

# **United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names**

**Twentieth Session**

**New York, 17-28 January 2000**

**Item 5**

**Of the Provisional Agenda**

## **REPORTS OF THE DIVISIONS**

**Paper submitted by the Republic of Cyprus**

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# United Nations Group of Experts

## On Geographical Names

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### 1. Introduction:

- 1.1 The island of Cyprus was created millions of years ago, in the depths of a great ocean, the remnants of which constitute the Mediterranean, the Caspian and the Black Sea. The creation of Cyprus, which has lasted three million years, was due to underwater volcanic activity and other more complicated processes. Even today, many low – and even high – lying areas are strewn with fossilized seashells that bear witness to the fact that these regions were once at the bottom of the sea.
- 1.2 To a significant extent, Geography determined the historical destiny of Cyprus. This was due to its geostrategic location, at the meeting point of three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa, as well as its natural wealth. The history of its civilization begins from the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. For long periods, Cyprus lived under foreign domination and it became an independent Republic and a member of the United Nations in 1960. In 1961 it became a member of the Council of Europe, the British Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement. In 1990 it applied to join the European Union and negotiations for accession begun in April of 1998.
- 1.3 The people of Cyprus, are privileged to have most of their geographical names bequeathed to them in ancient texts from the depths of history. These include works by such notable names as Homer, Herodotus, and Strabon up to ancient cartographers, like Claudius Ptolemaeus and from medieval cartographers, like Abraham Ortelius, up to lord Horatio H. Kitchener who mapped Cyprus in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century at the beginning of the British rule of the island. The name of the island “Kypros” was mentioned by Homer, 3000 years ago.

1.4 The most recent foreign powers that controlled Cyprus were the Ottoman Empire, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and subsequently the British Empire until 1960. All geographical names, which survived through the centuries in writing or in the oral tradition until 1960, the year when the island gained its independence, are fully acknowledged and preserved by the Government of Cyprus. A large number of them have been collected from various texts and historical documents left by the British and the Ottoman Turks, as well as, other previous conquerors. Through the centuries of foreign domination, all the conquerors of Cyprus have imposed, during their stay, their own system on the island but none has attempted to change any of the traditional geographical names. Now, however, Turkey since its invasion and occupation of 37% of the territory of the Republic in 1974, is systematically attempting to change and rename, in an arbitrary way, the internationally accepted official toponyms that have survived through centuries, violating in this way the relevant resolutions of the UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical names

## **2. Historical Background of Geographical Names**

2.1 Cyprus belongs to the Mediterranean world, which appears in written history with written monuments, at least three thousand years ago. Naturally the historical sources about Cyprus refer also to toponyms. If one takes, as a basis, the Greek presence in Cyprus, on account of its being the most long-lived, from 1100 BC to this day, one can find four basic types of toponyms: pre-hellenic toponyms, toponyms of the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods (in Greek), toponyms of the Frankish periods (in French or Latin) and toponyms of the Turkish period (in Turkish). In this kaleidoscope of Cypriot toponyms, the long and rich history of Cyprus is reflected.

2.2 Research has ascertained that the toponyms are mostly stable, but also variable. Some toponyms remain unchanged through the millennia, following only the changes which take place in the historical evolution of the language, but some are altered, as life itself moves along.

2.3 It is possible to compile an extensive archive of Cypriot toponyms in an electronic form by sorting out the sources from ancient times till today – texts, inscriptions, codes, maps, catalogues, collection and local manuscripts. This task constitutes one of the future projects of the Cyprus Permanent Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names.

### 3. Cyprus Permanent Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names.

3.1 The Cyprus Permanent Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names was set up in April 1977 by decision of the Council of Ministers No 15769 and constitutes the only competent national geographical names authority. It consisted originally of 5 members from various related Governmental Departments responsible for collection, standardization and romanization of the geographical Names of Cyprus.

3.2 In 1997, by decision of the Council of Ministers a new Committee was formed consisting of 10 members, a Geographer-Cartographer, five Philologists, a Lawyer representing the Ministry of Interior and three Glossologists/Linguists, two of them representatives of the University of Cyprus

3.3 In 1998 a new law, No 66(1) of 1998, about the *Proceedings for the Standardization of Geographical Names* came into force and was published in the Official Gazette of Cyprus No 3257 of 17 July 1998. With this law, in addition to the Cyprus Permanent Committee for the Standardization of the Geographical Names, a Geographical Names Advisory Committee, was established. This committee is composed of five experts (Glossologists/Linguists) - a presiding member and four other persons appointed by the Minister of Education. Two of them must be academics from the University of Cyprus. The Committee will be responsible for:

- (a) examining all the matters which will be referred to it by the Cyprus Permanent Committee, and

- (b) investigating the objections submitted to it by any interested body or person, and
- (c) submitting the results of its investigations to the Cyprus Permanent Committee for the Standardisation of Geographical Names, for decision.

3.4 The Ministry of Education & Culture is obliged to make regulations, which are in line with the above-mentioned law or are necessary for the expedient application of the law. These regulations are now before the Attorney's General Office, for legal advice. The regulations will then be submitted to the House of Representatives for final approval and inclusion to the above law (No 66(1) of 1998).

#### 4. Achievements and Progress made regarding the Geographical Names

4.1 In the program of the Standardization of Geographical Names and according to the resolutions of the UN Conferences, the major tasks undertaken by the Competent Authority since its establishment, were the following:

- i) The application of the standardisation of names, mainly to geographical names, geographical terms, in cartography, in archaeological names and in toponyms. The system of transcription of the Greek names into the approved Roman alphabet (ELOT 743) has been fully implemented in official geographical names, in cartography, in toponyms and in the road signs. It is also implemented, to a large degree, in the details included in national passports. The standardisation of names and their transcription into the approved roman system has began to be implemented also in the private sector, in the press, in books and in studies.
- ii) From the archive of Cypriot toponyms, which has been compiled by the Department of Lands & Surveys from the maps and the cadastral plans, two gazetteers have been prepared:
  - a) in 1982 the *CONCISE GAZETTEER OF CYPRUS* which contains about 2000 main geographical names and
  - b) in 1987, the *A COMPLETE GAZETTEER OF CYPRUS* which contains about 67000 names

iii) The Cyprus Permanent Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names has undertaken the following tasks:

- a) To offer advice for standardization of names to the Government Municipal and Village Authorities and private individuals.
- b) To discuss the historical spelling of some Greek names.
- c) To standardize and transcribe the new odonyms of towns and villages.

4.2 In Cyprus, the odonyms are subject to the municipal and communal Authorities. The odonyms, which are given by the communal authorities, are under the approval of the respective District Officers, Ministry of Interior. All the names given are referred to the Cyprus Permanent Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names, for grammatical correction, if necessary, and for uniformity all over the island.

4.3 The Greek odonyms, as these are expressed with the terms *ODOS* (street), *LEOFOROS* (avenue), *PLATEIA* (square) are all in genitive case. For the Greek odonyms of Cyprus, the following principles apply:

- a) All the given names are complete, to identify the persons, in favour of whom these are given.
- b) The names of the ancient language are recorded to the ancient type of the genitive type, as is the case with the surnames of the citizens. The names of the modern language are recorded in the modern type of the genitive case.
- c) The transcription to the approved Roman system, where it is applicable, is obligatory.
- d) In the road signs, the Greek names are written on the upper level and the Roman type at the lower level. The Roman constitutes the transcription of letter to letter of the Greek names. The same principle covers foreign names as well. The foreign writing of the foreign names is not used on the road signs.

## 5. Work in progress

5.1 The tasks which are in the process of being realized, are the following:

- a) The compilation of a Booklet/guide containing guides and principles applied for the standardization, transliteration and transcription to the roman system of the geographical names of Cyprus. It consists of about 90 pages and is already completed in draft form.
- b) The compilation of *Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors*. This has about 40 pages and is also compiled in draft form.
- c) The compilation of the list of countries and capitals in the Greek language.

5.2 It is hoped that by the time of the next conference, Cyprus will be in a position to publish and then present the above-mentioned works, firstly in the Romano-Hellenic Division and then, in the upcoming Conference of the United Nations.

## 6. Future Program

6.1 The following have also been scheduled:

- The preparation of a new and improved edition of the *Concise Gazetteer* consisting of about 2000 names.
- The compilation of volume II of *A Complete Gazetteer of Cyprus*. This however cannot be realized yet because further research and fieldwork is needed to complement the whole project by adding the geographical names which do not constitute official names but exist and are part of the culture of the Cypriots. The scientific work regarding the local enquiry and field checking for verification is not possible in the northern part of the island, due to the continuing Turkish military occupation, which renders it inaccessible to the competent authority.
- The preparation of a glossary of sea and undersea features.
- The preparation of *A Complete Odonyms Gazetteer* for the free area only and not for the whole of the island because of the same reason referred to above.
- The compilation of a glossary under the title *Generic terms in Cyprus Geographical Names*.
- The preparation of a map of the Administrative Division of Cyprus and Regions, Districts and Municipalities.
- The Standardization of Cartographical Symbols.

## **7. United Nations Conferences and Sessions on the Standardization of Geographical Names**

7.1 Cyprus participates in all the conferences and meetings of the UN on the standardization of Geographical Names and is a member of the following four Linguistics Divisions.

- The Roman-Hellenic Division.
- The East-Central and South-East Europe Division.

Unfortunately we did not participate to the 15<sup>th</sup> Session of the East-Central and South-East Division held between 19-21 April 1999, because of technical reasons and I apologize for it.

- The Asia South-West Division (other than the Arabic Division).
- The "East Mediterranean" (Other than Arabic).