

13 March 2023

English

**United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names**

2023 session

New York, 1 – 5 May 2023

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 the Netherlands

Submitted by the Netherlands **

Summary:

The report provides information on the developments, actions and achievements in the Netherlands with regard to geographical names standardization during the period 2021–2023.

Some developments of importance are:

- Full update of the Dutch exonyms list and exonyms website of the Dutch Language Union
- Creation of a new Commission on Geographical Names of the Dutch Language Union responsible for the standardization of exonyms and for consultancy on geographical names within the Dutch language area (Netherlands, Flanders, Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean)
- Creation of the Kadaster knowledge graph, a graph database that supports integrated analysis of several key linked open data sets in the Netherlands
- Publication and further development of Transcriptor, a web application for the romanization of personal and geographical names
- Increasing use of Frisian place names in government registrations and on maps

* GEGN.2/2023/1

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Report of the Netherlands

The various relevant developments, actions and achievements have been reported under the headings of the relevant resolutions adopted by the consecutive United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN).

Res. I/7 and II/19 Regional meetings

Partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic no regional meetings took place in the 2021-2023 period.

Res. I/4 and V/15 Establishment of national geographical names authorities

The Netherlands is one of the few countries in Europe that have not yet formally established a national geographical names authority. Furthermore, there are no formal or informal rules or procedures for geographical names standardization agreed between the governmental agencies involved in the registration of geographical names, of which the municipalities and several national governmental agencies are the most important.

However, as of 2023 the Dutch Language Union (*Nederlandse Taalunie*), a supranational body in which the Netherlands, Flanders and Suriname cooperate on Dutch language policy, has established a new Commission on Geographical Names (*Commissie Aardrijkskundige Namen*, CAN). This new commission is responsible for the standardization of Dutch exonyms as well as for consultancy on the orthography of domestic geographical names within the Dutch language area (the Netherlands, Flanders, Suriname, and the Dutch Caribbean). The commission replaces the previous Commission on Foreign Names of the Dutch Language Union and the Advisory Commission on Geographical Names within the Netherlands of the Royal Dutch Geographical Society.

The Commission on Geographical Names consists of members from academia and representatives from various governmental agencies, media organizations, publishers, translators, and language advisors. Its main tasks are the maintenance of the Dutch exonyms website, advising on the use of exonyms in Dutch, setting up guidelines for and giving advice to governments in the Dutch language area when they choose a new geographical name, advising on the use of domestic geographical names, maintenance of the Toponymic Guidelines of the Netherlands, supporting the development of automated transcription modules for languages that use a non-Roman script, and in performing all these tasks applying the UN resolutions on geographical names.

Res. II/13 Publication of romanization systems

In 2022, the Transcriptor was formally launched, a web application for the romanization of personal and geographical names from non-Roman script to Roman script. The web application was presented in a paper submitted to the Second UNGEGN2 Session: [GEGN.2/2021/CRP.120](https://www.ungegn2.org/). The Transcriptor can be found at <https://transcriptor.nl/>.

The web application consists of different transcription modules per language. In 2022 the modules for the Ukrainian and Russian languages were published. Modules for other languages are still in development.

Res. VIII/1 Promotion of minority group and indigenous geographical names

For the first time in 12 years, a Dutch municipality decided to change the official populated place names in the municipality from Dutch to Frisian. In the Netherlands, populated places (cities and villages) can have only one official name. Municipalities in the bilingual province of Friesland (official name: Fryslân) have to choose between retaining the Dutch official names or changing to Frisian official names. The municipality of Noardeast-Fryslân

decided for the latter: as of 2023 the Frisian names became official. An exception was made for 4 villages in the eastern part of the municipality near the border with the province of Groningen, where a Low Saxon dialect or Dutch is spoken instead of Frisian. Another exception was made for 3 villages that did not want their name to be changed. These 7 villages kept their Dutch official name.

On topographic maps, the new situation is reflected by rendering the official Frisian names first and adding the Dutch names in second position.

Res. VIII/4: Exonyms

In the past 2 years, a large-scale review and update of the Dutch exonyms website has been carried out. All exonyms on the website as well as the corresponding endonyms have been checked against large text corpora, with language material from the entire Dutch language area, to find out what exonyms are still in common use in Dutch. When the endonym appeared to be much more common in Dutch than the exonym, the exonym has been moved to a separate section with historical exonyms. In addition, various sources have been scanned to find missing Dutch exonyms. These exonyms have been checked against text corpora as well and added to the website if they appeared to be in common use. Missing obsolete exonyms have been added to the historical exonyms section.

In addition to Dutch exonyms for geographical features around the world the exonyms website contains special geographical names lists for 3 bilingual regions that are (also) part of the Dutch language area: the province of Friesland (Fryslân) in the Netherlands where Frisian is a co-official language, the Brussels Capital Region in Belgium where French is a co-official language, and the region of French Flanders in the extreme north of France where a Dutch (West Flemish) dialect is traditionally spoken. For the French-speaking region of Wallonia in the south of Belgium and the German-speaking community in East Belgium a separate list contains all Dutch exonyms that are officially established by Royal Decree and must be used by governments and governmental agencies in Belgium.

The updated Dutch exonyms website is now consistently based on common Dutch language use. Common Dutch exonyms are prescribed by the Dutch Language Union for general use in the Dutch language, although every language user still has a free choice to use the corresponding endonym if desired. The exonyms in the historical exonyms section are only meant to be used in a historical context or can be used as a reference when reading historical sources. The Dutch exonyms website is widely used by governmental agencies and various (media) organizations in the Dutch language area. In some cases usage has been made mandatory within an organization or by government, e.g. in education material such as school atlases.

The website is maintained by the Commission on Geographical Names of the Dutch Language Union and can be found at <https://namen.taalunie.org/> The Explanatory Notes on the website have recently been completely rewritten and a new Frequently Asked Questions section has been added. A separate page with information in English can be found at <https://namen.taalunie.org/dutch-exonyms>.

Res. VIII/6 Integration of national names into national and regional spatial data infrastructures

Kadaster, the Netherlands' Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency, has made various key registers available as linked data, including the national topographical databases such as the Key Register of Topography (BRT), in support of the ongoing development and application of linked data technologies within the Dutch government. Recently the Kadaster Knowledge Graph has been developed, an open-standards based platform that links features from various key registers to each other and allows for integrated analysis of all linked data sources. For example, geospatial objects with geographical names available in the Key Register

of Topography are now linked with those from other registers, providing users with rich, integrated information about geospatial objects from one source.

Technical users and third parties are able to access this information through various standards-based service interfaces, including SPARQL and Elasticsearch. These same services are also used by data browser and viewer applications aimed at providing non-technical users with access to this information in a low-threshold manner, for example Object Viewer and Toponamenzoeker (“topo names finder”). The Kadaster Knowledge Graph forms part of a larger vision for an ecosystem of federated data sources based on semantic technologies.

A separate paper on this subject has been submitted to this Session: GEGN.2/2023/63/CRP.63.