

16 March 2021

English  
Original: Russian

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**United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical****Names****2021 session**

Virtual, 3–7 May 2021

Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

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

Submitted By Belarus \*\*

## Summary:

The naming and renaming of geographical objects is a living natural process that reacts to the cultural, political and social processes taking place in the country and meets the modern needs of society and the State. Given the importance of geographical names, special attention is paid to their standardization. A particular element of the standardization of Belarusian toponyms is the establishment of their normative form in the two official languages – Belarusian and Russian.

In Belarus, the naming of geographical objects is based on the principle of legality, with account taken of national interests, geographical, historical, natural, ethnic, ethnographic and other factors, and the opinions of citizens living on the territory of the relevant geographical object. The State protects geographical names as an integral part of the country's intangible historical and cultural heritage.

The Toponymic Commission of the Council of Ministers of Belarus was established in 1998 to develop a single approach to work involving the names of geographical objects. During the period from 1998 to 1 January 2021, the Commission held 85 meetings, as a result of which 54 names were assigned to newly formed geographical objects, 58 objects were renamed, and around 1,000 names of railway objects were standardized.

The State's policy relating to the names of geographical objects is implemented by the State Committee on Property of Belarus. During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the State Committee on Property has been faced with the task of continuing uninterrupted its toponymic activities, in particular by setting up remote forms of interaction between experts from government agencies and other organizations on the one hand, and citizens on the other.

Thus, the State catalogue of names of geographical objects of Belarus continues to be maintained; this can be done through the website <http://maps.by>. In 2020, the experts who are authorized to maintain the State catalogue established 37 laws and regulations, on the basis of which 68 changes were made to the catalogue, including the naming of one new geographical object and

the renaming of 17 existing objects. As at 1 January 2021, the State catalogue contained 36,465 names of geographical objects.

In 2020, work continued on the standardization of names used across the road network in order to establish uniform spelling of each name across various sources such as the national register of addresses, citizens' passports and information signs. As at 1 January 2021, the register of addresses contained 79,639 street names, including 1,379 in the capital, Minsk. The register is available on the Internet at <http://nca.by>. Because the register can be maintained remotely, citizens have been able to exercise their rights to register real estate and carry out real estate transactions without interruption.

In 2020, in order to minimize the spread of COVID-19, the State Committee on Property and the Toponymic Commission worked with citizens by email only, without any in-person contact. In the past year, 16 appeals were processed with regard to the practical application of domestic law on the names of geographical objects, including the naming and renaming of geographical objects and the use of toponyms.

The remote maintenance of toponymic resources, and electronic interaction on geographical names between government agencies and other organizations on the one hand and citizens on the other, are in keeping with current realities and are fostering the development of national toponymy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

Naming and renaming geographical objects is a living natural process that reacts to the cultural, political, and social processes taking place in the country and meets the modern needs of society and the state. Given the importance of geographical names, special attention is paid to the issues of their standardization. The specifics of the standardization of Belarusian toponyms are the reduction of names to the normative form in the two official languages – Belarusian and Russian.

In the Republic of Belarus activities in the field of names of geographical objects are based on the principles of legality; taking into account national interests, geographical, historical, natural, national, ethnographic and other conditions, the opinions of citizens living on the territory that belongs to the corresponding geographical object; state protection of geographical names as an integral part of the intangible historical and cultural heritage of the republic.

The main toponymic legislative act is the Law of the Republic of Belarus, dated November 16, 2010, “About names of geographical objects”. The categories of geographical objects of the republic are shown in the schema. The Law does not regulate the naming of special use areas and objects located outside the territory of the Republic of Belarus, discovered by Belarusian researchers. Special acts of the President and the Government are issued for their names.

In 1998, the Toponymic Commission under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus was established to form a unified approach to working with the names of geographical objects. Toponymic Commission includes 24 members: representatives of ministries, local councils, scientists of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, higher educational institutions, cartography specialists. The current composition of the Toponymic Commission was approved in March 2018. In the period from 1998 to January 1, 2021, 85 meetings of the commission were held, as a result of which 54 names were assigned to newly formed geographical objects, 58 objects were renamed, and about 1000 names of railway objects were standardized. Due to the epidemiological situation, there were no meetings of the Toponymic Commission in 2020.

2018-2020 was held in Belarus under the sign of the “Year of the Small Motherland”. The Toponymic Commission recommended that local self-government bodies perpetuate prominent personalities of local significance in street names. For example, vulica (street) Siamjonava in Hlusk, Mahilioŭ vobl. (region), is named after the former chief physician of the Hlusk clinic. The perpetuation of local heroes is especially important for stimulating active citizenship among the population and preserving the historical, cultural and spiritual heritage of the regions.

The state policy in the field of names of geographical objects is carried out by the State Committee on Property of the Republic of Belarus. In the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic the State Committee on Property was faced with the task of implementing continuous and uninterrupted toponymic activities, in particular, organizing remote interaction between specialists of government agencies and other organizations with citizens.

Thus, the State Catalogue of names of geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus continues to be maintained with the possibility of its administration through the Web-site <http://maps.by>. It contains information about names of existing and abolished geographical objects, and it makes it possible to trace the history of names, to identify geographical objects having the same name on the basis of any extra information, including administrative-territorial reference, geographical coordinates. Names of geographical objects are taken into account in the State Catalogue in Belarusian and Russian, as well as by means of Latin letters in accordance with the national Romanization system approved at the 10th UN Conference for standardization of geographical names (2012).

Over the year 2020 the specialists, who are authorized to maintain the State Catalogue, have worked out 37 regulatory legal enactments being the basis of 68 amendments to the State Catalogue in particular, the designation of one new geographical object was taken into account and

17 objects were renamed. As of January 1, 2020 the State Catalogue contained 36 465 names of geographical objects in categories:

- names of administrative-territorial and territorial units (provinces, regions, settlements);
- names of transport infrastructure objects (railway objects, airports and airfields);
- names of physical and geographical objects.

In 2020, work continued to standardize the names of elements of the road network in order to establish uniformity in the spelling of the same name in various sources: the Register of Addresses of the Republic of Belarus, citizens' passports, information signs, and others. As of January 1, 2021, 79639 street names were registered in the Register of Addresses:

- in Brest vobl. (region) – 14 793,
- in Viciebsk vobl. (region) – 14 612,
- in Homiel' vobl. (region) – 10 899,
- in Hrodna vobl. (region) – 7 407,
- in Minsk vobl. (region) – 19 654,
- in Mahilioŭ vobl. (region) – 10 895,
- in the capital city of Minsk – 1379.

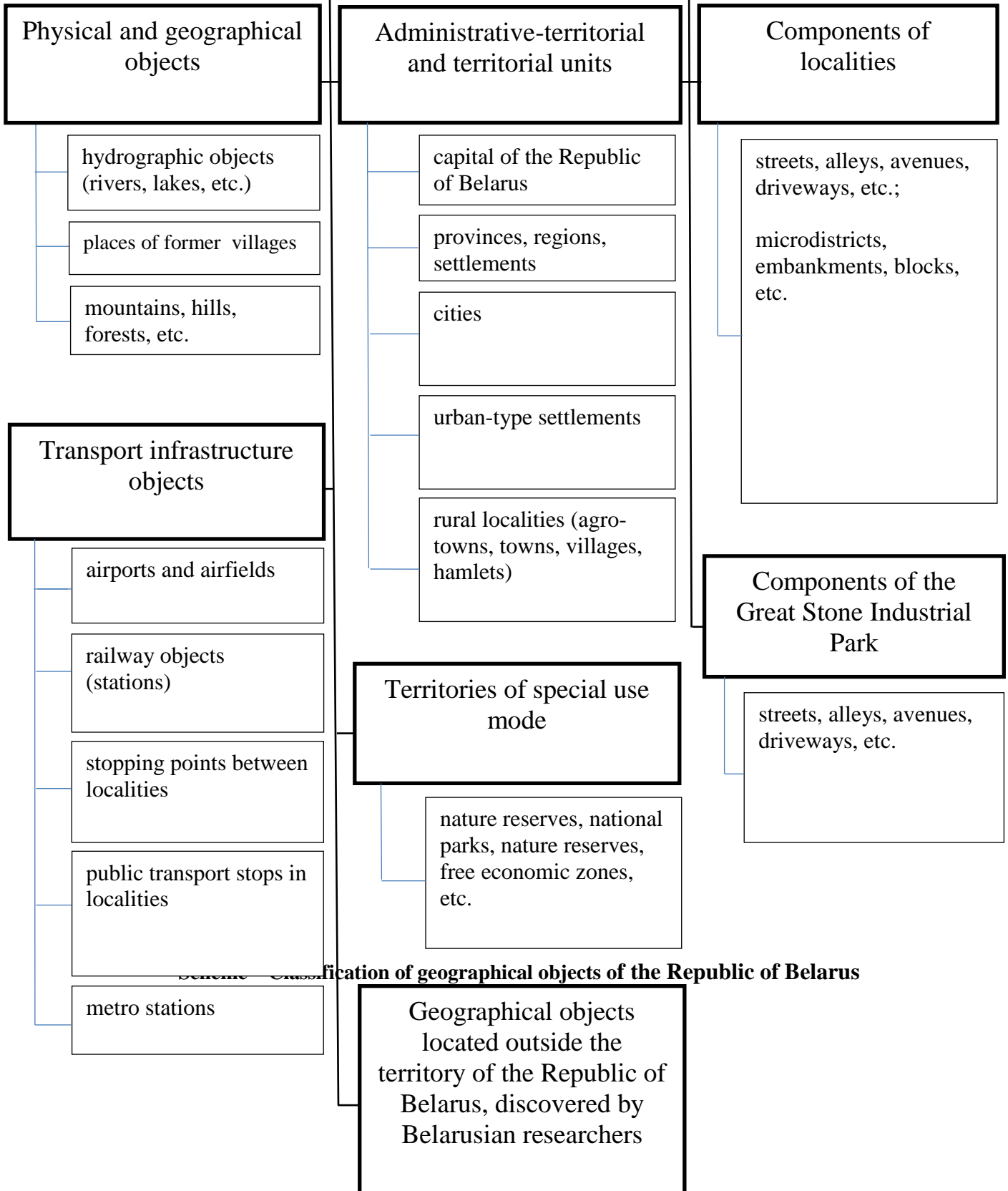
The Register of Addresses is available on the Web-site <http://nca.by>. The possibility of remote maintenance of the Register of Addresses allowed citizens to smoothly exercise the rights to register real estate and carry out transactions with it.

In order to minimize the spread of coronavirus infection, the State Committee on Property and the Toponymic Commission in 2020 worked with citizens with the complete exclusion of personal contact only through the electronic correspondence. In the past year, 16 appeals were considered on the practical application of the legislation of the republic in the field of names of geographical objects, including the naming and renaming of geographical objects and the use of toponyms.

Thus, the organization of remote administration of toponymic resources, interaction on the names of geographical state bodies and other organizations with citizens through electronic messages meets modern realities and contributes to the development of national toponymy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The prospects of Belarusian toponymy development seem to appear in normalization and harmonization of all existing names, filling in the State Catalogue, issue of reference and regulatory literature required for optimization of work by the bodies of state administration, legal entities and physical persons, including individual entrepreneurs, during fulfillment of the activities related to geographical names.

**GEOGRAPHICAL OBJECTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS**



**Figure 1. Classification of geographical objects of the Republic of Belarus**