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DUTCH AND GERMAN-SPEAKING DIVISION

REPORT FOR SWITZERLAND

Presented by Prof. E. Spiess, Zurich

UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
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Report for Switzerland

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Following the Conference of Montreal the rapporteur has taken some steps in the direction of a national names authority. A meeting was organized in which delegates participated from all Federal Government offices that are involved in names standardization, namely the

- Federal Office of Topography, Wabern (names in the national topographical map series)
- Directorate of Cadastral Surveys (names in the large scale cadastral plans)
- Federal Office of Statistics (responsible for the gazetteer of administrative units)
- Federal Office of Traffic, represented by the General Directorate for the Federal Railways (names of the railway stations) and the General Directorate of post services (names of the post offices and bus stations)
- Division for International Organizations in the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs (names of foreign countries)
- Department for cartography of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) Zurich (names in school atlases and in the national atlas, liaison to multilateral bodies)

A first meeting was mainly devoted to an analysis of the whole situation and a discussion of some activities along the lines of the resolutions of the past U.N. names conferences. Thereafter the ad-hoc group of experts checked a proposed amendment to the decree that contains guiding principles for the treatment of the names of railway stations and other places that appear in the official time tables. The new decree has been put into legal force by the 1st of March 1988 by the Federal Minister of the Interior. It has been published in the three official languages under the following titles:

- Richtlinien über die Festsetzung und Schreibweise der Stationsnamen und Namen von PTT-Dienststellen des EVED vom 1.März 1988
- Directives concernant la détermination et l'orthographe des noms des gares et des offices des PTT du DFTCE du 1er mars 1988
- Direttive concernenti la determinazione e l'ortografia dei nomi delle stazioni e degli uffici PTT del DFTCE del 1º marzo 1988

The group examined also a list of different name categories which will be needed for legislation purposes in this field, especially in connection with new digital name files that will be part of the cadastral surveys, for which an entirely new concept is actually developed.

In mutual cooperation between the Federal Office of Topography, the Department of Cartography of the ETH Zurich and the Liga Rumantscha in Chur a first draft for a glossary with exonyms for all four languages has been composed. The lists contain also historical names. It has proved to be practically impossible to decide on which exonyms are still in use and which ones might be eliminated.

In a next step all 26 Cantonal Toponymic Commissions have been invited to an informal meeting that served mainly the purpose of mutual exchange of information and experience with those experts that are confronted with the name problems in close contact with the general public. For the moment there seems to be no need for amending the rules and procedures according to which names are treated in all four language areas. It was welcomed to hold similar meetings on toponymic problems also in future. The Federal Office of Topography has started to establish a digital name data base for all maps at 1:25'000.

The Federal institutions represented in the group mentioned above approved that the Department of Cartography of the ETH Zurich ought to play a leading role in international contacts such as UNGEGN and StAGN in the next period. A formal delegation had to be proposed to the Ministry of the Interior.

The group will study a proposal for terms of reference for a national names authority and eventually put forward a proposal to the Federal Government. It will have to be examined first what tasks ought to be taken care of by such a national names authority. There is in so far no urgent need for it in internal matters, because the decentralized toponymic commissions function quite well.