

UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS

ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

EIGHTH SESSION

New York, February 26 - March 9, 1979

Agenda item No. 10(c)

Working paper No. 23

CONCERNING THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL
TOPOGRAPHIC FEATURE NAMES^x

The 3rd UN Conference on the standardization of geographical names held in Athens in 1977 paid due attention, among other problems, to that of naming extraterrestrial topographic features. The resolution of the Conference concerning this matter reads: "... that recent planetary research programmes resulted in a growing requirement for names for newly discovered (topographic - A.K.) features on the surface of the planets"/1/.

The Resolution, noting the role of the International Astronomic Union (IAU) in the compilation of lists of names and their application in naming extraterrestrial topographic features recommends that the UN GEGN collaborate with the IAU in programmes for establishing names on the largest possible international basis.

Pursuant to the resolution the chairman of the UN WG on the names of extraterrestrial topographic features who is also an adviser of the IAU WG for Planetary System Nomenclature established contacts with the last.

In the period after the Athens conference the exploration and mapping of the planet surface continued developing. A series of maps of Mars at

^x Prepared by A.M.Komkov (USSR), Chairman of the WG on the names of extraterrestrial topographic features.

/...

1:5,000,000 scale published by the US Geological Survey /2/ and the Atlas of Mercury published by the NASA /3/ may be cited as examples. In this connexion the work of the IAU/WGPSN has become more active and regular.

It should be noted that the UN initiative in setting up a special Working group on the names of extraterrestrial topographic features under the GEGN and the subsequent activities of the group promoted a lot the normalization in naming topographic features on the lunar and other planet surface. The problem was discussed at the 2nd (London) and 3rd (Athens) UN conferences on the standardization of geographical names as well as at the previous UN GEGN sessions. We attended one of the IAU/WGPSN meetings where we presented a survey and analysis of the existed system of naming extraterrestrial topographic features and our proposals directed to the improvement of this system /4/. All this appeared to be quite fruitful.

At present the regularly functioning IAU/WGPSN (under the chairmanship of Dr. P.M. Millman, Canada) coordinates the activities of 5 Task groups for the nomenclature of the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus and outer planets of the Solar system. Each Task group gathers and analyses the proposals of names for the features of "its" planet and submits them to the consideration of the IAU/WGPSN. The IAU/WGPSN discusses them and submits to the IAU Executive Committee and a regular General Assembly for approval. The fourth /5/ and fifth /6/ meetings of the IAU/WGPSN were held in 1977 (Washington) and 1978 (Innsbruck) respectively.

As it was already stated in our report at the Athens conference /7/ the IAU/WGPSN had begun observing a certain system in naming extraterrestrial topographic features. According to this system a certain name category is assigned to surface features of a certain planetary body. For example, major craters, as a rule, are named for outstanding persons of all nations: on the Moon for astronomers and physicists; on Mercury for writers, musicians, painters; on Venus for radiophysicists and radioengineers; on Mars for scientists contributed to the exploration of the planet. Surface features on the satellites of giant planets are named for mythological heroes.

In conformity with the adopted system the IAU/WGPSN prepares lists of names (a kind of data bank) available for naming specific features

when necessary. Under such circumstances the task of our WG is to provide the widest possible participation of the countries of the world in compiling such lists. Resolution 23 adopted by the Conference recommended that the interested countries work out name proposal forms.

However it became clear that no special forms are needed for name proposals. Commemorative names may be offered by any country in an arbitrary form. The only thing necessary is the minimum of data as follows: family and christian names of a man of science, art or culture, dates of his birth and death, brief information about his role and merits in his sphere of activitics. The lists of proposed names supplied with necessary information were already received from experts on geographical names from Bulgaria, Hungary, India and Poland. Some of them were already passed to the IAU/WGPSN. Such work should obviously be stimulated in other countries too. The solely important thing is that the proposed lists contain the names of the most outstanding persons which contributed a lot to the development of both national and international science or culture. It is advisable to compile such lists in cooperation with the national Academies of sciences or appropriate centres of science and culture.

Besides, the Athens conference recommended to use national generic terms, i.e. terms belonging to the specific language (valley, trench, lowland and the like) when publishing maps of planets and their satellites in different countries. The IAU prefers in such a case Latin terms and keeps using them.

Another problem still unresolved is that of Romanization of names originally written in non-Roman writing systems.

These are evidently the only problems on which we has not yet reached the full consent with the IAU.

In conclusion it should be noted once more that the main task our WG faces is to strengthen the collaboration with the IAU/WGPSN and to promote in such a way the fulfilment of the programme for naming extraterrestrial topographic features on the widest possible international basis.

/...

References

1. Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. Athens, Greece. Report of the Conference. Resolution 23. Extraterrestrial Feature Names. (E/CONF. 69/4) 8 September 1977.
2. Atlas of Mars. 1:5,000,000. Topographic Series. Published by the U.S. Geological Survey, 1977.
3. Atlas of Mercury. Authors and Editors M.E.Devies, S.E.Dwornik, D.E.Gault, R.G.Strom, NASA, 1978.
4. Concerning the normalization of the nomenclature of extraterrestrial topographic features. By A.M.Komkov. Minutes of the Second Meeting of the IAU Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature. Moscow, July 14-18. Appendix B.
5. Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the IAU Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature. Washington, D.C. June 1 and 2, 1977.
6. Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the IAU Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature. Innsbruck, June 2, 1978.
7. Problems of Extraterrestrial Topographic Feature Nomenclature. Prepared by A.M.Komkov (E/CONF. 69/L. 18) 23 June 1977.