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**United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names****2019 session**

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Item 14 of the provisional agenda*

Exonyms (Working Group on Exonyms)**Border between “ours” and “theirs” drawn by place names****Summary****

The distinction between endonyms and exonyms for place names symbolizes the distinction between “ours” and “theirs” in geographical terms, between geographical features in a community’s own territory and features in the territory of another community. The names of geographical features in the community’s own territory are endonyms (names from within). Endonyms are symbols of appropriation. Whoever owns a feature or has responsibility for it usually reserves the right to name it. The function is similar to that performed by flags, coats of arms or logos. For geographical features outside its own territory, a community will usually adopt existing names, translating them into its own language or adapting them morphologically or phonetically. In contrast to the names of features in its own territory (endonyms), they are exonyms, needed by a community to mark features outside its own territory in such a way that their use is comfortable, meaning they are pronounceable and easy to communicate. In contrast to endonyms, exonyms are not symbols of appropriation and do not express claims, but indicate the importance of a feature for the community and its relations with it, in other words, its network of external relations. Exonyms help to integrate a foreign feature into the cultural sphere of a community and help to avoid exclusion and alienation. Starting from a cultural and geographical perspective, the full report is aimed at demonstrating the following:

- The distinction between endonyms and exonyms precisely reflects the distinction between “ours” and “theirs” and therefore refers to borders and territoriality, in other words, to basic human attitudes and basic features of human life, and is for that reason an essential toponymic issue.

* [GEGN.2/2019/1](#).

** The full report was prepared by Peter Jordan, Austrian Academy of Sciences. The report will be available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/1st_session_UNGEGN.html, in the language of submission only, as document GEGN.2/2019/62/CRP.62.



- Exonyms also have the function of debordering, of integrating the alien into one's own cultural sphere, and are tools for international networking and acquiring a dense mental map. They are, in contrast to earlier concepts, including those expressed in resolutions adopted at the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names recommending the reduction of exonyms, a category that transcends borders and facilitates international contacts, although it is also true that using exonyms requires political sensitivity.
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