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English

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Item 13 of the provisional agenda *
Exonyms**

The endonym/exonym divide as a core topic of critical toponomastics

Submitted by Austria **

Summary:

The report is on a book, published in 2022, about the endonym/exonym divide in which the political and societal backgrounds of the divide are addressed based on its correspondence to the dichotomy of “mine” and “yours”, as well as to human territoriality. Accordingly, the distinction between endonym and exonym is treated as a core topic of critical toponomastics and is linked to the naming process. In addition, the mediating function of geographical names between humans and space is reviewed; the question of the reference area of endonyms and exonyms in geographical space (land and sea) is examined; how the use of exonyms is affected by power relations is addressed; the advantages and disadvantages of using endonyms and exonyms are weighed; and guidelines for the use of exonyms are presented. The book also contains an examination of some areas in which endonyms and exonyms are typically used and a discussion of the cultural-geographical and other perspectives on endonyms and exonyms. The delicate relationship between exonyms and standardization is addressed in the last part of the book.

* GEGN.2/2023/1

** The report was prepared by Peter JORDAN (Austria), Honorary Chair, Austrian Board on Geographical Names.

The endonym/exonym divide as a core topic of critical toponomastics

Presenting a new book published 2022 in German:

JORDAN, Peter (2022), *Breslau oder Wrocław? Das Begriffspaar Endonym/Exonym als Kernthema der Kritischen Toponomastik. Wie politische Haltungen den Gebrauch geographischer Namen bestimmen* [Breslau or Wrocław? The concept pair endonym/exonym as a core topic of critical toponomastics. How political attitudes can affect the use of geographical names]. Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag. 179 p.

Motivation for and goal of the book

The Second Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) in May 2021 demonstrated once again and perhaps more drastically than ever how controversial the concept pair endonym/exonym is and how emphatically the advantages and disadvantages of exonyms are discussed. No other topic at the meeting led to such lively discussions.

However, it was also shown that official, 'politically correct' and state-politically compliant statements on exonyms, as they are usually put forward in such sessions, have shifted from predominantly pleading for a reduction in the use of exonyms to a perceived parity between exonym skeptics and exonym defenders. While the United Nations passed several resolutions in the 1970s and 1980s recommending the reduction and prudent use of exonyms, no such resolutions came about later.¹ On the contrary: Resolutions of the 2000s and 2010s that recognized traditional geographical names as part of cultural heritage did not explicitly exclude exonyms, i.e., implicitly included them.²

The explanation for this remarkable shift lies in a fundamental change in the political environment. Until the late 1980s, the global political situation was determined by a Communist bloc with an internationalist ideology that demonized exonyms as an expression of nationalism. It was cooperating in the UNGEGN – remarkably enough – with the anglophone countries, which did not regard English exonyms as exonyms in the proper sense, but as international names that were unavoidable anyway and not in danger of being reduced. A third pillar of exonym skepticism were the German-speaking countries, whose language (including German exonyms) was stigmatized by the events of World War II and the atrocities of the Nazi regime.³

The first pillar of exonym skepticism, the Communist bloc in Europe, has imploded. The third pillar, the reluctance of German-speakers to use their own exonyms, is no longer

¹ See especially Res. II/29-1972, Res. II/35-1972, Res. III/18-1977, Res. IV/20-1982, Res. V/13-1987

² See Res. VIII/9-2002, IX/4-2007 and X/3-2012

³ The author of this book has only participated in UNGEGN sessions since 1986, but was by his teacher Josef BREU (1914-1998), Austria's delegate to UNGEGN sessions and United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names Geographical names (UNCSGN) from the beginning, also UNGEGN chairman from 1977 to 1981, informed in detail about previous sessions and conferences. BREU was an advocate of the use of exonyms and reported on the enormous pressure exerted by both Communist and anglophone countries at the time to reduce exonyms, although as chairman he was only able to moderate the wording of the resolutions to some extent.

as strong as before due to the distance in time from the Second World War and the new position of Germany and the German language in Europe in particular. It can also be seen that the use of exonyms – despite UN resolutions calling for their reduction – increased again after the end of Communism in the former Communist countries and was hardly reduced elsewhere – probably because exonyms are after all just functional.

The remaining exonym skeptics in the ranks of UNGEGN experts are recruited mainly from Western Europe and North America and argue against a deviation from the previous UN direction stressing that contradicting earlier UN resolutions or even their repeal would mean to challenge the authority of UN resolutions and the United Nations in general.

This again reveals the political dimension of the distinction between endonym and exonym and how fundamental it is for toponomastics. Paul WOODMAN, longtime British delegate to UNGEGN sessions and United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names as well as founding member and doyen of the UNGEGN Working on Exonyms, unlike his British predecessors in the UNGEGN, thoroughly estimated exonyms. He classified the endonym/exonym divide in a book title even as “the great toponymic divide”.

This book attempts to justify this assessment and to present the distinction between endonym and exonym as a core topic of critical toponomastics. It is necessary, however, to place the topic in a wider context to gain a deeper understanding of this particular question and to start from a wider scope. In the second chapter, therefore, the wider field of research is first examined, that of toponomastics and especially critical toponomastics, with the geographical aspects being emphasized in this multi- and interdisciplinary field of research.

The third and fourth chapters are dedicated to two fundamentals of understanding the meaning and value of geographical names, also the distinction between endonym and exonym, namely to the process of naming (Chapter 3) and the role of geographical names as mediators between humans and space (Chapter 4). The difference between endonym and exonym already becomes clear during the process of naming, and the considerations on this process result in definitions of these two terms on which this book is based. The roles of geographical names as mediators between humans and space also differ in this regard.

The fifth chapter then presents the distinction between endonym and exonym as fundamental and radical from a cultural-geographical point of view, but also contrasts it with linguistic perspectives that classify these two terms as less contradictory. The reasons for the emergence of exonyms is also discussed here, whereby the main reason is seen in the historical and current external relations of a community and demonstrated by examples. In addition, the boundaries between the reference areas of endonym and exonym in geographical space, which are assumed to be identical to the boundaries between 'one's own' and 'those of others' – on land and at sea – are discussed.

Since the use of exonyms is politically and culturally sensitive, their use must be weighed against political and cultural risks in each individual case, for which Chapter 6 offers criteria and guidelines.

Chapter 7 then compares two typical areas of application of endonyms and exonyms using regional examples from East-Central Europe, namely traffic signs as an area of application predestined for endonyms and school and world atlases as an area particularly suitable for the use of exonyms.

Before some concluding remarks and a detailed bibliography, Chapter 8 finally discusses the delicate relationship between exonyms and the standardization of geographical names, since standardization aims to determine the 'one', 'correct' name for a geographical feature, and the exonym is at least one of the additional names for the feature.

The book can be read as a result and conclusion of the many inspiring discussions in the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms, which to conduct between 2006 and 2017 the author had the great honor and pleasure.

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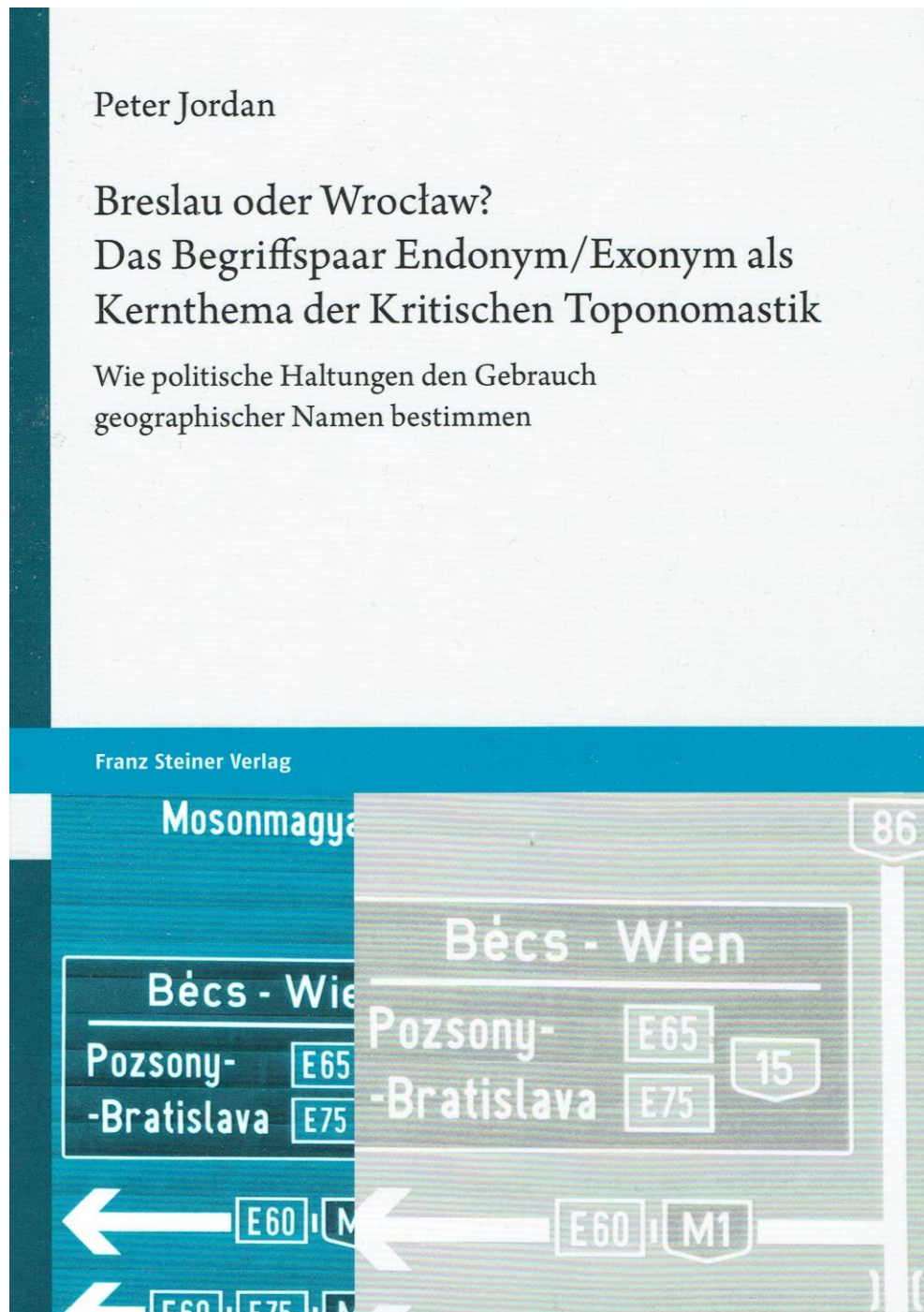
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The Group of Experts is requested to:

- (1) Discuss the endonym/exonym divide under pragmatic aspects recognizing advantages also of using exonyms.

- (2) Consider whether the resolutions of the 1970s and 1980s are still justified in a new political environment and facing the fact that exonym use has recovered even there where it was avoided for some decades proving that exonyms are functional.