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Geographical Names
2019 session**

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Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda *

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

Report of the Netherlands

Submitted by the Netherlands **

Summary:

The report describes the developments, actions and achievements in the Netherlands on geographical names standardization since the convening of the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

The Netherlands is one of the few countries in Europe that does not yet have a national names authority. It also does not have any formal or informal rules or procedures for geographical names standardization agreed between the governmental agencies involved in the registration of geographical names, of which the municipalities and several national governmental agencies are the most important. The delegation of the Netherlands to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names has therefore taken the initiative to propose the creation of a national names commission to establish a national standard for geographical names. That process is currently under way.

Other developments of importance are:

- Progress in the Kadaster project to update toponymic data in the Key Register of Topography (Basisregistratie Topografie) with the help of local historical societies
- Revision and publication of the toponymic data file 'TOPnamen', containing the names present on all topographic maps of the Basisregistratie Topografie with scales ranging from 1:25,000 to 1:1,000,000
- Reorganization of the commission on exonyms of the Dutch Language Union (Nederlandse Taalunie), as part of its new Commission on Foreign Names
- Organization of and participation in activities of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, such as the regional training programme in toponymy,

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**Prepared by Jasper Hogerwerf, Kadaster

including marine toponymy, held in Manila in March 2018 and the scientific symposium and joint Division and Working Group meetings organized by the Group of Experts in Brussels in October 2018.

Report of the Netherlands 2017-2019

2. The various relevant actions and achievements have been reported under the headings of the relevant resolutions adopted by the consecutive United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN).

Passing away of Prof. Dr. D.P. Blok

3. On 6 February 2019, Prof. Dr. Dirk Peter (Dick) Blok died, at the age of 94. Blok was born in 1925, studied medieval history at Utrecht University, took his PhD on old charters in 1960, and was director of the Meertens Institute (for research and documentation of Dutch language and culture) of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences from 1965 to 1986. In 1980, he was nominated professor in settlement history and place name onomastics at the University of Amsterdam.

As a university lecturer, he was secretary of the spelling commission appointed by the Dutch government to standardize Dutch place names (1962-1973), and this involvement with place names probably was the reason why he was delegated by the Netherlands to the first UNCSGN. At home, Blok chaired both the place name commission of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (established in 1970 to advise on municipality names after mergers), and the Commission on Exonyms of the Dutch Language Union for an extended number of years.

Within UNGEGN, he was elected rapporteur of the second and third conferences, and president of the fourth conference, in Geneva in 1982. There, he was elected chair of UNGEGN for the 1982 – 1987 term.

Blok was especially proud of his role (when rapporteur, conference chair or just behind the scenes) in getting a number of crucial resolutions accepted, such as the resolutions on the acceptance of the Pinyin conversion system (III/8), national standardization (against name changing by occupying powers, III/16), reduction of exonyms (IV/20), Toponymic Guidelines (IV/4), and acceptance of the GOST 1983 conversion system for Russian Cyrillic (V/18).

Res. I/7 and II/19 Regional meetings

Res. VIII/5 Joint meetings of the linguistic/geographical divisions and working groups of the UNGEGN

4. Representatives of the Netherlands participated in the meeting of the Dutch- and German-speaking Division held in New York, USA, 10 August 2017, in connection with the Eleventh Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

5. Representatives of the Netherlands, together with representatives of Belgium and Norway, organized the UNGEGN Scientific Symposium and Joint Divisions and Working Group Meetings in Brussels, Belgium, from 10 to 13 October 2018.

During this event, representatives of the Netherlands participated in a joint meeting of the Norden Division and the Dutch- and German-speaking Division, in a separate meeting of the Dutch- and German-speaking Division, in a scientific symposium on the role and importance of expert knowledge in the standardization of geographical names, in a meeting of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers, as well as in a joint meeting of the Working Groups on Evaluation and Implementation and on Publicity and Funding.

Res. I/4 and V/15 Establishment of national geographical names authorities

6. The Netherlands has a long tradition of active involvement in UNGEGN. Yet, it is one of the few countries in Europe that has not established a national geographical names authority. It also does not have any formal or informal rules or procedures for geographical names standardization agreed between the governmental agencies involved in the registration of geographical names, of which the municipalities and several national governmental agencies are the most important.

In 2018, the Dutch delegation in UNGEGN took the initiative to propose to the Geo Information Council (GI Beraad), an advisory body of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the standardization of geographical names on a national level by mutual discussion and agreement between the different governmental parties involved in geographical names registration: the municipalities for street names and populated place names, Kadaster for names in the topographic databases, the Hydrographic Service of the Ministry of Defense for off-shore water names and names in the Caribbean parts of the Netherlands, Rijkswaterstaat (Agency for Public Works and Water Management) for names of waterways, etc. A new commission with representatives of these governmental parties could establish such a standard and also play an advisory role for local and national governments in naming questions.

In December 2018, the Geo Information Council approved the proposal of creating a standard and to apply it to the registration of new geographical names. At the same time, it asked for a further impact analysis to study the consequences of standardization of existing geographical names, with a special focus on what practical benefits standardization would bring to certain categories of names, such as water names, area names, street names, etc.

Currently, work is in progress to compose a commission with representatives of the various governmental agencies involved in the registration of geographical names, so that it could make a start with a national standard for geographical names.

7. Exonyms in Dutch are standardized by the Commission on Exonyms (Buitenlandse Aardrijkskundige Namen, BAN) of the Dutch Language Union (Nederlandse Taalunie). The commission on exonyms was established in 1968 by the Dutch Ministry of Education and Science, and in 1988 became part of the Dutch Language Union, a supranational body in which the governments of the Netherlands, Flanders and Suriname cooperate and decide on matters concerning the Dutch language.

In 2018, a new Commission on Foreign Names (Commissie Anderstalige Namen, CAN) was established within the Dutch Language Union, consisting of a section on exonyms (still identified as BAN) and a new section on foreign personal names. Prof. Dr. Arjen Versloot of the University of Amsterdam was appointed chair of the new commission.

Main issue regarding personal names is the transcription of names from other writing systems into Latin script, if desirable according to Dutch transcription rules. To facilitate language users, the plan is to develop a web application called Transcriptor, which should provide automated transcriptions from non-Latin to Latin script. The first focus will be to develop automated transcriptions from Arabic and Russian or Cyrillic. Suggestions in Latin script will be provided according to several transcription standards (international, Dutch, English, German, French) as well as according to the pronunciation in Dutch, if necessary. Also geographical names will be included, with transcription according to the conversion systems established by UNGEGN.

The exonyms section continues its work on updating the list of exonyms in Dutch, including the Dutch names in the bilingual province of Frisia (Fryslân / Friesland), in Wallonia (French- and German-speaking parts of Belgium) and in French Flanders, the traditional Dutch language area in the extreme north of France.

Res. V/16 Publication of geographical names in their national official form

8. In April 2018, the first renewed dataset of the digital gazetteer TOPnamen was published, as the latest product to be developed under the product range of the Key Register of Topography (BRT). For each map scale, it provides an overview of the names (texts) on the topographic maps, with location, font size, text direction, type of name, etc. It contains all names on the maps ranging from 1:25,000 to 1:1,000,000 scale. TOPnamen is updated and published 5 times a year, like all other products in the BRT product range and with the same temporal accuracy, according to the 1-year update cycle for all topography of the Netherlands.

Res. VIII/1 Promotion of minority group and indigenous geographical names

9. In the Key Register of Topography (BRT), all water names and names of populated places in the Frisian language area of the province of Frisia (Fryslân in Frisian and officially, Friesland in Dutch) are registered with the official, Frisian and Dutch name. Since 2019, also the municipality names are registered with both the official, the Frisian and the Dutch name.

In the Netherlands, for each object only one name can be registered as the official name. It depends on the choice of the (former) municipality whether the Frisian or the Dutch name is the official name of a municipality, a populated place or a water body. In some areas of Frisia where a Dutch or Low Saxon dialect is spoken, dialect names were chosen as the official water names.

Res. VIII/6 Integration of national names into national and regional spatial data infrastructures

10. Kadaster is cooperating with local historical societies to check and update toponymic data in the Key Register of Topography (BRT). More information about this project can be found in a paper and presentation to the Eleventh UNCSGN, E/CONF.105/87.

As of January 2019, 75% of the historical societies needed for a nationwide coverage in the Netherlands is cooperating in the project and about 50% has returned its contribution. An extension of the project has been investigated by making a crowdsourcing application aimed at individual volunteers, to also make use of knowledge of people who are not members of a historical society and to be able to check and update names also in areas where no historical society cooperates. The results of this pilot study were promising, but no decision has been made yet on the introduction of a crowdsourcing application.

11. In the Dutch system of key registers, names of ‘public spaces’ are registered by municipalities in the Key Register of Addresses and Buildings (Basisregistratie Adressen en Gebouwen, BAG). Street names make up about 95% of all public spaces registered in the BAG, as they are an essential part of the addresses in the Netherlands. However, public spaces themselves are not registered with a geometry in the BAG; only addresses are registered with a geographical location (and linked to a residential object and to a building with a geometry). In the newly developed Key Register of Large-scale Topography (Basisregistratie Grootchalige Topografie, BGT), maintained by municipalities and several national and regional

governmental agencies together, the BAG street names are registered and visualized as label points near the corresponding road segments.

In order to create a dataset in which street names do have a geometry, in 2018 a new automated process was introduced to link the street names of the BAG as attributes to the road segments of the Key Register of Topography (Basisregistratie Topografie, BRT). For this purpose, the address locations in the BAG, the street name label points in the BGT, the names of road network lines in the National Roads Database (Nationaal Wegenbestand) maintained by Rijkswaterstaat (Agency for Public Works and Water Management), as well as the names of roads in OpenStreetMap are used. Multiple linking methods are applied to link the street names from one of these datasets to the road segments in the BRT. In order to maintain a high level of reliability in the output of this automated process, only in cases where most linking methods indicate the same street name, the road segment is indeed attributed with this name. For the most recent BRT dataset of April 2019, the analysis results in the linking of 88% of all street names registered in the BAG to at least one road segment in the BRT. Of all road segments in the BRT, 52% is attributed with a BAG street name. Research is being conducted to further increase these percentages, although a considerable part of the road segments in the BRT are private roads or roads in nature areas, that do not have a street name or cannot be categorized as a 'public space'.

Res. VIII/15 Support for training and publications

12. In March 2018, a lecturer from the Netherlands participated in the Regional Training Program in Toponymy in Manila, the Philippines. The course was aimed at increasing the knowledge and understanding of the principles and concepts of geographical naming and the standardization of a country's toponyms, with special emphasis on marine toponymy. More information on this event can be found on the website of UNGEGN.