

**United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)**  
**Meeting of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers**  
**Brussels, 4<sup>th</sup> February 2009.**

A session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers was held in conjunction with the closing workshop of the EuroGeoNames Consortium and Reference Group at the Fédéral Public Service Finances, Brussels, Belgium, 4<sup>th</sup> February 2009. The Working Group session was attended by 26 participants from 19 countries.

The UNGEGN Chair opened the session with a number of presentations covering UNGEGN business.

Significant progress was being made in the population of the UNGEGN World Geographical Names database which was to hold names data for countries, capitals, and cities with a population of over 100,000. The database would be accessible through the UNGEGN website and would provide data in Roman, and, where appropriate, in non-Roman scripts with romanised forms. International boundaries, country names and capital city information had been supplied through the UN and UNGEGN working groups, and other city data had been sourced mostly through national names committees. The Chair demonstrated the user interface and the output results in map and table formats, and looked in detail at the various fields that would be available. Trialling would take place in March to which Working Group members would be given access and be asked to provide feedback. It was anticipated that the database would be launched at the forthcoming 25<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN session in Nairobi in May and an *ad hoc* committee of UNGEGN members could be formed to oversee the database.

The UNGEGN Chair outlined the concept of the National Toponym Database project, a joint initiative of UNGEGN and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The ECA had assisted the Ethiopian Mapping Agency in creating the digital “EthioGaz” based on the Ethiopian National Gazetteer and was working on the creation of a generic digital gazetteer format which could be used by any UN member state. Interest in this project had already been expressed by Sierra Leone and Nigeria. This “UNGaz” would be a freely-available platform-neutral desktop application with a graphical interface designed to run on a low-bandwidth connection. The UNGEGN Chair outlined the simple user-interface, the various data fields, the methods of data input and future development plans. The Working Group welcomed the initiative and would attempt to gather information on similar projects being undertaken independently in order to coordinate efforts. The ECA had been publicising the “UNGaz” through National Mapping Agencies and would also give a presentation to UNGEGN. ECA would be encouraged to provide Working Group members with access to the “UNGaz” for review purposes.

A number of special presentations were being arranged for the 25<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN session and the UNGEGN Chair described those which had been proposed. Several workshops and meetings would take place out-of-session and an exhibition would be organised by the ECA. The Working Group Convenors would be responsible for the scheduling and arrangement of papers submitted under their agenda item and for drawing conclusions from their session.

Mr Illert (BKG Germany) gave a presentation on the work of INSPIRE, the legal framework for a European Spatial Data Infrastructure, which was aimed at promoting interoperability between data sets and services, building on International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and Open Geo-Spatial Consortium (OGC) standards. The architecture was demonstrated and an overview of the various Themes and associated Thematic Working Groups given. The Geographical Names Thematic Working Group was responsible for drawing up legally-binding “Implementing Rules” as well as a non-binding Guidance Document. Mr Illert described the model and characteristics, and outlined problems encountered and perceived future steps. Further details could be found at <http://inspire.jrc.ec.europa.eu>

Mr Stani-Fertl (Austria) reported on the creation of the Database of Exonyms and Other Variant Names (EVN) which was being built as an add-on to the EuroGeoNames central server, connected through spatial object unique identifiers. Lists of exonyms and other variants had been provided by national names authorities and representatives of official minorities authorised by national mapping authorities for all countries of the EuroGeoNames Reference Group<sup>1</sup>. 3,300 entries in 25 languages had been added to date, with a total of more than 5,000 anticipated. Mr Stani-Fertl displayed the data model and described the online editing procedure, authorised access to which was available through <http://141.74.33.52/egn.edit-vne>

Mr Päll (Institute of Estonian Language, Estonia) and Ms Kivisalu (Estonian Land Board) described the geographical names network within state information systems and introduced the new Place Names Register. A new online version had been launched in January 2009 after the Estonian National Topographic Database, the Address Data System and the National Place Names Register had been interconnected to provide a single access point solution to names enquiries. The interface was available in English and Estonian at <http://xgis.maaamet.ee/knravalik>

The Working Group discussed preparations for the forthcoming UNGEGN session. The Co-convenors would draft a report of Working Group activities and monitor papers submitted under this topic. A poster-format panel for an exhibit area at the session would be considered by the Working Group, possibly incorporating text encoding standards relevant to the ECA data model. Members would pass ideas and recommendations before the beginning of March 2009 to the Convenors who would arrange the compilation of the poster.

Various subjects for an out-of-session workshop were considered in some detail, including simple database applications, data modelling, and lessons learned through the EuroGeoNames project. Members concluded that Working Group involvement should complement and support the ECA “UNGaz” project and would therefore postpone a decision on a workshop until details of the planned ECA contribution were available. The Convenors would investigate this and draft a proposal for a workshop ahead of the UNGEGN meeting.

The Working Group agreed that the altered format followed during this session would serve as a model for future meetings, with increased focus on the description of relevant work being carried out by member states.

The next meeting of the Working Group would be held during the 25<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN session in Nairobi. Members were encouraged to consider holding future joint meetings with other UNGEGN working groups or divisions.

5<sup>th</sup> February 2009.

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<sup>1</sup> comprising the 15 participating European National Mapping and Charting Agencies (NMCAs)