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English

**United Nations Group of Experts on
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 Bulgaria

Submitted by Bulgaria **

Summary:

The national report of Bulgaria contains information on activities related to geographical names made since the 2021 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

The global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as the unstable local political environment, significantly affected the work concerning the standardization and management of geographical names, reducing it to a minimum: the maintenance of the database storing the register of geographical names by the Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency. In the fourth quarter of 2021, the Agency started a three-year project aimed at consolidating its three existing separate databases. Among the expected outcomes of the project are an enriched register database interlinked with the available cadastral information, and better system functionality in providing data and services, including with respect to standardized geographical names. Possibilities for supplementing the register with geographical names from different local governmental institutions and non-profit organizations are also being assessed.

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Report of Bulgaria

1. Background information

According to the Geodesy and Cartography Act (<https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2135520647>), the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works appoints a Council for Standardisation of the Geographical Names and organises its work. The Council implements expert activity in the field of standardisation of the geographical names. The Council members are ministers from the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Environment and Waters, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency (GCCA), the Institute for Bulgarian language and the Geographic Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Science. The Council proposes to the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works for approval:

- the order and the rules for unifying and the registering geographical names in Bulgaria, as well as their spelling;
- the established geographical names in Bulgaria and their recording in the Register of Geographical Names;
- the transcription of foreign geographical names along with their spelling;
- the transcription of the Bulgarian geographical names in Latin alphabet, while taking into consideration the recommendations of the relevant international organisations as well as the Bulgarian traditions in spelling.

In its duties, the Council is assisted by the GCCA. The GCCA is also the responsible institution for the maintenance of the geographical names' database called the Register of Geographical Names (RGN). It stores standardised geographical names for the Bulgarian territory ensuring the uniformity and sustainability of their use as well as preserves any historical changes of these names. Since its creation in 2012, the database is constantly updated and improved. Free access to the RGN is provided via a web service at <https://geonames.cadastrе.bg>.

2. Recent activities (2021 – 2023)

2.1. Database upgrade

The 3-year project “*An upgrade of the Specialised Information Systems for spatial data at the Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency (GCCA)*” has started in September 2021. Its aim is to consolidate the GCCA’s three existing spatial databases:

- 1) the cadastral database,
- 2) the Register of Geographical Names (RGN) database, and
- 3) the Geokartfond (the Technical Archive for Geodetic, Cartographical, Cadastral and Photogrammetrical Data and Materials) database.

The Stage 1 Report delivered in April 2022, comments in detail on the status of the three databases and the related legislation, and provides a complete data analysis. In the Report, the

project focus with respect to the geographical names standardisation is presented with the following objectives:

- an enrichment of the present RGN database with standardised place names from the up-to-date cadastre and historical place names from the Geokartfond archive documents,
- an increased functionality in terms of search and cross-reference between the three current databases, as well as means for cross-validation and correction of geographical names,
- an update of the relevant legislation,
- a supplementation of the RGN database with geographical names from different local governmental institutions and non-profit organisations such as:
 - the National Statistical Institute,
 - the River Basin Directorates,
 - the Road Infrastructure Agency,
 - the Directorate General Civil Aviation Administration,
 - the National Company Railway Infrastructure,
 - the Executive Forests Agency,
 - the Ministry of Tourism,
 - the Ministry of Culture,
 - the Bulgarian Federation of Speleology,
 - the National Archaeological Institute with the Museum,
 - the National Institute of Immovable Cultural Heritage,
 - the Bulgarian Tourist Association, and others.

The Stage 2 Report is expected in late April 2023.

2.2. List of country names: an update

Based on an official note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the name change of the capitol city of Republic of Kazakhstan, an updated on-line version of the List of Country Names has been issued:

<https://www.cadastre.bg/news/katalog-s-imenata-na-drzhavite>

2.3. International activities: meetings and publications

○ *Meetings:*

A Bulgarian representative took part in the 26th meeting of the East Central and South-East Europe Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, held in Praha (Prague), Czechia, on the 18th of May, 2022. The included meeting topics were:

- 1) National Reports on new activities and changes since May 2021,
- 2) storage and data management of geographical names in information systems,
- 3) other methods of storage of geographical names, data evaluation, data collection,
- 4) storing the history of name changes and other origin of names, and
- 5) publishing changes of geographical names.

○ *Publications:*

An article entitled “*Speleonyms and the natural environment: examples from Bulgaria*“ by Stanislava Valcheva was published in the UNGEGN Bulletin No 63. It is based on a study on the geographical names related to speleology, which is being conducted since the beginning of 2022. Still in its initial stage, the study looks at the Bulgarian Federation of Speleology’s existing database for caves in Bulgaria assessing the possibilities for integration with the current RGN database.

2.4. RGN database updates

In the period May 2021 – February 2023, the current RGN database was continuously updated by adding new names for various topographic features (creeks, small peaks, tourist shelters and huts, etc.) and performing some minor corrections due to wrong entries and misspelling.

3. Conclusion

After the initial measures taken due to the presence of COVID-19 on Bulgarian territory in March 2020, the local political environment became unstable. In only few months, the government recognised the need for new elections. Until the present day, several attempts for elections failed to provide a regular government. As a result, for the past two and a half years nine different appointed governments have ruled the country. Such a constant change among the members of the Council for Standardisation of the Geographical Names does not allow for its consistent work. Consequently, all activities related to the geographical names standardisation and management have been reduced to their minimum: the maintenance of the RGN by the GCCA. This includes mainly regular updates and corrections of the database (recorded geographical names), as well as the dissemination of the standardised geographical names via the RGN web service. As the Council assistant, the GCCA, within the frame of the project described above, also seeks ways for supplementation of the RGN database by assessing possible different sources of geographical names such as local governmental institutions and non-profit organisations.