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English

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Geographical Names  
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**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**

**Report of Estonia**

Submitted by Estonia\*\*

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## Summary

The report covers activities in Estonia concerning the standardization of geographical names. Information is provided on the Place Names Act, activities of the Place Names Board, Handbook for the Management of Address Data, the Estonian Topographic Database, navigational charts, the National Place Names Register, databases and the web dictionary of place names.

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The report covers activities in the field of the official standardization of geographical names from 2019 till 2021.

## NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

The **Place Names Act** continues to be the legal basis of geographical names standardization in Estonia. Some changes have been made in the Place Names Act. More information will be given in a separate document submitted to the Session.

The **Place Names Board** (*kohanimenõukogu*) is the main names authority in Estonia, being a consultative body that is under the responsibility of the Minister of Public Administration who is working in the framework of the Ministry of Finance. In 2019 seven Boards meetings took place. In 2020 five Boards meetings took place. After the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic decisions have been taken through e-mail correspondence or virtual meetings have been held using special virtual solutions.

There is a gradual process of new **populated places** being formed or some places being renamed. The Minister of Public Administration has the right to approve names of populated places, based on the applications of local governments and the opinion of the Place Names Board. Some of the changes were due to administrative rearrangements as according to the Place Names Act there can be no identical names for populated places within one municipality. For example until the end of 2019 there were two populated places named *Kureküla* in Elva municipality. Although one of these populated places was a village and another was a small town, this situation could have had serious consequences if ambulance or rescue service arrived at the wrong *Kureküla*. One of the *Kureküla* was renamed to *Lilleküla* at the end of 2019.

The Place Names Board has the authority to confirm **lists of geographical names** provided no other authorities have done so, mainly this provision concerns names of natural features. In 2019 the Board confirmed the list of protected heritage sites (2033 objects). Most of the names were confirmed as unofficial names for the Place Names Register. Work is continuing with different lists.

During 2017–2019 the Board has handled requests from local governments and citizens to rename some features, like streets, villages and settlements, and given its opinion. For example activists from Tallinn proposed that one street in the Ülemiste region in Tallinn should be named as *X-tee tänav* (X-road street, named after a well-known data exchange platform that is nationally used in Estonia). The activists brought out that in the Ülemiste region there are many tech-firms and start-ups so *X-tee tänav* would suit well into that region. Place Names Board discussed the topic at its meeting and took the position that *X-tee tänav* is not suitable because according to the Place Names Act numbers and any other non-alphabetical signs should not be used as place names. The Place Names Board also found that with the name *X-tee tänav* there is a pragmatic problem with generic terms as both *tee* (road) and *tänav* (street) should not be used in one name. The Place Names Board brought out that instead of *X-tee tänav* there could be *Risttee tänav* (Crossroad street) or *Digiloo tänav* (Digital story street).

The Place Names Board also handled a request by activists from Narva municipality. Activists pointed out that two streets in Narva municipality were named after persons (Ancis Dauman and Albert-August Tiiman) whose actual activities were of such nature that the names were incompatible with the history and culture of Estonia and therefore these streets have to be renamed. Place Names Board pointed out

that the Board does not have competence in history, but according to generally known information the street names are incompatible with the requirements of the Place Names Act. To be sure, the Board asked for expert opinion from bodies that deal with 20th century history. Historians confirmed this conclusion. It should be emphasized, however, that the right to give or change names of streets rests exclusively with the local government.

Since 2003 the Board has continued its annual public events, **place names days**, for a wider audience that deal with issues of place names standardization. These are meant primarily for local officials but are open to all interested persons. The events take place in different locations, place names days were held in Narva (2018) and Võru (2019). In 2020 place names day should have taken place in Haapsalu municipality, but due to COVID-19 place names day it was postponed until 2021. Papers delivered at seminars deal with the implementation of the Place Names Act, principles of names standardization, information on the Place Names Register and with the place names of the local region.

Important for the understanding of the principles of geographical names standardization is training and providing assistance to names authorities. The Estonian Land Board is continuously updating an online **Handbook for the Management of Address Data**. This includes 259 pages of instructions, one third of which concern directly geographical names. As a body responsible for the maintenance of the National Place Names Register, the Land Board is checking the validity and conformance to the Law of all names entered into the register. A continuous process that is being supervised by the Land Board is the check on the validity of cadastral names.

All the documents concerning the activities of the Place Names Board have been published on its **website** (<http://www.eki.ee/knn/>), mainly in Estonian but also with English and Russian summaries. News on the current activities of the Board are regularly updated.

#### *Minority names*

The Place Names Act supports the use of minority place names, in some cases two parallel names are officially established. For example, there are parallel Estonian and Swedish names in the municipality of Noarootsi and since 2011, on Naissaar.

In south-eastern Estonia the names of populated places in several municipalities of the counties of Võrumaa and Põlvamaa have been standardized in their local form, i.e. in the Võru variety. This has been done with the aid of the Võru Institute. The Basic Map of Estonia (printed version) uses almost exclusively local name forms for natural features. Differences with the formerly used name variants are mainly phonetic. At the end of 2020 the Place Names Board received a letter from Kihnu municipality in which the Board's opinion was asked on standardizing village names in their local form, i.e. in the Kihnu variety. Kihnu municipality had received an application from the Kihnu Institute. The Board supported the proposal by the Kihnu Institute and agreed that standardizing village names in the Kihnu variety is an important aspect of strengthening local identity.

#### *Cartographic programmes and training courses*

**The Estonian Topographic Database (ETD)** is the central database to produce and provide topographic data covering the whole territory of Estonia. The Estonian National Topographic Database was established in 2007. The most important products are maps and services. Data is continuously being updated. One of the main objectives of ETD is to provide state and local government databases with topographic spatial data for objects managed in these respective databases. So far, ETD has successfully met the needs of national databases, such as Road Register, Address Data System, Environmental Register, National Place Names Register, etc. The cadastral registrar is entitled to correct cadastral data based on the topographic database and land cover data for each parcel will also be determined from topographic data starting from 2019. We hope that the landowners' feedback on land cover data will launch the largest crowd-sourced spatial data verification project in the history of the topographic database, thus further improving the quality of spatial data. To better meet the society's demand for

high quality spatial data, topographic data and cadastral data are available in Estonia as open data since 1 July 2018.

**Navigational charts.** The Estonian Transport Administration (ETA) commenced work on 1 January 2021. The new Transport Administration took over the tasks of the Maritime Administration, the Civil Aviation Administration and the Road Administration, thus facilitating planning of development of the three transport sectors in the overall mobility context.

ETA produces electronic navigational charts (ENC) covering all Estonian sea area and navigable Inland waters. ENC's are compiled for different navigational purposes in different scales from 1 : 180 000 to 1 : 2000. Currently 137 ENC-s is published.

ETA produces 66 sheets of paper navigational charts covering Estonian Sea area and navigable lakes in equivalent navigational purposes as ENC-s. To facilitate navigation for smaller ships and recreational boating 4 chart folios is produced.

In addition ETA produces navigational publications Notices to Mariners, Sailing Directions and List of Lights.

All charts and publications contain geographical names: sea areas, land regions, harbours, etc. that are considered significant for navigation or planning purposes. The source of geographical names is Estonian Place Names Register or Estonian Land Board Geoportal place names GIS. For harbours the source is Estonian Port Register, which also uses names from Estonian Place Names Register. If the name is not available in before mentioned sources the name in historical navigational charts is used.

Geographical names on navigational charts are not translated. If the navigational chart contains land regions or sea areas with geographical names from neighbouring countries then the name from charts published by neighbouring countries is used.

Larger sea areas between Estonia and its neighbouring countries (Baltic Sea, Gulf of Finland, Gulf of Riga) are named using both international name and national name to help navigators with identification of these sea areas.

**Other maps.** The most comprehensive privately produced cartographic work is the Estonian Road Atlas (1 : 150,000) by AS Regio (since 2016 Regio OÜ and Reach-U), which is annually updated, last issue is from years 2018–2019. The atlas includes an index of over 11,000 place names. An online-version (<https://kaart.delfi.ee/>) includes a search engine with about 4000 place names. Regio AS has also produced different travel guides with maps.

#### *Gazetteers and databases*

The **National Place Names Register** has been maintained by the Estonian Land Board since July 2008. Since December 2020. The Land Board is the controller of the register. Place Names Register is integrated with the Land Board's other spatial data, especially the Address Data Register. The register has the status of national supporting register. By the end of 2020 the register contained 216,417 place names, incl. traffic features (streets and squares, etc.) – 17,461; land roads – 8,477; minor address units (areas) – 613; lakes – 4,660; islands – 2,438; rivers, etc. – 3,166. In 2019–2020 the register has been increased with 3,788 new records, the biggest part of which were the names of bus stops (2199) and names of land units (1001) and traffic features (184), most of the rest has been entered from other registers (Environmental Register, Port Register) and the printed version of the Basic Map of Estonia (1 : 20,000). The spatial extension of the named features is constantly under review.

The National Place Names Register is available at <https://kohanimeregister.ee> in Estonian and English. In 2020 the public map application of the National Place Names Register was updated, it is available at

<https://xgis.maaamet.ee/xgis2/page/app/knravalik>. In 2020 the business analysis of the new Place Name Register was also completed.

A database of standardized place names, including names from Estonia and abroad **KNAB** (appr. 161,000 features with more than 516,000 names at present, <http://www.eki.ee/knab/knab.htm>) is being compiled at the Institute of the Estonian Language. The Institute has also the largest collection of Estonian place names, collected in field work. The collections of geographical names held at the Institute of the Estonian Language were completely scanned by 2013 (<http://heli.eki.ee/kohanimed/>), currently the work is going on to manually enter the headword names to the database, so that the 652,198 cards can be queried online.

The **dictionary of Estonian places names** („Eesti kohanimeraamat“) was published in 2016. The web version of the dictionary (<http://www.eki.ee/dict/knr/index.cgi>) was first published in February 2018 but its content is being constantly updated.

#### EXONYMS

Recommendations on the spelling of foreign geographical names are given by the Estonian Language Committee at the Mother Tongue Society jointly with various institutions (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Geography Institute at the University of Tartu, BNS News Agency). The list of names of countries of the world (<http://www.eki.ee/knab/maaad.htm>) is regularly updated.

#### INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Representatives of Estonia have actively participated in all meetings of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN, attending the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Division in Riga (September 2019). In 2020 the meeting of Baltic Division of UNGEGN should have taken place in Tallinn, but due to the global pandemic the meeting was postponed to 2021. Experts are also involved in some of the working groups of UNGEGN.