

## **Place names dilemmas and international relations**

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**ABSTRACT:** The international use of geographical names can be extremely sensitive and politically ticklish. Slovenians are well acquainted with the many years of lack of success regarding bilingual place-name signs in Austrian Carinthia. Three examples of geographical names are shortly elaborated: Piranski zaliv/Savudrijska vala (SLO-CRO), Macedonia - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (GRE-MAK) and East Sea/Sea of Japan (COR-JAP). The name of the Republic of Macedonia is a very illustrative example; because of Greek rejection of country name have extended consequences. However new geographical names issues are constantly emerging and it is almost impossible to make up a universal prescription. Discussions on different kinds of seminars are supposed to help decision makers in search for diplomatic/politically acceptable solution.

**KEYWORDS:** geographical names, sea names, border conflicts, Mediterranean Sea, Adriatic Sea, Piranski zaliv, East Sea, Sea of Japan, Macedonia

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## **How to be short and instructive?**

Many years ago (1990) we have been started to work on international atlas in Slovenian language. This was first Atlas to published in independent state, Republic of Slovenia was established (Hughes, J., Orožen Adamič, M., Kladnik, D., Moder, J., 1992). However, we have been faced with many problems in spite of the fact that first atlas of the world in Slovene language was already published more than hundred years before (Perko, D., Orožen Adamič, M., Šumrada, J., Urbanc, M., Fridl, J., Kladnik, D., 2005). Language, social life and political facts are constantly changing. This has a constant influence on geographical names, its use, form, etc... It was evident to our group that we had to share our experiences and views with the others.

The Commission for the Standardisation of Geographical Names was first appointed in 1986 and again in 1990. Due to staff changes and the reorganisation of the government bodies that participated in the Commission, it became inactive after 1991. The Government of the Republic of Slovenia reappointed the Commission in September 1995 and February 2001.

The primary task of the Commission was and is to direct and harmonise the work and to resolve problems in the field of standardisation of geographical names in the Republic of Slovenia. The purpose of the standardisation of geographical names is to define their written forms and make uniform the use of geographical names, both domestic and foreign.

The Commission cooperates with United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), which comprises the East Central and South-East Europe Division of UNGEGN and among other s produced several documents.

The Concise Gazetteer of Slovenia is based on resolutions of seven United Nations conferences on the standardization of geographical names (Geneve 1967, London 1972, Athens 1977, Geneve 1982, Montréal 1987, New York 1992 and 1998), especially on resolutions I/4 (National gazetteers), II/17 (Consultation on the preparation of gazetteers), II/35 (Interim lists of standardized names), III/2 (Specifications for international gazetteers of countries), IV/18 (Combined treatment of toponymic data), and V/16 (Publication of geographical names in their national official form).

The Gazetteer contains the Slovene geographical names on the 1:1,000,000-scale map of the Republic of Slovenia. All geographical names within the territory of the Republic of Slovenia were standardized by the Commission for the Standardization of Geographical Names of the Slovene government in 2001. A short geographical overview of Slovenia, a short description of Slovene language and Slovene alphabet, a table with some Slovene geographical terms in English, German, French and Spanish, and a list of references are included as well.

The list of Foreign Geographical Names in Slovene Language is consisted of more than 2300 foreign geographical names in Slovene language with the description of the method for writing exonyms. Commission works within Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy, Surveying and Mapping Authority of the Republic of Slovenia. Commission's headquarters is within Geographical Institute, Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and we are trying to be as possible active in different kind of UNGEGN activities.

In the early days of the United Nations, the problem of geographical names lacking standardized forms was raised, particularly in connection with cartographic services coordinated through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Beside that it was clear from the very beginning that geographical names issues are very sensitive from various points of view. At the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, in 20 century in general, borders of the World have been changed tremendously. Many new borders, problems and names have been appeared. It is understandable that UN in general is acceptable to all to deal with the problems.

In 1959, ECOSOC Resolution 715A (XXVII) paved the way for a small group of experts to meet and provide technical recommendations on standardizing geographical names at the national and international levels. This meeting gave rise to the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, now held every five years, and to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), which meets between Conferences to follow up the implementation of resolutions adopted by the Conferences.

During the debates of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1948, more than 60 years ago, the problem of standardization of geographical names was raised, particularly with regard to cartographic services. The United Nations Conference on the standardization of geographical names, convened every five years, continues to provide a forum:

- to encourage national and international geographical names standardization;
- to promote the international dissemination of nationally standardized geographical names information; and
- To adopt single Romanization systems for the conversion of each non-Roman writing system to the Roman alphabet.

In that respect of UNGEGN and our Slovene national commission it is understandable that each meeting dealing with geographical names issues is of our great interest (Orožen Adamič, 2007). This was a key reason that we were very pleased to have chance and cooperate on The 16<sup>th</sup> International Seminar on the Sea Names in Den Haag (The Hague). Beside that we were faced also with the sea name problem in Slovenia (Bay of Piran) and the paper prepared by Kladnik D., Orožen Adamič M., Pipan P. "*A Mediterranean Example of Problematic Treatment of Geographical Names: Piranski zaliv (Bay of Piran) or Savudrijska vala (Bay of Savudrija)?*" it will be presented later during this seminar. So it is understandable that here detail explanation is not presented.

However an over view map (Figure 3) is showing a diplomatic dispute resulting from Slovenia's desire to obtain a direct corridor from its own territorial waters to international waters, to avoid the necessity of Slovenian ships having to sail through the territorial waters of any other country to get to the high seas. Slovenia's only seacoast is in the Bay of Piran / Gulf of Trieste (as shown in this map), and its only commercial seaport is Capodistria / Koper (the eastern of the two red dots in Slovenia on this map), while Italy and Croatia both have long seacoasts outside the area shown in this map.

Slovenia's claim to the area labelled with green text (Figure 3), and the existence of a corridor to international waters would have been allowed by Croatia under the Drnovšek-Račan agreement, but this was never ratified by either country's parliaments.

Second point of our interest, especially with the respect to the standardization of foreign geographical names is the case of East Sea/Sea of Japan. What to do, how to deal with this problem.

This is quite understandable in respect that Slovenian history has always been turbulent. Slovenians won their independence only two decades ago, after a continuous struggle to preserve ethnic identity over nearly a millennium and a half in and near the Alps, and the persistent loss of ethnic territory. Within what is today the Republic of Slovenia, Slovenians also mixed with neighbouring ethnic groups, which usually gradually assimilated to the Slovenian majority (Kladnik, 2009)?

Europe (EU) in particular represents a new factor that could help improve the status and the initiative for cooperation between the Slovenian Commission for the Standardization of Geographical Names and names authorities in neighbouring countries. The establishment of mutual trust and creative cooperation in resolving open issues can contribute significantly to further efforts with regard to appropriate treatment of geographical names should be highlighted as an important part of future relations on bilateral and multilateral level.

The very much different is the case of the name Macedonia or now official UN form Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). This is an odd name for the country in spite of the fact that most of the countries are having short and long form of its names. Claims by Greece based on Greek history created this situation. When Macedonia applied to become member of NATO name of the country stop its accession process. The time is come for the EU to set a date for the start of accession talks with Macedonia. The issue of Macedonia's talks is pointed out that the foreign ministers had promised in December (2009) to revisit the issue during the Spanish EU presidency. It is said that: "We need a forward-looking Macedonia. We need a Macedonia continuing to push ahead with reforms to make progress to EU membership. I think the time has come for us to set a date for the start of talks."

Greek Foreign Minister Yeoryios Papandreou subsequently told that intensive talks were underway between Macedonia and Greece to resolve the name dispute between the countries and that the two countries had never been so close to an agreement. The issue of Macedonia's talks with the EU was also raised by the European Parliament's reporter for Macedonia has been waiting for the start of membership talks since December 2005, when it obtained the status of a candidate country. This is an obvious example of the key issue for the future of one country. Probably never before a geographic name issue was so crucial for the future of one country and this region in general. The firm position is to be cross-examined also in an enormous dept of Greek state and all what is going on in this country.

On July 21st 2010 Yoko Tsuge, first secretary of the Embassy of Japan in Slovenia visited us and presented publication of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan entitled »The One and Only Name Familiar to the International Community Sea of Japan (2009). This is official Japanese statement. It is well known position and was followed with the two copies of UN and ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) that the name »Sea of Japan« is currently used in official correspondence, publications and websites.

## **Conclusions**

It is evident that geographical names and its use is a sensitive issue and is understandable that it is more than 60 year in important topic in UN work. It is also understandable that there are a

lot of small counties and small language groups, so it is common that in most cases foreign publishers simply »translate«, »rearrange« maps into end language. With better knowledge of problems and situation, for example the old predominately used form »Japonsko morje« (Sea of Japan) is gradually completed by »Vzhodno morje« (East Sea). The practice is now that two names are/were used. We think that this is an important step forward because for example in the English version of National Geographic Atlas »Sea of Japan« and »East Sea« are put in brackets, subordinated. We in Slovenia believe that the use of slash (/) in stead of brackets () reflects better contemporary facts (Orožen Adamič, 2007). However new issues are emerging and it is almost impossible to make up a universal prescription. It is no doubt that highest possible sensitivity, understanding and patience should in general be used.

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- II/17 (Consultation on the preparation of gazetteers),
- II/35 (Interim lists of standardized names),
- III/2 (Specifications for international gazetteers of countries),
- IV/18 (Combined treatment of toponymic data),
- V/16 (Publication of geographical names in their national official form).

Figure 1: Situation of borders in Europe in 1914.



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Figure 2: Situation of borders in Europe in 2003.



Map of 2003. © Copyright 2002-2007, Centennia Software, Mystic, Connecticut USA, www.HistoricalAtlas.com

Figure 3: Situation and border dispute on the borders of Croatia, Italy and Slovenia. Details about the names *Piranski zaliv* (SLO) and *Savudrijska vala* (CRO) is explained in other paper.

