

**Twenty-eighth Session
New York, 28 April – 2 May 2014**

Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda

Report of the Divisions

Summary of the Division Reports*

*Prepared for UNGEGN by Botolv Helleland, Norden Division / Norway

Of the 23 geographical/linguistic Divisions, 17 submitted reports. The reports are listed at the end of this summary. The summary follows the same disposal as previous Division Reports summaries.

1. Structure of the Division reports

The Division Reports vary considerably as to their structure, length and content. This is not surprising as the degree of activity and the main focus differ from Division to Division. The Divisions are composed of countries with different challenges and not least different resources. Some Divisions may wish to report on activities which others pay less attention to. One main challenge is to distinguish between divisional and country based activities. As there is no agenda item relating to country reports at Sessions, some countries in a Division wish to report in national issues, in the Divisions Reports. The information on the documentation for the Session, issued by the Secretariat, mentions that this is a possibility but underlines also that national activities may be presented in separate Working Papers.

The structural variety in the Divisional Reports makes it difficult to make comparisons. At earlier Sessions it has been discussed if a template for Division Reports should be set up. Some experts seem to be in favour of such a template, others are pointing to logistical, practical and economical problems which several Divisions were facing. This situation makes it difficult to promote divisional activities in some regions. However, the reading of the present 17 Divisional Reports leaves an impression of optimism and progress. Notwithstanding, a clearer distinction between Divisional Reports and Country Reports is desirable. So, the normal structure is, after a brief summary, one part on divisional activities or activities shared by more than one country within the Division and one part relating to individual country activities. This is the case with most of the reports, like the Report of the Africa Central Division and the Report of the Baltic Division. The country part of the report may be presented under a common heading according to item, as in the Report of the Norden Division, or listed according to country as in the Report of the East Central and South-East Europe Division, depending on how close the countries within a Division are working together.

Some Divisions report only by country. For instance, the Latin America Division, which reports separately for Argentine, Brazil, Mexico, and Spain. A similar country based report is submitted by the Africa South Division for Botswana, South Africa, and Swaziland.

Some Divisions organize their reports by referring to selected UNGEGN agenda items, either at a divisional level, like the Norden Division, or at a national level, like the East Central and South-East Europe Division. Another model refers to resolutions. For example, the Dutch- and German-Speaking Division addresses progress against 16 resolutions. This model applies partly to the USA-Canada Division which continues to follow up Resolution V/22 relating to the promotion of Aboriginal / indigenous names. The Africa East Division dedicates most of its report to the international training for trainers in toponymy in Antananarivo in 2013 and its fruitful outcome. In addition, the report contains individual reports for Kenya and Madagascar.

As to the length, some reports comprise a higher number of items and are more detailed than others. The Eastern Europe Northern and Central Asia Division submitted a report of 16 pages, the Dutch- and German-Speaking Division submitted 12 pages, and the Baltic Division submitted 10 pages. Other Divisions like the Africa South Division and the United Kingdom Division submitted 2-3 pages. The length of the reports is not decisive for the information value. The various activities and achievements may be described in a concentrated format.

With respect to layout, only a few reports are supplied with illustrations. A useful way of reminding the readers of the distribution of the divisional countries is given by the Africa Central Division. The report of this Division is supplied with a map showing the countries which belong to the Division.

The chairmanship of the Divisions normally follows the five-year term between Conferences. In some cases there is a shift during the period. Some Divisions are chaired independently of Conference cycles.

2. Cooperation

Several Division Reports underline the importance of cooperation within a Division. The Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic) underlines the advantages of developing a geographical names database for the countries belonging to the Division. Several African Divisions mention the importance of cooperating with the Task Team for Africa. Various Divisions also mentioned the benefits of UNGEGN training courses. The Asia South East Division reports on national and international training courses. The Arabic Division mentions that several committees are addressing such issues as training, terminology and databases. The Arab Division also reports on the establishment of a Permanent National Committee for geographical names in Saudi Arabia. The Norden Division is looking into the possibility of an online web service based resource for minority geographical names within the Norden Division area.

3. Meetings and Conferences

The cooperation between Divisions is often triggered by regional and inter-divisional meetings. Most of the Divisional Reports mention regional meetings as part of their activities. Thus the Asia South-East Division reports on meetings in 2013 and 2014. The Latin America Division refers to the regional effect of the International Conference on Geography in Mexico City in October 2013 where a panel on geographical names was organized and where the UNGEGN Chair, Bill Watt, was speaking. The Baltic Division and the Norden Division report on a joint meeting in Tallinn in 2013. Simultaneously a seminar on geographical names terminology was held. The Romano-Hellenic Division highlights the 14th Meeting of the Working Group on Exonyms in Corfu, Greece in 2013.

Some Divisions have already planned further meetings during the present Session or after this venue, like the East Central and South-East Europe Division and the Dutch- and German-Speaking Division. Several Divisions report that it was not possible to organize meetings since the last Session.

4. Progress – General, Romanization, Legislation

Technological development with electronic storage and dissemination of geographical names data as well as improved web-based tools, allow general progress in the handling of geographical names. Most Divisions report on good progress in these areas, whereas others struggle. The Africa Central Division Report mentions that Botswana fights for reviving its place name Commission. However, the Africa East Division, which in its previous report concluded “Let us hope that the situation will continue to progress and that promoting the geographical names standardization in Africa will not be a utopia”, this time asserts its existence by the concrete result which is the fulfilment of relevant projects.

The political and economic situation remains an obstacle for efficient procedures in the treatment of geographical names standardization in many countries, in particular in Africa.

Some progress has been made in the field of Romanization according to the Report of the Baltic Division and the Report of the East Central and South-East Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division mentions that legislative steps have been taken within the Division. Also the Report of the South West Pacific Division notes progress in legislation pertaining to geographical names in New Zealand.

5. Progress – Maps, Gazetteers, Websites

Several Divisions report that considerable progress has been made in compiling regional maps and gazetteers. This applies i.a. to the Arabic Division. The Asia South-East Division reports on the creation of a website in cooperation with the Pacific South Division. The Latin America Division underlines the high activity within a number of geographical names activities in Brazil. The Asia South West Division (other than Arabic) mentions that it continues its work on the development of the geographical names database for its region. The China Division mentions that the work of a comprehensive National Toponymic Survey will be undertaken 2014-2018 and will include all types of geographical names. During this project, unnamed features will be named. The Dutch- and German-Speaking Division reports on the single database called “Geographical Names of Germany”. This Division also points to the progress in the integration of geographical names databases.

A number of Divisions have updated or recently established their websites. There is reason to believe that websites increasingly will serve as a forum for exchange of geographical names expertise.

6. Other activities

The question of geographical names as a part of the cultural heritage is mentioned in several reports. The Africa South Division puts it this way: “The naming of geographical features in South Africa is a part of the process of transformation of the South Africa Heritage Landscape in order to forge a common national identity and nationhood”. The China Division informs on a new organization for the protection of the cultural heritage of geographical names. The Africa Central Division reports on a

newly established inventory template for registering and storing place names on all kinds of maps.

7. Conclusion

The level of activity by many Divisions is certainly high, and many Division Reports indicate the usefulness of these structures for countries with similar standardization issues to discuss best practices and regional challenges, and to exchange documentation in languages suitable to Divisions participants.

This summary comprises just a few points from the 17 Division Reports. Of course, it does not give enough credit to all the work behind them. Many hands within the Divisions, and not least the Division Chair, have spent hours in contributing to the final result.

The question of a template for Division Reports remains open not because it would not be useful, but because the varying conditions within the 23 Divisions make it difficult to carry out all of the activities which a template would comprise. On the other hand, by reading this summary and even more the Division Reports themselves, the Divisions may develop new ideas for solving the tasks relating to geographical names standardization.

List of Division Reports

- Africa Central Division
- Africa East Division Report
- Africa South Division
- Arabic Division
- Asia South-East (ASE) Division
- Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)
- Baltic Division
- China Division
- Dutch- and German-speaking Division
- East Central and South-East Europe Division (ECSEED)
- Eastern Europe, Northern And Central Asia Division
- Latin America Division
- Norden Division
- Romano-Hellenic Division
- South West Pacific Division
- United Kingdom Division
- USA/Canada Division