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Definition of exonym applied by the Commission on Standardization of Geographical Names

Commission on Standardization of Geographical Names Outside Republic of Poland makes standardization of Polish exonyms, but until 2006 formally it did not adopt definition of exonym, which would be in consequence applied in its further works.

UNGEEN adopted definition of exonym, which was next published at the *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names*. The definition has the following form: “EXONYM – name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status, and differing in its form from the name used in the official language or languages of the area where the geographical feature is situated”.

In 1998 Polish edition of the *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names* (Polish: *Słownik terminów używanych przy standaryzacji nazw geograficznych*) was published. In this publication terms and definitions used in English edition were given, but their exact translation was not done. Jerzy Kondracki, long-term chairman of the Commission on Standardization of Geographical Names, who did translation of the whole glossary, enriched his text with Polish examples, however omitting examples less important for Polish reader. Definitions, which were, according to him, non-precise or too general, modified or made serious changes, based on Polish publications and Polish tradition. In this way also definition of exonym was modified to a form: “EXONYM – name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status, and differing from the official name in the language or languages of the area where the geographical feature is situated”. Polish version of the definition was applied *de facto* until 2006, although formally the Commission never approved its application for their works.

As UNGEEN works on new definition of exonym the Commission decided to make its comments to it. During 23rd UNGEEN Session in Vienna two versions of definition of exonym were presented. Definition proposed by the Working Group on Exonyms had the following form: “EXONYM – name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is spoken, and differing in its form from the name used in an official or well established language of the area where the geographical feature is located”, whereas version proposed by Working Group on Toponymic Terminology was as follows: “EXONYM – name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status or (where no official language exists, is widely spoken), and differing in its form from the respective endonym(s) in the area where the geographical feature is situated”.

Commission on Standardization of Geographical Names decided to analyze both versions of definitions and to make comments to them. At the same time it was concluded to take a decision, if to approve formally as used in Poland definition from Polish edition of the *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names* (*de facto* so far applied) or to adopt UNGEEN definition in its exact form or definition in one of the versions proposed during Vienna UNGEEN session, or perhaps to adopt totally new definition, which would be applied in Poland.

After analyzing definition used so far by UNGEEN and its two newly proposed versions it was found, that each of these definitions is too general and hence difficult to its

application in practice. This fact most probably results from difficulties in adopting one definition of exonym, which would be accepted by all UNGEGN members.

In present UNGEGN definition is the unclear statement „name used in the official language”. First, sometimes it’s difficult to say, which languages have official status on a given territory. It results from various definitions applied in particular countries for different languages: constitution, state, official, national languages, etc. For instance, in Poland - according to adopted in 2005 Act on National and Ethnic Minorities – languages used by these minorities are called minority or regional languages; they are not official, but auxiliary. But officially, geographical names is done in these languages. So, whether names in German language for in south-western part of Poland, where this language is used, will be endonyms in official language, as it is required by definition of “exonym”, or not? There are more similar examples. In addition, for some countries it’s difficult or not possible to find information, if on a particular area other official languages, beside state language, exist, for instance whether in Jewish Autonomous Region in Russia Yiddish language is the official one, and if yes, what are geographical names in this language. Similar situation is on Niue island, where beside English also Niuean is official language; what are the official languages on North Mariana, Palau or Micronesia (various sources give contradictory information) and what are geographical names in these languages.

There is also a problem for areas without official language, for seas and oceans, for undersea forms outside territorial waters, as well as for Antarctic. Should in these cases names in English be adopted as endonyms? It’s also difficult to determine precisely, whether territory of official language covers territorial waters, or exclusively economic zone? The other question is, if an area is not covered by official language, whether all names applied for this area are the exonyms? Or perhaps, on the reverse, if there are no official languages, we cannot speak about exonyms?

Similar problem arises in case, when a particular object does not have a name in the country of origin, but name of this object is applied in the other country (for instance name *Wyżyna Zachodnioaustralijska* applied for vast areas of western Australia – in Australia this area does not have one name, but several names related to smaller terrain objects). The other unclear situation exists for names in official languages for “countries”, which are not recognized by international community; whether languages approved as official by “authorities” in these “countries” can be recognized as official or not?

Determination of names in official languages is the next important problem. Should all forms of a name in official language, including popular, slang and acronyms, be determined? And how to find all those forms and to state, whether a name which is thought to be an exonym is the exonym in reality (i.e. is different from all forms of name in official language)? Most of gazetteers gives only one form of a name, omitting non-official variants, so it is not possible to determine all names of an object in official language. Due to these doubts the Commission on Standardization of Geographical Names assumed, that present definition of exonym applied by UNGEGN is not acceptable in practice and it cannot be adopted for works concerning determination of Polish geographical names for the world.

In definition proposed by the Working Group on Exonyms there are more ambiguous phrases. First, replacement of phrase „feature situated outside the area where that language has official status” by phrase “geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is spoken” causes, that for many areas exonyms will no more formally exist. Polish emigration, which started at the period of partition of Poland, resulted in a fact, that at present a dozen or so millions of Poles live outside boundaries of Poland. Polish language is used by descendants of 19th century emigrants in Australia, Argentine and the United States as well as by Poles in Germany and Great Britain, who emigrated to these countries recently. According to the proposed definition, Polish names for Australia, The United States or Germany would

be no more exonyms. There is also a phrase „well established language” in the definition; this phrase can be interpreted in different ways – whether English in Bangladesh or Egypt and French in Morocco or Syria are „well established languages” and hence English and French names in these countries are not exonyms?

In definition proposed by the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology there is less ambiguity. But a phrase „respective endonym” is disputable – in what sense this endonym should be individual? Besides, both in this definition and in presently used definition exonym means “name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status”. However, there are cases, that one language is official in a few countries, but different names are used for objects located in these countries. For instance, in Kazakhstan and Russia Russian is the official language, while for river crossing these countries Russians use name *Ural*, but Kazakhs use name *Žaik*; for a city in Kazakhstan Russian official name is *Žympity*, while in Russia name *Džambejty* is used; similarly for other Kazakh city there are two names *Žanaozen* and *Novyj Uzen’*, respectively.

Alike, official Spanish name of country is *México*, while in Spain name *Méjico* is used. Similarly, for a small locality in Rumania beside Rumanian name official Polish name *Nowy Soloniec* was set, while in Poland name *Nowy Soloniec* (written with letter ł, not l) is used and approved as exonym by the Commission. Names of this type should be most probably treated as exonyms.

Due to ambiguity, the Commission also decided not to adopt definitions proposed by the Working Group on Exonyms and the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology.

As a consequence, the Commission adopted in May 2006 its own definition of exonym, applied for standardization of Polish geographical names of the world: “EXONYM – name presently used in Poland in Polish language for geographical feature situated outside its territory and different in graphical form from standardized endonym of this feature”. At the same time it was determined, what should be understood by a difference of graphical form. Omission or addition of diacritical signs or e.g. prefixes is such a difference, but not omission, addition or translation of generic term. Also transliteration or transcription of names written originally in non-Latin alphabet (if done according to the previously adopted rules) is not recognized as a difference. This definition was decided to be adopted as working till adopting new definition by UNGEGN. When UNGEGN will adopt new definition, the Commission will state finally, if it will use its own definition or will adopt UNGEGN version.

The Commission also decided, that in its opinion presented to UNGEGN it will not support any of the proposed changes of definitions of exonyms and it will not vote for keeping the present definition. The Commission will present its own definition in the form: “EXONYM – name presently used in a country in official language or languages of this country for geographical feature situated outside its territory and different in graphical form from standardized endonym of this feature”.