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Country names in Hungarian language

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In Hungary, the work of the Committee on Geographical Names is regulated by the government decree 303/2007. (XI.14.). According to this decree, the Committee may „take a stand on the domestic usage of the Hungarian equivalents of foreign geographical names”.

Hungarian equivalents of full official names and short names of independent states fit into this category. According to the unanimous opinion of the Committee, any Hungarian text should include appropriate Hungarian equivalents of country names, instead of native form of these names. Therefore, the Committee publishes a list of the names of independent countries; this list also includes the names of some dependencies and autonomous territories, as well as ISO codes. The regularly updated list of country names can be downloaded at the following URL: <http://www.vm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=2234> (under the name Országnévjegyzék).

In this paper, I shall give a summary of those decisions of the Committee, that are related to the list of country names, changes in country names and determining the Hungarian equivalents of country names. The paper covers years 2001 to 2010.

Georgia

The most complicated problem in the aforementioned field has been the Hungarian name of the Caucasian country Georgia. In historical Hungarian sources, this country appears under names *Georgia* and *Grúzia*. In recent documents, the name *Grúzia* is used unanimously. During 19th century, there has been an attempt to construct a new name that seems to be an autochthonous Hungarian word („Görgényország”), but this name did not manage to get widely used.

In June 2009, the Georgian Ambassador to Budapest initiated that, in Hungarian texts, at least on the level of official communication, the name *Georgia* should be used instead of the name *Grúzia*. According to the opinion of the Ambassador, *Grúzia* is a word of Russian origin, while *Georgia* is used by most European countries, so it is the more appropriate name of the independent country. The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Külügyminisztérium*) supported this initiative; however, parliament representative Mátyás Eörsi (SZDSZ) took a stand against the initiation, interpellating the minister. The author of this paper suggested the Committee to accept the Georgian initiation.

In September 2009, the Committee discussed the problem at its 68th meeting. At this meeting, the following arguments have arisen in favour of the Georgian initiation:

–In cases when country names had been changed on political reasons, the new names (such as Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Myanmar) were usually accepted by the Hungarian society and now they are widely used.

–Acceptance of the initiation could improve the relationship of Georgia and Hungary.

Committee members against the initiation expressed the following arguments:

–The country name *Grúzia* and the word *grúz* ('Georgian') have been present in the Hungarian language since the first half of the 19th century, though the name *Georgia* was more widely used until the end of World War II. Nowadays, the name *Grúzia* is used almost exclusively.

–Ethnonym *grúz* is a standard element of the Hungarian lexicon, used even as family name; no organization has the right to insist a change in its usage.

–The country name *Georgia* is not widely known in Hungarian society; there is a possibility of confusion with Georgia, a member state of the United States.

–The country name *Georgia*, pronounced either [georgia] or [dʒordʒa], does not fit to the phonological rules of Hungarian language.

–According to the opinion of the Committee, no country has the right to prescribe, how the country should be called in other countries (Hungary cannot enforce the alteration of the English name *Hungary*).

–The case of Georgia is not analogous with the cases of Sri Lanka and Myanmar. The governments of these nations have changed the official names of their countries, and insist that the new name should be used worldwide. On the other hand, the Georgian government insists the usage of the name *Georgia*, derived from intermediary languages, instead of the native name *Sak'art'velo*.

–Parallel use of names *Grúzia* and *Georgia* is not acceptable, as this use would probably lead to the rejection of one of the name versions. Alternatively, one of the synonyms could get a negative meaning (as it happened in the case of *szlovák* and *tót* ('Slovak')).

Considering all of these arguments, the Committee made a decision that the recommendable Hungarian equivalent of the country name Georgia is *Grúzia*.

At its 69th meeting in December 2009, the Committee discussed the case of Georgia once more, and confirmed its earlier decision in favour of the name *Grúzia*.

At the 71th meeting in June 2010, the Committee stated that the usage of the name version *Georgia* is acceptable only in bilateral diplomatic correspondence between the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Georgian authorities.

United Kingdom

The Committee has discussed several times, whether the preferable Hungarian equivalent of the short name of the country is *Egyesült Királyság* (direct translation of *United Kingdom*) or *Nagy-Britannia* (translation of Great Britain). The name *Nagy-Britannia* is universally used in Hungary, while the name *Egyesült Királyság* bears no meaning for most of native Hungarian speakers. However, *Nagy-Britannia* is not a precise name, as the United Kingdom includes the territory of Northern Ireland, that is not a part of Great Britain. Considering these arguments, the Committee decided that the names *Nagy-Britannia* and *Egyesült Királyság* can both be used as short names of the United Kingdom; the first choice is still *Nagy-Britannia*, while *Egyesült Királyság* is „increasingly used”. The full Hungarian name is *Nagy-Britannia és Észak-Írország Egyesült Királysága*.

Németország

According to the decision of the Committee, the full Hungarian name of Germany is *Német Szövetségi Köztársaság* ('German Federal Republic'). Before 1990, the same version has been used as the official name of the western part of a divided Germany.

The name *Német Szövetségi Köztársaság* is not a precise translation of the official name of the country (*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*); however, it is analogous with full Hungarian names of other European countries (*Oszták Köztársaság* 'Austrian Republic' instead of **Ausztria Köztársaság*, *Spanyol Királyság* 'Spanish Kingdom' instead of **Spanyolországi Királyság*). In international correspondence, the direct translation of the official name (*Németországi Szövetségi Köztársaság*) may also be used as an alternative name.

Russia

In the case of Russia, the Committee has made an opposite decision and accepted the name *Oroszországi Föderáció* ('Federation of Russia', a direct translation of *Российская Федерация*), rejecting the name *Orosz Föderáció*.

Countries that gained independence recently

East Timor has gained independence in 2002. According to the decision of the Committee (December 2002), its short Hungarian name is *Kelet-Timor*, while its full Hungarian name is *Kelet-timori Demokratikus Köztársaság* (direct translation of the official name).

Two countries became independent in 2006, when the federation of Serbia and Montenegro had dissolved. In the case of Montenegro, the Committee has accepted the name *Montenegró* as a short name, instead of the native name *Crna Gora*, that is also widely known in Hungary. In the case of Serbia, the short Hungarian name was determined as

Szerbia, and the full Hungarian name as *Szerb Köztársaság*. The Committee declined the proposed name *Szerbiai Köztársaság*.

Kosovo gained (partially recognized) independence in 2008. According to the decision of the Committee, the short Hungarian name of the country is *Koszovó*, and the full Hungarian name is *Koszovói Köztársaság*. Several years earlier, the Committee had named the territory as *Koszovo* (without the diacritic mark); the new name can be treated as a new exonym (exograph).

Other countries

In many cases, the alteration of Hungarian country names became necessary because of a change in the form of government of the country, or a change in the terminology of UN organizations. In such cases, the Committee usually accepts the change and determines the Hungarian name of the country as a direct translation of the official name. Here follows an alphabetic list of these changes:

Afghanistan: After the overthrow of Taliban rule, the country only had a short name. The new constitution defined the country as an Islamic Republic. The full official English name of the country is *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*; its Hungarian equivalent is *Afganisztáni Iszlám Köztársaság* (December 2008).

Algeria: The Hungarian equivalent of the full country name is *Algériai Demokratikus Népi Köztársaság*. The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has insisted the insertion of the word *és* ('and'), but the Commission declined this (December 2008).

Australia: As a translation of *Commonwealth of Australia*, the official Hungarian country name was recorded as *Ausztrál Közösség* (December 2008).

Bolivia: The full Hungarian name of the country is *Bolíviai Többnemzetiségű Állam*, direct translation of *Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia* (September 2009).

Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Committee changed the short Hungarian name of the country to *Bosznia-Hercegovina* (April 2006), omitting the word *és* ('and').

Cape Verde: The Committee determined the short name of this country as *Zöld-foki-szigetek* ('Green Cape Islands'). The full Hungarian name is *Zöld-foki Köztársaság* ('Green Cape Republic').

Comoros: The full Hungarian name of the country is *Comore-szigeteki Unió* ('Union of Comore Islands').

Republic of Congo: In December 2008, the Committee deleted the short name *Kongó*, as it could lead to confusion with the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Eritrea: The full Hungarian name of the country was determined in December 2008 as *Eritreai Állam* (direct translation of *State of Eritrea*).

Fiji: In April 2003, the Committee changed the full name of the country to *Fidzsi-szigeteki Köztársaság* (direct translation of *Republic of the Fiji Islands*). In December 2008, the former situation was restored; now, the short Hungarian name of the country is *Fidzsi*, while its full name is *Fidzsi Köztársaság* ('Republic of Fiji').

Guyana: According to a decision made in December 2008, the full Hungarian name of this country is *Guyanai Köztársaság* ('Republic of Guyana'). The word *szövetkezeti* ('co-operative'), still used in the official English name, was omitted.

Kiribati: The full name of the country was determined as *Kiribati Köztársaság* (April 2003).

Libya: In December 2008, the full name was changed from *Líbiai Arab Szocialista Népi Közösség* to *Líbiai Arab Szocialista Nagy Népi Közösség* ('Libyan Arab Socialist Great People's Community').

Macedonia: The full Hungarian name of the country was determined in December 2008 as *Macedón Köztársaság* ('Macedonian Republic'). In international relations, the alternate name *Macedónia, volt jugoszláv köztársaság* (direct translation of *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*) may also be used. The Committee declined the name version *Makedónia*, that is usually used as the name of the ancient kingdom.

Nepal: The official name of the country was changed because the former kingdom was substituted with a republic. According to a decision made in December 2008, the full Hungarian name of Nepal is *Nepáli Demokratikus Szövetségi Köztársaság*.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: The short name *Saint Vincent* was changed to *Saint Vincent és Grenadine-szigetek* (December 2008).

Somalia: The full Hungarian name was changed from *Szomáli Demokratikus Köztársaság* to *Szomáli Köztársaság* (December 2008).

United Arab Emirates: This country used to have a short Hungarian name *Arab Emírségek* ('Arab Emirates'). The Committee deleted this name in December 2008, now the country only has a full name.

Vatican City: The full name of the country is *Vatikánvárosi Állam* (direct translation of *Stato della Città del Vaticano*), but the alternate name *Szentszék* ('Holy See') may also be used in international relations.

Venezuela: The full Hungarian name of the country was determined as *Venezuelai Bolívari Köztársaság* in December 2008. There has been a debate on the Hungarian equivalent of the Spanish word *bolivariana*.

Vietnam: The Committee has discussed if the correct Hungarian spelling of the short name is *Vietnam* or *Vietnám*. According to the decision of December 2008, the short name is *Vietnám*, while the full name is *Vietnámi Szocialista Köztársaság*.

References

This paper is largely based on documents used during the meetings of Commission on Geographical Names of Hungary.

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Summary

According to the government decree that regulates the work of the Commission on Geographical Names, the Commission may express an opinion on the usage of Hungarian equivalents of foreign geographical names. This includes full official names and short names of countries. The Commission discussed the name of the United Kingdom, where the Hungarian name *Nagy-Britannia* is traditionally used, but the usage of *Egyesült Királyság* is also spreading. A repeatedly discussed problem is the Hungarian name of Georgia, in which case the Georgian government insists that the name *Georgia* should be used instead of the traditional Hungarian name *Grúzia*. Other countries whose names were discussed relatively recently include Afghanistan, Australia, Bolivia, Kosovo, Libya, Nepal, Serbia, the United Arab Emirates and Venezuela.