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Culture, heritage and language recognition: exonyms

Excessive use of exonyms by Google

Summary**

The report is focused on the practice by Google of notating on its weather forecast maps, for an audience in a certain language, a maximum of place names not in the endonym version (i.e. in the version locally used), but as exonyms in the context language (i.e. in the language of the map user and of the map title and map legend). That, however, includes not only exonyms in popular use in the context language, but also outdated exonyms as well as morphological and phonetic adaptations of the endonym to the context language, and sometimes also historical or only locally known minority endonyms corresponding to the context language. That practice contradicts all United Nations resolutions on exonyms (e.g. II/28, on lists of exonyms; II/29, on exonyms; and IV/20, on reduction of exonyms) and impedes communication with the local population and with fellow speakers of the context language. While such practices may help with the pronunciation of names, the name notated in that way is hardly recognized by anybody else. It is suggested that Google be advised to consult lists of standardized exonyms that already exist for several countries and languages or to refer to national names authorities when it comes to deciding which range of exonyms is to be used.

* GEGN.2/2025/1.

** The full report was prepared by Peter Jordan (Austria), Austrian Academy of Sciences and Honorary Chair of the Austrian Board on Geographical Names. The report will be available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/, in the language of submission only, as document GEGN.2/2025/17/CRP.17.

