

**Ninth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

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**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries
and on the progress made in the standardization of
geographical names since the Eighth Conference**

**Report on the contribution of the Institut géographique national de
Belgique (I.G.N.-B.) to the Standardization of Geographical Names**

Submitted by Belgium**

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Report on the contribution of the Institut géographique national de Belgique (I.G.N.-B.) to the Standardization of Geographical Names

The Belgian National Geographic Institute¹ (I.G.N.-B.) is a federal government agency whose main task is to collect the topogeographic information, toponymy included, for the entire Belgian territory.

Throughout its activities, products and services, the I.G.N.-B. promotes in several ways the Standardization of Geographical Names.

Collecting the toponymy at the local level and adopting official or recommended forms

The collection of the toponymic information is done at the local level, together with correspondents who are appointed by the local council concerned.

A thorough investigation enables us, among other things, to discover new toponyms, different spellings for the same toponym or contested forms.

In these cases, since only the spelling of the administrative units is official², the I.G.N.-B. consults with an advisory scientific institution, the Royal Commission for Toponymy and Dialectology (Commission royale de Toponymie et Dialectologie³).

Use of the endonyms

Belgium⁴ is divided into four linguistic regions:

- the Dutch-speaking region
- the French-speaking region
- the German-speaking region
- the bilingual (Dutch-French) Brussels-Capital region

Each of the Kingdom's 589 municipalities belongs to one of these linguistic regions. Some municipalities however enjoy a special statute by virtue of which facilities are granted to their inhabitants.

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² *Co-ordinated Constitution of 17 February 1994, in Moniteur belge (Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees), 17 February 1994*
Royal Decree of 24 June 1988 establishing the names of the municipalities, in Moniteur belge, 6 July 1988
Royal Decree of 12 September 2001 changing the spelling of the municipality of Blégny into Blegny, in Moniteur belge, 2 October 2001
Since 1 January 2002, as a result of the special law on institutional reforms of 13 July 2001, the Regions (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels) have the competence to enact nearly all rules regarding the organization of their local institutions. As such, they are empowered to change their spelling.
Otherwise, giving names to roads and public places is a prerogative of the local council, the legislative body at the local level. Recommendations and specific procedures have been introduced in each of the three communities (Dutch speaking, French speaking and German speaking) as well as for the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region.

<http://www.belgiumlex.be>

³ <http://www.toponymie-dialectologie.be>

⁴ <http://www.belgium.be>

Some names of administrative units have been given a translation in one of the national languages by the legislator. "Antwerpen", for instance, which is a municipality situated in the Dutch-speaking region, has an official French translation: "Anvers". This translation can be considered as an exonym.

The N.G.I. for its part respects the form(s) that is (are) used in the linguistic region to which the toponym belongs. On its products, it only mentions the official translations for:

- the bilingual Brussels-Capital region ;
- the municipalities enjoying a special linguistic statute.

Internet site

Since January 2001, a complete chapter of the I.G.N.-B's Internet site is dedicated to the toponymy, with a description of the Belgian institutional and linguistic context, of the method used to collect and process the information, of the content of the data... Besides, it contains a topic on the issue of the Standardization of Geographical Names and a link to the United Nations website.

Toponymic guidelines for Belgium

A project on toponymic guidelines for Belgium has been undertaken in collaboration with the Royal Commission for Toponymy and Dialectology. The project has been nearly finished off for the Dutch- and the French-speaking regions but more work needs to be done for the German-speaking region and for the Brussels-Capital region.

Toponymic gazetteer and database

On the occasion of the completion of the first digital edition of the topographic map of Belgium at scale 1:50 000 (1993-2001), the I.G.N. has published -in partnership with Lannoo Publishing House - a topographic atlas of Belgium⁵ at this scale.

It contains an alphabetical index of the 18 000 odd toponyms mentioned on the map extracts in the atlas. Each name is followed by the number of the extract and by two numbers allowing to locate it. These numbers refer to the co-ordinates of the Belgian Lambert projection mentioned in the margin. Geographic co-ordinates (WGS 84) are mentioned on the very map extracts.

A database containing all toponyms mentioned on the basic map at scale 1:10 000 is being set up. It will contain initially (first semester of 2008) about 200 000 toponyms with the co-ordinates of their cartographic text.

Later on, other information will be added, such as their language code, the pronunciation, the status of their spelling (official, approved or not), the date of creation, of revision or even of removal; the co-ordinates of the topogeographic object they refer to...

The toponymic data will be updated every six years.

⁵ *Topografische Atlas België = Atlas topographique Belgique*. -1: 50 000. – Touring, IGN, Lannoo - 2002
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