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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: Divisions of the Group of Experts

Report of the Baltic Division

Submitted by the Baltic Division **

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** The full report was prepared by Maciej Zych, Chair of the Baltic Division in collaboration with divisional members

Report of the Baltic Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

The report covers the two year period since the 2023 Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on the Standardization of Geographical Names (1–5 May 2023).

1. Composition of the Division

The Baltic Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), established in 1992, is one of 24 linguistic/geographical divisions of UNGEGN. The Division comprises five member states: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the Russian Federation. Due to the Russian aggression against Ukraine the collaboration of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland with the Russian Federation was suspended since 2022. In accordance with the principle of rotation, Poland has been the coordinating country for a four-year term since 2021. The Divisional Chairperson is Mr. Maciej Zych (Poland), and the Divisional Vice-Chair is Mr. Saulius Urbanas (Lithuania), who replaced Ms. Rita Viliuvienė (Lithuania) in this position in 2024.

2. Divisional meetings

One divisional meeting was held during the reporting period. The 23rd Meeting of the Baltic Division took place in a hybrid format in Vilnius (Lithuania) on 2–3 October 2024, at the invitation of the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania, the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language, and the National Land Service under the Ministry of Environment. The meeting was attended by 60 participants from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine, including representatives of local government units in Lithuania.

Fourteen reports and papers were presented and discussed during the meeting. Participants exchanged information and experience regarding the status of work on national standardization of geographical names carried out in their countries including an overview of legislative and organizational frameworks; the status of updates of national placenames, toponyms and exonyms; the use of geographical names in national registries and Information Systems, collection and updating of place names; linguistic aspects related to geographical names, issues in using geographical names in minority languages, etc.

A discussion session focused on various aspects of geographical name management. Key topics included legal regulations on geographical names standardization and geographical name databases management in different countries, examining which solutions were most beneficial and which would need improvement due to inefficiencies. Participants also discussed strategies for enhancing the efficiency of updating geographical names lists and databases and expanding the availability of standardized geographical names. Practical cases of using geographical names within national spatial data infrastructures were also reviewed. Additionally, participants considered how geographical name data and e-services could be adapted for machine-readable formats and AI-compatible technologies. The group also debated whether geographical name databases should include name variants, historical forms, and versions of names without diacritics.

Participants recommended that countries link all objects in national gazetteers to their respective locations (by assigning coordinates) and continue integrating geographical name data into national and international repositories (registries). They also expressed a desire for maintaining communication, engaging in joint initiatives, exchange experience, and sharing best practice on UNGEGN and Geographical names related matters.

Minutes, presentations and other documents from the 23rd Meeting of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN are published on the divisional website (<http://eki.ee/knn/ungegn/>).

3. Election of the Division's chair and next meeting

During the 23rd Meeting of the Baltic Division (Vilnius, 2–3 October 2024), participants elected the next divisional chair and vice-chair for the term 2025–2029. Mr. Saulius Urbanas (Lithuania) was elected as the chair of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN, and it was agreed that the vice-chair would be nominated by Estonia. Estonia has later proposed Ms. Margit Mitt, the secretary of the Place Names Board of Estonia as the vice-chair. It was agreed that the term for the chairmanship will begin on 3 May 2025 and continues till the 6th UNGEGN session in 2029.

It was also decided that the 24th Meeting of the Baltic Division will be held in autumn 2025 or spring 2026 in Latvia.

4. Cooperation between UNGEGN Divisions and other cooperation

Experts from the Baltic Division member states participated in the 2023 Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

In addition, experts from Latvia, Estonia and Poland contributed to various UNGEGN Working Groups, including: the WG on Geographical Names Data Management (Latvia), the WG on Romanization Systems (Estonia, Poland), the WG of Toponymic Terminology (Estonia, Poland), the WG on Exonyms (Estonia, Latvia, Poland), and the Focus group on Indigenous Geographical Names (Latvia).

Experts from the Baltic Division member states also participated in the following UNGEGN working group meetings and other geographical names related events from 2023 to 2025:

- Toponymic sessions of the Joint International Geographical Union/International Cartographic Association Commission on Toponymy during the 31st International Cartographic Conference of the International Cartographic Association, 14–18 August 2023 (Cape Town, South Africa);
- 7th Joint Tripartite Meeting of Geographical Names Commissions of the Czechia, Poland and Slovakia, 5 September 2023 (Prague, Czechia);
- 26th Meeting of the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms, 14–15 May 2024 (Prague, Czechia);
- 28th Session of the East Central and South-East Europe Division of the UNGEGN, 16 May 2024 (Prague, Czechia);
- Toponymic session of the Joint International Geographical Union/International Cartographic Association Commission on Toponymy during the European Cartographic Conference EuroCarto 2024, 11 September 2024 (Vienna, Austria).

5. The website

The website of the Baltic Division (<http://eki.ee/knn/ungegn/>) is maintained by the Place Names Board of Estonia. It provides general information about the Division and includes records of all meetings of the Baltic Division since 1992 (minutes, agenda, lists of participants, reports, and photos).

Conclusion

The Baltic Division of UNGEGN held one meeting during the reporting period (in 2024). Experts from member states actively participated in UNGEGN and other geographical names-related activities. The exchange of information within the Division, as well as with other divisions and interested parties outside UNGEGN has significantly contributed to the national standardization of geographical names in member states and has helped to raise awareness of the importance of geographical names standardization.

Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (1) Take note of this report and acknowledge the progress made by the Baltic Division.
- (2) Provide comments and input on similar work being carried out in other divisions.