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Geographical Names**

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Item 4(a) of the provisional agenda *

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

Report of Norway

Submitted by Norway**

Summary:

The full report provides an outline of the progress and developments of Norway on geographical names since the 2021 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

Item A is a brief report on the revision of the secondary legislation on place names, following the revision of the Norwegian Place Name Act in 2019. The revised regulations include preconditions for choosing non-standard spellings of place names if they have a long tradition.

Item B pertains to news and updates from the Norwegian Language Council on its work during the intersessional period.

Item C is a report from the Kven place name service, which is a subdivision of the Norwegian Language Council that works on Kven place names in the core Kven areas in northern Norway. It has handled numerous place name cases since 2021. Notably, Norway was given an official Kven name in May 2021, as well as official names in three Sami languages. The Kven name for Norway is *Norja*, and the full name for the Kingdom of Norway is *Norjan kuninkhaanvaltakunta*.

Item D features the Sami place name service, which is subordinate to the Sami parliament and works continuously with a variety of place name cases. In 2021 and 2022, the service, among other things, prioritized the south Sami place name collection by providing additional grants. The place name service was recently strengthened with more employees.

* GEGN.2/2023/1

** Prepared by Peder Gammeltoft, Norway, and others.

Item E is a review of the geographical names service under the responsibility of the Norwegian Mapping Authority (Kartverket). The Authority hosts, maintains and develops the central geographical names register of more than 1 million names, 110,000 of which are road or street names, and maintains and updates the toponymic guidelines for international use. Between 2020 and 2022, the Authority and Peder Gammeltoft cooperated with the Republic of Moldova to establish its geographical names database, as well as a legal framework for its geographical names infrastructure. The Republic of Moldova will report to the Group of Experts at its 2023 session on the outcome of the project.

Item F is a report of the Norwegian Language Collections, which in 2021 celebrated the centenary of the Norwegian place names archive with a two-day conference attended by national and international participants. The printed proceedings of the conference are currently being prepared for publication.

Although much of the work of the Norwegian Language Collections has recently centred around complying with the enforcement of the new General Data Protection Regulation and universal accessibility regulations, work has continued in developing new services to help with the standardization of geographical names. The service reported on at the last session of the Group of Experts, the place names archive service Norske Stedsnavn, is still being refined and work is continuing in terms of both adding more historical sources and updating the linked open data framework to improve queries and displays. In addition, an editing module is being modelled.

Item G provides a report on extended cooperation between the three national institutions involved in the standardization of geographical names. The Norwegian Language Council and the Sami parliament provide linguistic advice, and the Norwegian Mapping Authority makes decisions on standardization. In 2021 and 2022, regular digital meetings were held to discuss matters of common interest. A seminar day focusing on the transmission of competences was convened in Oslo. Nestors shared their experience on the Norwegian Place Name Act, and the final presentation highlighted the suppression of Sami geographical names in the twentieth century.

Report of Norway

ITEM A: The revision of the secondary legislation on place names

The latest revision of the Place Name Act of Norway entered into force in 2019 (cf. Report of Norway of 2021, GEGN.2/2021/9/CRP.9). One of the most highlighted changes in the act was to transfer the phrase “if the spelling has been in use for a long time, and is well known and incorporated, one can deviate from the current spelling and spelling principles” from the regulations to the act itself. This and other changes made in the legal text made it necessary for the Ministry of Culture and Equality to revise the regulations as well. The Mapping Authority and the Language Council participated in a group preparing the changes.

The most substantial change in the new regulations was a set of criteria for when to use the exception rule just mentioned. In the revised section 1 of the regulations the following criteria must be considered if the exception rule for the written name should be applied: meaning/etymology, tradition/use of the written form, local agreement, tradition in the actual language (Norwegian, Kven or Sámi languages).

The revised regulations entered into force in 2022.

ITEM B: News and updates from the Language Council of Norway

In April 2021 the Language Council released an e-learning course on the Place Name Act of Norway and executive work on standardization of place names.¹ The overall goal of this course is to improve the implementation of standardized forms in accordance with the principles in the Place Name Act. The course provides a simple introduction to the purpose and contents of the Act. The target group of the course is mainly employees in the public sector working with place names at local government (municipal) level, and the purpose of the course is to assist the participants in how to deal with place names in their daily work.

With the use of visual and interactive content, the course aims to engage and motivate the users to learn about place names and their importance for society and culture. The future will show whether this course will lead to a better understanding for the rationale behind the Act and make the procedures for standardization better known. Since the release, the course appears to have been welcomed by the participants, all of whom have given positive feedback regarding content, design and utility value thus far. This course was presented in a separate report, GEGN.2/2021/20/CRP.20, at the last UNGEGN Meeting.

The Specialist Advisory Board for place names

The specialist advisory board that was founded in 2018 and became permanent in 2020, has continued and consolidated its work. Since 2021 the specialist board has completed nine meetings, five in 2021, three in 2022 and, thus far, one meeting in 2023. The next meeting is planned to take place in May 2023. The meetings are now mostly digital/video meetings, with one or two physical meetings a year. Since March 2021 the leader of the specialist advisory board has been Professor in Nordic Languages at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Mr. Ivar Berg. The other board members are Ms. Anne Svanevik, Mr. Rune Røsstad, Ms. Ingvil Brügger Budal, Mr. Roger Lockertsen (all name consultants for Norwegian) and Ms. Irene Andreassen (name consultant for Kven).

At the meetings, the board mainly debates general questions pertaining to ongoing place name cases as well as political and other issues of current interest for the general work on place names. Some cases that the board has worked with, are worth mentioning. For instance:

- Throughout 2022 the board has been working on an update of the list of additional spelling rules for Norwegian place names. These are special rules that consider many of the local pronunciation varieties of place names. Due to the amendments to the

¹ A more detailed presentation of this course can be found in GEGN.2/2021/20/CRP.20.

Place Name Act and regulations from 2019–2021, the list of additional rules needs to be adjusted too. The completed list is planned to be finished by May 2023.

- The board has also continued to work with cases concerning place names, giving statements in particular cases where principles mentioned in the Place Names Act or in the regulations to the Act give room for more than one interpretation or more than one resulting standardized name or spelling.

The Norwegian Place Names Consultancy Service

The work within the consultancy service has been progressing as usual since 2021. The main task of the service is to provide spelling recommendations to the authorities who decide how place names are written. These recommendations must follow the Place Names Act of Norway and the additional rules for spelling of place names. The act and the additional rules allow for differing considerations and priorities; thus, the linguistic factors must also be balanced against traditional spellings, local usage and pronunciation, local preferences, market forces and the needs of the State for unambiguous names and spellings for navigational purposes.

The consultancy service now consists of three advisors and five consultants. In addition, there is also one advisor and one name consultant for Kven place names.

ITEM C: The Kven Place Names Consultancy Service

The work within the Kven Place Names Consultancy Service as part of the Language Council of Norway has been progressing as usual since 2021. One noteworthy development is that the Kingdom of Norway has been given an official name in the Kven language (along with official names in the Sámi languages North Sámi, Lule Sámi and South Sámi).

The process of establishing these names was initiated by the state in 2019, and the Kven Place Names Consultancy Service was actively involved in the discussion of what name to use in Kven, together with language institutions within the Kven community, and various Kven minority organizations. Several alternatives were discussed, but eventually a proposal was promoted to the Norwegian Parliament, that the Kven name for Norway should be *Norja*, and the Kven name for the Kingdom of Norway should be *Norjan kuninkhaanvaltakunta*. The names were granted official status by the Parliament on 4 May 2021, and the name *Norja* will be used, together with Norwegian and Sámi names, on signposts at border crossing points in the Kven speaking areas in Northern Norway.

ITEM D: The Sámi Place Names Service

Sámi place names are – as all other place names in Norway – protected in the Place Names act of Norway. The Act came into force on 1 July 1991 as a departmental order, and regulations on place names came into force on 1 June 2007. According to Section 13 of the Place Names Act, the Sámi Parliament is the Service for Sámi Place Names and provides guidance and advice on the spelling of Sámi place names, naming customs and naming. The service may also comment on the use of Sámi place names.

Since the law was passed in 1991, the work with Sámi place names has had a positive development. Among other things, more Sámi place name material has been collected, and the number of Sámi names in public registers, maps and on signs have increased. The spelling of several town names in the Sámi area has been adopted in recent years, for example *Romsa* (Norwegian: Tromsø), *Bådådđjo* (Norwegian: Bodø), *Tráante* (Norwegian: Trondheim) and *Plaassja* (Norwegian: Røros).

The Sámi Place Names Service will continue to contribute to Sámi Place names being made available, used, and made visible in all public places. Signage in Sámi languages will help to raise the status and value of the languages, while at the same time the signs show Sámi presence and history in its areas. According to the Norwegian Public Roads Administration's handbook N300 – Part 4A: Traffic Signs, three languages may be used on road signs. In those cases where it is necessary to choose which language to use, emphasis must be placed on which name has the longest tradition and is the best known on the spot. The Sámi Parliament will here highlight a derogation application from 2021 where Sør-Varanger municipality applied for signage in four languages Norwegian, Kven, Northern Sámi and Skolt

Sámi. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration approved the municipality's application for a derogation and will thereby approve the use of four languages on the place name signs for the areas of *Neiden, Øvre-Neiden, Melkefoss* and *Pasvikdalen*.

Today, the Place Names Act covers Northern Sámi, Lule Sámi, Southern Sámi and Skolt Sámi. The Sámi Place Names Service will also work to get Pite Sámi and Ume Sámi into the law, so that it will be possible to adopt names in these languages as well. On the Swedish side of the Sápmi, Pite Sámi and Ume Sámi names are already in public use.

In the spring of 2021, the Norwegian Parliament, Stortinget, adopted official Sámi names for Norway and the Kingdom of Norway: Northern Sámi: *Norga* and *Norgga gonagasriika*, Lule Sámi: *Vuodna* and *Vuona gånngágisriikka*, and Southern Sámi: *Nöörje* and *Nöörjen gånkarijhke*. The Service for Sámi Place Names Service sees positively on the fact that the state has introduced official Sámi names in Norway, and in that way confirms and makes Norway visible as a diverse and multilingual state, as well as confirming the state's recognition of the Sámi's belonging in the country.

Although the Place Names Act of Norway has been in operation for over 30 years, the Sámi Place Names Service sees that there is still potential for improvement in the management of Sámi place name matters. This applies to both municipalities' and other bodies' following-up of place name matters, as well as with road signage. These are issues that the Sámi Place Names service will follow up with the various bodies that manage Sámi place names.

Sámi place names are a topic that arouses engagement in society and is often the subject of discussions both in the media and social media. The Place Name Service still sees a backlog of historical events regarding Sámi place names, as it is mentioned in the 11th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Place Names Report from 2017 where it's mentioned that Sámi place names have been silenced, rewritten to Norwegian and removed from maps. The Place Names Service observes that Sámi place names engage the population but considers it important to raise general knowledge among the population, with factual knowledge and information about Sámi place names. It is therefore also very important that Sámi place names are made visible to the public, especially to display the Sámi presence.

ITEM E: The Place Names Service of the Norwegian Mapping Agency

The Norwegian Mapping Agency oversees, hosts, maintains, and develops the Central Place Name Register (Sentralt stedsnavnregister, SSR). There are 953,000 named places, some of which have several names, amounting to 972,000 names in the register. Some of the names have variant spellings, thus totaling 1,166,000 name forms. In total there are 109,000 authorized spellings in the register. Of the total number of named places, 33,000 have Sámi language names and 3,200 have Kven names. From 2021 to 2022, the number of Sámi named places increased with 2,000 and Kven with 300.

The numbers given here are lower than those given in the report from 2021. This is owing to the omission of the category of address-names in calculating the numbers.

ITEM F: The Norwegian Language Collections

The Norwegian Language Collections hosted a conference in honor of the centenary of the Norwegian Place Names Archive on October 27th-28th 2021. 90 persons from Norway, the Nordic countries, Poland and the United Kingdom participated in the conference that ran over two days and covered a number of topics pertaining to core activities involving place names archive: collection of place names, research and standardization. At total of 18 presentations were given and many have been published in the Open Access journal *Namn og Nemne*: <http://ojs.novus.no/index.php/NON/issue/view/264/78>.

The Language Collections is continuing its work in digitization and updating its digital services. New digital datasets are regularly made available, adding to the substantial documentation of place names in Norway. In total historical and current documentation for 12 million different name forms have been collected for 3 million individual place name expressions. A digital place name service of this magnitude needs to have a stable digital foundation, and a new version of the Linked Data portal presented at previous UNGEGN Meetings is now being developed and will be launched later in 2023.

A new feature will be different thematic data views – including one for viewing the content of individual sources, and one for viewing historical and current forms of individual place name expressions.

The Language Collections took part in a project with Norwegian Mapping Agency to aid Moldova in the creation of a new system for collecting, managing, and storing place names of Moldova, as well as a Place Names Law of Moldova. This will be reported on by Moldova in their country report, GEGN.2/2023/100. The project, which ran from 2020 to 2022, was organized around virtual events: trainings, seminars and workshops on geographical names. However, the one in-person workshop took place at the Norwegian Language Collections at the University of Bergen in late 2022.

ITEM G: Extended cooperation between the three national institutions involved in the standardization of place names

The Language Council of Norway and the Mapping Authority have continued their regular cooperation meetings on administrative issues. Starting in 2020, the Sámi Parliament has also been invited to these meetings, and since then the three agencies have managed to meet 3–4 times a year. In these meetings, the agencies normally discuss their division of labor and other issues of joint interest. The Norwegian Language council and the Sámi parliament provide linguistic advice, and the Norwegian Mapping authority carry out place names standardization decisions.

A seminar on onomastics

The report GEGN.2/2021/10/CRP.10 described the rapid decrease in the number of place name scholars, and accordingly, in onomastic expertise, within the Norwegian linguistic field over the past 10 to 15 years. The decrease is caused by the fact that onomastics has been one of several vulnerable fields in the humanities for a long time, and the whole field is now facing a dark future. As a response to this ongoing demolition of the field, The Language Council and the Mapping Authority decided to arrange a seminar on onomastics in October 2022. The arrangement was a one-day seminar where the Nestors in the field of onomastics gave speeches about their specialties. At the seminar, lectures were given on the history of onomastics in general, on the development leading up to the Place Name Act, both prior to the date when the Act came into force and on some later developments of the Act and amendments to the Act. In addition, one lecture was held on the work of the Norwegian Mapping Authority and one on the work with Sámi place names and highlighted the suppression of Sámi geographical names.

To preserve this knowledge for future generations, video recordings were made of the speeches. The organizers wish to continue to arrange seminars such as this, hopefully on an annual basis.