfth Session of our Group.

On the request of the Dutch- and German-speaking Division I wrote the Secretary on the possibility of institutionalizing the divisional meetings and made some suggestions in this respect; we will return to this subject under item 13 of the agenda.

Another subject about which I contacted the Secretary, was the status of the Working Papers presented to the meetings of our Group. As a result of this consultation I can now state, that our Working Papers have no official status whatsoever. The Working Papers are not United Nations Documents. They are private papers, that give information to the experts and serve their work. Only a Working Paper that is presented to a United Nations Conference is an United Nations Document and accordingly obtains an official registration number (e.g. E/Conf.74/ L 54).

I think that this state of affairs gives us more freedom of expression; we don't have to be afraid to be too bold or too unclear, to make too imprudent suggestions or even to make errors. Our Working Papers are no more that a means of communication among us, and each expert knows how easy it is to criticize and consequently each expert will tend to be forgiving.

Let me end in a more subdued tone. I received a circular letter from the Secretary-General of the United Nations to all presiding officers of the intergovernmental bodies, dated 24 January 1986. The Secretary-General points out the extremely difficult financial situation of the United Nations and then asks for our support in reducing the expenditures that could, with prudence, be avoided.

This letter ends with the words: "Although the organ you chair is not an intergovernmental body composed of the representatives of States, I should be most appreciative if you would bear in mind the considerations which I set out".

I may ask the members of the Group of Experts to bear in mind this request made by the Secretary-General, in the case they consider to make proposals that will lead to new expenses. Be prudent!