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English

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Geographical Names**

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Item 8 (c) of the provisional agenda *

Culture, heritage and language recognition: Exonyms

Foreign names in Estonian

Summary **

As a rule, foreign names in Estonian are written as in the original if they are in Roman script and in romanized form if they are in other scripts. In the past, a number of exonyms have been used in Estonian, but in 1960, 1976 and 1983 decisions were made that decreased their use significantly. Especially the 1983 decision on names of countries and their capitals was quite radical so several of the recommendations were later reverted.

Traditionally, the standardization of foreign names has been a purely linguistic activity with recommendations published in dictionaries of Standard Estonian (ÕS). There is no official approval needed to use or not to use any exonym or endonym in Estonian. Recent trends of naming in the world have brought along the growing politicization and disputes on naming. The paper will take a look at some of the challenges that this trend may bring in handling foreign names.

* GEGN.2/2025/1.

** The full report was prepared by Peeter Päll, Institute of the Estonian Language, Estonia. The report will be available under document symbol GEGN.2/2025/108/CRP.108, in the language of submission only, at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/