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The spelling of geographical names of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the People's Republic of Bulgaria in the German Democratic Republic

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Pursuant to the resolutions adopted by the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the German Democratic Republic respects the names for the geographical objects abroad, i. e., the respective names are taken over without being changed unless their translatable parts have to be translated. As far as foreign geographical names are concerned which are not written in the roman alpha-bet, their translation is required.

As to the names of languages which make use of the roman alphabet, the demand to respect the relevant non-roman geographical names is more differentiated and depends mainly on the intended purpose.

In the following, some experiences concerning the translation of geographical names of states using the Cyrillic alphabet are dealt with.

The peoples and nations living on the territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (22.4 million km²) speak about 130 languages (of which 70 written languages, among them 50 languages are of ^amore recent date). About 150 million of the approximately 260 million Soviet people speak Russian as their

mother tongue and another 50 million people speak it as a second language. The mother tongues of the remaining 60 million people are Ukrainian, Belorussian (together with Russian they form the eastslavic branch of the Slavic family of languages), Uzbek, Tatar, Kazakh, Azerbaidzhan, Armenian, Georgian, Lithuanian, Yiddish, Moldavian, Chuvash, Latvian, Tadzhik, Turkmen, Bashkir, Estonian, Kirghiz, Udmurt etc. (these languages are given in the order of the decreasing number of their speakers).

Also for the Soviet people speaking the latter languages, Russian is the language of their supranational understanding and cooperation in public, political, economic, cultural and scientific life; Russian is the language which serves the individual constituent republics of the Union to exchange their cultures among them and with foreign countries, to contribute to the Soviet and international culture. Apart from this, Russian is one of the six official languages of the United Nations Organization. For these reasons, also the Russian forms of the non-Russian geographical names of the Soviet Union are very important, and the non-Russian geographical names transcribed into Russian can be used, if written in the non-Russian language concerned in the non-roman alphabet, just as original forms. This applies, in particular, to the respective Russian forms of the Ukrainian and Belorussian geographical names which exist completely equally in both forms so to speak. For special purposes, the respective non-Russian geographical names can also be directly translated into German (without reference to their Russian equivalents); this procedure is already provided for, to a certain extent, by relevant regulations.

The Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Karelian and Finnish geographical names which are written in roman types in the USSR

are taken in their original forms in the GDR, e.g. Vilnius, Riga, Tallinn, Lahdenpohja, Lähdeemäki. The parallel Russian forms of these names cannot be transcribed any more. The Russian names of all other non-Russian names of geographical objects in the USSR which have not been mentioned yet are, in contrast, regarded to be suitable for transcription. This is true, above all, for the Ukrainian, Belorussian, Moldavian, Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaidzhan, Kazhak, Uzbek, Turkmen, Kirghiz, Tadzhik as well as for the Bashkir, Buryat, Kabardino-Balkarian, Kalmyk, Komi and Mari, Mordovian, Tatar, Ossetian, Tuvinian, Udmurt, Checheno-Ingush, Chuvash, Yakut and other original forms.

The names of geographical objects of the People's Republic of Bulgaria have solely Bulgarian forms even if they are partly borrowed from other languages, e.g. from Turkish. As to the spelling of Bulgarian geographical names, the GDR introduces the transcription system adopted by the third United Nations Conference on Geographical Names (Athens 1977) in the making of cartographic products.

Various spheres of data storage and processing or data exchange existing between several countries for the purpose of interinstitutional information (in library catalogues, data files, bibliographies, information and documentation storages etc.), where geographical names appear both in roman and non-roman alphabets, demand for a system of character reproduction (transliteration) which can be operated by machines at any time and thus can be retransliterated on the basis of the roman alphabet with its 26 basic letters while using suitable diacritics created artificially in most cases. Relevant tables contain character equivalents which are largely unambiguous.

Consequently, there are a binding transliteration for libraries in the GDR concerning the Slavic Cyrillic characters¹ and a corresponding collection of regulations, which has been further developed and is independent of languages, concerning the transliteration of the Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Bulgarian, Mongolian, Serbo-Croatian and Macedonian alphabets, existing within the framework of the centre of scientific and technological information which was established by the socialist countries; the latter transliteration system embraces not only a basic variant using in each case only one character and completing it, if necessary, by diacritics, but also a secondary variant adapted to data processing which uses an additional ordinary character instead of the diacritics.

The transliteration system contained in "Der Große Duden"² (a German reference book) which is designed to reproduce Cyrillic names in German has proved to be advantageous for users in the GDR. In this way a special influence is exerted also on the correct pronunciation of these names, so that the geographical names may be reproduced as analogously as possible to the national form irrespective of the fact that they were translated.

Bibliography:

- 1 Regeln für die alphabetische Katalogisierung (Rules for alphabetical cataloguing). Volume 4. Berlin 1976, pp. 35 - 40
- 2 Der Große Duden. 17th, rev. edition, Leipzig 1976, pp. 27-31