

30 May 2002

English only

**Eighth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

Berlin, 27 August-5 September 2002

Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on
the progress made in the standardization of geographical names
since the Seventh Conference**

**Report on work in the standardization of geographical
names in Poland between 1998 and 2002**

Submitted by Poland**

* E/CONF.94/1.

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Standardizing Polish names

1. *Commission for Establishing Names of Localities and Physiographic Objects*

Standardizing the names of localities and physiographic objects within Poland is performed by the Commission for Establishing Names of Localities and Physiographic Objects, operating within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration.

The name of a locality and physiographic object is set or amended by ordinance of the minister responsible for public administration announced in the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland. The condition for introducing amendments to the above regulation is presenting an application to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration by a commune's authorities, through the appropriate province governor (voivode). The application should be accepted by the interested residents, commune council and also receive the opinion of the Commission for Establishing Names of Localities and Physiographic Objects. Between 1998 and 2002 a total of 997 amendments of official names of localities and physiographic objects were introduced: in 1998 – 132 amendments, in 2000 – 39 amendments, in 2001 – 146 amendments and in 2002 – 680 amendments. A particularly large number of amendments were introduced recently, the reason being the commune authorities commencing work to bring order to locality onomastics, prior to the National Census in June 2002.

Work was commenced on a new *Act on official names of localities and physiographic objects*. The Ordinance of the President of the Republic of Poland of the 24 October 1934 is, by now, a legal act not adapted to the regulations of the present Constitution of the Republic of Poland and European Union requirements, and does not contain many legal definitions required to substantiate activities concerning official onomastics. The new Act will create the legal foundations to elaborate and issue a new list of official names of localities in Poland, in the place of the present outdated list of 1980-1982. In 1999 "*Methodological principles for a new list of official names of localities in the Republic of Poland*" were drawn up.

With regard to the rising trends to amend geographical onomastics, the Commission for Establishing Names of Localities and Physiographic Objects appealed for discretion to all local authorities who may present applications to amend the official names of localities. Geographical names are a recognised national value since they strictly relate to the nation's history and culture. Hence, they should be protected.

2. *State Register of Geographical Names*

The State Register of Geographical Names is subordinate to the Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography and is a collection of names of localities and physiographic objects. The principal source of information about geographical names is topographical 1:10000 maps issued by the geodetic and cartographic service. The Register also contains the names of large physiographic objects and natural regions.

To the moment some 164,000 names of objects have been entered in the data base, together with their characteristics, including around 103,000 names of localities and 61,000 names of physiographic objects. Work is proceeding on their verification from the aspect of standardization.

In connection with the creation of data bases related thematically to geographical onomastics, the upgrading and extension is planned of a system including the Register so that the entirety is compatible with existing data bases or those which may be created.

3. *National programme to standardize hydronyms*

The process of standardizing names of localities in Poland is the most advanced, while the majority of physiographic names are not officially unified. The earlier mentioned State Register of Geographical Names is becoming a comprehensive and the most extensive collection of all geographical names in Poland.

Material and methodological deficiencies in present sources of information concerning geographical names in Poland led to the need to undertake systematic and unified efforts to standardize hydronyms. Such work has been initiated and is being performed by the Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography.

Work on the language concept of drawing up onomastic material lasted since 1999, its implementation being commenced in 2000. Several documents have been drafted which have become the basis on which activities could proceed:

- *“Proposals of a programme of standardising work on hydronyms in Poland”*
- *“Instructions for drawing up a list of hydronyms for the requirements of the State Register of Geographical Names”*
- *“Project of a schedule for verification of State Register of Geographical Names data as regards hydronyms”.*

A group of linguists-hydronymists was formed by the Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography to supplement the hydronyms in the State Register of Geographical Names by materials additionally originating in onomastic elaborations and historical sources. The group was to deliver full, to the greatest possible extent, lists of flowing waters (streams, rivers, canals etc.) and standing waters (lakes, ponds, bays etc.), functioning at the present and in the past, within Poland's present borders. The purpose here is to supplement the stock of hydronyms held by the State Register of Geographical Names as well as to draft a list of hydronyms from Polish territory which require urgent standardization by the Commission for Establishing Names of Localities and Physiographic Objects, which possesses the appropriate authority to do so.

Almost 50,000 hydronyms were collected in language elaborations within two years, including various variants of names (dialectic, graphic, foreign-language, historical etc.) and also names of lost objects and names reconstructed from foreign sources. That collection will allow the reinstating of the original names of objects which are nameless today (without names on maps and other documents) and will allow their verification from the aspect of language correctness.

The lists of hydronyms drawn up by linguists and verified by cartographers and geographers from the State Register of Geographical Names and also by hydrographers working on a new version of the *“Hydrographic division of Poland”*, will be successively delivered for opinions to the Commission for Establishing Names of Localities and Physiographic Objects. Basing on the experience acquired to the present, it is expected that work on delivering successive parties of hydronyms lists to the Commission will end in 2004.

4. *Toponymic guide*

The Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography has drawn up a toponymic guide and prepared it for publication (*“Technical instructions. Collecting and elaborating topographical names for large-scale maps”*) in the form of instruction on collecting names outside towns for the use of topographers when updating topographical maps. The technical instructions are valid for preparatory work and collecting names outside towns.

Standardization of world geographical names

Issues of geographical onomastics are dealt with by the Commission for Standardization of Geographical Names Outside Poland.

In the wake of reorganising state administration, this Commission was assigned to the Surveyor General of Poland and placed within the Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography (it had earlier worked within the Ministry of National Education). Under the terms of the *“Geodetic and Cartography Law Act”*, in his ordinance of the 24 March 2000 the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration defined the manner and scope of the Commission's activity assigned to the Surveyor General of Poland. The Surveyor General of Poland in his Order of 4 September 2000 appointed the Commission (term of office 2000-2004) of a new composition and approved the rules of its operations.

Preparations commenced on preparing a Polish geographical onomastics of the world. This publication which has been awaited by various groups (publishers, scientific institutions and government bodies) is to take the place of the

outdated onomastics published in the 1950s. Instructions have been prepared according to which the following are given in sections concerning individual countries: obligatory principles of transcription and pronunciation, terminology glossary, list of more important names (in the original system of writing, in transcription and transliteration, in the shape of an exonym wherever required and also local names used). Apart from preparatory sets of entries, 2001 witnessed the drafting of lists of around 6000 names in the Latin alphabet and around 2000 names in other systems of writing.

An extended and updated third edition of “*Toponymic Guidelines of Poland for Map Editors and other Users*” was published in English in 2002. These guidelines were also published in Russian.

A new updated list of “*Names of countries of the world*” has been prepared and is to be published in late-2002. An abbreviated version of this list was also drawn up and will be placed on the Internet page of the Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography (www.gugik.gov.pl).

An initial review and appraisal of how onomastics is used in Polish publications concerning countries outside the borders of Poland has been performed, especially as regards regions where the Latin alphabet is in use.

A Polish version of the UNGEGN advertising pamphlet has been drafted to popularise the UN idea of standardizing geographical names.

The traditionally lively cooperation with international organisations dealing with standardization of geographical names has continued:

- participation in the 16 session of the Regional Division of Central Eastern and South Eastern Europe (UNGEGN) in Slovenia (Ljubljana, 2000)
- participation in the 4 session of the Regional Division of East Europe, North and Central Asia (UNGEGN) in Belarus (Mińsk, 2001) and also in the 3 session of the Working Group for matters of Geographical Names of the International Council for Geodesy, Cartography, Cadastre and Remote Sensing of Members of the Community of Independent States.
- Reports on all these sessions and also on the VII UN Conference and Session of UNGEGN were published in the “*Polish Cartographic Review*”.

A seminar devoted to Polish exonyms was organised in Warsaw University’s Faculty of Cartography in March 2000 on the initiative of the Commission for Standardization of Geographical Names Outside Poland, to popularise the UN concept concerning standardizing geographical names.

Proposals and recommendations

Standardization of geographical names occupies an important position in the work of a contemporary state administration. Poland places great importance to this issue, testified to by the work of the Commission for Establishing Names of Localities and Physiographic Objects and the Commission for Standardisation of Geographical Names Outside Poland.

When programmes of the most urgent tasks are drawn up, the aim is to achieve the future goal which is to be a national gazetteer, a publication encompassing a list of, possibly, all basic geographical names in a country. Efforts have commenced to ensure that the duty of local government bodies and the Commission is that the names of objects be of a durable character and not subject to transitory changes. Geographical names should resist passing trends to amend or eliminate them. Awareness of that must be rooted in all bodies of public administration and disseminated among residents. Names should be legally protected like historical monuments of culture and the arts.

Efforts are under way to publish lists of geographical names, the purpose being to unify geographical onomastics of the world used in various countries, particularly in cartographic publications, handbooks, the press and other mass media. Activities have been commenced to ensure that the decisions of the Commission for Standardization of Geographical Names Outside Poland become binding (legally sanctioned).