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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON  
THE STANDARDIZATION OF  
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
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Item 8 of the provisional agenda

EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE ON PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE REPORT OF  
THE GROUP OF EXPERTS 1/

Views submitted by the Government of the Federal Republic of  
Germany

1. General principles for the standardization of geographical names

Recommendation I, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

(a) We are of the opinion, as mentioned in E/CONF.53/L.1, point 12, that standardization of geographical names for international purposes is dependent upon the international acceptance and use of geographical names as determined by the national names authorities for various countries and language-areas. International standardization of geographical names can only be achieved when the individual countries have determined the official spelling of names for their own areas.

(b) We are in accord with the point that the composition of national names authorities for the co-ordination, standardization and determination of forms and spelling for geographical names is necessary for domestic standardization.

In the case of countries which are a federation of states, difficulties may arise as a result of varying regulations for the determination of geographical names in the various state jurisdictions. Here, the necessity is for the co-ordination and standardization of regulations and practice relating to geographical names of all states within the country, in cases where they all have a common language.

1/ See also E/CONF.53/L.2, pages 7-18.

(c) It is also possible that name standardizing bodies can co-ordinate the geographical names for common language-areas, as is the case for the Ständiger Ausschuss für geographische Namen (Permanent Committee on Geographical Names) which is composed of experts from Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

(d) The recommendation of the Group of Experts, that names authorities publish gazetteers for the standardized names, is important both for domestic and international standardization procedures. It is felt that such gazetteers be published at varying intervals to take account of additions and changes in geographical, community and place names. Notation of character and extent of features would be desirable at all times.

(e) The necessity for liaison between national cartographic agencies and national names authorities in the process of domestic standardization has been duly stressed by the Group of Experts. Hereby, it is possible to attain the goal of domestic standardization in that officially authorized names would appear in all maps and charts.

(f) Further, we are of the opinion that in standardizing geographical names, printed forms should be taken from newer editions of maps and cadastral plans, and that the written forms should take preference over spoken and/or local forms.

## 2. Uniform regulations for the domestic standardization of geographical names

Recommendation II, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

(a) Standardization of geographical names by national names authorities should be according to uniform and constantly held principles with relation to the language-areas involved. These principles should include spelling regulations for specific and generic terms and descriptive designations applying to geographical names.

(b) It is felt that definite general rules for spelling of variant forms of names in the same language (problem c) cannot be made. Each name will have to be approved as an individual case according to how often a particular spelling is used in directories and on maps, what the local form of the name is, and which variant renders best the meaning of the name. This can only be done by research and knowledge of areal and linguistic factors involved for each name of the language-area.

(c) It is felt that definite criteria for the retention of established names vs. substitution of new names cannot be set up as a general principle (problem h). Changes of well-established, well-known names would lead to confusion, as new name-forms would only slowly be accepted and promulgated. In many cases, substitution of new names will be a matter of necessity; as when two places with identical names are always confused with each other; as when names have a pejorative meaning; or where several communities and towns are merged into a new community. (For example: the towns Barmen and Elberfeld were merged into the city presently named Wuppertal.)

(d) Further it is recommended, in cases where a new name has been substituted for an established name - as with the example of Wuppertal - that this be shown in official directories for a sufficient period of time to prevent possible errors or confusion. Hereby, the older established name can be given in brackets following the new name.

3. Standardization of written forms; consideration of general spelling rules; procedures for historically established name forms

Recommendation III, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

(a) We agree that systematic treatment should not operate to suppress significant characteristic elements of names treated. Historically established forms of geographical names in the various countries should not be changed without due reason and cause.

(b) Complete standardization of written forms, including generic entities, may cause difficulties in cases where historically established and officially authorized names have spellings differing from present-day spelling rules. For example: present "hafen" (harbour), "tal" (valley), but established, officially authorized - Cuxhayen, Frankenthal - where older historical forms have been retained.

(c) Official, national changes in spelling rules for various language-areas have not been touched upon by the Group of Experts. It is recommended that when such changes in official spelling rules have been authorized for the various countries these then be nationally and internationally recognized and applied for the rendering of geographical names. For example: in Danish, replacement of "aa" by "å"; in Swedish, replacement of "w" by "v"; in Hungarian, replacement of "cz" by "c".

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(d) We are in accord with the statement that standardization of written forms for geographical names should not be based upon translation. As a result, established names as used in minority languages and other languages differing from the primary language of the country will be retained in regard to their individual spelling usage. For minority languages or dialects having no written forms, this will involve transcription from the individual phonemic notation for the particular languages. For further discussion, reference is made to point 7 of this paper.

#### 4. Use of identical names for various geographical entities

Recommendation IV, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved, whereby national names authorities take cognizance of, and appropriate measures to reduce, duplication of identical names for different geographical entities.

(a) Complete avoidance of duplication will not be possible in all cases, either for a country or areas of a country. A plethora of identical names, having the same generic terms, will occur simply as a result of historical development and often in adjacent areas. The names Neudorf, Kirchberg, Rothorn, Weissbach (Newtown, Churchhill, Redpoint, Witestream) are examples of repetitive names which can be found in most areas of Germany. In such cases, suffixes may be added to existing established names to avoid confusion.

Experience shows, however, that there are cases where the possibility of adding descriptive designations to two similarly named entities - particularly mountains and rivers - cannot be applied. For example, there are two important rivers in Germany having the name "Kinzig"; in this case it is not possible to distinguish between them by adding a further descriptive term.

(b) Hereby, it is recommended that national names authorities propose the suffixes for identical names, to assist in the programme of domestic standardization. In each case the suffix for the individual names should be taken from the names of established geographical entities (features, mountains, rivers, well-known cities or towns) of the particular area where the place is actually located.

5. Consultation of national names authority in the process of legally fixing new names or changing existing names

Recommendation V, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

It is desirable that the national names authority be consulted when new names are to be assigned, or for changes in existing names. This would apply both to the determination of the extent of geographical entities to which names are to be given, as well as the standardization of written forms.

6. Information of the general public and consultation of those affected, where changes in names are intended

Recommendation VI, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

It is agreed that informing the general public and consultation with those most affected in the event of changes in names, will increase acceptance of intended changes. This will be the case whether standard use of a name may differ from that in local usage, or whether standard names or spellings are chosen from alternatives. In this respect, reference is made to II, 2 a of the "Report of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on the Progress of Standardization of Geographical Names in Germany", whereby in the Federal Republic of Germany the communities affected are consulted in the event of proposed name changes.

7. Allowances made for countries having several official languages; minority languages; dialects and regional forms

Recommendation VII, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

(a) A point of particular importance is taking account of geographical names which differ from those used in the principal language of a country.

(b) A problem, which has not been discussed in detail in recommendation VII, relates to countries having more than one official language, or to areas where official names are taken from a minority language. In such cases, difficulties arise in the course of domestic standardization of names, which also affect international usage.

Hereby, official gazetteers and maps - whether intended for national or international use - should include the various name-forms in official usage. On maps, varying or double names should be entered only for the areas applying to the particular language-area.

(c) It is felt that in standardization of names preference should be given rather to standard speech forms than to local or dialect forms. However, in regions where dialect forms are common usage - for generic terms, etc. - these should not be changed merely to effect complete domestic standardization. (For example, where the standard High German form of "Büchel" (hill) has the Bavarian dialect form of "Bichl"; or the standard High German form "Bach" (stream) has the northern Low German form "Beck", "Beke"). The same applies to local variations - whether occurring regionally or singly - having different spellings for the same generic term: in German, -born, -bronn, -brunn for "Brunnen" (well, spring).

8. Determination of extent of natural features, standardization of names for larger natural features.

Recommendation VIII of the Group of Experts is approved.

(a) In the Federal Republic of Germany, the process of domestic standardization for spelling the names of natural features has been aided by establishing the limits and extent of natural features. All such references are documented in a *Landschaftsnamenkartei* (General Catalogue of Geographical Names), which can be drawn upon for questions of specific or general relevance.

(b) The measures suggested in the final paragraph of Recommendation VIII, regarding definition of parts of natural features for inclusion in national gazetteers, has been applied in volume I of "Duden, Wörterbuch geographischer Namen" in the interests of domestic and international standardization.

(c) The proposal made in E/CONF.53/L.1 of 26 October 1966, section "International Co-operation", whereby the names of physio-geographic entities extending over various countries and language-areas should be given one standard name, which would apply to the entity in all of the concerned countries, would seem impracticable at the present time.

Each country uses an official name which refers to the entire entity, and each of these names has a long historical development, e.g. Fr. Alpes; Ger. Alpen; It. Alpi. In Italy, Alpi Pennine; in Switzerland, Fr. Alpes Valaisannes, Ger. Walliser Alpen. For the Danube, Bul. and Serb. Dunav; Ger. Donau; Hung. Duna; Slov. Dunaj. For the Rhine, Dutch Rijn; Fr. Rhin; Ger. Rhein.

However, in cases where international publications are printed in one particular language, then the names of the larger natural features - extending over various countries and language-areas, e.g. the Alps and Carpathians - should be given in the forms in use for the language chosen.

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In the case of oceans or seas - which border on a number of different countries - one of the official languages of the United Nations could be selected for the names to be used on an international level.

9. Specifications relating to administrative divisions as given in national gazetteers

Recommendation IX, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, national gazetteers list the parts of collective entities and/or administrative districts in the "Gemeinde- und Ortsnamenverzeichnisse" according to the following system:

- Länder (= states and/or provinces);
- Regierungsbezirke (= administrative districts);
- Landkreise and/or Kreisfreie Städte;
- Gemeinden;
- Wohnplätze.

10. Optional parts of names

Recommendation X, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

It is felt that geographical names should be used without optional parts whenever possible, as long as such optional parts are not integral elements of a particular name.

(a) In regard to optional parts of names (problem g) - which parts must or can be used - this can be determined for each case only by the official names directories.

It is felt that Recommendation X should be expanded to include the rendering of names both in official directories and on official maps, for those parts of names which are integral elements, and standardized for domestic and international use.

(b) In regard to optional parts of names, the official directories in the Federal Republic of Germany state the parts of names which must be used. These names are those used on the official topographic maps, which include both prefixes and suffixes; for example: Bad Homburg v.d. Höhe (with the prefix 'Bad' and the suffix 'vor der Höhe'); Rothenburg ob der Tauber (with the suffix 'ob der Tauber'). In both cases, the prefix and/or suffix is an integral part of the name.

11. Distinguishing of generic terms used as a definite part of a name, or as a descriptive part

Recommendation XI, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved; whereby national names authorities distinguish between generic terms that are integral elements of geographical names, or words used as descriptive additions.

(a) In Germany, geographical names with generic terms occur mostly in connexion with the addition "Gebirge" (mountains, mountain-range) as in "Ohmgebirge". In cases where the generic term is not an integral part of the established name - such as "Egge" and/or "Eggegebirge", "Eifel" and/or "Eifelgebirge" - preference is given to the shorter form for authorized usage.

(b) In cases where the nature of a feature is not apparent from the proper name, it is necessary to indicate the type of feature in the official directories or gazetteers.

12. Bedeutungsfeld (field of meaning) of geographical names

We are of the opinion that Recommendation XII should be deferred for future consultations and research on the part of linguistic and toponymic experts for the various countries and language-areas involved.

It is felt, that the immediate problems of domestic and international standardization of geographical names should have priority over questions dealing with wider-ranging research programmes. These will require the consultation of specialists for the various fields within each country and language-area to acquire definite results.

In order to provide complete historical information on geographical names for any area, the personnel employed must have a thorough knowledge of linguistics and geography for the area to be researched. Most of the official agencies for administration, cartography and geography concerned with the various areas, have neither competent personnel nor time to concern themselves with more specialized names-research.

13. Geographical glossaries

Recommendation XIII of the Group of Experts is approved.

National glossaries will take some time to set up, especially for languages having various grammatical forms involving gender, number and case of generic terms.



It would be advantageous that the various national glossaries be co-ordinated on a multi-language level, for international use by cartographers and geographers of various countries.

14. Parallel syntactical or grammatical forms of identical geographical names

Recommendation XIV, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

Such forms do not occur in German geographical names. Occasional prepositional forms may be given in special cases, for example: Auf dem Acker (mountain range of the Harz); im hohen Rain (= field name); Hinter der Hartmühle (= populated section of the city of Mainz).

15. Definite and indefinite article as a part of names

Recommendation XV, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

(a) The national names authority should determine, for the purposes of domestic standardization, which names have the definite article as an integral element of the name. In Germany, the definite article - der, die, das - is only used in rare cases as an integral element of a name for areal-, mountain-, or lake/sea regions.

(b) We are in agreement with the point that in domestic standardization languages having both a definite and indefinite name form, the national names authority should determine which of these forms be used in standardization.

16. Abbreviations of elements in geographical names

Recommendation XVI, as proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

It is necessary that all abbreviations used should be explained by the names authorities of the various countries. It is recommended that all geographical names in official directories and on maps be given in unabbreviated form, both for domestic and international usage, as such abbreviations may be misunderstood.

17. Consistent printing form for similar geographical names

Recommendation XVII, relating to Problem 1, that the printing form of similar names be uniform, is justified.

The German opinion is that, as far as possible, printing should be uniform for similar geographic names; as for example Gross Heide (Lüchow-Dannenberg) and Grossheide (Norden). As far as possible standardized spelling rules for all

geographical names should be applied in each country. In the Federal Republic of Germany this principle is, however, difficult of application, as each of the Länder (= states) is responsible for the spelling of names within their jurisdiction. Officially changing all names to accord with standardized spelling rules would be a costly procedure.

In countries such as Germany, where names have historically established forms which have been officially used for a long period of time, complete standardization will not presently be possible.

18. Location of geographic features

Recommendation XVIII, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved; whereby the location of geographic-topographic entities should be stated in terms of geographic co-ordinates and/or references to other established points.

19. Information on geographic names; relating to gender, number, form, stress and pronunciation

Recommendation XIX, proposed by the Group of Experts, is approved.

(a) It is felt that national names authorities should include information in gazetteers on gender, number, definite and indefinite form, stress and pronunciation of geographical names. This should certainly be the case when such gazetteers are meant for international use.

(b) It is recommended that for stress and pronunciation the international phonetic alphabet of the International Phonetic Association be preferred to a national phonetic alphabet. The international phonetic alphabet has been recommended for use in the 1962 "Specifications" of the International Map of the World, 1: 1 million.

20. National documentation of geographic names for the countries with Amharic, Arabic, and Thai alphabets

Recommendation XX of the Group of Experts is approved.

It is recognized that the prerequisite for national standardization is the documentation of geographical names, for the countries having Amharic, Arabic and Thai alphabets. International usage can only be based upon the results of domestic standardization. For further comments, reference is made to the "Proposal

of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on the transliteration and transcription of geographical names" (Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda).

21. Alphabetic writing forms of geographical names for countries having ideographic writing systems

Recommendation XXI of the Group of Experts is approved.

Reference is made to the "Proposal" (Item 11 of the provisional agenda) which discusses more fully the points raised in Recommendation XXI.

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