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### STANDARDIZATION IN MULTILINGUAL

#### AREAS

The New Norwegian Place Name Law

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## The New Norwegian Place Name Law

### I The Legislation

The Norwegian Place Name Law was passed by the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget) on 22 February 1990 and sanctioned on 18 May 1990. The Law came into effect on 1 July 1991. Applying exclusively to the standardization and use of place names, this Law is unique in an international context.

### II Background

The place name regulations which were in force previously did not have the status of law, but legislation was needed to give legal weight to decisions concerning the standardization of place names. The law governing the division of property contained a clause giving the owner of a farm the right to determine the written form of the name of the property. In many cases the form chosen by the individual did not comply with the form recommended by the authorities on the basis of the linguistic and cultural history of the place name.

In the 1960s a number of property owners brought court cases against the State in order to have the official written form of place names changed. The State lost these cases due to lacking legislation. Later a research programme was conducted with a view to producing adequate and unambiguous regulations which would on the one hand give the State the necessary legal power to determine written forms and on the other hand take into account the interests of the individual. An official

Before the written form of a name is authorized all parties concerned must be consulted. The local usage of the name and the wishes of the local population must be noted. The official authorization of the name must be accompanied by a statement giving the reasons for the choice of standardized form. This statement is particularly important in the case of controversial names. The local council and, if relevant, the property owner must be officially informed of the authorization of the place name.

#### 5) Appeals Committee

An Appeals Committee has been established to deal with complaints about the standardized forms of place names. The chairman of the committee must be a High Court judge.

#### 6) Place Name Advisors

The Place Name Law has entailed an extension of the advisory service and division of the field of responsibility into regions. There are now two place name advisors at each of the four universities in Norway; in Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Tromsø, dealing with the standardization in the corresponding regions. In addition there are two or more positions for advisors for Sami and Finish place names. At each of the universities, there is a position for an assistant advisor whose function is to prepare cases for the advisors. The advisors and the assistants must have university qualifications in Nordic languages. The place name advisors are responsible for making sure that place names are written in accordance with the Law. The advisory service is financed by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

#### 7) The Place Name Register

A central computerized register of all Norwegian place names in official use is being established. New place names which come into use and changes in the existing standardized forms are to be notified to the Place Name Register. The Register is

based on the the Norwegian Map Series M711 on a scale of  
1:50000 and it is administered by the State Office for Carto-  
graphy. This office has now employed a specialist in name  
research to deal with the linguistic aspects of the register.