

28<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the UNGEGN East Central  
and South-East Europe Division  
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**The difficult approach towards  
a decision/resolution on exonyms  
as parts of the cultural heritage**

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**Draft decision on the use and safeguarding of exonyms (Exonyms WG, Ljubljana Sep 2022)**

*The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names*

*Considering the United Nations Charter adopted on 26 June 1945, and notably its Article 1 referring to the principle of self-determination of peoples, which implies at the same time the right of peoples who inhabit a place to name it and the right of other peoples to refer to that place in their own language without foreign interference;*

*Considering the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on 17 October 2003, which implies the safeguarding of languages and the safeguarding of geographical names which are “vehicles of the intangible cultural heritage”;*

*Recalling that decision 1967/I/4 (C, 1) has set up the objective that “unnecessary changing of names be avoided”;*

Recalling that decisions 1972/II/28, 2002/VIII/9, 2007/IX/4 and 2012/X/3 have recognized some geographical names, either endonyms or exonyms, as part of the intangible cultural heritage, and that decisions 1972/II/36, 1987/V/22, 2002/VIII/1 and 2007/IX/5 have underlined the legitimacy of using indigenous and minority geographical names in addition to the name in the majority language;

Recognizing that most exonyms, coined by common usage, generally indicate a familiarity of the language community or its sub-group(s) to the denominated features without any idea of domination on them, unlike some of those created artificially;

Recognizing that the relationship between geographical names, either endonyms or exonyms, and geographical features cannot be absolutely unambiguous like for a data processing identifier, but only be relatively unambiguous to a language community or its sub-groups, which has to define an acceptable scope of ambiguity;

Recognizing that technical advances in data management have dramatically lessened the practical need for reducing the use of exonyms since the early Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names;

Recalls that exonyms should be reduced in international and especially diplomatic use and that the possible use of an exonym in such a context should be done with consideration of political and cultural sensitivity, taking also into account the relevant provisions of last paragraph of decision 1982/IV/20, as well as the precedence of national official forms;

Recalls that exonyms should be used in combination with the corresponding endonym, wherever possible, in uses without context like databases, gazetteers or maps (printed or digital);

Recommends that national standardization should register, standardize and safeguard as living and vital parts of languages those exonyms coined by a long enough and still current usage which meet the criteria listed by decision 2012/X/3;

Recommends that national standardization should not initiate the formation of exonyms, except by conversion from one writing system to another, by the omission, addition or alteration of diacritics or the article, by declension or derivation, or by the translation of a generic term;

Considers outdated the provisions of previous UNGEGN decisions which would be inconsistent with this decision, such as those calling for a blanket reduction of exonyms.

**The new draft**

## **Draft decision on the use and safeguarding of exonyms**

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names,

Recalling resolutions 1972/II/29, 1972/II/35, 1977/III/17, 1977/III/18, 1982/IV/20, 1987/V/13 and 2002/VIII/4 of the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN), in favour of reducing the use of exonyms;

Recalling on the other hand that UNCSGN resolutions 1972/II/31, 1977/III/14, 1977/III/19 and 1982/IV/20 have limited the scope of this policy, that UNCSGN resolutions 1972/II/28, 2002/VIII/9, 2007/IX/4 and 2012/X/3 have recognized geographical names as part of the intangible cultural heritage, and that UNCSGN resolutions 1972/II/36, 1987/V/22, 2002/VIII/1 and 2007/IX/5 have underlined the legitimacy of using indigenous and minority geographical names in addition to the name in the majority language;

Recognizing that exonyms are a function of language, and that those that form living and vital parts of individual languages are part of the intangible cultural heritage;

Recognizing that most exonyms, coined by common usage, generally indicate a familiarity of the language community or its sub-group(s) to the denominated features without any idea of domination on them, unlike some of those created artificially;

Recognizing, however, also that exonyms, in particular those that have once been endonyms (historical endonyms), are sometimes misused to express territorial claims or political nostalgia or are perceived in this way;



Recommends that the standardization of geographical names should allow, in addition to the endonym(s) the use of exonyms, when they are living and vital parts of individual languages, but that the main field of exonym use is to remain communication within a language community, while employing exonyms in international use should be done with cultural sensitivity, in both fields of application - where appropriate - in combination with the corresponding endonym.

Thank you for your attention!

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