

10 March 2023

English

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

2023 session

New York, 1 – 5 May 2023

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 **

Summary:

The full report covers activities in Estonia concerning the standardization of geographical names from 2021 to 2023. 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, the National Place Names Register, databases and the web dictionary of place names.

* GEGN.2/2023/1

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Report of Estonia

The report covers activities in the field of the official standardization of geographical names from 2021 till 2023.

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 regarding commemorative names.

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. Between 2021 and 2023 twelve (12) Board meetings have been held. 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. This kind of hybrid solution has become the normality in terms of organising the work of the Place Names Board. More members are participating in the meetings and taking part in the work of the Board.

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 old village names have been restored (for example Kanariku village) and at least one new village has been formed (Kohtla-Uueküla).

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. Between 2021 and 2023 the Board did not confirm any large lists of geographical names, but worked with small proposals from active citizens to add some names of different natural features to the place names register. The board double-checked the proposals and decided to confirm two lists of natural features (in total 83 objects).

During 2021–2023 the Board has handled requests to rename some features, like streets, villages and settlements, and given its opinion.

The Place Names Board discussed 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. The 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 the 20th century history. Historians confirmed this conclusion. These names (Ancis Dauman and Albert-August Tiimann) have been changed by now.

After the 24th of February 2022 the topic has become once again active and there are at least 7 place names in Estonia that are incompatible with the history and culture of Estonia and therefore these streets have to be renamed. Once again the Place Names Board asked for expert opinion from the bodies that deal with the 20th century history. Historians confirmed that the place names were incompatible with the history and culture of Estonia.

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 2022 the place names day took place in Haapsalu municipality. 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 223 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** (<https://www.eki.ee/knn/>), mainly in Estonian but also with English and Russian summaries.

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 (since 2017 part of Lääne-Nigula) and since 2011, on the island of 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, but no activities have been taken by the Kihnu municipality by writing this report.

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, Nature Information System, National Place Names Register, Land Cadastre, etc. Topographic data has been available in Estonia as open data to meet society's demand for high-quality spatial data since 1 July 2018.

In recent years, attention has been focused on water bodies: updating shorelines, increasing the positional accuracy of watercourses to provide accurate spatial data for Land Improvement System, and creating enriched data layers, for example, islands. The Islands layer will combine data from ETD, Place Names Register and Nature Information System.

Navigational charts

The Estonian Transport Administration (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 140 ENC's have been published.

ETA produces 65 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 3 chart folios have been produced.

In addition ETA produces the following 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 the National Place Names Register or the Estonian Land Board Geoportal place names GIS. For harbours the source is the Estonian Port Register which also uses names from the National Place Names Register. If the name is not available in the 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 names from charts published by neighbouring countries are used.

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

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. The Place Names Register is integrated with the Land Board's other spatial data, especially the Address Data System. The Place Names Register gives street names (thoroughfare names) and address area names data to the Address Data System. The register has the status of national supporting register. At the beginning of 2023, there were 352,500 place names in the Place Names Register, including traffic features (thoroughfare names for streets, squares, etc.) – 17,980; land roads – 8370; minor address units (address area names) – 600; lakes – 4680; rivers, etc. – 2690; islands – 2030. Most of the register entries are cadastral parcels (282,900) and the rest of the entries are thoroughfare names, land roads, bus stops, other objects connected with nature and land (landscape objects, waterbodies, etc.) and so on. The Place Names Register gets its data from the Environmental Portal, the Road Register, the National Public Transport and State Port Register and also 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.

The future plan is to merge three registers: Address Data System, Place Names Register and Points of Interest (POI). At the moment Points of Interests are mainly collected by the Geoinformatics Department of the Land Board from different state registers. The current Place Names Register is very outdated, the aim is also to stop using Oracle as platform for ADS and to give legal status to the collecting of POI's. Currently the business analysis is in progress (to be completed within 3-4 months) and the development in stages over the next 3-4 years.

With the completion of higher resolution laser scanning in years 2017–2020, the Land Board is focusing more on providing true 3D data. 3D web map application prototype was completed in 2022. However, 2D solutions will also be used. The new system of address data and place names (merged three registers) will use and publish both 2D and 3D data.

A database of standardized place names, including names from Estonia and abroad **KNAB** (appr. 161,500 features with more than 518,000 names at present, <https://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 (<https://www.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 (<https://www.eki.ee/dict/krn>) was first published in February 2018 but its content is being constantly updated to include newly created populated places.

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 (<https://eki.ee/teatmik/maailma-maade-nimed>) is regularly updated.

In 2022 the Estonian Language Committee made a correction into the transcription system for Ukrainian names, in order to bring it closer to official romanization.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Representatives of Estonia have actively participated in all meetings of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN. In 2021 the meeting of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN took place in Tallinn via Zoom (with simultaneous interpretation). Experts are also involved in some of the working groups of UNGEGN.