



UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE  
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
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REPORT BY GOVERNMENTS ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN  
THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Situation in Dutch-speaking Belgium

Report by the Government of Belgium

(Royal Commission on Toponymy and Dialectology, Flemish Section)

When the Commission (now the Royal Commission) on Toponymy and Dialectology was first set up in 1926, its Flemish Section was concerned at the anarchy prevailing in the spelling used in gazetteers of Dutch-language geographical names.

1. Names of communes

Except in the case of large centres of population, these names were written in an utterly archaic form, entirely out of keeping with the modern rules of Dutch spelling. In addition there was a fantastic variation in the spelling used even in official circles and private usage was no less heterogeneous.

Efforts at modernization had been made from time to time on the initiative of numerous Flemish cultural groups, but no permanent official solution had been found.

In 1928 a special commission composed of the Flemish Section's toponymists embarked on a study of the problem, and in 1929 it instructed the undersigned, the secretary of the Sub-Commission, to publish the results. These appeared in a booklet<sup>1/</sup> of which several tens of thousands of copies were distributed, and the proposed gazetteer was approved, and used in practice, by all the Flemish cultural organizations without exception.

<sup>1/</sup> H.J. Van de Wijer, De Vlaamsche gemeentenamen in moderne spelling. Leuven, Instituut voor Naamkunde, 1929, 43 pp.

The reform was fiercely opposed by conservative elements for a number of years but was officially accepted by the Belgian Government in 1937 and made compulsory for all official purposes.

Following the Dutch spelling reform of 1954, the gazetteer was simplified as necessary and these changes, too, have been officially recognized. ✓

## 2. Names of hamlets

In general, the principles of the new gazetteer are also applied to the names of hamlets appearing in official publications. There is still, however some work to be done on these names, and the publication of an up-to-date list of names of hamlets should come up for consideration in the near future.

## 3. Street names

The official orthography is normally used in street names as a result of the supervisory authority conferred by the Belgian Ministry of the Interior on the two Sections (Flemish and Walloon) of the Royal Commission on Toponymy and Dialectology.

## 4. Glossary

A modern bilingual dictionary of Belgian communes has been in existence for several years. 2/

In addition to much useful administrative information, this work contains the official gazetteer of communes and shows, for each commune, the names of hamlets and principal features (streets, etc.). It was prepared by an official of the National Statistical Institute and is a useful working tool, but it is in need of thorough revision.

## 5. Belgian Ordnance Survey Map

The situation with regard to this map is excellent.

Since 1951 the two Sections of the Commission<sup>3/</sup> have maintained fruitful co-operation with the Military Geographical Institute of Brussels, under the

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1/ The new (bilingual) gazetteer is published annually by the National Statistical Institute. See "Official population census for the Kingdom as at 31 December 1966" (Moniteur belge, 19 July 1967).

2/ A. Houet, Dictionnaire moderne "géographique, administratif, statistique" des communes belges, Fr. van Muysewinkel, rue d'Anethan 23-27, Brussels.

3/ On the Walloon side, under the direction of Mr. J. Herbillon; on the Flemish side, under the direction of the undersigned. Both are members of the Royal Commission on Toponymy and Dialectology.

Ministry of National Defence, on the linguistic and orthographic revision and modernization of the geographical names to be included in the new edition of the Belgian ordnance survey map on the scale of 1:25,000.

According to my estimate, some two-thirds of the Flemish communes have been examined so far, and the same is probably true for the Walloon communes.

Once this rather laborious task has been completed, consideration should be given to the preparation of a glossary.

#### 6. Belgian cadastral survey

(In particular the cadastral survey of the Dutch-speaking part of the country)

Here we are obliged to change our tune.

The cadastral lists for the Flemish region defy description. The spelling of the names given in these lists is more than a century old, and absurd and often incomprehensible forms abound.

The revision of the Flemish cadastral gazetteer - which, moreover, is not entirely up-to-date - will take a very long time. A preparatory scheme was put forward by the undersigned but the Belgian cadastral administration is unable, for the time being, to accept it.

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