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ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL
NAMES IN THE SOVIET UNION IN 1972-1974

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Great progress in domestic standardization of geographical names in the Soviet Union has been made since the 5th meeting of the UN Group of Experts held in March, 1973.

At the present moment this work has three interconnected aspects: scientific and methodical, legal and that of technical organization.

The scientific and methodical aspect of the work aims to provide (a) a correct and uniform Russian spelling of the names of the geographical units of the USSR and that of foreign countries (for the Russian language is a means of communication of all Soviet peoples) and (b) a correct and uniform transfer of these names to all the other languages of the Soviet peoples in all the Soviet publications. This work basically aims to preserve national names as close as possible to their original form and to avoid distortion. It appears feasible for, along with general guidelines, special rules for rendering foreign names into Russian are being developed based on a thorough and comprehensive study of both the principles and peculiarities of the original spelling of names and the possibilities of the Russian alphabet to reproduce them. These rules form the core of the instructions for the transfer of non-Russian place-names to Russian.

These instructions were repeatedly exhibited at international conferences on geographical names. Information was supplied at the London Conference (1972) as to the change of their status and as to the work started in this connexion, that of revising and republishing the existing instructions along with the developing of new ones.

More than 30 instructions had been worked out and published by December 1974. A set of instructions for the languages of the Union Republics is practically completed (the last one is in preparation), a set for the Autonomous Republics and National Districts has been started and will be completed in the coming two years, a revision and renovation of the instructions for rendering names from foreign languages is also in progress.

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During 1973-74 instructions for rendering place-names in Viet Nam, Korea, Ethiopia, Portugal and Brazil were issued. Some of them are completely new works, others are a renovation of previously existing ones.

Now that these instructions have become compulsory not only for cartographic works but for all kinds of Soviet publications in Russian it has become indispensable to make some rules more detailed, to formulate them more precisely and also to insert some additional information. Their main scheme has been left without any changes: the general notes, sources of place-names, rules of transferring, rendition of generic terms, orthography of compound names, and conventional names. The newly issued instructions are supplemented with a brief description of the peculiarities of the phonetic and graphic systems of the language concerned and of the place-name structure of the given territory. The lists of local generics and other words that build the toponymy of the country are considerably enriched.

In some cases extremely difficult problems were to be solved. The Russian form of a foreign name should correspond to the modern orthoepic norms of the literary language concerned, though the Russian language often has its own traditions in the spelling and pronunciation of many non-Russian names. For example, the German diphthongs ei/ey, äu/eu have been transferred to Russian by эй/ей, ёй/эй ages ago which means that the German place-names Eider, Kleinbeeren, Neubrandenburg, Eutzsch in Russian transcription looked like Эйдер, Клейнберен, Нейбранденбург, Эйч. The new rule gives the correct transfer of German diphthongs: ай, ой - Айдер, Клайнберен, Нойбранденбург, Ойч, although it entails a revision and republication of a large number of books and maps. Very few German names that have taken root in Russian classical literature have been preserved in their traditional form: Рейн, Лейпциг and some others.

The elaboration of scientifically grounded and uniformed rules for rendering geographical names is a necessary and basic condition in the standardization of geographical names. But even most perfect instructions cannot envisage all the cases that may occur in practical work. Gazetteers and dictionaries of geographical names compiled on the basis of such instructions are the only means that can completely eliminate discrepancies in transferring foreign names. The compilation of such gazetteers is a very complicated and labour-consuming work. On completion of the elaboration of the instructions the next stage of our work on the standardization of geographical names, i.e. the preparation of dictionaries and gazetteers is started. A number of dictionaries of geographical names of the Union and Autonomous Republics are now being prepared for publication. Dictionaries of geographical names of the Arab countries, Korea and Ethiopia were published in 1973-74. The compilation of such dictionaries and gazetteers for the republics of the Soviet Union and for foreign countries has become our principle work for the years to come.

Fifteen glossaries of local geographical terms have also been published as a practical aid for the surveyors and other people who take part in field topographic work and in field collection of names.

The gist of the legal aspect of standardization of geographical names is as follows: Instructions containing rules for rendering geographical names and dictionaries or gazetteers containing individual names should be given a status of compulsory documents for the spelling of modern geographical names in official papers, scientific reference-books, on maps and other publications of the agencies and institutions of the country. In the Soviet Union this is executed on the basis of legislative enactments and government decrees which regulate the general procedure of nomination and renomination of geographical entities in the USSR as well as the transcription of foreign place-names. In order to co-ordinate the activities of various organizations

in this field a Permanent Joint Commission composed of representatives of different ministries, agencies and institutions interested in geographical names is functioning under the auspices of the Chief Administration of Geodesy and Cartography. The Commission examines all the suggestions submitted concerning the new names, the alteration of names of geographical units as well as the instructions, dictionaries and gazetteers prepared for publication and adopts the necessary recommendations. Similar commissions have been set up in all the Union Republics. Instructions for rendering place-names of the Soviet Republics and dictionaries of their place-names are usually submitted for approval to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Union and Autonomous Republic concerned.

The Chief Administration of Geodesy and Cartography has been given the right to approve these instructions, dictionaries and gazetteers after which they become compulsory for all the agencies and institutions of the USSR.

The success of standardization of geographical names largely depends on its technical organization, i.e. on the qualification of the staff, the technical equipment available and the organization of labour. The elaboration of scientific and methodical aids, the preparation of material for the Joint Commission and the current work (such as: regular monitoring of a catalogue of place-names, the establishment and verification of names by request of cartographic enterprises, answers to the inquiries of other organizations, etc.), all require steady and joint efforts of a rather numerous and qualified personnel. Such a personnel is on hand at the State Geodetic and Cartographic Service and is, practically speaking, the permanent service of geographical names.

Since none of the institutes or universities can prepare universal specialists capable of solving the whole set of problems connected with standardization of geographical names the service of geographical names is provided with a staff of various specialists: linguists (experts in Slavic, German,

Roman, Oriental and etc. languages), toponymists, geographers, and cartographers. A successful solution of scientific, methodical and practical problems of the standardization of geographical names can be achieved and guaranteed only on condition that these specialists work in close cooperation.

The development of national economy, science and culture and the expansion of international contacts intensify the need for the standardization of geographical names and, consequently, the volume of such work is constantly increasing. Therefore a necessity arises to modernize the methods and technology of the work. It foremost concerns some labour-consuming operations where manual labour prevails: the maintenance of the catalogue of names, the compilation of gazetteers of geographical names, indexes to maps and atlases, and the like.

Instead of ordinary catalogue cases with boxes of over 15 kg each in them we have got special automatized "Zippel" cases made in the Hungarian People's Republic that considerably facilitate handling the catalogue. The elaboration of a universal computerized information retrieval system (IRS) is in full swing. A computerized IRS for toponyms is a component part of it (the Russian abbreviation is АИИСТ - in English AIPST).

The principle scheme of this system is as follows: codification of information on geographical names, recordings on machine carriers, input into the computer, processing, output, typing and reproduction of necessary reference data.

The research work and experiments performed resulted in the development of methods that provide output of information in various forms: gazetteers on countries or regions, alphabetical indexes to maps, lists of place-names of given units (such as populated places, rivers and the like), lists of place-names within given geographical or orthogonal co-ordinates and others.

The system not only allows for the giving of the standard Russian form of a foreign name but also its original form when necessary. When the latter form is given the gazetteers are

supplemented with alphabetical indexes of names in their original lettering.

We are already working on the compilation of gazetteers with this new technology. In the very near future this new system will be in full swing. It will speed up the circulation of the results of the standardization of geographical names among all the organizations who are in dire need of them.

Here, in brief, is our work on domestic standardization of geographical names performed in the Soviet Union in the course of the last few years.

L I S T

of instructions for rendering geographical names into Russian, dictionaries of geographical names and glossaries of generic terms published in the USSR
(by December 1974)

- I. Инструкция по русской передаче географических названий Азербайджанской ССР. М., 1971.
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4. Инструкция по русской передаче немецких географических названий.
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