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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 SEVENTH CONFERENCE

Report of Latvia

(Submitted by Latvia)**

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** Prepared by Vita Strautniece (State Land Service) Report is worked out with advice and help of Anna Stafecka, Ojārs Bušs (Latvian Language Institute) and Agris Timuška (State Language Centre)

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REPORT OF LATVIA

Summary

The legislation of the Republic of Latvia declares only the general principles of treatment of geographical names and tasks of different bodies in establishing the official names. However, the lack of national standardization programme and weak co-ordination of the efforts between different authorities prevents the progress. The elimination of mistakes in officially approved place names and the inadequacy between the official names and those in local usage are serious problems. The local peculiarities and spelling traditions of different regions should not be lost during the standardization.

The main achievements during the reporting period: constant and successful collaboration between the cartographers and place name specialists - geographers and linguists (specialists in onomastics and dialectology) in framework of state mapping programs; completion and publishing of the richest in toponymy map of Latvia – the Satellite Map M 1:50 000 (the first so large scale map in Latvian, covering all the state territory); creation and development of the Place Names Database of Latvia; establishment of the official village names; continuation of compiling place names dictionaries (not only serving as sources of information for place names standardization, but also popularising the place names as a national cultural heritage). The progress is recognized also in the work out of spelling rules for foreign geographical names in Latvian, toponymic education and research work.

1. National standardization; names authorities

According to the legislation of the Republic of Latvia:

the Parliament (Saeima) names and renames the cities and districts of Latvia;

the Cabinet of Ministers names and renames other administrative-territorial units and towns of Latvia (naming or renaming has to be reposed on the decisions of concerned local governments);

the corresponding ministries name and rename railway stations, ports, airports;

local governments name and rename villages, hainlets, farmsteads, buildings, pieces of land (parcels) and streets.

The names of villages had been officially approved during the 2000-2001 (the official list did not exist since 1991). However, there is a number of inexactly spelled, even wrong village narnes. In addition, the criteria for establishing the status of village to populated places have been applied variously in different parishes. The list of official village names is available now on <http://www.vzd.gov.lv/aris/> (in Latvian).

Until August 2001, for the naming or renaming of administrative-territorial units and populated places (except farmsteads), the conclusion of the Place Names Commission was necessary, but that practice has been cancelled. In that way, the process of official naming and renaming is going without a sufficient piece of advice and control of specialists in toponymy. The result is a growing amount of erroneous official toponymy.

The main authority of names of natural features is the State Land Service (performing the functions of the state mapping authority) but for official approving of the names, also the agreement of the local governments is necessary.

The State Language Law, adopted in December 1999, declares only the general principles on naming and treatment of place names in Latvia.

The State Language Centre, Ministry of Justice, Republic of Latvia, is the main authority working for implementation of the Law. *Regulations on Creating and Usage of Place names, Titles of Institutions, Non-governmental Organizations, Companies (Enterprises) and Titles of events* had been worked out and adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia in 2000. The State Language Centre has adopted and published recommendations on spelling farinstead names and numbers of houses in urban and rural territories and regulations on spelling addresses. Both of them have been published in a special issue devoted to the spelling of proper nouns.

Nevertheless, a special authority dealing especially with practical geographical names standardization problems, co-ordinating the efforts and interests of different bodies concerning place names is necessary.

The Place Names Coinmission at the State Language Centre, Ministry of Justice, Republic of Latvia, functioned until 1999 as an advisory board with recommendatory rights, based on the *Regulations of the Republic of Latvia Council of Ministers Place Names Commission* re-issued in 1995. The Place Naines Commission dealt with practical standardization problems, e.g., renaming of municipalities due to their amalgamation, spelling of particular place names, naming and renaming of railway stations, streets etc., as well as drafting guidelines in writing foreign place names. The Sub-commission of Latgale, a dialectally diverse area, solved the problems of standardization of genuine

vernacular forms of place names. Unfortunately, the Commission has been abolished due to the changes in legislation and is not renovated.

Latvia does not have a national place names standardization program. The process of standardization, being realized by particular institutions suffers from the lack of coordination and clearly stated national guidelines. Local and dialectal name forms are not legally protected. Place name experts almost have no legal way to influence the decisions of local governments on approving the official place names. Financing of scientific researches in toponymy is insufficient. Applied toponymy and field collection of names can make a progress mainly due to the state mapping programs and continuous support of the State Land Service.

2. Place name law

The draft of a Law of Place Names had been prepared and renovated several times by different bodies, but was not accepted by the Parliament.

3. Field collection of place names, mapping programmes

Field collection of place names has been closely connected with the realization of the state mapping programs by the State Land Service such as the *Satellite Map of Latvia M 1:50 000*, the *Topographic Map of Latvia M1:50 000* and the *Topographic Map of Latvia M1:10 000*.

The most intensive field collection was done by the Laboratory of Toponymy of the Cartographic Board (1994-1999, Toponymic Section of the Cartographic Division), State Land Service, for the *Satellite Map of Latvia*, scale 1:50 000, from 1994 till 1998. Staffs of local governments and local inhabitants were interviewed in each parish, town and rural territory. The Satellite Map of Latvia, consisting of 131 sheets, comprises from 20-1300 place names per sheet, depending on the area of land on a map sheet. Therefore, that first after the Soviet period large-scale map, compiled in Latvian, is the richest in toponymy map of Latvia, whatever has been published in Latvian language. The map is issued in electronic and printed versions.

The field collection is being continued now for the *Topographic Maps of Latvia*, scale 1:50 000 (since 1998) and 1:10 000 (since 2001). This field collection includes mainly consulting the local governments about the names of villages, hamlets, farmsteads, etc.

In addition, the laboratory of Toponymy has done field collection for the Place Name Database of Latvia and for compiling of local and regional place names dictionaries. Field collection of place names of Latvia is being continued also as a scientific research work at the Latvian Language Institute and at the Scientific Laboratory of Regional Geography and Toponymy, University of Latvia.

Delimitation and demarcation maps of the state borders of the Republic of Latvia were compiled during the reporting period.

For the time being the cartographers and toponymists of Latvia collaborate within the framework of the main state mapping programs closely and successfully.

The private map publishing company "*Jāņa sēta Map Publishers*" has continued the production of regional maps of Latvia, scale 1:100 000, city and town plans, scale 1:15 000 – 1:20 000, school maps and atlases, maps of foreign countries. A new version of the *Road Atlas of Latvia* (1:200 000) is published in 2002, containing an index list of over 21 thousand geographical names of Latvia. A CD-ROM *JS Latvija*, containing all the latest

maps of territory of Latvia produced by “*Jāņa sēta Map Publishers*” and data base with information about more than 15 000 settlements, natural objects, points of interest is issued.

4. Toponymical education and training courses

A lecture course on Toponymy is being delivered at the Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences and the Faculty of Philology, University of Latvia. Student’s papers on toponymic topics are being compiled at both above-mentioned faculties, also at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, University of Latvia, and at the Pedagogical Academy of Liepaja each academic year.

An event disseminating the information about the standardization of geographical names was the *Conference devoted to the 30th anniversary of the toponymic research work of geographers in Latvia*. The State Land Service in collaboration with the Scientific Laboratory of Regional Geography and Toponymy, University of Latvia organized it in May 2001. The 4-th Meeting of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN, held in Riga, April 2002, assembled quite a wide auditory, too.

5. Office treatment of geographical names (names on the maps, in the official registers etc.)

The state surveying and mapping authority – the State Land Service of Latvia - maintains the Laboratory of Toponymy that is responsible for field collection and processing of place names, compiling or checking the place names drafts for each map sheet. Since December 2001 all the maps, place names lists etc. compiled in the State Land Service have to be checked by specialists of the Laboratory of Toponymy.

The official and unofficial names are used on the maps produced by the State Land Service of Latvia. Names of cities, towns, administrative-territorial units are always in their official, standardized forms. The local, currently used name forms for the villages can be preferred (if the officially approved ones are erroneous). The local and dialectal forms for the nature features prevail. The Laboratory of Toponymy constantly has tried to implement the principle of place names standardization, based on a local usage of the local place names forms, collected through the field work (stated in the UN resolution VII/5 in 1998). Local forms, at least, are used on maps in brackets as additional information.

The official state registers such as the Register of Addresses, the Register of Real Estates (both managed at the State Land Service), the Register of Residents maintains the officially approved place names. Only the Register of Addresses asks the advice of place name specialists regularly. The Register contains official names of all cities, towns, villages, streets of Latvia. The address information about farmsteads is under compilation now.

The problem is the lack of harmonization of geographical names information between the different registers, private and state mapping enterprises, geographical reference books publishers etc. Quite frequent changes of village names have been carried out by local governments as well as errors in officially approved names also make the things worse.

6. Toponymic data files and gazetteers

The Card Index of Place Names at the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia, containing now approximately 1.5 million entries is being continued to elaborate. The cards comprise almost only linguistic information.

The Card Index of Physiogeographical Place Names of Latvia is being maintained at the Scientific Laboratory of Regional Geography and Toponymy (since 1995 at the Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences), University of Latvia. Every card, besides the data about the place name, contains also a geographical description of the feature and its localization.

Both indexes are on cards and suffer from inadequate financing.

The coverage of place names of the Satellite Map of Latvia is the basic data source for the Geographical Names Database of Latvia, is being formed in the Laboratory of Toponymy, the State Land Service. The theory and methodology of the Database are being worked out since 1998. The first stage in the development of the Database is already completed. Drafts of two place names dictionaries (containing 9.7 thousand place names) are the first output of it. The Database already serves also as an informative supplement for the work of the Laboratory.

Since the 1997 compiling of the place names dictionaries is going in collaboration between the State Land Service and University of Latvia - two regional toponymic dictionaries have been published. The dictionary of village names of Latvia and a local dictionary of Sēlpils parish are under completing.

7. Standardization of names in dialectally diverse or multilingual areas

The standardization of village, farmstead and natural feature names in their local dialectal forms is recommended in the eastern region of Latvia since 1993. Dialectal names have to be written using standard language letters and with flexions conformable the standard Latvian grammatical system. The Laboratory of Toponymy has made continuous efforts to encourage the local governments to approve the names of villages, hamlets and farmsteads taking into consideration the local, dialectal forms of place names in the territories with alive dialects - the North Western part of Latvia (Kurzeme or Kurland), and Eastern part of Latvia (Latgale). A great number of not officially approved local forms of natural feature, village and hamlet names are used on the Satellite Map of Latvia scale 1: 50 000 and on the new topographic maps. The lists of recommended for standardization dialectal village names had been disseminated, as well as instructions for spelling and treatment of dialectal place names in standard Latvian.

Part of the village and farmstead names has been standardized according or specified successfully. But a lot of village names and some parish names have kept their incorrect official forms, arisen in periods when standardization according to the standard language was forced without enough knowledge of etymology of each place name. The fear of changes in a wide range of documents, containing the wrong form of the name and accustomed difference between the written and spoken name forms, are the main reasons of keeping those errors in official toponymy.

To simplify the solution of the problem, the *Regulations on Creating and Usage of Place names, Titles of Institutions, Non-governmental Organizations, Companies (Enterprises) and Titles of events* have stated that legally identical is a place name spelled only with differences which appeared due to specifying the spelling of the place name.

Specifying the spelling of a place name does not have to be followed by changing the spelling of the place name in ownership and personal identity documents.^{1*}

The State Language Law stated the right of the historical minority Livonians to use their national place names.

8. Exonyms and principles of writing foreign place names

The names in standard Latvian have to be with declinable flexions. For that reason almost all foreign place names in Latvian can be used only after addition a suitable ending (what inevitably makes them different from the original). Beside that, foreign place names in Latvian should be written according to the phonetic principle (because the Latvian writing system is phonetic).

The Latvian language has many traditional exonyms that are used in different publications, mass media, school maps and books. Foreign place names in their original or romanized forms are used in almost all other maps e.g. state topographic maps, road maps and atlases etc.

The State Language Centre has adopted and published recommendations on spelling Latvian place names in English and a list of country names (short and official names) in Latvian. Both of them have been published.

The new edition of Orthographic Dictionary of the Latvian has been published comprising more foreign place names than the previous one.

Recommendations on spelling Polish and Hungarian proper names, including place names, have been worked out and published.

Issues concerning the spelling of Chinese, Korean, Turkish and Arabic personal names enclose the corresponding transcription tables.

A manuscript including standardization rules for spelling of Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish proper names has been put on the debate with the Latvian Language Experts Board.

As the ISO-3 166-1:1997 “Codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivisions – Part 1: Country codes”, comprising short and official country names, had been adopted in the status of Latvian National Standard LVS ISO 3 166-1:1997, the Latvian forms of the official names of countries and their subdivisions were checked by the specialists of geographical names.

Consultations, concerning spelling foreign geographical names etc., are available at the Information & Consultation Department, State Language Centre.

9. The main publications

- Avotiņa R. Madonas rajons. Kalni. Upes. Ezeri. Purvi. Meži. Ģeogrāfiska vietvārdu vārdnīca /Geographical Dictionary of Place Names. Madona District. Hills. Rivers. Lakes. Bogs. Forests./- R.:Latvijas Universitātes Reģionālās ģeogrāfijas un toponīmikas zinātniskā laboratorija, LR VZD Nacionālais mērniecības centrs, 1999, 237 Ipp. In Latvian.
- Balode L. Hüdroniūmid XIV – XVII sajandi Laati kaarditel / Hydronyms on XIV – XVII Century Maps of Latvia /. – Keel ja Kirjandus, 1999, Nr. 8, 568.-570. In Estonian.

¹ * *Regulations on Creating and Usage of Place names, Titles of Institutions, Non-governmental Organizations, Companies (Enterprises) and Titles of events*, chapter 11.5 and 11.6. (unofficial translation)

- Balode L. Latvian hydronyms of anthroponymic origin. – Akten des 18. International Kongresses fur Namenforschung. Trier, 12.-17. April 1993. Band IV: Personennamen und Ortsnamen, 1999, S. 76.-81.
- Balode L., BuSs O. -o- un -uo- Latvijas vietvardos /Vowel -o- and diphthong -uo- in Latvian Place Names/. – Linguistica Lettica. 1999 (Nr.4), 211.-222. lpp. . In Latvian.
- BuSs V. Eine Streitfrage der Lettischen Namenkunde (Ortsnamen mit *Paun-*). – Baltistik: Aufgaben und Methoden. – Heidelberg, 1998, S. 371-378.
- Goba Z. Latvijas ģeogrāfisko nosaukumu vārdnīcas, to sastādīšanas principi, saturs un uzbūve /Dictionaries of the Place Names of Latvia, the Principles of Compiling, Contents and Structure// Latvijas Vēstures institūta žurnāls 1997, Nr.1. - R.: Latvijas Vēstures institūta apgāds, 1997, 108.-134. lpp. In Latvian.
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- Kovaļevska O. Krāslavas rajons. Ģeogrāfisko nosaukumu vārdnīca /Dictionary of Geographical Names. Krāslava District/. - R.: Latvijas Universitātes Reģionālās ģeogrāfijas un toponimikas zinātniskā laboratorija, LR VZD Nacionālais mērniecības centrs, 1997, 173 lpp. (with cartographic supplement), pielikuma 15 kartoshēmas (M1:10 000 - 1:50 000) un karte “Krāslavas rajona vietvārdi” (M1:100 000). In Latvian.
- Latvijas autoceļu atlants /Road Atlas of Latvia/. – R.: Karšu izdevniecība Jāņa sēta, 2002, 340 lpp.
- Rudzite M. Izloksne vietvārdos /Dialect in Place Names//Savai valodai.- R.: Latviešu valodas institūts, 1997, 247.- 259. lpp. In Latvian.
- StafECKa A. Village names in Latvia //Humanities and social sciences in Latvia. Latvian region, 4(33), 2001, R.- University of Latvia. In English.
- Turlajs J., Millīņš G. Latvijas apdzīvotās vietas /Populated Places of Latvia (with cartographic supplement)/.- R.: Apgāds Jāņa sēta, 1998, 272 lpp., pielikumā kartes “Latvija. Apdzīvotas vietas” M 1:400 000 un “Austrumlatvija. Apdzīvotās vietas” M 1:200 000. In Latvian.

10. Further information may be obtained from:

Valsts zemes dienesta Kartogrāfijas pārvaldes Toponimikas laboratorija
(*Toponymy Laboratory, Board of Cartography, State Land Service of the Republic of Latvia*)

Ojāra Vācieša iela 43

LV-1004 RĪGA

(Ms. Vita Strautniece, tel.: +371-7614906;

e-mail: vita.strautniece@vzd.gov.lv)

LU Latviešu valodas institūts

(*Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia*)

Akadēmijas laukumā 1

LV-1050 RĪGA

Fax: +371-7227696

(Mr. Ojārs BuSs, tel.: +371-7213606;

e-mail: latv@lza.lv)

Valsts valodas centrs
(*State Language Centre*)
Merķeļa iela 13, LV- 1050, Rīga
Fax: +371 7221258
(Mr. Agris Timuška tel: +371 7221258)
E-mail: lrvc@delfi.lv

LU Reģionālās ģeogrāfijas un toponimikas zinātniskā laboratorija.
(*Scientific Laboratory of Regional Geography and Toponymy, University of Latvia*)
Raina bulvāris 19
LV-1586 RĪGA

„Karšu izdevniecība Jāņa sēta”
(*Jāņa sēta Map Publishers*)
Elizabetes iela 83/85, k.2
LV-1050 RĪGA
(Mr. Jānis Turlajs, tel.: +371 7092277;
fax: C371 7092273;
e-mail: kartografi@kartes.lv
<http://www.kartes.lv>)