

**THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
AND THE NAME OF SHARED FEATURES**

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The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names has been concerned since its first conference (Geneva, 1967) about the naming issue of features shared between different countries.

Indeed, a resolution on the names of features that extend beyond a single sovereignty was adopted at the First Conference on Geographical Names, held in Geneva in 1967 (Recommendation 8 A).

This resolution clearly recommends that the denomination of these spaces is subject of a shared designation.

The Conference *considers that it is preferable that a common name or a common application be established, wherever practicable, in the interest of international standardization;*

And recommends that *'the geographical names authorities of the nations concerned attempt to reach agreement on these conflicting names or applications.*

At that same conference, this concern has also been extended, to topographic maritime and undersea features where the need to standardize at the international level the names of topographic and oceanographic or submarine features was emphasized in order to promote the navigation and facilitate the exchange of oceanographic scientific data. It also sets out several actions in this goal, including those to initiate cooperation with various international organizations like the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and the International Association of Physical Oceanography (IAPO) (Recommendation No. I / 8 B)

Since then, this problem has been discussed in all UNGEGN meetings;

It was during the Second Conference of UNGEGN (London, 1972), that this issue was widely discussed and we record the adoption of no fewer than five resolutions on the subject; those deal with different aspects of designations of shared areas either maritime, undersea, extraterrestrial or topographic.

The Resolution No. II/25 specifically addresses the topographic areas which are under the sovereignty of more than one country or are divided among two or more countries,

It recommends that *'countries sharing a given geographical feature under a different name form should endeavour to reach agreement on fixing a single name for the feature concerned'*,

And further recommends that *'when countries sharing a given geographical feature and having different official languages do not succeed in agreeing on a common name form, it should be a general rule of international cartography that the name forms of each of the languages in question should be accepted. A policy of accepting only one or some of such name forms while excluding the rest on principle would be inconsistent as well as inexpedient in practice. Only technical reasons may sometimes make it necessary, especially in the case of small-scale maps, to dispense with the use of certain name forms belonging to one language or another'*.

The analysis of this particular recommendation underlines that the use of one name remains in the realm of the exception; this would be allowed only for technical reasons.

The use of both names is the rule set.

During the same conference, the sensitivity of the issue is raised and the resolution II/34 recommends precisely the Group of Experts on Geographical Names, *'to continue to study this wider aspect.'*

In accordance with this last resolution, this problem has continued to be discussed at the Third Conference (Athens, 1977) where a modification of the resolution II/25, is proposed and adopted. This corrects certain provisions of this resolution particularly those concerning the reference to the language, it henceforth refers to the country, but mostly it attenuates the arrangement of the first alienation, by making it less restrictive; In fact it states that when the countries in which extends the same geographic detail give this detail a different name, *'should endeavour, **as far as possible**, to reach agreement on fixing a single name for the feature concerned'*. (III/20)

In the original resolution *'**as far as possible***, is not there.

**During** the fourth conference (Geneva, 1982), this issue has not been recommended yet, it was discussed during the work of Commission III, under item 12.

It was during the fifth conference (Montreal, 1987) that a new resolution was adopted (Resolution N°V/25).

The latter, referring to Resolution No. II/ 25 of the Second Conference, recommends especially to countries facing this problem to let the UNGEGN be informed about the progress in this area and for those who have not yet done so, to initiate the necessary actions to establish joint programs for the identification and treatment of *'features extending across their common border'*

Since this conference, no other resolution was recorded on this issue.

This does not exclude that this point continues to be part of the agenda of the Commission III's work and is subject of interesting discussions

But it should be noted that from this date, the exchanges and discussions that take place at each Conference and UNGEGN Session, are exclusively oriented to the naming of the maritime space shared between Korea and Japan, in particular to the name of the Sea called 'Sea of Japan' for some and 'East Sea' for others.

It was indeed during the Sixth Conference (New York, 1992) that the Korean participation in the work of UNGEGN started and the Sea of Japan/East Sea 'naming issue has been for the first time raised.

From there, the discussions about the name of this sea shared between Korea and Japan, dominate the debates and take a new figure on the interpretation of the previous resolutions adopted by the UNGEGN on the subject.

Do the terms of these resolutions, especially the I/8, the II/25, the III/20 and the V/25, apply to this sea? Does this sea is under the sovereignty 'of several countries or is it common to two nations at least'?

Is its part located in the High seas is shared between the two countries or it is just 'international waters'?

This is the kind of questions about this subject that were raised during the debates of Commission III.

No progress on this issue has been recorded since.

To make things progress, should we have a new resolution specifically for this sea? Or a clarification and an update by a simple modification specifically of the resolution III/20 cited above and which is itself modified? Or, a new resolution on the spaces' under no sovereignty, but nevertheless shared between two countries, at least.

In order to remove any ambiguity of interpretation , isn't it necessary to invite the Working Group on the terminology to give the definition of terms found in the resolutions in question in particular '*shared space*', a '*space under the sovereignty of both states (or countries ) at least*' and '*Area under no sovereignty*',

We believe that a preliminary answer to these questions could make a difference.

Here are just ideas and issued tracks that may generate more ideas and approaches able to find an acceptable solution to this case.