

**United Nations Group of Experts On**

**Geographical Names**

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

**Report of Bulgaria**

**GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES AS SOCIO-CULTURAL OBJECTS AND THEIR ORGANIZATION**

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\*\*The full report was prepared by the Geodesy and Cartography Department of Bulgarian Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency.

According to the recommendations of the UN conferences, the Council for Standardization of the Geographical Names of Bulgaria considers the description of the geographic names in their capacity of cultural and historical objects as a permanent important task.

In the names of settlements, mountains, localities, lakes and rivers there are "hidden" phenomena and history, lifestyle, views, beliefs, memories of concrete people, who are kept in the linguistic memory of the community and represent an important part of Bulgaria's historical and cultural heritage. The practice proves, that the names contain and activate areas of the historical memory of the people, of the different communities and thus present in the actual social life.

The marking of the names of geographical objects has an applied character for the society, a tool for orientation in the geographical and social space, and the history of the names is also a history of the objects, of the social community, of the respective nation. Changing the name of a geographic object is not just a naming but a reflection of social relations, as the process of naming itself is a sign, an attribute of qualities, and social qualities. The name system reveals the true meaning, the complex morphematic composition and linguistic influences in the formation of names, and in the Balkans and Bulgaria these influences are multifaceted and versatile.

The standardization of geographic names in Bulgaria is based on researches in the field of toponymy and etymology, sociology of language and current linguistic practice. The statutory body for the standardization of geographic names in Bulgaria - the Council for Standardization of Geographical Names has also been set up based on inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional principle. This report highlights the main directions in efforts for the socio-cultural description of geographic names and the establishment of uniform standards for their storage and organization in accessible and functional registers. This is an activity similar in nature and significance to that of preserving the monuments of culture and is based on a complex approach in which the geographic names are considered

- *as part of the historical and cultural heritage;*
- *as part of the spatial data infrastructure;*
- *as systems of writing and pronunciation.*

Bulgarian toponymy (as well as any other) reflects the national character of the nominees or inhabitants of these lands and the historical changes in them. Due to the fact, that the Bulgarian lands have been inhabited since ancient times, the names are of different origins - Thracian, Slavic, Proto-Bulgarian, and as the latest layer - Turkish. The evidences show that in the last few centuries, of which the names are preserved today, the Bulgarian element has been the strongest. Hybrid names most often include a Bulgarian Slavic component and borrowings, representing the movement and settlement of different ethnicities on the territory of the country in its historical development - Turkish, Romanian, Greek and older layers - Thracian, Arabic and others. Most commonly the names characterize the settlement, its location, for example Kutlovitsa - the old name of Montana, is from the Bulgarian equivalent of valley. The most popular plant in the surrounding area gives the name of the village - Elhovo and Topolovgrad, Gabrovo - based on the name of the hornbeam growing in these places, Dryanovo and Shipkovtsi. The names of other villages are related to the fauna, found

in the area. Often the localities are given their names based on local traditions. There are settlements whose names come from their natural resources.

The etymology of Bulgarian settlements and geographic toponyms are relatively conservative and therefore have a significant historical contribution in solving complicated historical parallels, controversies or proving of existing and already well formulated theories. The names of today's Bulgarian cities, mountains, peaks and rivers (hydronimas), which are the most stable verbal forms, which have been preserved over the millennia, carry specific features of the language, life and history of the settlements on our lands. As the researchers point out, "names sometimes obey their own and unexplained linguistic and cultural logic, and their semantics and etymology can not be accurately revealed in spite of the efforts, sometimes names are strictly tied to the story or characteristic of the holder or object of the name."

For example, for the name of Varna (one of the biggest cities of Bulgaria) there are theories, that it comes from the Old Bulgarian "varna", meaning "black, crow coloured", according to another it is from "lime", which means mineral spring - not by accident here is the Czech Karlovy Vary. As for the name of Burgas it is supposed to come from the Latin Burgos - a tower. According to another interpretation, it is from the Roman word for road pillar "burg". The linguists are common opinion that the name of Sliven is from the word "merge", but there is a disagreement about whether our ancestors had in mind that the field and the mountain merged there, or the merging of three rivers, which still happens just outside the city. For the old name of Veliko Turnovo (one of the ancient capitals of Bulgaria) - Tarnovgrad, the most common theory is that it is coming from "thorn", "thornov" - thorn and "town" - fortified place, stronghold. Even today, the names of some settlements are Turkish: Haskovo from the old Hasköy, which means Ottoman feudal possession; Harmanli - from the Harman; Pazardjik, Kardzhali.

Toponymy allows the study of dialectal influences in the movement of the population at different periods of time.

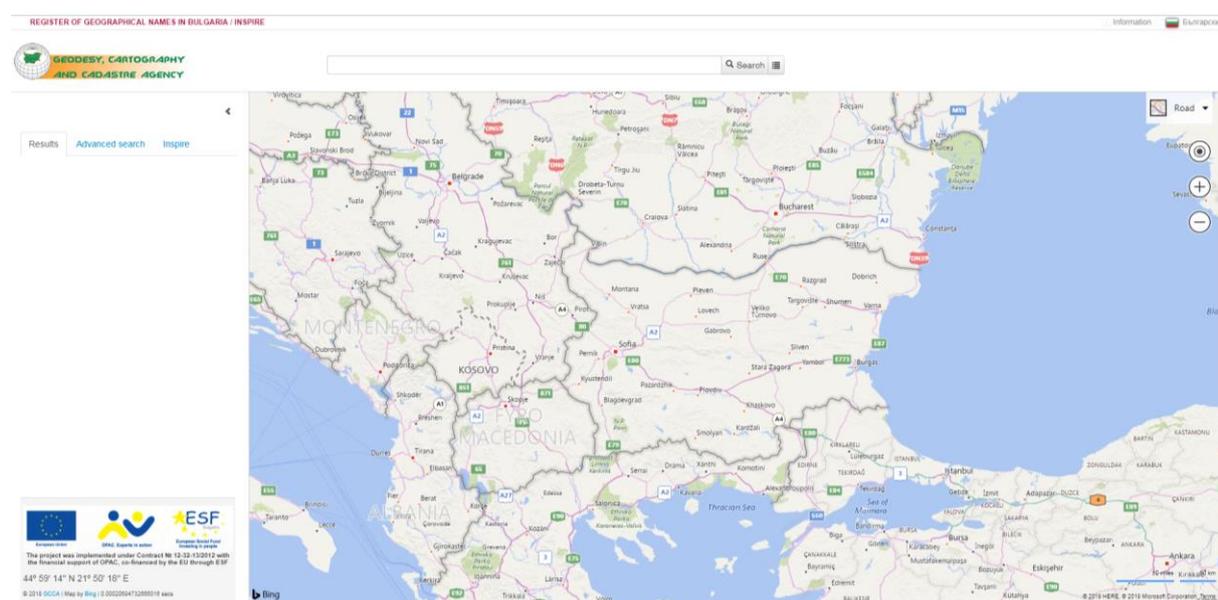
Of particular interest are the alterations in the names, which clearly bear the impression of the socio-political context of the time in which they were performed. Surveys show that these processes invariably accompany major events in the life of the society. In Bulgaria, for example, the processes of renaming after the Liberation in 1878, by 1945 and 1989-1990, were the most active. Less changes occurred in 1950, 1962, 1991 and others. More recently, 838 locations have been renamed, bearing Turkish-Arabic names (essentially the names were translated into Bulgarian).

Some researchers are challenged to trace the history of the Bulgarians by examining the preserved Bulgarian toponyms around the world, which (they believe) have left behind on their way but for which there is no direct historical data. In places where no ethnic Bulgarians are living any more, there are towns of Dog or Kucha (house), Khan, Sueck rivers, Balhat. In addition to individual toponyms, in some places there are also more - 15-20. It is also claimed that at least 300 toponyms "bulgar" are present in northern India. Such hypotheses and studies are a brilliant illustration of the significance of names that have historical value and overshoot national borders.

In the process of standardization, in order to ensure uniformity and steadiness in the use of geographic objects' names, their storage, timely updating - tracking of the historical changes of the names of one and the same objects, as well as archiving this information, a register of geographical names in the Republic of Bulgaria was created. It is conceived as an open database for the Bulgarian geographic names, containing not only the contemporary names, their transliteration in Latin, but also information about the old names of the settlement, the history of the region, geographic information, etc. The entering of information is a continuous process in which data on geographic names are supplemented and updated.

The responsible institution for the maintenance of the geographic names database according to the Geodesy and Cartography Act is the Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency (GCCA).

The register of geographical names of Bulgaria is accessible via the GCCA's website and allows users to consult and search geographic names according to different criteria and characteristics.



## Register of Geographical Names

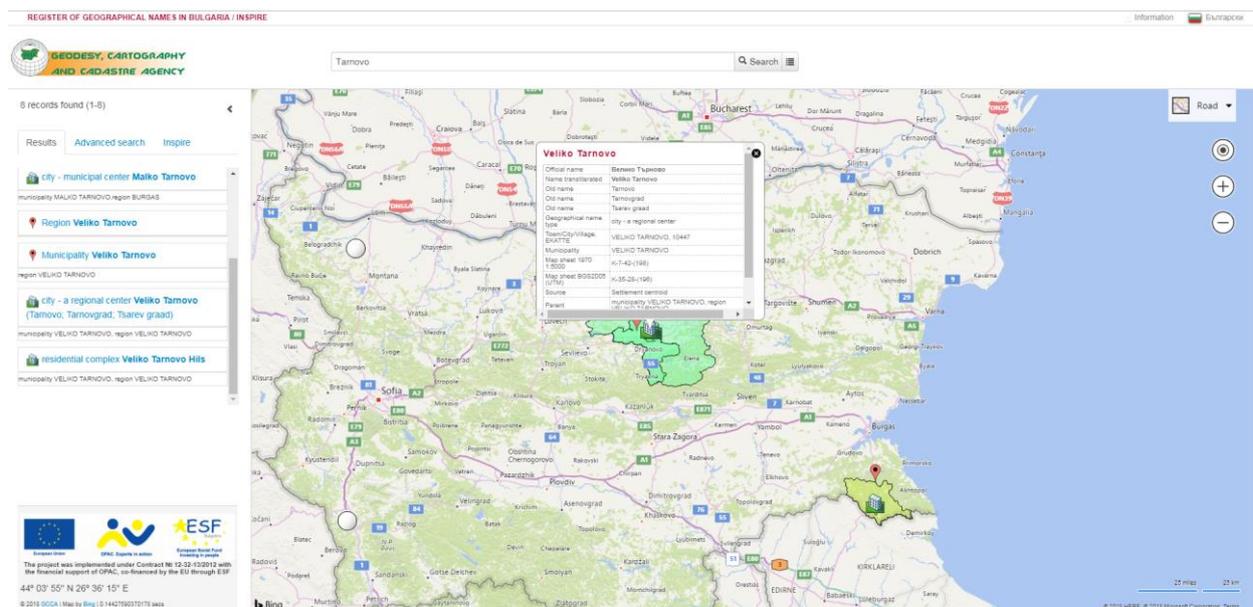
<http://geonames.cadastre.bg/>

The whole information about the geographic names, elements and features of geographic objects, extracted from the different sources, is organized into uniform digital data, using one and the same format. Depending on the type of objects, their visualization is, respectively, as a point, line or polygon. The Web Portal uses Bing maps as a basic layer, on the top of which are visualized the search results found and allows for them to be exported both in KML and JSON formats, which is in line with the requirements of the EU INSPIRE Directive. The application supports both Bulgarian and English interfaces.

The search for geographic names is done on all data in the register. As a result, in addition to the list of found objects, a window with all the data about the respective geo object is also displayed:

- geographic object name;
- transliterated name of the geographic object;

- alternative/ old name of the geographic object;
- type of geographic object to which the geographical name refers - settlement, municipality, orographic object, river system; belonging to the geographic location, administrative affiliation or affiliation of the terrain and tourist objects to the relevant orographic object or system or hydrographic object or system:
  - ✓ the affiliation of settlements, sections and neighborhoods to a given settlement is specified;
  - ✓ the affiliation of terrain and tourist objects to the relevant orographic object or system is specified;
  - ✓ the belonging of the hydro-graphic site (rivers, lakes and dams) to the relevant river system is specified.
- Map sheet nomenclature for 1970 system in scale 1:5000 and 2005;
- Map sheet nomenclature for BGS 2005 (UTM);
- the source, where the name has been derived from;
- belonging to the geographic location, administrative affiliation or affiliation to a larger orographic or hydrographic object or system;
- Coordinates of a point within the object in Bulgarian Geodetic System.



The Register of Geographical Names gives the opportunity to provide accurate and quick information on the geographic names to the state and municipal institutions, authorities and organizations, mass media, map producers, citizens and other users. Equally important is the role of international communication and the dissemination of Bulgarian culture.