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STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
IN THE USSR
IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE 7th AND 8th
SESSIONS OF THE UN GROUP OF EXPERTS ON
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
(1977-1979)

A detailed report about the work in the field of standardization (normalization)^x of geographical names carried out in the Soviet Union in 1972-1977 was submitted by the USSR to the 3rd UN Conference on the standardization of geographical names (Athens, August-September 1977). The interval between the 3rd UN Conference (and the 7th session of the GEGN) and the present 8th session is not so long (September 1977 - February 1979). But even in this short time a great deal of theoretical and practical work in this field has been carried out in our country.

^x The English term "standardization" is the equivalent of the French "normalisation". Though both words exist in Russian they are not full synonyms. The term "standardization" is mainly used in exact sciences and technics (to the parameters of technical articles). In linguistics we usually observe certain orthographic, orthoepic, etc. norms or rules. That is why we now prefer, in Russian, to use the word "normalization" instead of "standardization" when we refer to working out rules for or observing some system in lettering Russian and non-Russian names.

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Among the recently published scientific works "Theoretical foundations of practical transcription" by A.V. Superanskaya /1/ should be first mentioned. The standardization of geographical names in the USSR rests on the principle of practical transcription, i.e. on the transfer of the s o u n d i n g of foreign names by means of the Russian alphabet characters only.

The many years' experience in standardizing geographical names has been generalized in a special issue of the Transactions of the Central Research Institute of geodesy, aerial surveying and cartography "Normalization of Geographical Names and its Toponymic Foundations" /2/. It contains articles by: A.M. Komkov "Problems of Normalization of Geographical Names", I.P. Litvin "Macrotoponymy. Its Specific Character and Peculiarities of its Rendering from one Language to Another (on the Material of Latin America)", T.V. Dubinskaya "Concerning the Russian Transcription of German Place-Names", Ya.A. Miropolsky and G.E. Tikhonova "On the Korean Geographical Names and their Transfer to Russian (An Experience in Compiling the "Dictionary of Geographical Names of Korea")", Ya.A. Miropolsky "Geographical Names in National Districts of China" and others.

The books by V.D. Belenkaya "Essays of English Language Toponymy" /3/ and by E.M. Murzaev "Geography in Names" /4/ are also of great scientific and practical interest.

It should be pointed out that toponymic researches on both theoretical level and that of concrete investigations are carried out not only in the Russian language and treat not only the Russian toponymy. A number of works published lately demonstrate the scope of such investigations in Union Republics. The following books are worth mentioning: S. Karaev "The Origin of Place - Names in Uzbekistan" (in Uzbek) /5/, D. Isaev. "Mystery of Geographical Names (Northern Kirghizia)" (in Kirghiz) /6/, "Onomastics of Middle Asia" (Collection of articles) /7/, A.S. Suleimanov "Hydronymy of Checheno-Ingushetia" /8/, E.E. Otin "Hydronymy of Eastern Ukraine" (in Ukrainian) /9/. All these works speak to the significant theoretical grounds of the practical work on the standardization of geographical names.

At the same time we have continued our series of practical guidelines (instructions) for Russian rendering of non-Russian names of our country and of foreign countries. In 1977-1979 some new issues were prepared and published, namely, instructions for Russian rendering of geographical names of Abkhazian ASSR /10/, Gorno-Altai AO /11/, Khakassian AO /12/, Burma /13/, Indonesia /14/, Italy /15/, Czechoslovakia /16/, and of the countries of West Africa /17/.

Several dictionaries of geographical names of Union and autonomous Republics and of some foreign countries are now under preparation or in print.

In order to facilitate the reference work with geographical names and to speed up the preparation of place-name dictionaries and indexes an automated information retrieval system for geographical names (toponyms) - AIPST has been worked out and put into operation. A special report about it was submitted to the IXth International Cartographic Conference (Washington, July - August 1978) /18/.

The Permanent Joint Commission on Geographical Names also continued its activities during these years. Besides the discussion and approval of the compulsory instructions and dictionaries of geographical names the Commission considers and makes decisions on over 2000 proposals per year concerning naming or alteration of names of geographical features in the USSR.

The standardization of geographical names in the Soviet Union calls the attention of wide audience. For recent years several central newspapers, TV and radio gave various materials about place-names. Thus, the official governmental newspaper "Izvestia" published the article "Name on Map" /19/. The article "Time on the Map of the Country" /20/ appeared in "Nedelya", the Sunday supplement to "Izvestia". "Komsomolskaya Pravda" gave the article titled "Is it easy to name a station?" /21/ and announced a competition for best names for new stations of the Baikal-Amur railway. Information of different kinds and special reportings were included in the programmes of radio and TV. All this testifies that the problems of geographical names are given great social meaning in our country.

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