

**Twenty-sixth session
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Item 9 of the Provisional Agenda

Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers

**EuroGeoNames (EGN) – Implementing a sustainable
European gazetteer service**

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1. Summary

According to United Nations Resolution VIII/6 [UNCSGN, 2002] as well as to the Directive 2007/2/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council [INSPIRE, 2007], EGN addresses the setup of a European (gazetteer) services' infrastructure which provides access to the authoritative, multilingual geographical names data held at the national level across Europe. Access is provided by a network of distributed Web Feature Service (WFS) interfaces implemented at each data provider's database [OGC, 2005] [ISO, 2001]. A reference Web Service (the so-called "EGN Central Service") accesses these distributed WFS (the so-called "EGN Local Services") to query the EGN infrastructure and return standardised result sets to the inquirer. Single searches for geographical names within the EGN infrastructure are free of charge.

The user as well as value added service providers have access to this EGN infrastructure and searching is enabled by using names in almost all official European languages, including minority languages (if authoritative data is available). [UNGEEN1, 2006], [UNCSGN, 2007], [UNGEEN, 2009] [UNGEEN, Bulletin].

2. Status quo

The EuroGeoNames (EGN) project funded by the eContentplus programme of the European Commission (EC) started on 1st September 2006 and the funded period lasted until 28th February 2009 with a project budget of 1,8 M €. During the funded period a European geographical names infrastructure has been established by connecting existing national official data sources of the participating National Mapping and Cadastral Agencies (NMCAs). In this way the geographical names data is updated in a consistent way and maintained at the source level by the responsible organizations.

Since 2009, the overall management of the EuroGeoNames infrastructure is conducted by EuroGeographics together with the German Federal Agency for Cartography and Geodesy (BKG).

EGN has been recognized as a very successful project by the European Commission and the project partners. EGN can become the first INSPIRE compliant service in Europe. The output of the EGN Central Service is to be mapped to the INSPIRE requirements as EGN conforms to all content mandatorily required by INSPIRE. Thus, EGN provides excellent opportunities for EuroGeographics and its members to meet future requirements in their role as reference information providers for national and European spatial data infrastructures.

Implementation over the period of 2009 – 2012 ensures the continuation of the EGN infrastructure and services. A priority is to achieve at least EU27 coverage as a part of EuroGeographics initiative to make EuroGeoNames self sustaining.

Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and Spain have now joined with a number of countries destined to join during 2011:

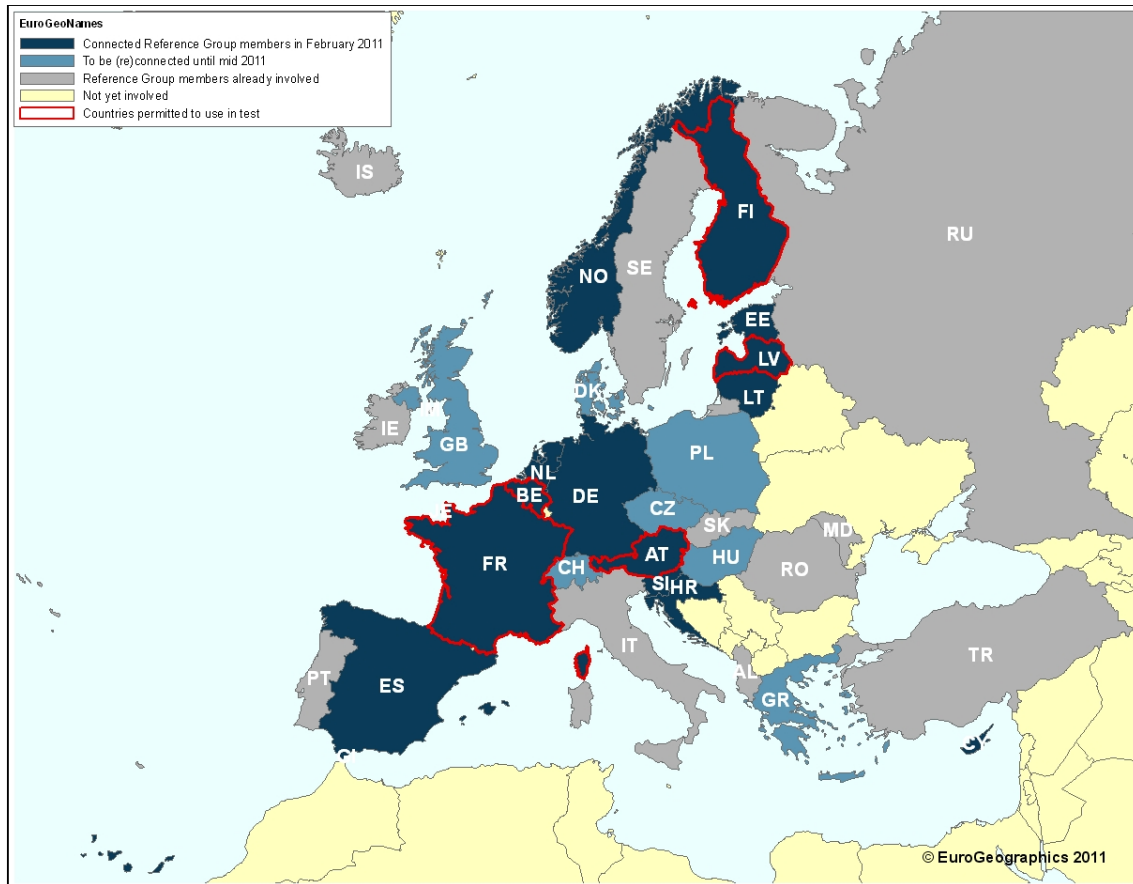


Figure: Overview of connected National Mapping and Cadastral Agencies (NMCAs)

The best architecture, use and management of EGN have been explored partly within the ESDIN project (a European Spatial Data Infrastructure Network). In this project best practice is sought for reaching INSPIRE compliance and creating harmonized pan-European location data and services. As Geographic Names is one of the 5 themes targeted by ESDIN there have been a number of insights and improvements which are now included in the EuroGeoNames implementation.

3. Making EGN Sustainable

During implementation in the period 2009 – 2012 the first priority is to grow the coverage to accommodate 27 nations. We have been successful in growing the connections to 14 by the beginning of 2011 and the initiatives to grow this further include awareness campaigns and activities with key users, suppliers and influential groups.

These activities include:

- Involvement with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographic Names
- Providing necessary advice, software and on-line tools to ease the task of mapping to the EGN specification and creation of Local Web Feature Services
- Workshops and questionnaire with National Mapping and Cadastral agencies on proposed pricing and licensing, access and supply preferences.
- Increasing basic coverage for the whole of Europe by including names data from alternative sources
- A test programme, interviews, questionnaires and meetings with all key customer groups.

- The Creative Problem Solving approach by the EGN Coordination committee sets out a plan to improve accessibility and usability of the offering and now shapes the proposition for a sustainable EuroGeoNames.

After 2012 the ambition is for EGN to become a component in EuroGeographics services infrastructure.

4. Future Plans

Events like the one day workshop on EGN at the joint meeting of the East Central South-East Europe Division of UNGEGN with the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers of UNGEGN in Zagreb, Croatia, on February 11th 2011 have helped EuroGeographics to engage with suppliers and users at the same time. Such activity will boost the number of connections as EuroGeographics gains a unique insight on core issues and take the opportunity to address them.

EuroGeographics' future plans are to;

- Increasing the connections by understanding and addressing supplier needs
- Improving user interfaces to meet user requirements
- Incorporating alternative content
- A new and more flexible architecture to accommodate different feeds
- Launch with an off-line Gazetteer product
- Continue with a phased approach to other offerings
- Increase the exonym and variant names data base content
- Iteratively improve the quality of content by providing free analysis of supplier data

The business plan for EGN proposes that EuroGeoNames becomes self sustaining. Models based on the well known internet "Freemium" model are going to be important.

5. Contacts

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The outcomes as well as all other deliverables of status 'public' are available through the EGN website: www.eurogeonames.com

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