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Reports: Divisions of the Group of Experts

Report of the East Central and South-East Europe Division

Submitted by the East Central and South-East Europe Division[**]

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The East Central and South-East Europe Division is one of the 23 UNGEGN Divisions. The countries of the **East Central and South-East Europe Division (ECSEED)** are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine.

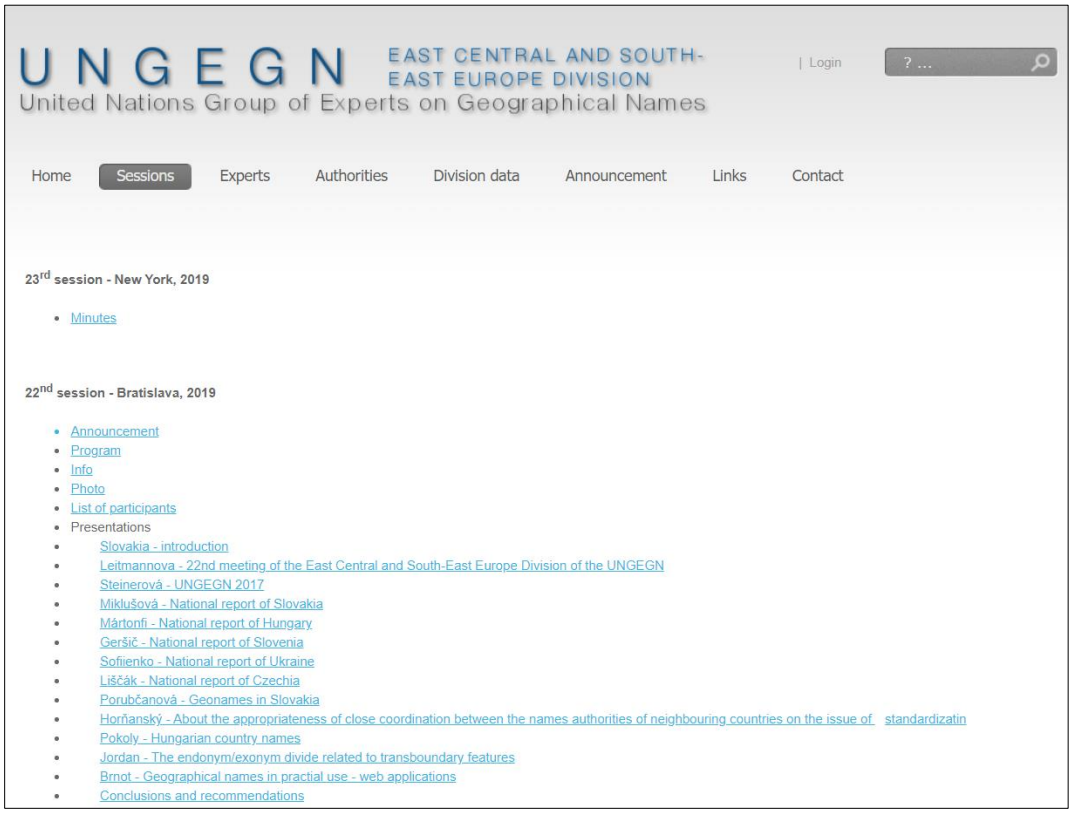
Current presiding country

Slovakia has been the presiding country of the East Central and South-East Europe Division since 2018.

Website

Website of the East Central and South-East Europe Division is divided to 8 parts. The Home part contains general information about the Division. The Session part contains information about program, documents and presentations of the sessions of the Division since 2008. Information about the sessions since 1971 till 2008 contains only the year and place of the meeting. The Experts and Authorities parts contain contact information about geonames experts and geonames authorities of member countries. These two parts are continuously updated. The Announcement part is used only when it is necessary to inform member countries about upcoming sessions or important news. The website also contains parts with data about member countries and useful links. There is also the contact information in the end.

The Divisional website is available on: http://ecseed.zrc-sazu.si/Home.



Meetings

The East Central and South-East Europe Division has organized 2 sessions:

22nd Session of the East Central and South-East Europe Division, 13 February 2019 Bratislava

Main themes:

1.) Geographical names as cultural heritage

2.) Harmonization of geographical names on state borders

3.) Geographical names used in practise – web applications

23rd Session of the East Central and South-East Europe Division, 1 May 2019, New York

- short meeting within a side meeting of the 1st session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

Activities

The delegates of the 22nd Session of the East Central and South-East Europe Division of the UNGEGN held on 13 February 2019 in Bratislava made the following recognitions, conclusions and recommendations:

- the delegates from participating countries recognized positive achievements and the progress made in the work of geographical names standardization. The delegates recommended that the ongoing process must continue.
- the delegates agreed to encourage their national geographical authorities to initiate the cross-border harmonization of the boundaries of the geomorphological units.
- the delegates agreed to check the Google maps and similar web applications for potential errors in the geonames displayed in these web applications.
- the next 23rd session of the Division was planned to be held in 2021 in Bratislava ahead of the upcoming 2nd UNGEGN session on standardization.

Based on these conclusions and recommendations the Division will work on these themes.

Mistakes in Google maps

Google maps is one of the most used web map applications, but unfortunately contains some mistakes in geonames. At the divisional meeting in Ljubljana in 2015 this problem was introduced for the first time. Than at the next divisional meeting in 2019 in Bratislava the Division opened this question again. The recommendation from the session was for each country to check their geonames in Google maps and other web applications.

Slovakia as a presiding country has randomly checked some parts of its area in Google maps application and found several mistakes in the geonames. They contacted the administrator of Google maps application and explained the problem. Slovakia's suggestion was to provide their national geonames database to Google so they can correct the Google database. Other option was to send the Google database to Slovakia where it will be corrected and then sent back. Exchanging, comparing and correcting the geonames databases was considered to be the most efficient way of how to deal with this problem. However, Google maps administrators diplomatically avoided this option and suggested a different approach to this issue.

For correcting wrong or incorrect geonames Google administrators recommended using the Geo Data Upload tool. It is possible to communicate with the operators of Google Maps application through this tool.

The presiding country has tried it and it was easy enough to use. The process of correcting the mistakes took place within a few days. This, however, is not an ideal solution for the future because it is necessary to find the mistakes first and then ask for their correction. Maybe if more countries approached Google with similar demands they might change their attitude towards exchanging the databases.

All member countries were informed about this activity and the respective communication.

Cyprus was also active in this theme even before the appeal from the Division. They contacted Google several times with the aim to provide data to Google, but they met with unclear communication. Cyprus also suggested addressing UNGEGN and UNGGIM for making official proposal in order to convince Google to use authoritative geospatial features and geographical names.

Hungary was active in this topic too but Google didn´t communicate with them. They also tried to find the contributors of Google map's geonames but they were unsuccessful.

Slovenia didn´t notice any major errors in geographical names on Google maps. However, they have been trying to correct one mistake of a location for many years, also trough Google support, but without any success so far.

Poland has not started a cooperation with Google Maps on exchanging databases of geographical names yet. Their office has no influence on the content published on the Google Maps portal. Users, however, have the option of reporting any errors directly to the above-mentioned portal.

Czechia has started collecting mistakes in Google maps. They plan sending them all at once. Also, they have been successfully cooperating with a similar web map application - Mapy.cz.

Discrepancies between the course of borders and the geonames of geomorphological units at state borders

Regarding the second recommendation the countries agreed to encourage their national geographical authorities to initiate the cross - border harmonization of the boundaries of the geomorphological units. Slovak national geonames authority has addressed this problem to the competent authority (Institute of Geography, Slovak Academy of Sciences), which manages the geomorphological division of the country. Institute of Geography is planning to improve the geomorphological division of the country. However, the harmonization of geomorphological units between neighbouring countries on state borders is very difficult, even impossible. The reason is the different division of geomorphological units between countries. Member countries were informed about this activity.

This problem has not arisen in Bulgaria. Also Cyprus as an island state doesn´t register this problem. Hungary has found materials for comparing geomorphological units, so they could work on this theme. Czechia has also found materials for comparing but unfortunately there is no authority at the moment that is competent for the division of geomorphological units. Poland didn´t solve geomorphological units on the state borders.

Picture 2: Discrepancies between the course of borders and the geonames of geomorphological units at state borders between Slovakia and Poland (hranica=border)

Model of national report

At the 5th conference in Montreal in 1987, a resolution about national reports was adopted. It recommends that the United Nations Secretariat, when sending invitations to Member States to participate in the conferences, will attach a detailed plan (model) for drafting of national reports. Unfortunately, the model is still not ready. It could be useful to have some instructions – a model to make national reports. At the 22nd session of the East Central and South-East Europe Division, member countries made a decision that the presiding country will prepare such model before the next session of this Division. The model was created and sent to member countries in February 2021.

During the next 24th session of the East Central and South-East Europe Division the member countries will discuss it and try to improve this model. Division's plan is to provide the final model to the Secretariat of UNGEGN.

Points for discussion
The Group of Experts is invited to:
(a) take note of the recommendation for UNGEGN to create a suggestion for Google maps application to use the official databases of standardised geonames for avoiding mistakes in the geonames;
(b) ask countries, if they also have the problem with discrepancies between the course of borders and the geonames of geomorphological units at state borders? If yes, what is their approach to it?