

From the Proposers
Zagreb, 28 September 2018

To the Government of the Republic of Croatia
Attn: The Prime Minister, Andrej Plenković, M.Sc.

Re: Proposal to establish the *State Commission on Geographical Names*

Pursuant to the recommendation of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, Economic and Social Council (UNGEGN, ECOSOC), and in line with the conclusions reached at the 14th International Conference on Geoinformation and Cartography, organised by the State Geodetic Administration, the Croatian Cartographic Society and the Faculty of Geodesy of the University of Zagreb, held from 27 to 29 September 2018, we propose to the Government of the Republic of Croatia that a *State Commission on Geographical Names* be established. In many countries of the world, there are national commissions whose basic task is to gather, systematise, standardise and study geographical names (toponyms) and articulate their application in various spheres of social and economic life.

In fact, geographic maps and toponyms are two reliable systems for orientation in space and the identification of objects. Linguistic and cartographic practices, however, have confirmed that there are many practical issues in naming and labelling toponymic forms on maps, and in other uses (lexicographical works, textbooks, the media, diplomacy, etc.) which still remained unresolved in principle. The institutions which should be dealing with these issues do not have a unified, coordinated approach to the use of geographical names.

Since geographical names are by definition a matter of linguistics (toponomastics) and a practical issue for all other sciences and the public sector, it is essential from the outset to weigh the need for linguistic credibility and practical implementation when proposing solutions. Many Croatian scientists (linguists, toponymists, geodesists, geographers, cartographers, and others) are prepared, with no conditions attached, to join in the organisation of a representative body which would in the future deal with issues related to geographical names, in theory and practice, at all levels, including the practical and state levels.

The existing work and results of Croatian onymists and standardisers should particularly emphasise, in regard to the philological aspect, the ongoing, scientific achievements of the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics, the Centre for Adriatic Onomastic Research of the University of Zadar, and the Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography.

It is equally important to emphasise the role of geodesy, particularly since the use of geographical names is largely linked to map-making and the geoinformation system. In the draft Act on the State Survey and Real Property Cadastre, which has passed a first reading in the Croatian Parliament, geographical names are defined as points with spatial coordinates, which is of course only one of their attributes. The draft Act also envisages the establishment of a Commission for the Standardisation of Geographical Names, in which the participation of geographers, cartographers and geodesists is not planned. In other words, it is to be a predominantly political body. In this sense, our proposal should be understood as complementary to the one in the draft Act.

In addition, in a special way, geographical names are part of scientific and expert interests in geography and complex studies of the interaction between human beings and space. Geographical names reflect coexistence in space, which we have always tried to understand through various forms of economic and social uses, and in which we orient ourselves and conduct our activities. For spatial orientation, the ability to recognise an object in space as pertinent to an activity is vitally important. This means the geographical object must be identified and given an appropriate name.

Since the general public, expert or amateur, is poorly informed on toponymic issues, yet geographical names are very important since they surround us literally at every step, whether as taught in schools, or used in bodies of local and regional self-government and the state, along with many examples in socio-economic activities and daily communications (land, air and sea traffic, telecommunications, postal services, public media, etc.), we believe it is necessary to set up a national body, consisting of representatives of the relevant scientific disciplines, which will coordinate various scientific and expert activities and propose specific solutions, bearing in mind the following:

- Geographical names as part of linguistic heritage and national identity
- Principles and problems of standardising domestic and foreign geographical names (orthography, pronunciation, etc.)
- Multiple names of referents (geographical objects)
- Exonyms
- Derivatives of geographical names – population names (ethnics) and adjectives formed from them (knetics)
- A national digital database of geographical names
- Geographical names on topographic, maritime and other maps
- Geographic and demographic aspects of studying geographical names
- Changes in geographical names (spontaneous, imposed, political, cultural, etc.)
- Geographical names in lexicographical works (encyclopaedias, atlases, lexicons, etc.)
- Geographical names in teaching Croatian and foreign languages, and in geography and history lessons at all levels of education
- Geographical names in administration, public and private companies (bodies of local, county and state administration, postal services, telecommunications, roads, the military, etc.)
- Geographical names in the media

Therefore, it is entirely justified and highly necessary to form a scientific-expert *State Commission on Geographical Names*, consisting of experts from various disciplines (geography, geodesy, cartography, hydrography, linguistics, history, etc.), and we respectfully propose to the Government of the Republic of Croatia that it adopts the relevant decisions in order to enable such a commission to be established, defining its scope of activities and obligations.

Signed (in alphabetical order)

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